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MAY 1927

THE Illustrated BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

N.S.E.

BEST Western STORIES

Harold MacGrath, Agatha Christie, Clarence Herbert New
Joseph Blethen, William Byron Mowery,
Frank Parker Stockbridge and Others

$500 in CASH for Real Experiences

DOES YOUTH SEEK FREEDOM OR LICENSE?

MRS. J. BORDEN HARRIMAN, whose social position and achievements in many forms of activity have made her one of the most distinguished women in America, writes in the current issue of The Red Book Magazine an article of extraordinary interest.

"Are the flappers jazzing along a primrose path to inevitable disaster?" asks Mrs. Harriman. "Does the life of modern youth tend to a shunning of the responsibilities of marriage, a breakdown of character and all serious purpose in life, with an end that must be destructive to civilization? Is there nothing redeeming and hopeful to be found in this revolt of modern youth? Is the youth of today going to the dogs?"

Her answer, as developed in the thoughtful and far-seeing pages that follow, is one of the most arresting contributions to social criticism ever printed.

Is a New Form of Marriage in the Making?

JUDGE BEN B. LINDSEY [whose portrait appears at the right] frankly narrates startling stories of the strange cases that have come before him in his long experience as judge of Denver's Juvenile and Family court. And from these actual facts of present-day life he draws conclusions of a most astonishing character. Everyone interested in the great changes in code and custom which to many seem impending will wish to read this candid article on "The Moral Revolt" which appears in —

Also

in this notable issue of a great magazine are stories and novels by

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Rupert Hughes
Wallace Irwin
Leroy Scott
Ben Hecht
James Francis Dwyer
Arthur Mason

and other noted writers.

The **RED BOOK** *for April*

MAGAZINE

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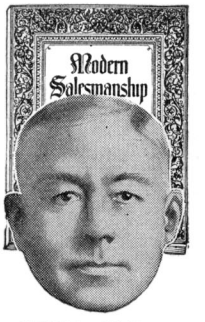

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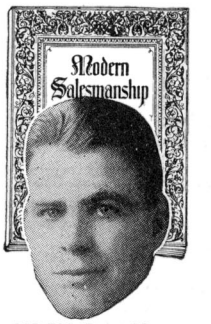
W. Hartle spent ten lean years in the railway mail service before "Modern Salesmanship" put him on the road to big pay. He has earned more in a week than he formerly earned in a month—averaged over $1,000 for thirty days!



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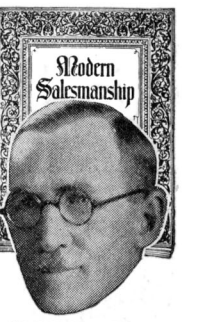

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F. G. Walsh was a clerk earning $1,000 a year, and trying to support a wife and three children. N. S. T. A. training built up his income last year to $7,286—an increase of over 700 per cent.

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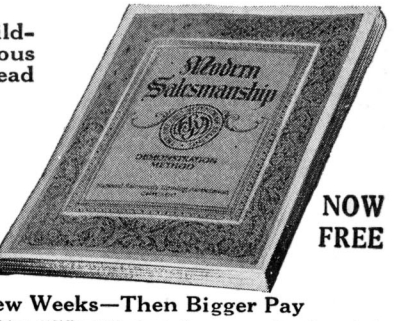

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The achievements of this remarkable book have already won world-wide recognition. The men who have increased their earning capacities as a direct result of reading "Modern Salesmanship" are numbered in the thousands. For example, there is E. E. Williams of California who was struggling along in a minor position at a small salary. "Modern Salesmanship" opened his eyes to things he had never dreamed of—and he cast his lot with the National Salesmen's Training Association. Within a few short months of simple preparation, he was earning $10,000 a year! To-day he receives as much in 30 days as he used to receive in 365!

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C. W. Birmingham, Ohio.

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"When I took up the National Salesmen's Training Association Course, I was selling shoes for $35 a week. Now I am earning an average of $135 a week. I attribute this remarkable progress to N. S. T. A. training.
James Jacobsen, Kentucky.

A Few Weeks—Then Bigger Pay

There was nothing "different" about these men when they started. Any man of average intelligence can duplicate the success they have achieved—for their experience proves that salesmen are made—not born, as some people have foolishly believed.

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If we were asking two or three dollars a copy for "Modern Salesmanship" you might hesitate. But it is now FREE. We cannot urge you too strongly to take advantage of this opportunity to see for yourself what salesmanship has done for others—and what the National Salesmen's Training Association stands ready and willing to do for you. Find out exactly what the underlying principles of salesmanship are—and how you can put them to work for you. No matter what your opinion is now, "Modern Salesmanship" will give you a new insight into this fascinating and highly-paid profession.

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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor
DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

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Cover design: Painted by Lawrence Herndon to illustrate "His Blaze of Glory."
Frontispiece: "The Cowboy's Calendar—May" by Will James.

Two Engrossing Novelettes

Roaring Bill By William Byron Mowery 7
This fascinating story of "The Man Who Died" is by the man who wrote "The Loon Lake Patrol," "The Red Heritage," "The Warden of Limberpine" and other stories you have liked well. (Illustrated by Paul Lehman.)

Jade By Joseph Blethen 164
The author of the Hiram Inkweller stories here offers you a most unusual drama of China and America. Be sure to read it. (Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson.)

Short Stories You Will Remember

The Harbor Builders By Warren Hastings Miller 25
Two American engineers tackle a hard job in North Africa and find the hostile Arabs and the Atlantic storms worthy foemen. (Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson.)

The Lady on the Stairs By Agatha Christie 35
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There's excitement of the most thrilling kind in this story of an American cattleman hard beset by a cutthroat gang in a Mexican tavern. And it's by the author of "The Lost Frontier." (Illustrated by Paul Lehman.)

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A joyous story of a fat youth and his friends on a motor adventure in the West—by the author of "The Tub Plays Sheik." (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

The Fortune Hunters By Stephen Hopkins Orcutt 86
One of the best of these widely popular Tales of the Merchant Marine—a story you will enjoy to the utmost. (Illustrated by William Molt.)

The Palooka's Punch By Ray C. Pearson 99
Lots of things happen in this lively story of passionate pugilism—including a battle well worth reading about. (Illustrated by William Molt.)

The Charge of the Golden Emperor By Bigelow Neal 108
The author of "Captain Jack," "At Hell-gate Butte" and many other attractive stories of wild life is in fine form here. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

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MAGAZINE

MAY, 1927

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A stirring tale of the wildest West, set down with notable skill and conviction by the author of "The Man Who Was Dead." (Illustrated by Paul Lehman.)

Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 150

"A Radio Double-Cross" again reveals Mr. New's extraordinary store of knowledge and his exceptional ingenuity in constructing an unusual story. (Illustrated by William Molt.)

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Modoc Rock By Frank Parker Stockbridge 52

This story of a star reporter's greatest case is by the author of the famous Buried Alive Club stories—and is one of the most interesting novels we've ever printed. (Illustrated by William Molt.)

We All Live Through It By Harold Mac Grath 114

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Fish-house Finance By Ross Berling 190

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A Border Mystery By Treasury Agent B— 193

A Government official here frankly sets down the facts about certain strange events in the Southwest.

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Advertising forms close on the third of second month preceding date of issue. Advertising rates on application.

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 45 MAY 1927 No. 1

Æneas Said a Mouthful

OF what stuff are good stories made?

"Perhaps at some future time," old Æneas exhorted his battle-worn and tempest-harried voyagers, "you will rejoice to remember even this."

Even this—the crisis of adventure, the height of hazard, perhaps the depth of despair. Hell at the time—but afterward, if you have borne yourself well, a treasured and dwelt-upon memory, a story to delight your grandchildren.

Have we here the basis of much interesting modern fiction? Consider, for example, some stories in this present issue:

Take "His Blaze of Glory"—that desperate exploit of an American cattle-man trapped in a Mexican honky-tonk. He lived ten years in ten minutes, and didn't enjoy it; but what a corking story it makes for you! And how often would he look back on that crowded hour with delight!

And "The Harbor Builders"—those two young American engineers struggling to build a breakwater on the North African coast, and caught between the devil of hostile Arabs and the literal deep sea of an Atlantic storm. Not just fun for them at the time, but they would recall it often and with pride. And we who read the story are absorbed and thrilled.

Good fiction, this, we sincerely believe. There's lots more of it in this same issue. And we take this occasion to call attention to some specially worth-while stories coming in the next number.

First there's Arthur Carhart's splendid short novel of the Oklahoma oil-fields—a fiction *locale* which combines the excitement of the old wild West, of the New York stock-market on a hectic day, and of a stampede to a new gold-field. There's a story to hold any man's interest.

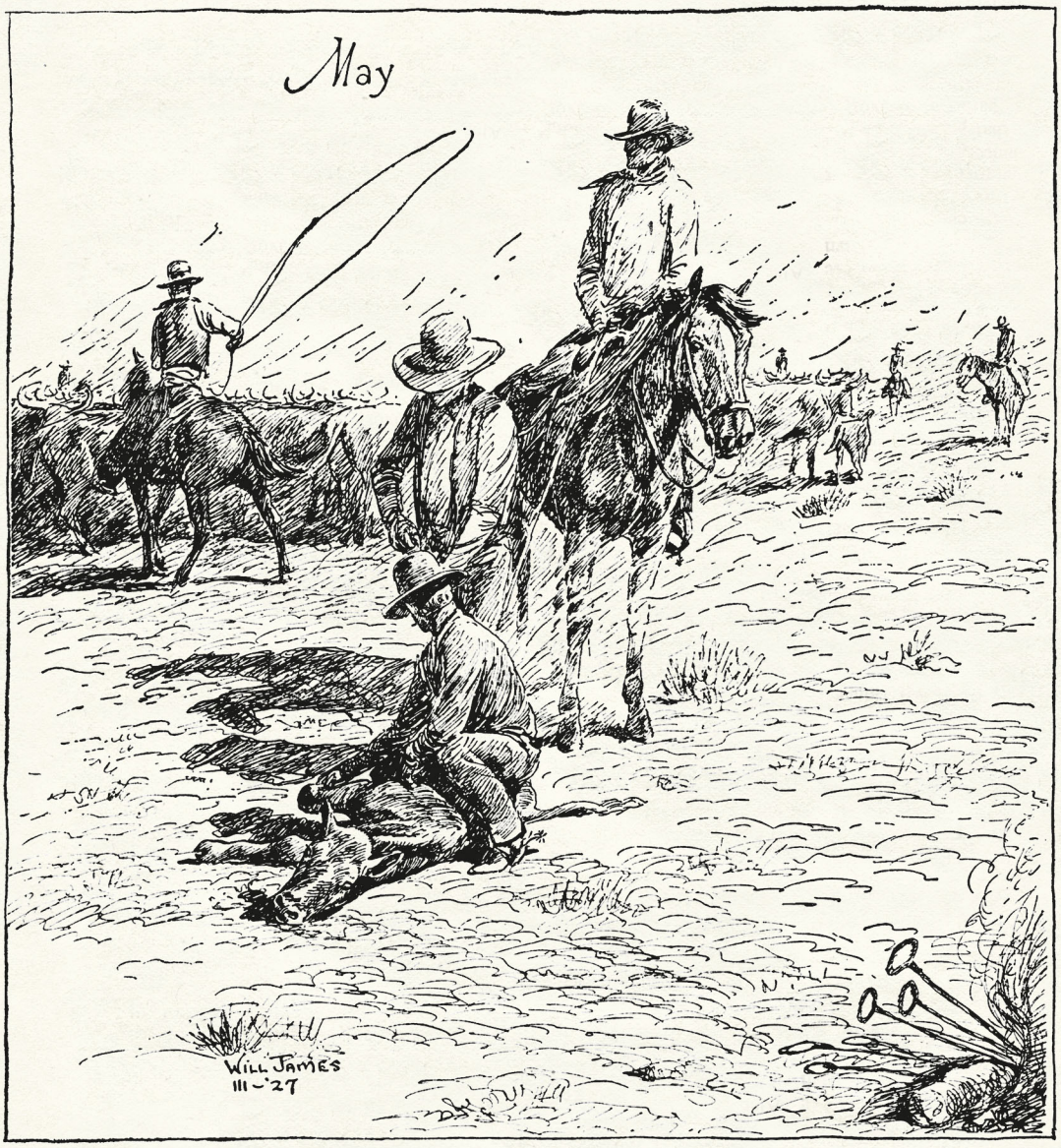
Be sure, also, to look for John Mersereau's fascinating drama of the Arizona desert "The Flying Dutchman," a story of hard days, of bitter struggle and of—victory.

In a lighter vein is "Cowboyin' in the Corn Country," a joyous tale by Bud La Mar, who was till lately a rodeo rider himself. Calvin Ball, too, is coming back with one of the most amusing tales he has ever written, "The Bon Ton Boom;" and if we can crowd it in, there'll be another of Whitman Chambers' jocund motor adventures.

The Old Guard will also be on hand: Clarence Herbert New with a fine story of the Free Lances in Diplomacy; Agatha Christie with a new exploit of that canny detective Hercule Poirot; Lemuel De Bra with a captivating Chinatown story; and so on.

And—not least—our prize stories of real experience: As near as we can judge, our readers are growing more and more interested in these, and you will find the winners of this next issue very well worth reading.

—*The Editors.*



The Spring Round-up

The Cowboy's Calendar—By Will James

"IF the winter is of average, and spring is not too slow in coming, the spring round-up starts in this month. A wagon goes out loaded with grub and the cowboys' own rolls of bedding. Wherever that wagon is, is where the riders gather when the work is done. It is camp.

"Following after the wagon there comes what's called the 'remuda,' which is a herd of saddle-horses furnished by the company for the riders. The wrangler hazes them along to every camp and sees that the ponies are in the rope corral whenever the riders need fresh horses. The spring round-up is when the new calves all get the markings and brand of the outfit the mother belongs to, and in this picture that's just what's happening."

Roaring Bill

By William Byron Mowery

This splendid story of "The Man Who Died"—of the mountains, and of a great-hearted giant who had reason to love them—is the finest thing yet written by the man who has already given us "Red Heritage," "The Warden of Limberpine" and other deeply impressive stories.

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

I WAS sitting behind the barracks that afternoon, smoking and trying to read a book. It was a poor try; the book had too much competition. At the edge of the woods a hundred yards away a deer was watching me, thinking itself unseen. Farther up along the slope there was an engrossing play of life—bird-calls, and marmots whistling, and squirrels leaping dizzily in the tree-tops.

From the river valley the snow-crowned Tunahlin Range sloped up gradually westward to the glacier peaks several miles distant. The hardwoods of the lower timber belts were splashed with riotous autumn colors. And down the Tunahlin Valley came an endless succession of high-flying V's—ducks, geese, white wavies, cranes, pelicans and the whole migrant rout—all of them gabbling, squawking, flackering and honking south before the first woolly-whipper whooped down from the Yukon.

The sunshine beating against the split logs felt mighty good, for the crisp October air had a vigorous tang to it. No one except myself was at barracks. Corporal McCourtie had borrowed my heavy rifle and gone up-valley to lay for a bear which he had seen and which he declared was the granddaddy of all the grizzlies in the Canadian Rockies. Constable King was out on patrol to an Indian settlement over east. Constable "Slob-Ice" Webster had gone down-valley to the H. B. fur station for our tobacco and some grouse ammunition.

Our days usually passed like that; we had very little to do. Our post was buried deep in the mountain wilderness of the western Cassiars, away from men and therefore away from work. An old gold-trail coming up from Edmonton and Calgary and Fort George forked in front of our door, one branch leading west over the Tunahlins to Telegraph Creek and on to Juneau, the other north to Dawson. We had about a hundred Moose-antler and Beaver Indians to look after, a couple of timber-estimating camps fifty miles southeast, a few dozen *méti* (half-breed) trappers, an occasional bighorn hunter, a sourdough now and then, and three lone wilderness homesteaders a day's ride down the valley.

We did all that was expected of us and more, and still had most of our time to ourselves. We hunted, fished, climbed some respectable glaciers, mapped a big block of country; and three evenings a week we walked up to "Roaring Bill" Mallory's cabin on the mountain-side where the Dawson telegraph came through, and listened to the ticking news of the outside world.

ONE good man could have held down the post easily enough, and here were four of us. The Mounted doesn't usually waste its personnel like that. When I first came,

I had wondered what under heaven was the reason of it. Then very gradually I realized. We were sent there not to work, but to recover from work. We were a sort of casualty squad, gathered at odd times from three different divisions. Instead of being invalided home to mope around and become soft, we had been sent to this Tunahlin River post, with merely nominal duties, to get in shape again for real service.

I think that our physical remolding was only a small factor in our being sent there. It is true the place was terrifically healthy; I had never seen any that quite equaled it for that. The winter cold, though intense, was dry and invigorating; the summer robust and exuberant. We breathed a mountain perfume of fir and pine all the time. It was a strenuous place; a man either went down and out quickly, as young Corporal Davis did, or else became as hard as oak again in a season. But the real reason of our being sent there was a little deeper and more subtle than body health; and it showed a profound wisdom in our sometimes-reviled superiors.

My own case will illustrate. I had been three years on the "hop squad" working in Vancouver. There are probably more drugs brought in along that strip of coast than at any other place on the continent. Those years were three years of hell. Hell means complete loss of faith in human nature and a belief that the ordinary virtues simply do not exist. I was no thinner of skin than the next fellow; some of my squad stuck it out only a year before asking for transfer. But three years of that work put me on the rocks physically and did worse than that mentally. I looked down into depths of depravity and vice so long and so steadily that I lost perspective, lost faith, and believed I was seeing the whole world in miniature.

Constable King was there for the same reason; he had been on the "hop squad" in Montreal. Webster's case was just the opposite of ours. He had been marooned four years on an Arctic island north of Seventy-five when the relief-ship twice failed to get through the ice and relieve him. I figured they were getting him used to civilization again by slow degrees. Corporal McCourtie's tragic case was unmentionable in detail. We never spoke of it, and whenever we saw him thinking about it, we snapped him out of it some way or other. It involved his young wife at a lonely station up near the Barren Grounds, and a pack of hungry, savage half-wolf huskies belonging to some Chippewyans, and McCourtie's desperate, futile attempts at surgery, and his lone, funereal sled-trip of three hundred and fifty miles.

So we were a casualty squad, or had been, rather; for all four of us were in the keenest health of body and mind again. We had taken on weight—stout muscle and bone; we had hardened; we had broadened out; we had straightened up and even added somewhat to our stature, though we were grown men around thirty years of age.

Some part of our redemption no doubt was due to the mere passing of time, but the greater part could be credited to our environment. There was a hugeness to that wilderness, a loneliness of just the right degree, an elemental molding power, that were far more potent than the tonic air or the vigor of the climate. I think that the exuberant zest and robust optimism and rugged qualities of our outfit had their counterparts in the wilderness spread around us, and that we drank them in without knowing it.

I WAS looking back across my seasons there and philosophizing about them over the pipe, and growling inwardly at my orders to report at Headquarters in November, when I heard two horses trotting up the valley trail. I thought it was King returning; he had taken an extra mount. But a few moments later an Indian, Bearfeathers, stalked around the corner of the barracks.

"Man want see you," he grunted, after I had returned his greeting. "I fetch'm up valley."

I stepped around toward the front. A stranger with a small leather portfolio in his hand was gazing up at the R. C. M. P. legend above the door. I walked on up to him.

He was a queer-looking person for that country. No sourdough or timber man or Government expert, but manifestly a *chechahco.* And even as an outsider I could not pigeonhole him. He was no big-game hunter, no professional roamer, no oil prospector. One could see that at a glance.

He was dressed in a serge suit that betrayed considerable wear. He wore a cap and "sidewalk" shoes, and a necktie that looked like a shoestring. I judged he was thirty-four or -five. He was medium-tall and a trifle chumpy. His eyes were a mild

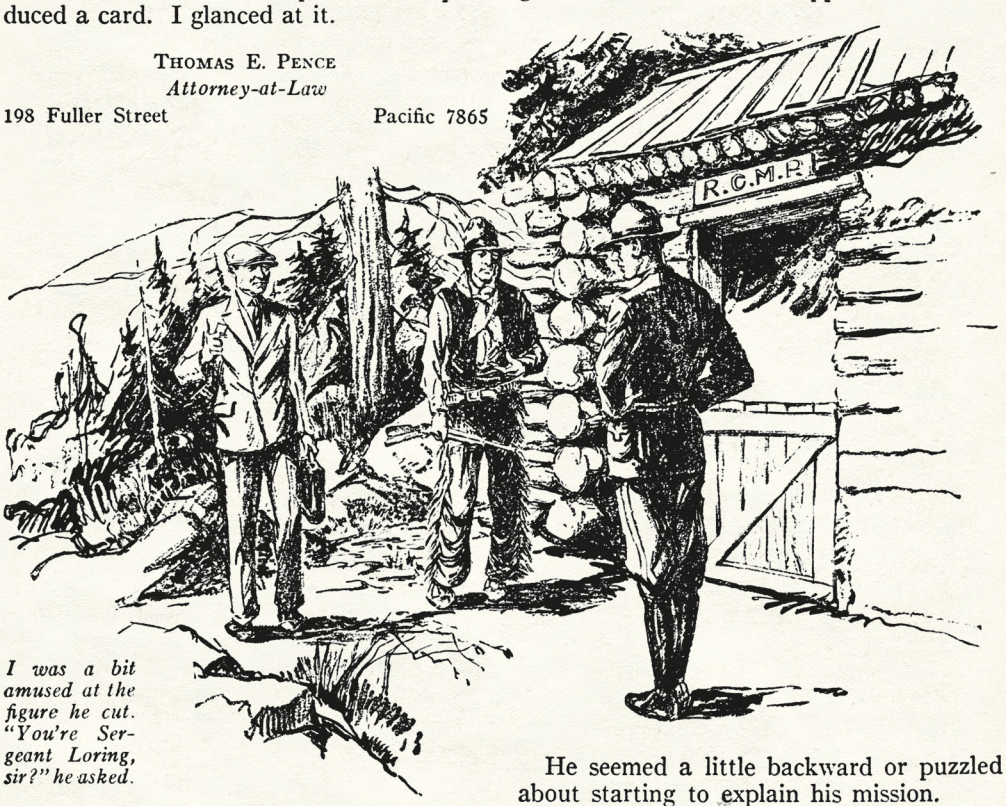
hazel, his face round, his complexion almost baby-pink. In spite of my wondering what on earth had brought him there to see me, I was a bit amused at the figure he cut.

"You're Sergeant Loring, sir?" he asked, looking at the three stripes.

"Yes."

He fished in his vest pocket and produced a card. I glanced at it.

THOMAS E. PENCE
Attorney-at-Law
198 Fuller Street Pacific 7865



I was a bit amused at the figure he cut. "You're Sergeant Loring, sir?" he asked.

"Of Seattle, Washington, sir," he added, clearing his throat.

It was a surprise to hear he hailed from so far away, and I was wondering what under heaven his mission could be; but it was a bigger surprise still to discover he was a lawyer. I looked at him closely as we shook hands. In my quick judgment a man more utterly unsuited to be a lawyer was hard to imagine. There was no brusque aggressiveness nor fighting quality about him. He lacked the sharp eye and quick, crisp tongue. He lacked every last essential of the profession. A lawyer worthy of the name could have stared him out of court.

His shabby clothes and battered old portfolio proved my judgment, proved him a pretty sorry failure. They indicated that carrying a brief-case was about as near as he came to being a real attorney. I pictured him drawing up small wills and doing other such five-dollar jobs—when he could get them. My amusement was slightly tinged with contempt.

Later I remembered, with the deepest shame and chagrin, this first reaction toward Pence. But I had nothing then to go on save his outward appearance.

He seemed a little backward or puzzled about starting to explain his mission.

"You probably came up here for a hunting vacation?" I suggested, to start him.

"No sir; I came up here to find a man. I was told that you perhaps would help me—"

I was astonished. Man-hunts were no very uncommon thing, but it was unusual to find a man like Pence on one of them.

"Certainly," I answered, hiding my surprise. "I'll be glad to do what I can if you'll tell me the circumstances."

"My last clear trace of him was about a hundred miles down the valley, at the little mining center called Singing Rock. They said he came up this trail. I followed on up to this abandoned mining-camp below here. The trading-master knew nothing about him, but he gave me a guide and some horses and sent me on to you."

"What kind of a looking man is he?"

Pence stooped, opened the portfolio and

took out two pictures. They were studio photographs, one a full-length picture, the other a close-up, both made in Seattle. The first showed a tall, lanky youth, thin as a bean-pole, stoop-shouldered, dressed rakishly and expensively, and trying his simpering best to look like a man. A girl was hanging on his arm, smiling sidewise at him. Her profile was very pretty, but there was something about her smile I didn't like. It was too doting—and manufactured.

The other picture, a close-up of the youth alone, said a lot. Dissipation, pampered idleness, viciousness, sensuality, were a few of the traits boldly and plainly brought out by a photographer more honest than flattering. I doubt if I ever saw a face I disliked more intensely. And there was an added depravity which I quickly recognized. The loose, shrunken lines of the jaws, the unnaturally rounded eyes, and other telltale marks—I had seen them on so many faces that I could spot a "snowbird" as far as I could see him.

This particular lad, however, I had never seen before. He was a total stranger to me. I wondered what on earth could ever have brought him clear up into that wilderness.

"Did he perhaps come past here?" Pence asked hesitantly.

My "No!" was pretty blunt. I was thinking that if I *had* seen a thing like that up there when nobody was around, I would have been tempted to put my foot on its neck and take hold of its legs and *pull*.

Pence seemed hurt and disappointed at my inability to help him. He mopped his face, though he must have been shivering in that thin serge suit.

"It's been quite some time ago, sir. Maybe you've forgotten him."

"He didn't come past since I've been here," I answered firmly. "If he'd passed when I was out on patrol, the men would have told me about it. Strangers—especially like that—are rare up here; folk remember them a long time."

"I know, I know, sir," Pence agreed. "It astonished me how well people remembered him—those who saw him."

HIS disappointment deepened. It was so tragic that I felt sorry for him, and for his sake began to take more than a perfunctory interest in his quest. Besides, I wondered more and more why a lad like that should have left home, or at least left snow-peddlers and luxury behind. I wondered why Pence was after him, seeming deeply concerned and troubled. It struck me there was something unusual and strange here. But I did not pry. I have learned that folk have a tendency to close up like a pricked oyster when you pry, and to disclose everything if you don't.

"Which direction was he headed?" I asked, thinking hard. "Toward Juneau, or on straight north?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You say it was sometime ago?"

"Yes, sir, quite sometime ago. In fact, sir—it—ah—"

I was busy thinking and paid little attention to his hesitant "ah's." If the youth had taken the Dawson Trail, he probably had passed out of the picture before he reached the next cabin, for it was eighty miles away over a terrific path. But if he had turned west on the Juneau fork, he would have passed Mallory's cabin. Mallory was in the habit of mothering things like that. There was no discrimination about him; anything that came along was hugely welcomed. We were more or less transients, but he was a moss-backed fixture. If the lad had taken the Juneau trail, Mallory more than likely would know something about him.

"And you're sure, sir," Pence asked, half-pleading, half-apologetic for repeating his question, "that he didn't pass here?"

"I didn't see him if he did. The most I can do for you is to take you to another man who might have seen him. It's about an hour's walk."

PENCE'S face brightened up hopefully. His sincerity and mildness was beginning to overcome the amusement with which I first sized him up. I hadn't the heart to tell him that our trip would be just what I had said—an hour's walk. If Mallory had seen the lad, there was about one chance in ten thousand of him not telling us about it, for we talked of everything under the sun during those evenings up there. And there was another reason, which seemed to me almost symbolic. At the fork the Juneau Trail climbed up into the mountains; the Dawson Trail led up the easy valley—for a little distance. A youth such as the picture showed would be likely to take the easy path without considering where it led to.

"I'd be very grateful for your trouble, sir," Pence said eagerly. "If I can trace him past this fork of the trail, it will be easy to follow him then."

I let off a couple shots by way of signal, to make sure that Mallory was home.

I assured him it would be no trouble at all. Going into the cabin, I got my gun and belt and also a fur coat for Pence, —young Corporal Davis' coat,—explaining off-handedly, when I went out and gave it to him, that it would be deucedly chilly up the mountain. He took it very thankfully.

I let off a couple shots by way of signal, to make sure Mallory was home. Following my eyes, Pence was looking up at the far-away cabin in the tiny mountain-side clearing. At that distance the swath where the telegraph-line went through looked like a mere ribbon.

A half-minute later I heard Mallory's roar come rolling down over the fir tops. I closed the door of the barracks and made Bear-feathers grin by telling him to hold the fort till we got back.

"Good gracious!" Pence exclaimed, as we started toward the edge of the woods. "Can that man halloo two miles? Old Polyphemus must have roared like that!"

I tacked another quality on Pence. Whatever his legal attainments, he was pretty well educated. His talk gave him away.

"Two miles?" I answered. "You aren't used to mountains. It's four miles up there. Bill can roar six; he can roar eight on still winter days. He practices roaring at the mountains."

Though I was telling the honest truth, most *chechahcos* would have thought I was playing upon their ignorance. But Pence did not. He simply accepted what I said as true. I think he accepted what anybody said as true. As I began to get acquainted, I felt myself warming toward him. One couldn't help liking his sincerity and candor. And I began to see that he had more depth to him than what I first imagined.

He seemed interested in the telegraph line; and at the first stop to let him breathe, I explained it was a relic of the attempt to connect America and Europe by throwing a line up across British Columbia and Alaska to Bering Straits, across that to Siberia, and across the Czar's domain clear to the European capitals; and that word of the success of the Atlantic cable had stopped the gigantic undertaking when it was half completed. I explained that this portion of the line was still in use to keep the Canadian Yukon in touch with the world, and that every eighty miles along it was a cabin where a man lived who "walked the wire" and kept the line in repair. I added that the man we were going to see was the oldest "wire-walker" on the job, that the rest could never stick it out over a couple of years.

At the next stop to breathe I probed a little bit, for Pence's quest and the whole situation had me puzzled and interested. I found out that the youth's name was Sidney Atherton; that he had inherited a good-sized fortune of several hundred thousand dollars; that he had suddenly "pitched off" without much more than the clothes on his back—without funds, or jewelry save a watch, or even the ability to earn his living except with his hands. It was beyond imagination that a person like him and in his circumstances should deliberately cut himself off like that.

"Maybe he was a victim of aphasia," I suggested.

"No sir. He wrote his name on a hotel register in Chilcotin. That's how I first got trace of him. The handwriting positively was his."

"I suppose you'll get a handsome bit of change if you find him, after your long, hard search."

"No sir," Pence answered. "The fee has nothing to do with it. In fact, there is no fee involved."

He must have seen my surprise and bewilderment, for he added:

"You see, he is a relative of mine, sir—a first cousin. His father and my mother were brother and sister. His father was in the ocean transport business. He operated some coast-wise steamers and a line to Japan—"

"And your father?" I blurted out before thinking.

"A minister, sir."

I was able to piece the picture together. Atherton's father could build up a fortune in the cutthroat Oriental trade. The same traits which enabled him to do that were strong in Pence's mother. She probably had small use for the ministry as a profession for her son. She had chosen law for him. That would explain the pathetic misfit.

"And besides the relationship," he added, "Sidney and I were always good friends—especially after our parents died."

THE idea of Pence being friends with the youth of that picture was almost incredible. They were as far apart as the poles. One threadbare poor, the other rich; one candid and sincere and high-minded, the other sneaking and vicious and debauched. But if Pence said they were friends, it was the truth, whatever the explanation.

While we climbed the last stretch to Mallory's cabin, I found out a few more things about Pence himself. He was married; he had two children; he could ill afford this expensive search. His law-practice was very slender, as I had guessed at first. He wanted to get out of it and take a degree in classics and teach, but he hadn't the money for the two years' study.

I noticed him looking around at the wilderness; at the valley spread below us, at the snowy peaks above, at the far-flung leagues of primitive, virgin forest. He sniffed the tang of pine on the thin, crisp air, and his eyes grew a little wider with awe as he looked around at the immense distances. I think he appreciated, for all his city life, the huge, elemental power of that wilderness. A month or two of strenuous idleness there, I thought, would do him a world of good.

Another thing I noticed, a very trivial incident, but none the less indicative. At our last stop a belated *brûlé* fly lit on his wrist and stung. A *brûlé* fly can sting painfully, can sting till the blood trickles. Our

habit was to smash them so hard that we usually hurt ourselves. But Pence merely looked at the fly and *brushed* it off. It seemed as if he took care not to injure the thing.

As we stepped out of the lodgepoles and approached Mallory's cabin, I found myself clutching at the same straw that Pence had clutched at. I wanted Mallory to know something about the depraved lad so that Pence's search would be cut short or speeded up at least and so that he could get back to his family.

BILL came out of the cabin and a couple of rods down the path to meet us. I could see Pence's mild eyes light up with amazement at the sight of this bush Hercules. We were so used to Bill that he no

Pence was tongue-tied with amazement at sight of this whopping stranger—the contrast between those two was laughable.

longer was a marvel to us, but I could imagine how he must have appeared to a stranger as he came face-to-face with us there on the hill-slope.

Constable Webster stood six feet one, but Mallory could look over his head. Though he was broad as a door, huge-shouldered, huge-chested and tremendously muscled, yet he was not stocky. He was perfectly built and perfectly proportioned. He took a great pride in his superb body. His hard work would have made him muscle-bound had he not guarded against that by practicing special muscular feats that were his delight. He must have weighed better than two hundred and fifty, yet he was light on his feet and a swift runner; and—though the word sounds odd—he was graceful.

Unlike a good many big men who are comparatively weak, Mallory was as strong as he looked. I knew him once to throw a three-hundred-pound caribou across his shoulder and walk home with it, five miles up a mountain game-trail! Whenever a bad storm snapped the telegraph at several places, he hit the trail—chopping, splicing, whooping on to the next break till all of them were mended, though it took him two or three or four days around the clock. When a tree was down across the line, he would roar at it and shake his ax and demolish the offending stick. He walked the wire through the worst blizzards the Yukon could hurl down at us; and very often in winter-time, when his neighbors on each side were afraid to stir outdoors, he covered their eighty miles for them and made repairs.

McCourtie called him "shaggy-barked," and in one way the words fitted him. His clothes were rough, homemade ones of leather. His hair, which he habitually combed with his fingers, was long and manelike. His heavy black beard went on

down his neck and spread out over his chest in a heavy growth.

But in another way the words did not fit. They implied a rough, ignorant bear of a man, and Mallory was not that. I knew him intimately, more intimately even than the other three of us did; and I can vouch for his being more than a big, good-hearted ignoramus. He had a shelf of books in his cabin, and devoured them hugely. He borrowed every volume that King and I had brought, and he was surprisingly well-informed for a man who had lived his life in the bush. And he was not queer or on the verge of "shaking hands with the willows," as a good many men are who lead a solitary life on the fur-path or gold-trail. He had some of the habits; he talked to himself; he kept pets and talked to them as if they were his children; he welcomed passers-by effusively; but he was entirely sane and wholesome.

Bill had come to mean a lot to us four men. Our zest and exuberant spirits and rugged health were more or less reflections of the mountain wilderness around us, but Mallory was the living incarnation of those qualities. Whenever we felt blue—and that was pretty often in the early days—we went up to visit Bill, and came back whistling. Why he should have been buoyant I don't know. He worked at terrific labor in all kinds of weather for thirty dollars a month, lived in a rough shack, had nothing but the telegraph click and dog-eared books for amusement. But his buoyancy was infectious. It surged out of him spontaneously. It overwhelmed whomever he came in contact with. I knew a weary-eyed Duluth banker who came in to hunt bighorns for a week and stayed a month, till the search-party came after him—following Bill around, listening to his roaring laugh, as if he had discovered something new, something priceless.

Mallory was elemental; he was something to tie to; he was a fire to warm our hands at; he was deep-rooted and unshakable as a mountain; he was—but Constable King summed it up when he said: "As long as Bill Mallory is up there roaring, I'm not afraid of devils." For that was the way we all felt.

I think that our respect for Mallory and our faith in him and his power of good over us were founded largely upon his simple-heartedness. He seemed as innocent and guileless as a baby. It was a marvel to see all that strength going hand-in-hand with gentleness and mildness. He and I had become about as intimate as two men can be, and I had never yet discovered anything in him but gentleness. My philosophy and all my observation inclined me to believe there were shortcomings and even latent capabilities of evil in any man; but in Mallory's case I had to conclude that this was not true. The mildest and most gentle man I ever knew before meeting Bill, had acquired those traits as a reaction from a crime. But with Mallory such a thing was unthinkable.

AS I knew he would be, Pence was tongue-tied with amazement at the sight of this whopping big stranger. And just as I had been, Mallory was pretty much surprised at Pence, for Pence did cut a queer figure. I let them size each other up a few moments before introducing them, for the contrast between those two was something laughable.

Bill's two pets had come out of the cabin with him. He was always bringing in fawns or wounded birds or cub animals, and just now he had a pair so strange that only his vigorous paternal language kept them from warfare. There was Pete, a Canada goose whose wing had mended almost enough for him to join the migration; and Jasper, a half-grown patch fox—a wild and untamable mischief who had strictly no use for hissing geese or any other two-legged creature except Mallory. Jasper was standing between Mallory's legs, staring up at us suspiciously from his glinting oval eyes; and Pete had flopped up to Bill's arm, where he looked for all the world like the pictures one sees of a lady with a canary perched upon her wrist. That fox and goose living there together, if not exactly in amity, at least in sufferance of each other, were a living monument to Bill's vast peace-making powers.

None of us ever shook hands with Bill; it was too risky, for he had no idea of his own strength. But Pence didn't know any better, and I'd forgotten to warn him not to. Bill shook his hand extra heartily. I saw Pence wince. When he drew back his hand, he flexed his fingers furtively and looked to see if any blood had been squeezed out of them.

I told Mallory that Pence wanted to speak with him a few minutes, and he led us back toward the door of the shack. In front of it were scattered squirrel-tails and rabbit-ears and mice with the heads eaten

off—Jasper's handiwork. This wanton killing was against Bill's principles. Two days before when I came up to visit him, I had heard him roaring: "You dirty hound, you had a ground-hog to eat this morning, and here you come toting in a poor rabbit. I ought to break you in two!"

I noticed that Mallory had already started gathering rocks and logs for the new and bigger cabin he was going to build. Instead of pitching off as the other wire-walkers did after a couple years at most, he evidently was counting on rooting in there for good.

We went inside the cabin and sat down, Pence on the chair, Bill and I on upended blocks. The sunlight streaming through the small west window just touched the top of Pence's cap. Pete the goose was fumbling in his hand for a tidbit. Jasper, after deciding that the wolf-fur coat was quite harmless, had come in and jumped up into Bill's lap. The door stood open, and I had a magnificent panorama of the ranges and foothills lying eastward.

The cabin was neat but rough and bare. The furniture consisted of four pieces: a bunk, a chair, a tin stove and a block table. A cracked mirror and some cooking tins hung on pegs behind the stove. The center of the floor was covered with three bear rugs. There was a shelf of books above the bunk; and the telegraph set stood beside it so that when the clicking stopped, Bill would wake up. At the other end of the cabin was a small fur loft. A slab, cleated for Pete's climbing to roost, led up to it.

On the shelf, besides the books, was a square, pound-size tobacco can where Mallory kept his money. His expenses were very small, and he made a considerable sum each season from bounties on wolves and catamounts. I figured he must have had many hundreds of dollars in that can. It was a sore temptation to a half-breed bush-sneak or to any person who did not know the wilderness law that thievery of a man's possessions is on a par with murder. No effort is made to hide things usually. The situation is a bit like that of the London bobbies. They wear no guns, but woe to the man who takes advantage of that fact!

SINCE I was the connecting link, I had to break the ice for them. Pence's first words surprised me. They explained his hesitant "ah's" down at the post. This young lad, it seemed, had disappeared a considerable time before any of us Mounted had come to Tunahlin River. I realized, after a moment of thinking, why Pence had been hesitant about that. If he mentioned at first how cold his trail was, people would think him crazy for trying to follow it and would not be likely to interest themselves. After their interest was aroused, he could tell them the facts. It was good reasoning, subtle reasoning, I had to admit. It had worked with me.

As he went on to describe the lad and I happened to glance away from him to Mallory, I had another surprise, a very disturbing and perplexing surprise, this—something was the matter with Mallory. For the first time in my acquaintance with him, his free, open-hearted manner had dropped. His eyes had narrowed suspiciously. He would not look at Pence. He was making a pretense at stroking the fox, but his huge hand trembled with nervousness. He sat very still, and when he spoke, it was in a deeper, hoarser voice than usual.

The change in him was so very pronounced that I could not possibly be mistaken. It was a puzzle, a bewildering puzzle, but not a tenth so bewildering as the shock I got a few moments later.

From the description of the youth, Pence told of him crossing the mountains from Chilcotin to Fort George and trading his watch there for some clothes. Pence had recovered the watch and obtained an accurate description of those clothes from the trading-book. Naturally he described the corded hat and the fantastically colored buckskin shirt and quilled trousers in minute detail to Mallory and me.

About a month previously I had come up to Bill's cabin to borrow his reloading outfit. He was out walking the wires. With the same freedom he would have taken down at the station, I hunted around for what I wanted. Up in the fur loft I had come across some garments. I had wondered about them at the time. They certainly were not Mallory's, for he would have burst them to tatters if he had tried to put them on. I thought they must be the duffle some passer-by had abandoned there. But Pence's description left no doubt in my mind.

Up there in his fur loft Mallory had this lad's hat and shirt and trousers!

My first reaction was stunned surprise. It was the sheer, drilled-in habit of self-control under such circumstances that kept

me from jumping to my feet and betraying what I knew. I gripped myself so that Pence or Mallory would not notice, and tried to think.

Of course there were other garments like the ones Pence described, and some one else might have left them there. But this young Atherton had come up the valley. It would have been strange that two people, dressed in clothes so peculiarly alike, should have passed there. The coincidence was too much for me to swallow. And besides, there was Bill's queer behavior.

It occurred to me that Atherton might have changed his clothes and left the old ones behind. But he could not have worn any of Mallory's, and Pence had said that the lad possessed nothing but what he wore on his back. He had traded his last possession, his watch, for them.

Atherton *had* passed that cabin. That much was bedrock certainty. Mallory knew something about him. That was a dead surety too. Why had Bill never mentioned this strange lad—when he had talked about every other sourdough or 'breed or Indian or *chechahco* who had ever passed his cabin? He had spoken at great length about these ordinary passers-by; they were events in his solitary life. Why had he never said a word about this extraordinary pallid-faced, drug-shattered, tenderfoot city lad's coming along? He had related trivial incidents about his visitors in great detail. Why had he never mentioned this lad's visit or leaving his clothes there?

My suspicions were aroused—not so much because of the facts I knew, but because of Bill's own actions. I would have swallowed the coincidence—I would have swallowed almost anything—if it had not been for his strange behavior. He gave himself away. He had some knowledge about the lad. His actions were the actions of a man with *guilty* knowledge.

I tried to laugh at my suspicions that Mallory, Roaring Bill Mallory, could be involved in something he did not wish to speak about; something that would not bear the light of day; something possibly criminal. I said over and over again to myself that he would explain those clothes and his silence satisfactorily. But his nervousness and strained manner were against him.

Then Pence repeated his hesitant question, leaning forward toward Mallory, hanging tremulously upon his answer.

"Did he perhaps pass here—and you saw him, Mr. Mallory?"

IT was a flat question. I didn't see how Mallory could evade it. I too was hanging upon his answer. If he said no, he would be lying. If he said yes, then he would have to explain those clothes and his strange silence about the lad and what had happened to him.

He was fidgeting nervously on the block of wood, still keeping his eyes away from Pence, though he glanced at me occasionally. He wet his lips a couple times before he spoke; and then—he side-stepped.

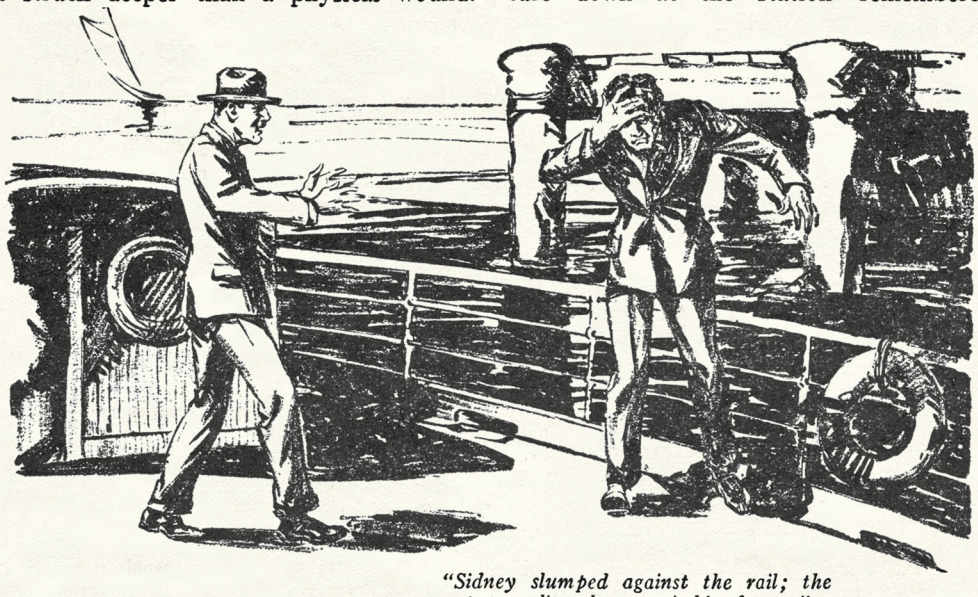
"I don't know—I can't say exactly," he answered haltingly. "You say it's been a considerable time ago. Mebbe, if I knowed more about him—"

His nervousness, his tautness, were so utterly unlike him that I knew he was under some tremendous strain. He *did* know, he *could* say; he was stalling, he was *lying!* Though I fought against it, I sensed that here was something which my sworn duty as an officer of the law would compel me to take a hand in and clear up.

Those moments as I sat there watching Bill Mallory were a little blacker than any I had ever gone through. It was not merely the sudden unexpected twist to Pence's hunt. It was not merely discovering that a man was probably a criminal. It was not even discovering something evil in a man whom we had thought honest. It was more than all that. With us Bill Mallory stood for certain things, certain precious, priceless things. When we had been on the rocky edge, it was his great, roaring, devil-chasing laugh, his simple, sunlit philosophy, his vast buoyant spirits that repeatedly dragged us back till we stood solidly on our own feet again. When King and I had faith in nothing else under the sun, not even in ourselves, we had faith in Bill Mallory. When the ordinary virtues had seemed to us mere empty shams which strong men broke and weak men obeyed because they had to, we saw those virtues starkly exemplified in the daily life of a man strong enough and intelligent enough to smash his way through life in whatsoever manner he liked. We had felt, we had sworn, that here was a man innocent of wrongdoing; blameless, guileless and upright. We had pinned our faith to Bill. With the four of us he was symbolic—symbolic of strength going hand-in-hand with gentleness, of purity of heart, of all the

things we desperately wanted to believe in and yet—in our calling—had a hard time believing.

If he were guilty of anything, I felt I would never believe in a human being again. Because of all this, the question of his blamelessness now was a question of terrible moment. And as I watched his nervousness and heard him uttering a lie, it struck deeper than a physical wound. were forming in my mind. The picture of the youth, his viciousness, his penniless destitution when he came to Mallory's cabin, the can of money recklessly displayed on the shelf, his shameful theft of it after Bill's mothering kindness toward him, and Bill's towering anger—they were plausible outlines. I remembered my own thoughts when I looked at the lad's picture down at the station—remembered



"Sidney slumped against the rail; the paper slipped out of his fingers."

There can be no blacker tragedy than the one I was facing. My suspicions of him seemed like a crime, but his lie drove me to them. If it had been in my power at that moment I would have kept that scroll from being unrolled any farther, so that my suspicions would never be anything more than suspicions, and so that the three men down at barracks could keep their faith in Bill. But it was not in my power.

PENCE was leaning forward, pleading.

"And you're quite sure, Mr. Mallory —quite sure you never saw him? Wont you try—to remember—that you did?"

"I can't say exactly," Bill repeated. "It's been a long while ago, years ago, you say."

Pence reached down to open his portfolio and took out the pictures. I cut in, then. I saw that Mallory was stalling for time, time to think. I wanted to give him that time—to cook up some story. I myself wanted time to think before some action was thrust upon me. The vague outlines of what possibly had happened what I, with no provocation at all, would have felt like doing to him. Bill had a dozen times more charity than I, true enough; but would even his big-heartedness excuse a treachery and villainy like the lad's stealing his money? I recalled a story which Bear-feathers had told me about Mallory—a story of what Mallory had done to a Beaver whom he caught clubbing his sick squaw.

I was trying desperately to justify Bill. I was clutching at straws; I realized it. If he were given time, he might cook up something to satisfy Pence; and I could get the truth later. So I cut in.

"Suppose," I said to Pence, "suppose you tell Bill and me some more about this Atherton lad. We're pretty much in the dark. You might give us a clue. We might be able to figure out where he was headed for. What kind of a lad was he? What made him pick up and leave home? And how certain are you that he came up this trail from Fort George?"

Pence hesitated. He was trying to get out of telling the story. I think it went

against his principles to speak evil of anybody, and he could not tell the story without saying a lot of hard things. But I told him rather firmly that if I were going to help him I couldn't work in the dark.

"I CAME back to Seattle from my law-school," Pence began, speaking mostly to me, "when Sidney was seventeen. His father died that same year. His mother had been dead since he was ten years old. He hadn't any near relative except myself. His guardian was a lawyer, the head of the trust-company that has had charge of the estate. According to the will, Sidney got twenty thousand a year to spend until he became of age. The estate, you see, was pretty large; the ships alone of the N-W-O Line sold for half a million—"

"Just a minute," I interrupted, as something like an inspiration flashed into my mind. "You mean his father owned the N-W-O Line? Do you recall if two tramp steamers, the *Gavriel Pribylof* and the *Kuro Siwa,* belonged to that Line? If I remember right, they did."

"Yes sir; Sidney's father owned them."

My inspiration had been correct! Here was retribution with a vengeance! Sergeant Banks, my predecessor with the Vancouver hop squad, had told me when he turned over the reins and the departmental secrets, to keep an eye on the crews of those two tramps. For a long time the men had been smuggling "snow" in, Banks said; but he had been unable to get court-sure evidence against them. He had appealed to the ship captains to let him place a man on the ships to get that evidence. They had told him to go to hell. He had appealed to the head of the company, old Atherton himself, pleading for coöperation; and Atherton had coldly replied that what his crews did was no concern of his. Certainly he would not permit any spies on his ships, nor would he go to the expense of hiring new crews because of a sergeant's suspicions.

It was more than probable that some of the "snow" smuggled in on Atherton's ships helped slide his own son down and out!

"What about it, sir?" Pence asked.

"Nothing. Go ahead with your story."

"I took an interest in Sidney," Pence continued. "He had some faults, and he developed some—some other—ah—faults. But I thought he would outgrow them. And he wasn't altogether to blame for them, sir. You know it is very unjust to give a boy that amount of money to do with as he pleases, especially a boy with no guidance or restraint. His father hadn't taken as much care with Sidney's training as perhaps he should have. His guardian was too busy, during those years after his father's death, to watch after him very closely. Besides, his guardian hadn't much control over him. So I thought it was my duty to guide him and help him find himself. Sidney seemed to like me, if I may say so. I had a good deal of influence over him, and I was hopeful, sir, that he would come out all right. He was not yet out of his formative years, either body or mind—"

NOW, I knew what Pence was meaning and would not boldly out with, for I was painfully familiar with the retarding, stultifying effects of the drug. Listening to his prevarications, I was reading the true story back of what he said. Those "some faults" he mentioned were viciousness and pampered idleness and prodigal extravagance. The "other—ah—faults" which the lad developed were sensual indulgence and the "snow" habit. I could see how old man Atherton, too calloused and unconcerned to give Sergeant Banks a little help in his praiseworthy fight, would also be so busy and so blind to higher values that he saw nothing but the outside of his son. Though it looked like a paradox on the face of it, I could understand, too, why young Atherton should like Pence, and why Pence was the only man who could do anything with him. To sway a depraved lad like him took infinite patience, such as the busy guardian did not have; and utter unselfishness and forbearance and kindness—such as Pence did have. And probably, when the lad's vicious habits broke out openly, Pence was the only one who stuck by him.

It struck me that this lawyer-guardian "too busy to look after him closely" must surely be getting many thousands a year for supervising the lad and the estate. I wondered how much Pence, the lad's spiritual guardian, ever got? His clothes answered that question. I remembered the remark I had dropped as we were climbing up to Mallory's cabin—"You'll get a handsome bit of change—" and it made me ashamed.

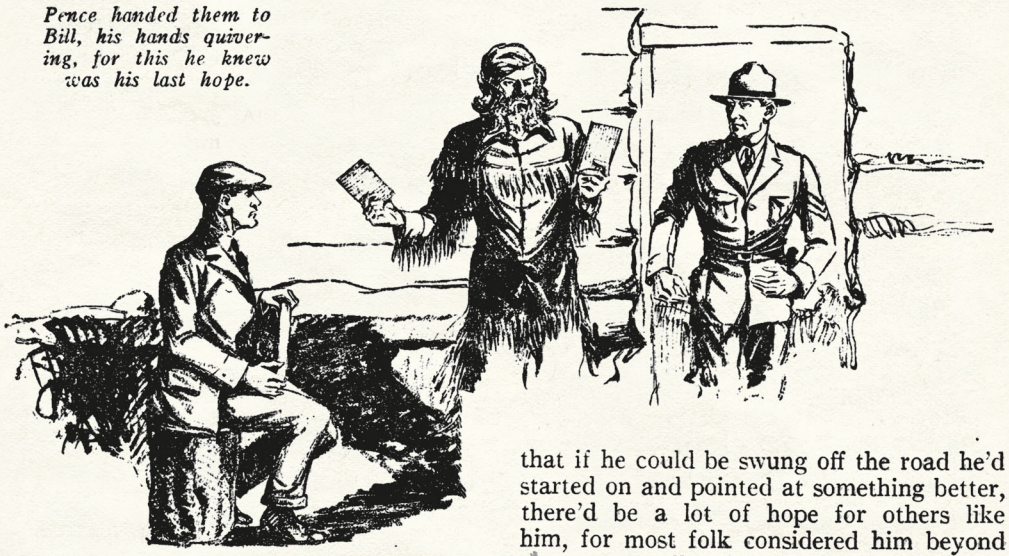
"You were not his official guardian, then?" I probed.

"No sir, I was merely a friend."

"Please excuse a personal question, Pence. But I am interested in your story. You say young Atherton liked you. A few thousand dollars meant little to him. He probably knew you wanted to get that degree. Did he like you to the extent of—"

"Oh, yes sir," Pence interrupted. "He offered me money a good many times. But don't you see that I couldn't accept it?"

"Why not? I don't see."



Pence handed them to Bill, his hands quivering, for this he knew was his last hope.

"If I'd have taken money from him, it would have looked—he might have thought that I was sticking by him for—ah—interested reasons, sir. And that would have completely undermined my influence with him."

Good heavens! An hour ago I had thought this man as shallow as a teaspoon!

"Go ahead," I bade him in a moment.

"I was hopeful, sir," Pence went on, "that Sidney would come out all right in the end. His mother was a woman of splendid, shining character, and I thought that eventually the heritage from her would overcome the heritage from—"

He stumbled, and started to retrieve his slip.

"From his father," I finished his sentence bluntly. "Go on."

"Of course I was hopeful for Sidney because he was my relative, and also because we were close friends. But there was another reason, sir. I don't know if I can make you understand it, but I'll try. It seemed to me that Sidney's case was typical of every young man who wakes up to manhood and finds himself struggling with deep influences and desires and temptations that he has not been trained to meet courageously and well. Of course Sidney's twenty thousand a year was a powerful weapon against himself which few young people have; but the main thing, the critical thing, was his lack of guidance. In that way his case *was* typical. What I'd like to make you understand, sir—I thought that if he could be swung off the road he'd started on and pointed at something better, there'd be a lot of hope for others like him, for most folk considered him beyond grace or recall. Of that whole class who are considered hopeless, Sidney was—"

"Symbolic," I interrupted. "I understand you perfectly, Pence. And it was a very momentous issue with you, Pence."

"Yes sir—symbolic. And it was as you say, a momentous issue. I didn't dare give up, or despair. I stuck with him for several years. And very gradually I began to succeed. He was weaning himself away from the wrong kind of associates, and talking about college, and cutting down on—"

ONCE again poor Pence stumbled, and started to retrieve his slip.

"Cutting down on dope!" I finished for him. "I saw that in the picture. Go ahead."

Pence mopped his forehead. I was sorry I had been so brutal.

"Then Sidney met a girl and fell in love with her. Very deeply in love, sir. I think it was the most potent thing which had ever come into his life. I knew it would be either a very good influence or a very bad one. That all depended on

the girl. I didn't—ah—like her so very well; but then I didn't really know her. So I resolved just to watch. But Sidney's guardian took a hand in it. He still managed the estate, although Sidney was twenty-three; for one of the provisions of the will was that Sidney could not touch his estate till he had finished his education. So the guardian had a certain influence over him.

"I found out afterward just what happened. If I had known in time, I would have strongly opposed it. His guardian called Sidney to his office one day and told him very forcefully that the girl was—a—a—ah—"

It seemed I was slated to supply all of Pence's hard words for him. I wasn't entirely sure of the right word this time, but I remembered the girl's face and took a chance.

"A gold-digger?"

"Yes sir; he called her a notorious gold-digger, and he told Sidney she would give him a golden fleecing and throw him over in a year's time. Those are his very words, sir; he repeated them to me. Sidney called him a liar. He wanted to fight. He offered to wager his whole estate. As nearly as I can remember, his guardian said:

" 'I could make six hundred thousand dollars mighty easy, Atherton; but if I'd take it away from you on a bet as sure as that, I'd get run out of town. But you've called me a liar and you wanted to fight, and you ought to be willing to stage a show-down. Since you've mentioned your confounded estate, suppose I write a personal letter to this girl and inform her in friendly fashion that your estate has gone on the rocks and that you'll be penniless in three months when receivership is demanded? I'll make it sound plausible, all right. And I'll give her an excuse for my letter by telling her how much you need her love and sympathy and so forth now, and wont she try to comfort you and stick with you closer than ever. If you're so damned sure of her as to call me a liar, you ought to agree to that!'

"Sidney *was* sure of her, sir. He was so eager to prove her innocence that he jumped at this chance. He even helped write the letter, and supplied some personal details.

"Sidney and she had planned to take a short yachting trip the next day. He went down to his yacht in Elliot Bay to wait for her as they had arranged. His guardian came to see what happened. She did not appear. Instead came a note. Sidney turned white as he tore it open. The guardian didn't know what it said, for Sidney slumped against the rail, shivering and nerveless and stricken; and the paper slipped out of his fingers and went fluttering out upon the water. After a while he managed to go down to the cabin, and poured himself a little liquor and then went ashore, never speaking a word to anybody.

"No one ever saw him after he stepped ashore. He didn't even go back to his apartment. He simply disappeared.

"We tried to find him. We advertised; we hired detectives. But for six years we never got a trace of him. It wasn't till this July that we heard of him again. Then a man who'd years ago been skipper on one of Atherton's coast-wise boats and who'd gone into the lumber business for himself up the Fraser River, came back to Seattle and heard about the disappearance. He hunted me up and told me about seeing Sidney Atherton's name on the hotel register in Chilcotin six years ago. He wondered at the time what young Atherton was doing up there, but he didn't realize its significance till he heard about Sidney's disappearing.

"I went up there immediately and verified what he said. I traced Sidney across to Fort George. There is no doubt in the world about it, sir. People remembered him very distinctly. He was dressed queerly for what folks up here call 'the bush.' And he acted queerly too, as you may imagine he would do. From Fort George I traced him—"

I INTERRUPTED Pence there. I had added together several things he had said; and an idea—an idea about Pence—was shooting through my mind. I had studied him as he talked. He himself was a hundred times more interesting, more amazing, more worthy of attention than the story he told of a worthless young hop-head. Except as it affected Pence and Bill Mallory, I did not give a damn what had happened to this Atherton whelp. As far as I was concerned, he was out of the story. It was Mallory and Pence, and what those two men signified, that I cared about.

More and more as he talked, Pence had come to the forefront of my thoughts and Mallory, in spite of his momentous issue

still hanging fire, had slipped back. Pence was amazing, he was a growing revelation. I had come to realize that the man was profoundly wise in matters of human psychology. His hesitant "ah's" were one small instance of it And from my own past three years, I could surely appreciate the profound wisdom of a man who could fight against the snow habit and a vicious nature and twenty thousand a year. I hadn't the faintest doubt but that Pence would have succeeded entirely if this guardian had not butted in and ruined everything.

For all his mildness, Pence was tenacious as a bulldog. His six years of trying to reform the lad were witness to that. I doubted if Bill Mallory had that much courage. In his own quiet way Pence was cheerful and optimistic. His cheerfulness was of the deliberate, reasoned sort—the diametric opposite of Mallory's huge, roaring overflow. I suspected that when one got to know him intimately he would be as inspiriting and strengthening as Mallory had been to us. And Pence had achieved his cheerfulness with no aid from a wonderful natural environment or high-spirited animal health; he had achieved it in spite of meager earnings and a dozen carking worries and all the petty human sordidness that he encountered in his distasteful profession.

His kindness, his charity, his transparent sincerity were other qualities of the man. I fully realized by now that when I stepped around the corner of the barracks down below there and saw him gazing up at the letters, it had been my good fortune to meet a man entirely worthy of respect and admiration. But all these traits were tame compared with the idea—the idea about Pence—which was shooting through my mind. It seemed incredible; it was amazing; but still—Pence was amazing. So I cut in, to see if it could be true.

"JUST a minute," I interrupted. "I want to ask you a couple questions, Pence. What happened to the Atherton estate?"

"Nothing, sir. The trust company still administers it. The guardian is a very wise man financially. I think the estate must be worth eight or nine hundred thousand dollars by now."

"The will made provisions for the disposal of the estate in case young Atherton died, did it not?"

"Yes sir."

"You no doubt know the law in a matter of wills like this, Pence. You know that the legacy could be thrown into court, and Sidney Atherton, in view of his long absence, adjudged legally dead. Is there an 'Enoch Arden statute' in Washington? There isn't? Then the common law would cover this instance. If the case were thrown into court and pressed hard, the common law would adjudge young Atherton legally dead, wouldn't it, Pence?"

"Yes sir; I believe it would."

"Now, what were these provisions of the will in case young Atherton died, Pence?"

I think he saw what I was driving at. He fidgeted in the creaky chair. I had to repeat the question.

"There's provision for founding a chair of nautical engineering at the University, and several bequests to his ship-captains and—"

"Lump these small items all together, Pence, and deduct them. How much of the estate is left?"

"About two-thirds, sir, or six hundred thousand."

"What happens to that?"

"It goes to various relatives."

"You told me, Pence, that you were Atherton's only near relative. *How much of that six hundred thousand goes to you?*"

He swallowed a couple times and tried to dodge that question. He started to explain about those other distant relatives. I made him stop, and pinned him down to a clean-cut answer.

"Practically all of it, sir. Five hundred thousand, I should say."

BILL MALLORY got up and tramped heavily at the door and spat down the slope and came back. I couldn't do anything but sit and stare at Pence. He was mopping his forehead and fidgeting painfully in his chair. I guess he was thinking that we figured him the damndest fool we had ever met.

In one way I was thinking just that of him. If his bulldog persistence should happen to be successful, if he should happen to trace young Atherton and find him up the line somewhere working honestly for his salt horse and beans, and should drag him back to that estate, it was a ten-to-one gamble that the lad would soften and ease back into his old ways and take up his vices where he had left them off. But then, Pence was wise. Surely he had

thought about that. Probably he was banking on his own ability to keep the lad straight.

In any event, here he was, man-hunting for this young Atherton, this symbol of young wickedness, when success meant that he would be cutting himself out of half a million dollars! Even after I had bored through his reluctance and seen my idea starkly proved, I could not at first believe. On the surface, unselfishness like that looked preposterous. But thinking a moment and looking a little deeper, I began to understand and to believe it. Half a million dollars sounded like an avalanche boom in my ears, but twenty thousand would have done almost as well with Pence. All he wanted was that degree and a decent living and probably educational advantages for his kids. No doubt young Atherton would have offered him that much at least as a reward, and he could have accepted it. His hunt and all it implied were not a bit more amazing or preposterous than his six-year attempt to reform young Atherton.

But making all deductions, his act still stood in front of me as the most amazing, most colossal instance of unselfishness I had ever seen.

It was a question with me whether this Atherton story, which Pence in my esteem was riding to glory on, was going to prove a toboggan for Bill Mallory—a toboggan that would slide him down and out.

"Suppose," I suggested to Pence, "suppose you show Mallory those pictures you showed me, and see if maybe they will recall this lad to his mind."

Pence stooped and took them out and handed them to Bill. His hands were fairly quivering as he did so, for this he knew was his last hope, because of the fork of the trail. I was watching closely, to see what Mallory would do. I had decided that if he did not admit the lad came past his place, I would take Pence down to barracks, come back, and force Mallory to tell what had happened. But Bill surprised me.

His eyes lit up as he took the pictures and glanced at them. He appeared very much startled. He was feigning that, of course; he had known all along that the lad who came past his cabin and whose clothes were in his possession was the lad Pence was searching for. The point is, Bill had had time to cook up a story.

"Great Smokes, yes!" he ejaculated. "I sure*lee* do remember the boy."

Pence jumped as if he had been hit. He exclaimed something or other; it doesn't make any difference what.

"But look here, Bill," I said pointedly. "Why didn't you remember him before you saw the pictures? Pence's description of the clothes and of the lad was definite enough."

"I did remember him," Bill answered frankly. "That is, I suspicioned that the boy I remembered was Pence's boy. But I wasn't dead sure—not till them pictures. In a matter like that, seeing how keyed-up Pence was over him, I didn't want to say anything till I was dead sure."

That was understandable, all right. And no doubt Bill had wanted to hear the story just the same as I did. But it wouldn't explain his previous silence about the lad's passing there. I expected him to explain that now. And I wasn't going to swallow any story that was manifestly manufactured.

"Tell us what you know about him," I said briefly.

"I kinda hate to," he said hesitantly, for once looking at Pence, "seeing you thought so much of him, Mr. Pence, and want to find him so bad. But I s'pose you'd find out some other way, mebbe, so I might as well—"

PENCE had a premonition of what was coming. One could see that by the fear and sorrow creeping into his honest face.

"—might as well tell you now," Bill concluded, after a deep breath. "The young fellow come up here, all right. He was in a mighty pitiful condition. Inside he was all broke up about something. I c'n see now it was about that girl. He had just reached his limit. He was looking for a place to drownd himself. I'm not stretching it—he was wanting to die. His body was all shot, too; and you know how that affects a fellow's spirits.

"But I'll say this much for him. I know it'll be a mighty comforting thing for you to hear, Mr. Pence. He had cut out dope, cut it out completely. There was a bottle of pain-killer here that's heavy with dope, and he wouldn't touch the stuff. It was an awful terrific fight with him, but he won out. He was off of it; he was off all them things you hinted at. He had won out completely. But in a fight like that where

"I'll swear to it," he was saying. "That fellow did die — Tommy didn't know me!"

a fellow's fighting ag'inst himself, he pays a big price to win out. It was just like as if he'd cut half of himself away.

"I got mighty well acquainted with him," Bill went on, with a sorrowful, remembering look in his eyes. "I've thought about that boy a hundred times since. It was pitiful—God, it was pitiful! Just when he'd won out completely, for him to—You see, he'd cut all those things away from him. He even said he'd never go back. I don't know what it was he wouldn't go back to, but I see now it was that money. He wouldn't go back to it; he was afraid he might slump. He was that set and determined. Money, even near a million dollars, didn't mean a thing to him in comparison with his own self."

Pence's face was a picture—sorrow, deep and stricken; but shining elation, too.

"This place here," Bill went on in a moment, leading up very gradually and tenderly to what we both foresaw,—"this place here is mighty exactin'. I mean it's a strong place; a fellow either goes down and out in a wink, or he braces up and shakes out of it mighty quick. You seen how that worked with Jimmy Davis last spring, Loring?"

I nodded.

"If the young fellow had had more to build on, he might have stood a chance; for he had a grip of himself, and he had the fighting spunk. But he was too far gone. He kept on fighting to the end—"

I wanted to turn Pence's sorrow aside for a moment at least. I interrupted:

"But this trip across the mountains and up this valley, Bill, ought to have spruced him up some and given him a toe-hold."

"That's what I thought. But my, my goodness,"—Bill shook his head sadly as he looked back at the occasion,— "you didn't see him, Loring. You have no idea—"

Pence got up and went to the door. I saw him reaching furtively for a handkerchief as he stepped outside. He didn't want us to see.

I leaned forward closer to Mallory.

"What happened, Bill? He died, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Haven't you got any of his possessions or anything to prove he died?"

"Why, yes, Loring; I have. I've got his clothes."

He was amazingly frank and open-hearted about his admission. His nervousness had left him. He seemed his old self again.

A number of things were shooting through my mind at that particular moment, but two of them stood out above all the others. One of them was the momentous question involving Bill Mallory. Was he lying? Was his whole story a fabrication? It sounded honest and straightforward; my doubt of him seemed criminal.

But there was the unanswered question of why he had been silent about the lad. His story did not explain that. Though I wanted to believe him, though that belief would have rolled a black load from my shoulders, I could not accept what he said as the whole truth.

I had my own idea of what that truth was. If the lad had stolen the money or aroused Bill's anger by some other dastardly trick, and something had happened,—other than what Bill related,—Bill might possibly be veiling the sorry truth out of compassion for Pence. For me there was small consolation in knowing that, whatever had happened, the wilderness law had justified Mallory.

The other preëminent thing in my mind was a fervent desire to see Pence rewarded, at least materially—rewarded in some way commensurate with his deserts. To see him free of his profession and into another where he would be a success; that is, where he would be happy. Heaven knows, I thought, he would never achieve that freedom himself. He had none of the so-called predatory instincts.

"Bill," I asked, "what made you get up and go over to the door awhile ago?"

"Good Lord, didn't you hear what he said, Loring? You ought to've heard; you dragged it out of him. He's searching for a man he'd lose half a million dollars to find. Aint that enough to stir a fellow?"

"That's how I figured you, Bill. Now what I'm driving at is this: You've got some of this lad's possessions as material evidence. That will go a long ways. If you'll dictate your story to me, and we have the other fellows witness it, do you see what that means, Bill? The document will be worth that half a million to Pence. He'll get it. He'll have to get it!"

Bill looked at me with mild reproach in his eyes. "Why, goodness, Loring, I was meaning to do that. Sure, bring up the fellows and we'll make out the affidavit—"

Pence came back in then. There was a suspicious redness about his eyes, but he was quite calm and collected again. Bill and I both shut up. I guess we felt it would have been indelicate to mention money-matters to him then. One thing I'm sure of; the thought of that fortune being his, now that Atherton was dead, had never occurred to him.

While he was there, I would not make Bill tell me the truth. And yet I did not want to take Pence down to barracks and come back. The momentous question of Bill's innocence was plain agony, unendurable. I had to know.

As shortly as I could, I drew Pence away and edged him out the door and started down the path. His battered old portfolio was lying forgotten on the bear rug and the two pictures beside it. They meant nothing to him now; he had come to the sorrowful end of his search. For reasons of my own I did not remind him of them or pick them up.

AT the edge of the tiny mountain-side clearing I stopped and told Pence to sit on a boulder there till I went back and got his portfolio.

As I came within a couple yards of the cabin threshold, the pet fox yapped at me and fled inside. I stepped up on the threshold. Pete the goose was waddling up the cleated slab to his roost, though the sun was still an hour high, making the low, gabbling sounds of a goose with a full craw at sunset.

Bill was standing in the middle of the floor, his body half turned away from me so that I was looking at his silhouette, and so that the late sun streaming through the window fell upon his shoulders and his shaggy hair. He was standing so still and so intent that he did not hear me; and something in his posture struck me suddenly silent and tongue-tied.

He was holding in one hand the cracked old mirror and in the other the picture of Sidney Atherton. He was talking to himself, in the habit of solitude—speaking hardly above a whisper, but his deep, resonant voice carried to me distinctly.

"I'll sign the affidavit," he was saying. "I'll swear to it. It'll be worth half a million dollars to him."

He paused there a moment, glancing from the picture to his own image in the mirror, and back to the picture again.

"I'll swear to it," he repeated. "By the Lord, I'll swear to it. And it wont be a lie. That fellow did die. He died six years ago. All hell— *Tommy himself didn't know me!*"

Bou Maza was leading them to the attack; Archerson whipped out his revolver.

The man who wrote "High Tension," "How the Croix Is Won," "Royal Bengal" and many other well-liked stories here offers another tale of North Africa—this time a tale of two American engineers in a death-struggle with the Arabs and the Atlantic.

The Harbor Builders

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

WHAT Archerson, C. E., expected to get out of this present job was the chance to build the New Mole at Algiers. They had been harbor-sounding for it when he left, a year ago. The Casa Blanca Breakwater had given him fame, but not independent fame; for Danon, the French engineer, had been chief there, and Archerson his assistant. But now they had given him this small port of the western Sahara to play with.

Archerson sat back in his dinghy, looked over his work and found it good. Block by block, gravel-scow by gravel-scow, the Cape Miriek Breakwater was growing under his direction. Nature had given him a reef, a small island on the heel of the reef near shore, and a narrow bay with a spit of sand running out to sea opposite the rock run of the reef. All the foundations that an engineer of his ability and ambition needed, Archerson had decided, when he bid for the contract in Algiers. A fill of gravel on the reef, a wall of big concrete blocks bedded on that, stone revetments dumped on the seaward side of that wall—and lo, a breakwater running out from the island that would make a port of Cape Miriek!

The Algerian Government agreed with him; and as most the men of Danon's caliber were reaching for bigger things than this, Archerson got the contract. Also he knew that the man who puts through anything at all in a God-forsaken region like the West Coast of the Sahara establishes a confidence with them whose duty it is to award jobs that would give him an exceedingly favorable lead when it came to the New Mole.

The Chief Engineer of the Cape Miriek Breakwater was at this moment giving him-

self up to memories. He was a large and sunburned man, with an obstinate jaw and rather choleric eyes, clean-shaven, and gifted with a dense bootbrush of bleached and tow-colored hair that never seemed to need the protection of a solar topee. His memories were reviewing a crowded and hectic year; memories of those raw beginnings when it was absolutely necessary to be rude, with rifles, to an enthusiastic *harka* of Tuaregs who seemed to regard Archerson's fleet of gravel-scows, supply barges, stone-boats, floating crane and diver's launch as loot sent from Allah for their special benefit; of civil war and pestilence over in the Arab camp of the Beni Khelil, who had established themselves on the point as laborers on the Cape Miriek Breakwater; of desperate battles with the Atlantic, when northwest gales had twice piled in and washed acres of gravel fill, tons of revetment stone, and rods of huge concrete blocks weighing twenty tons apiece off the reef as if they had been so much sludge.

Then there was the little incident of that sandstorm sweeping up out of the Erg Iguidi and lasting a week—by which time their only well was filled to the brim with sand. Archerson and Jimmy Burbridge, his cub, had stood guard for twenty-four hours, rifles in hand, while the Beni Khelil dug out that well again, cursing—for they regarded it as an act of God and a sign that the breakwater was afflicted by evil spirits. There was the time when Big Ben, their giant floating crane, had gone adrift before an accursed *shamali,* north wind, and again it was Jimmy Burbridge, cub, assistant and Archerson's one dependable man, who had stuck to her with the diver's launch, finally unbolting and prying overboard a half-ton cast-iron steam pump that held when all his anchors were but scratchingly futilely over the sands.

Always Jimmy, through those memories—the boy who didn't know much when he first came on the job, but was that much easier to break to Archerson's ways; the assistant who spared himself no more than Archerson did his own long frame, worn beyond the limits of human endurance though both might be by the indefatigable heat, the treacherous Atlantic (always a smooth and smiling adversary,) and the idiotic Arabs who were blown hither and yon by every rumor and were never much better than born thieves and liars, and who worked as little as might be for as much as they could get. Yes, Burbridge was a valuable assistant, hand-raised, a cub of cubs!

Archerson's hard eyes softened as he watched Jimmy now, his tall and unmatured figure of scarce twenty years bent over a transit eyepiece and both arms signaling vigorously as Big Ben lowered yet another enormous concrete block into place in the line of them growing out upon the reef. The breakwater was two men's work, really. Shoulder to shoulder they had developed the technique of its building, how you had to make fast all that you held against the treacherous Atlantic, guarding each block with its riprap of stone, nailing down each fill from the gravel-scows with a layer of blocks lest the Atlantic run off with it, profiting by mistakes and learning by storms—an improvised technique, not found in books but learned as you went along, learned from those two inexorable tutors, the Atlantic and the Sahara.

Two men's work, unless you counted Achmed—who most positively counted himself in! He had joined the force from God knows where off a felucca in the Bay of Algiers. He could swim like a fish, do anything in the world with tackle, and boss anything in a burnous, no matter how truculent, for Achmed possessed a fist like a knuckle of beef and a voice that was Authority itself.

Archerson gave the order to row over to where Achmed himself was busy, standing on a concrete block suspended by the steel wire cable strands and giant pulley of Big Ben. One of Achmed's burnoused arms was waving at Burbridge behind his transit; his mouth was belaboring with Arabic invective the Portuguese engineer at the lever in Big Ben's house-on-deck.

"A foot more to the west, offspring of a flea!" he was shouting at the mechanic who controlled the movements of Big Ben. *"Aiwa!* Are we here for the look of the thing? West, and lower, the Sidi Seghrir says!" he added.

OLD Achmed always became vociferous when the Sidi Kebir, as he called the Chief Engineer, approached. Archerson smiled. These two he could depend on! No block was laid on that breakwater but Achmed directed it in person and Burbridge saw to it that it was true by his instrument. It would stay put when they got through with it!

"Good morning, Achmed!" he greeted the general foreman, whose black beard

thereupon cracked in a thick-lipped grin, exposing one lone yellow tooth.

"May God salute you, ya Sidi Kebir!" returned Achmed cheerfully. —"Lower away, there, dung of forty camels!" This to the Portuguese, for Burbridge had spread his arms out horizontally behind the transit, signaling that the block was true in place at the head of the wall of them stretching out to sea. The engine inside thumped and the wire cable began to move through its pulley sheave, slowly and warily. Water surged over the block face as it lowered. Achmed fended with a horny toe against the wall of the block already set, water rising above his ankles, up to his knees. He was holding a level staff fixedly the while, its round red-and-white disc some feet above his head. Down went the block, Achmed submerging with it. Over his head closed the Atlantic, but the leveling rod still stuck up, steadily lowering.

"That's well!" called out young Burbridge sharply, and at the same time hurled overboard a large stone. Achmed came sputtering to the surface at that signal, his brown eyes gleaming, a cavernous smile displaying the yellow tooth to advantage.

"Set she is, fair and true, that one!" he reported. "Our breakwater comes on apace, ya Sidi Kebir."

"*Our* breakwater, Achmed?" bantered Archerson.

"In truth, seeing that thou and I and the Sidi Seghrir, as it were, built it," retorted Achmed unabashed. "The rest—but flies on a camel's hump, the misbegotten ones!"

"The rest" but being a mere thousand-odd of the Beni Khelil in the camp over on the point, and a half-dozen Portuguese subforemen of the concrete mixers, the stone and gravel boats, the machinery of Big Ben and the diver's launch. But Archerson knew that Achmed spoke the truth. There were just three men here who could be depended upon in a crisis. The Atlantic and the Sahara had tried the others, once or twice, and they had lost their heads and nearly the breakwater.

"See that she is keyed properly, Achmed," said Archerson, referring to the neat cement key poured down into a groove between the blocks so that each should support its neighbor.

"*Aiwa!* A cem-eent key strong as the Sword of Akbar, ya Sidi Kebir! One needs such when the great sea talks! —Stone-boat ahoy! Are we to wait all day for our block to be secure?" Achmed broke off to yell at the nearest stone scow. "One needs stone and yet more stone outside, ya Sidi, lest the sea carry off our block as a child would a brick."

"That I know," said Archerson soberly. "How goes it over in the camp, Achmed?"

"Bad," reported Achmed cheerfully, and then interrupted himself to yank a rope and trip the pulley hook from its huge iron staple sunk in the concrete block. "Away, crane! Fetch me another block, and in haste, excrement of a toad!" he ordered the sheik in charge of Big Ben. "As I was saying, ya Sidi," Achmed resumed conversationally, "methinks they are once more as near to insurrection over there as a beggar to poverty—may Allah not have mercy on their graves!"

ARCHERSON whistled, but coolly. He was used to uprisings, without warning and without reason, among the Beni Khelil, who were all children of Shaitan, according to Achmed. Generally it was about pay, or the southeast wind, and once because Achmed himself, who had skeptical views concerning religion, was seen drinking wine during Rhamadan and they all had yearned for his blood. There was no love lost between them!

"Yes?" Archerson questioned softly. "What ails them now, Achmed?"

"A marabout, one Bou Maza, who has come in out of the Desert—may dogs defile his grave!" growled Achmed.

Archerson knew that Achmed had scant respect for Holy Men in general. They were almost always impostors, with a grievance; had usually some wildly idiotic theme to preach, such as possession of a charm that would make the white man's bullets like water, or a Koran from the tomb of some earlier saint that would fill the white man's heart with fear at mere sight of it.

"What ails *him?*" demanded Archerson.

"Taxes," grunted Achmed succinctly.

Archerson glanced ashore, where a small caravan was coming down from the interior at that moment, its sheiks yelling to the captains of three feluccas anchored inside the island to wake up and take aboard their produce. He knew that Achmed had described the grievance in one word—also that this marabout was no fool. There was commerce, ashore, just as it had been practised since time immemorial, the desert caravan, the coastal felucca, which would take their dates or millet to small towns scattered along the West Coast whose names

even the geographers hardly knew. The French were great colonizers; but they would most assuredly make the tribes of the interior pay for this breakwater that was bringing them increased harbor facilities, steamers, capacity for much larger caravans. Taxes—sergeants of the Légion, *meharistes* of the Chaamba, would collect them, throughout the interior. And the interior was objecting; it had sent this marabout to the Beni Khelil, as Archerson saw it, to do what he could to incite them to revolt and discourage the breakwater project.

"What sort of man is he?" Archerson asked Achmed narrowly.

"*Mashallah!* His mother was an ape and his father a worm!" replied Achmed. "Also he has a familiar spirit, a gazelle, who whispers to him the counsels of Allah in his ear. And so the folk call him Bou Maza, ya Sidi!"

"Him! Poisonous gent, eh? When does he strike?" asked Archerson for it was perfectly inevitable that the marabout *would* strike at them, nor could he be got rid of or run out of camp, Arabs being Arabs.

Achmed looked out to sea and raised a burnoused arm already drying in the hot Sahara wind. "Yea, when El Bhar Akbar strikes, ya Sidi!" he said.

He meant the Atlantic, for which Achmed had such respect that he prayed to it, occasionally. "Bou Maza tells them that this our breakwater will surely fail. Such is the power of his gazelle that it can draw out our blocks, one by one, even as a *hakim* draws teeth. Then will the Beni Khelil rise upon us with fire and sword, push our concrete mixers into the sea, and knock out the bottom of the Beeg Bean so that she sinks down into the bay. *Aiwa!* Thus and thus preaches he—may all his days come to harm! I have heard it, sitting near their camp-fire, out in the night."

"Hum! Nice mess! The great sea alone is more than one man's antagonist, Achmed. And now this fakir—"

"Hoo! But the great sea's talk is loudest, ya Sidi! See thou to that; lest our breakwater become, as it were, but a row of stones across a *oued*. As for yonder bundle of dung-cakes—"

Achmed flashed a grin in his beard that promised utter confusion to the Holy Man of the gazelle.

"Bah! Go!" snorted Archerson, his eyes, though, smiling with a puckering of weatherbeaten crow's-feet at the corners. "Treat him gently, my Achmed! No knives nor strangling-cords! The Sidi Seghrir and I will look to the concrete machinery and the breakwater."

NONE the less, Achmed's question had aroused its uneasiness. Suppose the sea *did* budge his breakwater, moved it bodily off the reef and tumbled it into the bay, and with it all Archerson's hard-earned reputation as a civil engineer? It was easy to criticize after the fact, to say wisely that he should have done thus and thus, but there was no come-back once a man's big work went down before the power of nature. He and Jimmy would go down with it. And there was practically no limit to the power of the sea. Archerson had heard, once, of a deck winch being torn loose, cast-iron base and all, by the power of the waves, ripped from its bolts and hurled headlong into the sea. If they could do that with stubborn iron, how about his mere construction of concrete blocks and stone?

He was being rowed out to rejoin Burbridge at the mixers now. Jimmy met him amid the rattle and rumble of them, a young god-of-all-work completely surrounded by yelling Arab barrow-pushers rolling sand, gravel and cement up the wooden ramps to the mixer troughs.

"How goes it, Chief?" he made himself heard above the racket of machinery. "Got down Twenty-one A this morning, and Big Ben's moving off with Twenty-one B now. We're keeping ahead of the gravel-scows and stone boats all right!" he crowed boyishly.

"Need to, and then some," said Archerson. "Put on fifty more men, Jimmy. Got any spare forms?"

"Two extra. Stuff sets fast in this dry heat, so I have a few more than we figured."

"All right. Set 'em up and fill."

Archerson looked along the line of wooden forms as he gave the order. That technique they had developed, too, after the first blocks had been cast and set in place by Big Ben. You could use the top coping of the blocks as bases for the wooden concrete forms. A little parting sand; then Big Ben could lift the new ones clear as soon as their forms were struck off. Now that a wall of blocks stretched for a hundred yards out to sea—with a corresponding revetment of loose stone on the seaward side

"I wish we'd have the bloomin' storm now, if we're going to have one!" the Chief Engineer rasped.

—the line of Jimmy's forms reached out here quite a distance. All the inner ones were now finished blocks curing in the sun before Big Ben came for them; further out were the forms cast last week; beyond those they were standing empty, and the hollow wooden forms were grumbling to the fall of tons of fresh concrete all around where the two men stood talking.

"Put the two extras out here, Jimmy—and let's go look at the weather."

JIMMY gave orders; then together they headed shoreward for the shack that was bunk-house and engineering office for both of them, and had been for nearly a year. Once in it, both stopped to look at the barometer and give it the thump that jarred its needle satisfactorily—a daily ritual with them both.

"Ol' bird's still 30.3. . . . . What's on your mind, Chief?" said Jimmy, resting his long loose frame against a wall that was all scribbled with figures and formulae.

"The weather, for one thing," grunted Archerson. "The Arabs, for another. They have a marabout now, another of these poisonous impostors who just naturally stir up trouble. This one has a familiar spirit, a gazelle who whispers things in his ears. The Beni Khelil devoutly believe it counsels him; messages from Allah and all that. Achmed was yarning to me about him today. We'll have trouble before the week is out."

"Why not steal his damn' gazelle?" Jimmy laughed. "Without his familiar, where's your marabout? I'd do it myself, for two cents!"

"You keep out!" growled Archerson. "You couldn't kidnap the infernal goat; one bleat, and the whole camp would be on you with knives—murder the lot of us. Can you run a steam engine, Jimmy?"

"Sure. Anything that turns, Chief—gas, steam, electricity. Why?"

"You may have to—with a rifle in one hand to boot! They'll be after Big Ben, among other things. I couldn't trust the Portuguese."

"How about the diver's launch?" came back Jimmy. "I can't run both. *Two* Portuguese, you see; and both will beat it overboard at the first sign of trouble. Oh, for just one Irishman!"

As a gentleman of that desirable nationality was not to be had for love or money they both fell silent.

"I'll take the launch—see?" said Jimmy after a time. "Some one with his head on his neck will be needed to steer Big Ben if you're going to use him during the row!

And we'll tie the Portuguese to his winch and shoot him if he bolts—eh, what?"

It seemed a fair plan. Archerson went over to thump the barometer again. The black needle remained obstinately at 30.3, and he shook his head.

"I *wish* we'd have the bloomin' storm *now,* if we're going to have one!" the Chief Engineer rasped exasperatedly. "The longer this marabout stays, the more he'll work up those asses over there in the camp. Achmed says he'll strike when the next storm breaks. He's telling the natives that his gazelle can pull down our blocks one by one—"

"Did Achmed say that?" interrupted Jimmy keenly. "Then you and I had better go over our keys right off, sir. If there's a defective pair anywhere, he knows about it, you can be sure! Listens like that to *me!* All he's got to do is to plant himself and his gazelle opposite and pray. The sea'll do the rest."

"Good head, young 'un!" commented Archerson. "We'll do it now."

THEY took iron mauls and went out the line of breakwater blocks, testing each cement key with a ringing blow. The blocks were twenty feet long and some six feet across their faces. They had been laid in a double tier, the lower under water as set by the indispensable Achmed, the upper rising to four feet above mean high tide. To seaward of them lay the revetment of loose stone, a great slope of basalt upon which a lazy surf was now beating. Beyond, across shallow blue water and still a hundred yards out on the point of the reef, rose the square corner of marker blocks on which was to go, later, the lighthouse that would guide ships in here.

"Don't mind that gap much now," remarked Archerson to his cub as they stood looking at the corner-stones that were their goal. "The sea sort of slews around what we have built and comes in without fuss. But once we're laid clear out there and have shut the sea out—she's in for some pounding!"

"Revetment, and plenty of it," came back Jimmy confidently with his sure-cure. "I'm piling all I can get out there as fast as the teams bring it down. Well, so long, Chief—they're back with another block!"

Jimmy hastened down the half-built quay to where his transit still stood. The giant crane was coming out, steered by their diver's launch, and from its shears was suspended yet another big block, hanging vertically a few feet above the surface of the bay. The floating crane was steered into position, advanced slowly with the block, Achmed standing on it and yelling objurgations upon the Portuguese at the launch helm and then sighting over at Burbridge stooping to his instrument. Down gurgled the block into place, the big crane pushing forward as it lowered.

"Mind you shove along those extras—may need 'em!" said Archerson in Jimmy's ear as he walked ashore to regain the shack. The bay behind him was noisy with toiling men, gangs of Arabs on the gravel-scows shoveling overboard tons of fill far out on the reef, more gangs outside dumping stone for revetment against the newly set blocks, teams coming and going along shore, a vociferous medley of barrow-men and concrete-rammers busy over the filling forms for new blocks. All were in burnouses, in red fezzes wound about with the typical orange kerchief of the coolie, in bare feet and dirty cotton *gandourahs,* undershirts. The Arab was a willing and happy worker if left to himself, no better laborer anywhere. Archerson sighed as he thought upon what incarnate devils they could become when sufficiently worked upon by their marabouts. He could cheerfully kill this one; instead he got up and thumped the barometer again. Nothing new.

ITS high needle did, however, bring them another misery, the *gibli,* the southeast wind off the Sahara, that brought with it an unceasing cloud of fine dust. It got into everyone's eyes, nose and tempers, into watch-cases and rifle-actions, into machinery where it made the bearings run hot; and it became a standing grievance. The Beni Khelil wanted to quit work entirely until this act of God was over, and growled curses because Archerson wouldn't let them. The Portuguese had tales of engine bearings that required a "leetle, so leetle" stoppage of Big Ben and the diver's launch—and they called on all their saints when Archerson couldn't see it. For the Chief Engineer was driving them all relentlessly now. He had yet another antagonist—Time; and that couldn't be trifled with. You could hope for nothing from the Atlantic, come September! Then it was that hurricanes boiled up out of that hell's caldron, the Gulf and piled up all their leavings on the West Coast of Africa. The breakwater had to be done by then.

It was finishing, fast. It grew forty feet a day. During the *gibli* the blocks reached out for the corner mark at a pace that kept the revetment boats in a sort of mad turmoil of work to hold fast what the wall had won from the sea. The gravel-scows had finished all but the last load of their bed fill; Jimmy was turning some of them into stone-floats, so urgent was it to strengthen the revetments all that could be against September. And Bou Maza had gone on preaching famously, incendiary talk, as reported by Achmed, his infernal gazelle forever nuzzling at his ear. The camp had built their Holy Man a hut of stone, about the size of a dog-kennel, and into it the marabout and his creature would creep every night. Archerson noted that it was planted on the beach about opposite the middle of his breakwater. He retested the keys there and looked sharp to his revetments, but could find nothing wrong. Chance, probably, the location of that hut, but yet—the marabout was no fool. Archerson wished he knew!

AND then at last the needle sagged. Jimmy and the Chief both saw it at the same time, a downward movement the mere thickness of the black steel point below the brass one. A thump made it drop still a thirty-second of an inch further. Then they both hurried out on the sea wall. Yes, the Atlantic was entirely in accord with that needle! A smooth and heavy swell was pounding upon the revetment, slogging it with a dull and purposeful drive that made the whole breakwater tremble ever so slightly.

Archerson looked out over his work and drew a long breath. Finished, those months and months of toil by three men and a thousand workmen—and now the test! Masons were already at the foundations of the lighthouse; would it ever go up to be a guide for ships and a beacon-light of civilization down here in the wastes of the western Sahara? Or would his breakwater—

Brroom! said the surf, and told him that while his figures were all right, there was no end to the arithmetic the Atlantic could pile up!

The tide was rising. Archerson was rather glad of it than otherwise. It would put the maximum test on his work right off, within a few more hours, and no long-drawn-out anxiety about it, no false hopes. He bit his lip and walked along the blocks, examining each narrowly for cracks, for any loosening of the keys. So be it! This was his job. He had built against the eternal ocean the best he knew, and they must all abide by the result. So many thousand tons of rock, backed by so many hundred tons of concrete blocks—weight enough with a factor or safety of ten against the heaviest wave ever calculated. But who could calculate the force of a living wave?

Archerson turned, to find Achmed at his elbow.

"Hoo! Ya Sidi, *now* he talks, El Bhar Akbar!" Achmed was crying out with admiration as a magnificent comber curled over, all green and capped with foam, to thunder down upon their new revetments. "Hold thou, our breakwater that we three built with these hands!"

"What is the marabout doing?" Archerson asked him tersely.

Brrrummm! crashed down the next wave, oily and smooth but high as a house. The breakwater acknowledged it with a tremor, slight as the mere hint of an earthquake. No structure of stone could receive that weight of water without a quiver!

Archerson turned and looked across the bay. The marabout was preaching from his hut, leaning an ear now and then to listen to his nuzzling gazelle, then gesticulating more wildly than ever. The whole tribe of the Beni Khelil were squatted in their burnouses before him, row upon row, all intent on that incendiary harangue, all of them facing the breakwater and the lone forked figure of its Chief Engineer.

"May Allah destroy his father's house!" grumbled Achmed. "They will be upon us soon, the owls, the cut-off ones!"

"When?"

"Lo, when this, the breakwater that we built, goes, ya Sidi."

"It *wont* go—it can't!" said Archerson truculently, but even as he said it, a sea half a mile long rolled in out of the inexhaustible Atlantic, gathered all the strength of the backwash to itself, curled over and smote the breakwater like the brutal blow of a fist. Archerson looked swiftly up and down his line of blocks. Burbridge, patrolling the inner end, signaled him reassuringly that all was well on his beat.

"Do thou attend to the marabout, Achmed," said the Chief Engineer. "Do anything you like but kill him. We *can't* have them breaking loose at a time like this!"

"Softly!" quoth Achmed. "We belong to God!"

AGAIN the brutal slog of the surf. Archerson estimated that those combers were at least twenty feet high to their crests. It was uncanny, that terrific and pounding sea, yet with hardly a breath of wind! A storm out there, hundreds of miles away; yet here were the waves of it, each of incalculable tons of weight. Archerson would have welcomed wind, something to lash and break up these solid walls of water. As it was—it was the test, all right!

"H'mph!" he ejaculated. "God has nothing to do with—" He never finished the sentence. His eyes were staring down fascinated, his heart gripped with icy chills of despondency, of bewildered questioning of his fate. For the incredible, the impossible, was happening! The entire breakwater,—this part of it anyway,—revetment, concrete backing and all, was moving bodily landward! There was no doubting the evidence of his own eyes. The corners of those two blocks on which he was standing projected now a full inch beyond the straight line of them that made the wall. And they were about opposite where the marabout with his idiotic gazelle sat there haranguing the Beni Khelil across the narrow bay.

Archerson jumped to the keys to confirm it. The neat cement cast in the slots between the blocks was now shorn and cracked, spalls of it forced out and lying on the flat surface of the quay. His breakwater was going, done for!

"It is the Power of God!" said Achmed in an awed voice. "It—it is not good for men to be here, ya Sidi, while the djinn destroy—"

"Power of *sand!*" rasped Archerson, his voice bitter with indignation. "Power of treachery, Achmed! Look, thou!" He had been hammering at the wreck of the key and throwing out the pieces. Now his hand reached down a foot into the slot and brought up—green, friable mortar!

"Crude iron sulphate!" he pronounced. "This cement never set. It *couldn't!* Did you see this lot mixed, Achmed?"

"Not I; there was no order as to superintending the cem-*eent,* ya Sidi," Achmed reminded him concernedly.

"*Bah!* Go! It was that marabout and his people, of course—and this was his gazelle's charm—green sand! *Kill* him, Achmed, if you have to, but stop that business over there quick! He knows it will go just here, damn him!" raged Archerson.

Just a moment of despair; then: "Off with you, Achmed! Do your stuff, damn you! —*Jimmy! Oh, Jimmy!* The first spare block and Big Ben—*quick!*"

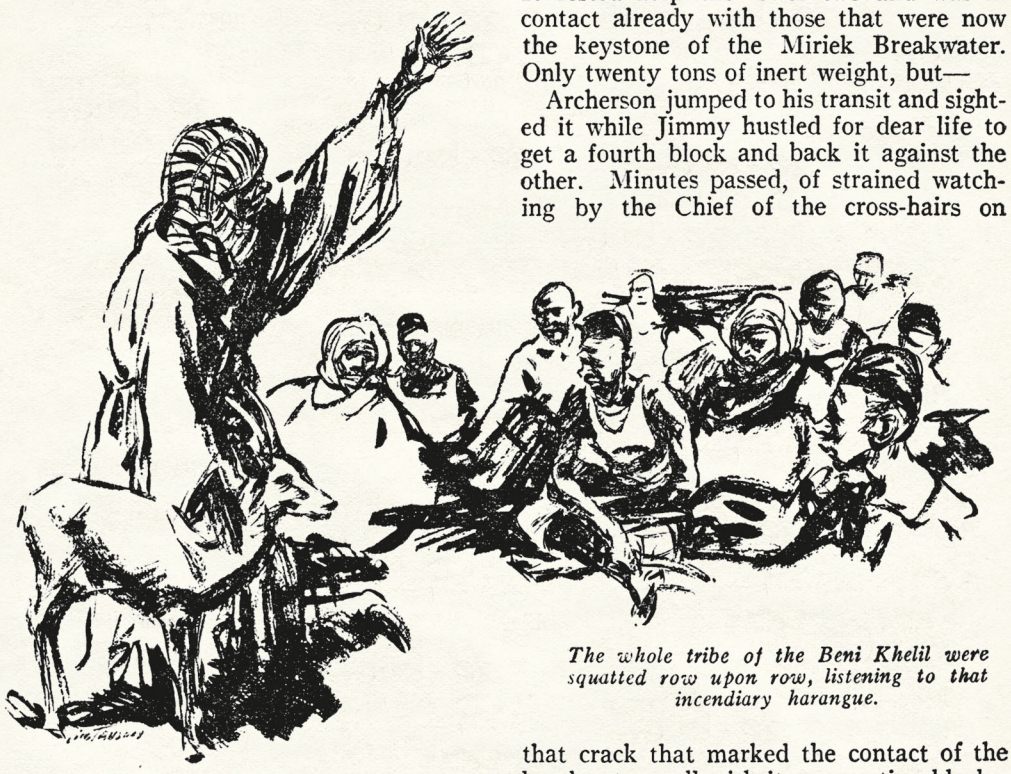
JIMMY was racing for the island long before Archerson's last shout of alarm, racing for Big Ben. These two had planned ahead just what was going to be done. Archerson scratched a pencil-line on the blocks while waiting for him, patrolled the rest of the wall to assure himself that no others had been tampered with. He was relieved that it was only these two, and that for them alone had been mixed the cement that would never set—cunningly covered with a foot or so of good material in the slot.

None the less, his whole breakwater hung by a thread. Mercilessly the heavy seas kept on pounding; they had moved the loose blocks four good inches before the crane arrived. Once they were dislodged, the whole Atlantic would pour through the gap, taking the end blocks on each side with it one by one, scouring away the underlying gravel bed, dumping revetment stone and concrete wall alike into the bay until nothing remained but the original reef.

Jimmy was swinging up with the full power of the diver's launch lashed alongside Big Ben. Hanging from its tall shears was a fresh block, one of those spares that Archerson had seen fit to have cast. Big Ben barged in, his block suspended low over the water; at the shout from Archerson— "Back her, Jim! One foot more! That's well!"—down it came on the run and plopped out of sight below the waters of the bay. Jimmy scurried off for another; he had his end well in hand, his two Portuguese tremendously excited but not particularly alarmed, for they had not been much impressed by that old marabout preaching on the beach yonder. Archerson watched his two bad blocks with grim tensity. The ocean moved them, and all the revetment back of them, two inches more before Big Ben arrived with his second block. It was dumped behind the other, the pulley hook tripped, and away scudded the crane for a third.

WHILE Jimmy was gone, Archerson measured grimly the distance he had left between his moving blocks and the new wall of them being laid. It was a scant eight inches, and he shook his head. Not yet had happened what he was ardently

wishing for, the only thing that *could* save his breakwater. It was hopeless to try to stop those blocks against the pounding of those enormous seas by any new wall whatever! He depended upon another physical fact. . . . . Once more he scratched a pencil-line down the outjutting blocks and looked at it as if his whole soul were there in his eyes. . . . . And this time he jumped up with a sob of relief, for that pencil line had *not* moved out beyond the wall even a fraction of an inch! Not that the sea had stopped at all its relentless advance. No—running back and sighting, the Chief Engineer saw that his whole wall was now bending—at least six inches out of line. The ocean was springing the entire mass, of mountains of revetment and tons of concrete block, inward as one bends a great staff!



The whole tribe of the Beni Khelil were squatted row upon row, listening to that incendiary harangue.

A layman would have given up, then and there, and gone down with a broken heart. Not so the Chief Engineer. He was singing for joy and shouting to Jimmy to hurry. For he had a fighting chance to live. That bend meant that those two loose blocks had jammed, at long last. The inward edges of their neighbors were gripping them fast and the whole thing was now a long, flat arch, with them as its keystone. And if you held fast the keystone by a support, however insignificant, you immensely increased the strength of the arch.

"Drop her, Jimmy!—forward a bit! Now! That's well!"

Big Ben had lowered their third block. It rested atop the lower two and was in contact already with those that were now the keystone of the Miriek Breakwater. Only twenty tons of inert weight, but—

Archerson jumped to his transit and sighted it while Jimmy hustled for dear life to get a fourth block and back it against the other. Minutes passed, of strained watching by the Chief of the cross-hairs on that crack that marked the contact of the breakwater wall with its supporting blocks. The crack was moving, imperceptibly, a quarter-inch, a half-inch, three-quarters. And Big Ben coming back with the block which would stop even that movement as fast as Jimmy could drive the launch.

And then a riot of fierce yells broke out across the bay. Archerson saw the Beni Khelil rising as one man, girdling their loins, whipping out their knives. Bou Maza was no fool; he had seen what the white men were doing, had suspected that perhaps, after all, his charm for ruining the Miriek Breakwater was going to fail. And he was now leading them to the attack along the beach, creeping on all fours as was his custom.

Archerson cursed as he whipped out his revolver. There was a raging of lurid profanity from the launch where Jimmy was yelping at his two Portuguese to stand by the job and not bolt overboard. For Jimmy and the Chief nothing else mattered

much, just now, but to get that last block laid, when their breakwater would be safe; they wouldn't care what happened between them and the Arabs after that. Grim-eyed and under threat of their revolvers, they got that block laid; and then for the first time gave thought to what was happening over on the beach.

It was rather peculiar, the situation over there. The gazelle seemed to have abandoned his marabout! He was now gamboling and kicking up his heels along the beach, but always moving *not* back along shore but out in the direction of the point! The Holy Man was creeping after him on all fours, begging, beseeching, even commanding, if one could judge by his urgent gestures. But the creature did not seem to be obeying at all. He would buck up coyly into the air with his tiny horns, prance, paw the sand, and then trot on some more, his owner following him wrathfully. The Beni Khelil sat down again. Without his familiar from Allah, the marabout was not so much; besides, hadn't the white man fixed their breakwater, somehow, in spite of the charm? The wall still held; all men could see that!

FINALLY the strange procession of gamboling gazelle and creeping Holy Man disappeared around the point, and Archerson drew a long breath.

"Well, I'm damned!" he said aloud.

"How's the breakwater, Chief?" came Jimmy's hail from the launch. Archerson glanced through the transit.

"Holding! Get another block, and we'll make it doubly secure. We'll have to cut away these two displaced blocks and key the new ones properly when this blows over; that's all. What I want to know is, what's become of our insurrection!" he demanded, grinning broadly.

It was evidently over, for the Beni Khelil were doing nothing without their marabout to lead them. And half an hour later Achmed let them know all about it; for what appeared to be a coconut came bobbing along the breakwater wall, and Achmed himself, naked and black, emerged.

"*Barik Allah,* ya Sidi!" he told them with sparkling eyes and the zest of one who has known great and unholy joys. "I left him, ya Sidi, bound and tied in a little gully beyond the point—and we'll have venison for supper, if it please God!" He grinned upon them, his beard encircling one yellow tooth like a tombstone.

"Yes, but *how?* What did you *do?*" demanded Archerson excitedly, while Jimmy laughed immoderately.

Achmed fumbled at a leather gourd in his girdle and unstoppered it.

"*Djibni,*" he said, as if that explained everything. "It is good ghee—"

Lord, but it was a cheese! An ungodly cheese, liquid and rancid and ripe and reeking of anise and musk and all manner of uncleanliness.

"Praise be to God!" quoth Achmed. "I swam over to the point, and then laid, as it were, a trail with my *djibni* bottle along the shore bushes. The gazelle, ya Sidi will comprehend, is a r-rambunctious animal—" He got no further, because both his Sidis were doubled up with unseemly laughter. They howled, they roared, they punched each other, they leaned up against each other. Achmed, dignified, though naked, looked on and then said:

"Shall I be beaten that I dared lay hands on a Holy Man, ya Sidi?"

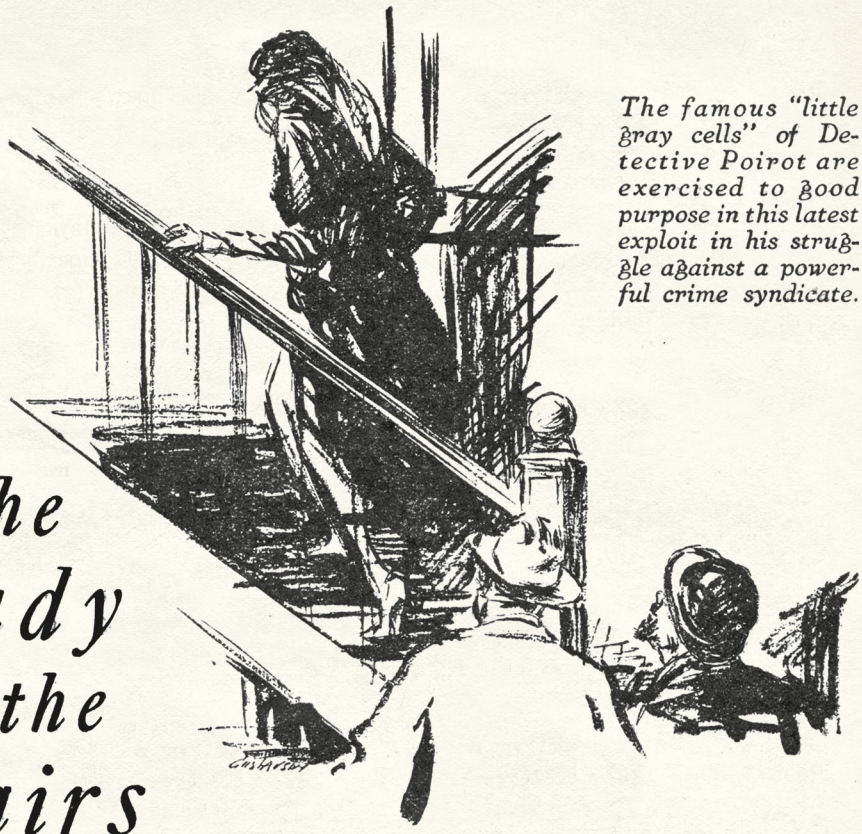
"Good Lord, no!" Archerson choked himself into seriousness long enough to assure him. "Lose him, Achmed, gently; out in the Sahara somewhere—we don't care where. There's a good fellow. Man, but you about saved the breakwater! And for God's sake bury that cheese!"

"By thy life!" cried Achmed, delighted. "Nay, but it was thou, Sidi Kebir, that did hold up our breakwater with thy bare hands!"

Brooomm! said the surf and wet them all with spray, for it was nearing high tide. Achmed looked around, and his practiced eye caught a line of white far, far out under the western horizon. "Here comes the wind, brethren," he warned them. "Let us take shelter while we may!"

They scattered, Jimmy to drop all anchors on Big Ben and secure him where he was against the storm, Archerson to carry his instruments to a place of safety near the shack where he could still sight his precious breakwater; and Achmed to points unknown in the Sahara, by a roundabout and circuitous route that avoided the Arab camp—now busy pegging down its tents and salvaging property blown at large before a furious gale.

And there, somewhere in the wastes of the dunes, Achmed liberated a very scared and chastened Holy Man, beat him soundly, and bade him fear from henceforth the Cape Miriek Breakwater and all who spake its name!



The famous "little gray cells" of Detective Poirot are exercised to good purpose in this latest exploit in his struggle against a powerful crime syndicate.

The Lady on the Stairs

By AGATHA CHRISTIE

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

"GOOD evening, Monsieur," said our friend Inspector Japp. "Allow me to introduce Captain Kent, of the United States Secret Service."

Captain Kent was a tall, lean American, with a singularly impassive face which looked as though it had been carved out of wood.

"Pleased to meet you, gentlemen," he murmured, as he shook hands jerkily.

Poirot threw an extra log on the fire, and brought forward two more easy chairs. I brought out glasses and attended to the liquid refreshments. The Captain took a deep draught, and expressed appreciation.

"And now to business," said Japp. "Monsieur Poirot here made a certain request to me. He was interested in some concern that went by the name of the Big Four, and he asked me to let him know at any time if I came across a mention of it in my official line of business. I didn't take much stock in the matter, but I remembered what he said, and when the Captain, here, came over with rather a curious story, I said at once, 'We'll go round to Poirot's.' "

Poirot looked across at Captain Kent, and the American took up the tale.

"You may remember reading, Monsieur Poirot, that a number of torpedo-boats and destroyers were damaged by being dashed upon the rocks off the American coast. It was just after the Japanese earthquake, and the explanation given was that the disaster was the result of a tidal wave. Now a short time ago, a round-up was made of certain crooks and gunmen, and with them were captured some papers which put an entirely new face upon the matter. They appeared to refer to some organization called the 'Big Four,' and gave an incomplete description of some powerful wireless installation—a concentration of wireless energy far beyond anything so far attempted, and capable of focusing a beam of great intensity upon some given spot.

"The claims made for this invention

seemed manifestly absurd, but I turned them in to Headquarters for what they were worth, and one of our high-brow professors got busy on them. Now it appears that one of your British scientists read a paper upon the subject before the British Association. His colleagues didn't think great shakes of it, by all accounts—thought it farfetched and fanciful; but your scientist stuck to his guns, and declared that he himself was on the eve of success in his experiments."

"*Eh bien?*" demanded Poirot, with interest plainly apparent.

"IT was suggested," pursued the Captain, "that I should come over here and get an interview with this gentleman. Quite a young fellow, he is—Halliday, by name. He is the leading authority on the subject, and I was to get from him whether the thing suggested was anyway possible."

"And was it?" I asked eagerly.

"That's just what I don't know. I haven't seen Mr. Halliday—and I'm not likely to, by all accounts."

"The truth of the matter is," said Japp shortly, "Halliday's disappeared."

"When?"

"Two months ago."

"Was his disappearance reported?"

"Of course it was. His wife came to us in a great state. We did what we could, but I knew all along it would be no good."

"Why not?"

"Never is—when a man disappears that way." Japp winked.

"What way?"

"Paris."

"So Halliday disappeared in Paris?"

"Yes. Went over there on scientific work—so he said. Of course he'd have to say something like that. But you know what it means when a man disappears over there. Either it's Apache work, and that's the end of it—or else it's voluntary disappearance; and that's a great deal the commoner of the two, I can tell you. Gay Paree and all that, you know. Sick of home life. Halliday and his wife had had a tiff before he started, which all helps to make it a pretty clear case."

"I wonder," said Poirot thoughtfully.

The American was looking at him curiously.

"Say, Mister," he drawled, "what's this Big Four idea?"

"The Big Four," said Poirot, "is an International organization which has at its head a Chinaman, who is known as Number One. Number Two is an American. Number Three is a Frenchwoman. Number Four, the 'Destroyer,' is an Englishman."

"A Frenchwoman, eh?" The American whistled. "And Halliday disappeared in France. Maybe there's something in this. What's her name?"

"I don't know. I know nothing about her."

"But it's a mighty big proposition, eh?" suggested the other.

Poirot nodded, as he arranged his glasses in a neat row on the tray. His love of order was as great as ever.

"What was the idea in sinking those boats? What is the Big Four after?"

"The Big Four are for themselves—and for themselves only, M. le Capitaine. Their aim is world domination."

The American burst out laughing, but broke off at the sight of Poirot's serious face.

"You laugh, monsieur," said Poirot, shaking a finger at him. "You reflect not—you use not the little gray cells of the brain. Who are these men who send a portion of a navy to destruction simply as a trial of their power? For that was all it was, monsieur, a test of this new force of magnetic attraction which they hold."

"Go on with you, monsieur," said Japp good-humoredly. "I've read of supermen many a time, but I've never come across them. Well, you've heard Captain Kent's story. Anything further I can do for you?"

"Yes, my good friend. You can give me the address of Mrs. Halliday—and also a few words of introduction to her if you will be so kind."

THUS it was that the following day saw us bound for Chetwynd Lodge, near the village of Chobham in Surrey.

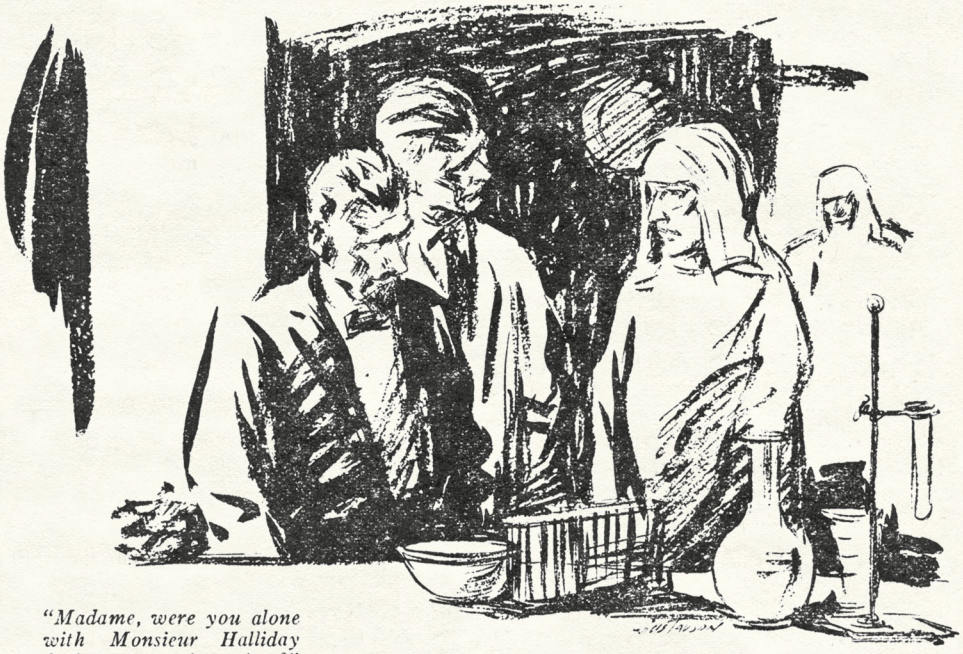
Mrs. Halliday received us at once—a tall, fair woman, nervous and eager in manner. With her was her little girl, a beautiful child of five.

Poirot explained the purpose of our visit.

"Oh, Monsieur Poirot, I am so glad, so thankful! I have heard of you, of course. You will not be like these Scotland Yard people who will not listen or try to understand. And the French police are just as bad—worse, I think. They are all convinced that my husband has gone off with some other woman. But he wasn't like that! All he thought of in life was his

work. Half our quarrels came from that. He cared for it more than he did for me."

"Englishmen, they are like that," said Poirot soothingly. "And if it is not work, it is the games, the sport. All those things they take *au grand serieux*. Now, madame, recount to me exactly, in detail and as methodically as you can, the exact circumstances of your husband's disappearance."



"Madame, were you alone with Monsieur Halliday during your interview?"

"My husband went to Paris on Thursday, the 20th of July. He was to meet and visit various people there connected with his work, among them Madame Olivier."

Poirot nodded at the mention of the famous French woman chemist, who had eclipsed even Madame Curie in the brilliance of her achievements. She had been decorated by the French Government, and was one of the most prominent personalities of the day.

"He arrived there in the evening and went at once to the Hotel Castiglione in the Rue de Castiglione. On the following morning he had an appointment with Professor Bourgoneau which he kept. His manner was normal and pleasant. The two men had a most interesting conversation, and it was arranged that he should witness some experiments in the Professor's laboratory on the following day. He lunched alone at the Café Royal, went for a walk in the Bois, and then visited Madame Olivier at her house at Passy. There also his manner was perfectly normal. He left about six. Where he dined is not known, probably alone at some restaurant. He returned to the hotel about eleven o'clock and went straight up to his room, after inquiring if any letters had come for him. On the following morning he walked out of the hotel—and has not been seen again."

"At what time did he leave the hotel? At the hour when he would normally leave it to keep his appointment at Professor Bourgoneau's laboratory?"

"We do not know. He was not remarked leaving the hotel. But no *petit déjeuner* was served to him, which seems to indicate that he went out early."

"Or he might, in fact, have gone out again after he came in the night before?"

"I do not think so. His bed had been slept in, and the night porter would have remembered anyone going out at that hour."

"A very just observation, madame. We may take it, then, that he left early on the following morning—and that is reassuring from one point of view. He is not likely to have fallen a victim to any Apache assault at that hour. His baggage, now—was it all left behind?"

Mrs. Halliday seemed rather reluctant to answer, but at last she said:

"No—he must have taken one small suitcase with him."

"Containing his toilet articles, and a change of clothing, eh?"

"Yes," she replied unwillingly.

"And the French police doubtless regard that as proof positive that his disappearance was premeditated?"

She nodded. "Do not you?" she asked.

"I am bound to say, madame, that I do. But I do not necessarily accept their view of the motive. With them, it is always, *'Cherchez la femme.'* Now, madame, it is clear that something occurred the day before which impelled your husband to a complete change of plan. What was it? And when did it arise? At Madame Olivier's? During the evening? Or on returning to the hotel? You say he asked for letters before going up to bed. Did he receive any?"

"One only. And that must have been the one I had written to him on the day he left England."

"H'm!" said Poirot, thoughtfully. "I wonder where he was that evening. If we knew that, we should know a great deal. Whom did he meet? There lies the mystery, madame—and to solve it, I myself journey to Paris immediately."

"It is all a long time ago, monsieur."

"Yes, yes. Nevertheless it is there that we must seek. Tell me, madame, do you ever remember your husband mentioning the phrase 'The Big Four'?"

"'The Big Four,'" she repeated thoughtfully. "No, I can't say I do."

THAT was all that could be elicited from Mrs. Halliday. We hurried back to London, and the following day saw us *en route* for the Continent. With rather a rueful smile Poirot observed:

"This Big Four, they make me to bestir myself, *mon ami.* I run up and down, all over the ground, like our old friend the human foxhound."

"Perhaps you'll meet him in Paris," I said, knowing that he referred to a certain Giraud, one of the most trusted detectives of the Sûreté whom we had met on a previous occasion.

Poirot made a wry grimace. "I devoutly hope not. He loves me not, that one."

"Wont it be a very difficult task," I asked, "to find out what an unknown Englishman did on an evening two months ago?"

"Very difficult, *mon ami.* But, as you know well, difficulties rejoice the heart of Hercule Poirot."

"You think the Big Four kidnaped him?"

Poirot nodded.

Our inquiries necessarily went over old ground, and we learned little to add to what Mrs. Halliday had already told us. Poirot had a lengthy interview with Professor Bourgoneau, during which he sought to elicit whether Halliday had mentioned any plan of his own for the evening, but we drew a complete blank.

Our next source of information was the famous Madame Olivier. I was quite excited as we mounted the steps of her villa at Passy. It has always seemed to me extraordinary that a woman should go so far in the scientific world; I should have thought a purely masculine brain was needed for such work.

WE were shown into a small salon, and presently the mistress of the house came to us there. Madame Olivier was a very tall woman, her tallness accentuated by the long white overall she wore, and a coif like a nun's that shrouded her head. She had a long, pale face, and wonderful dark eyes that burned with a light almost fanatical. She looked more like a priestess of old than a modern Frenchwoman. One cheek was disfigured by a scar, and I remembered that her husband and co-worker had been killed in an explosion in the laboratory three years before, and that she herself had been terribly burned. Ever since then she had shut herself away from the world, and plunged with fiery energy into the work of scientific research. She received us with cold politeness.

"I have been interviewed by the police many times, messieurs. I think it hardly likely that I can help you, since I have not been able to help them."

"Madame, it is possible that I shall not ask you quite the same questions. To begin with, of what did you talk together, you and Monsieur Halliday?"

She looked a trifle surprised.

"But of his work! His work—and also mine."

"Did he mention to you the theories he had embodied recently in his paper read before the British Association?"

"Certainly he did. It was chiefly of those we spoke."

"His ideas were somewhat fantastic, were they not?" asked Poirot carelessly.

"Halliday has a mole just above the left elbow." The man stretched out his arm —the mole was there.

"Some people have thought so. I do not agree."

"You considered them practicable?"

"Perfectly practicable. My own line of research has been somewhat similar, though not undertaken with the same end in view. I have been investigating the *gamma* rays emitted by the substance usually known as Radium C, a product of radium emanation, and in doing so I have come across some very interesting magnetic phenomena. Indeed, I have a theory as to the actual nature of the force we call magnetism, but it is not yet time for my discoveries to be given to the world. Mr. Halliday's experiments and views were exceedingly interesting to me."

Poirot nodded. Then he asked a question which surprised me.

"Madame, where did you converse on these topics? In here?"

"No, monsieur. In the laboratory."

"May I see it?"

"Certainly."

She led the way to the door from which she had entered. It opened on a small passage. We passed through two doors and found ourselves in the big laboratory, with its array of beakers and crucibles and a hundred appliances of which I did not even know the names. There were two occupants, both busy with some experiment. Madame Olivier introduced them.

"Mademoiselle Claude, one of my assistants." A tall, serious-faced young girl bowed to us. "Monsieur Henri, an old and trusted friend." The young man bowed.

Poirot looked round him. There were two other doors beside the one by which we had entered. One, Madame explained, led into the garden, the other into a smaller chamber also devoted to research. Poirot took all this in, then declared himself ready to return to the salon.

"Madame, were you alone with Monsieur Halliday during your interview?"

"Yes, monsieur. My two assistants were in the smaller room next door."

"Could your conversation have been overheard—by them or anyone else?"

Madame reflected, then shook her head.

"I do not think so. I am almost sure it could not. The doors were all shut."

"Could anyone have been concealed in the room?"

"There is the big cupboard in the corner —but the idea is absurd."

"*Pas tout à fait, madame.* One thing more: did Monsieur Halliday make any mention of his plans for the evening?"

"He said nothing whatever, monsieur."

"I thank you, madame, and I apologize for disturbing you. Pray do not trouble— we can find our way out."

WE stepped out into the hall. A lady was just entering the front door as we did so. She ran quickly up the stairs,

and I was left with the impression of heavy mourning that denotes a French widow.

"A most unusual type of woman, that," remarked Poirot as we walked away.

"Madame Olivier? Yes, she—"

"*Mais non,* not Madame Olivier. *Çela va sans dire!* There are not many geniuses of her stamp in the world. No, I referred to the other lady—the lady on the stairs."

"I didn't see her face," I said staring. "And I hardly see how you could have. She never looked at us."

"That is why I said she was an unusual type," said Poirot placidly. "A woman who enters her home—for I presume that it is her home, since she entered with a key—and runs straight upstairs without even looking at two strange visitors in the hall to see who they are—that is a *very* unusual type of woman—quite unnatural, in fact. *Mille tonnerres*—what is that?"

HE dragged me back—just in time. A tree had crashed down onto the sidewalk, just missing us. Poirot stared at it, pale and upset.

"It was a near thing, that! But clumsy, all the same—for I had no suspicion, at least hardly any suspicion. Yes, but for my quick eyes, the eyes of a cat, Hercule Poirot might now be crushed out of existence—a terrible calamity for the world. And you too, *mon ami*—though that would not be such a national catastrophe."

"Thank you," I said coldly. "And what are we going to do now?"

"Do?" cried Poirot. "We are going to think. Yes, here and now, we are going to exercise our little gray cells. This Monsieur Halliday, now, was he really in Paris? Yes, for Professor Bourgoneau, who knows him, saw and spoke to him."

"What on earth are you driving at?" I cried.

"That was Friday morning. He was last seen at eleven Friday night—but *was* he seen then?"

"The porter—"

"A night porter—who had not previously seen Halliday. A man comes in, sufficiently like Halliday—we may trust Number Four for that—asks for letters, goes upstairs, packs a small suitcase and slips out the next morning. Nobody saw Halliday all that evening—no, because he was already in the hands of his enemies. Was it Halliday whom Madame Olivier received? Yes, for though she did not know him by sight, an impostor could hardly deceive on her own special subject. He came here; he had his interview; he left. What happened next?"

Seizing me by the arm, Poirot was now fairly dragging me back to the villa.

"Now, *mon ami,* imagine that it is the day after the disappearance, and that we are tracking footprints. You love footprints, do you not? See—here they go, a man's, Monsieur Halliday's. He turns to the right as we did; he walks briskly—ah, other footsteps following behind—very quickly, small footsteps, a woman's. See, she catches him up—a slim young woman in a widow's veil. 'Pardon, monsieur, Madame Olivier desires that I recall you.' He stops; he turns. Now, where would the young woman take him? She doesn't wish to be seen walking with him. Is it coincidence that she catches up with him just where a narrow alleyway opens dividing two gardens? She leads him down it. 'It is shorter this way, monsieur.' On the right is the garden of Madame Olivier's villa, on the left the garden of another villa—and from that garden, mark you, the tree fell. Garden doors from both open on the alley. The ambush is there. Men pour out, overpower him and carry him into the strange villa."

"Good gracious, Poirot," I cried, "are you pretending to see all this?"

"I see it with the eyes of the mind, *mon ami.* So, and only so, could it have happened. Come, let us go back to the house."

"You want to see Madame Olivier again?"

Poirot gave a curious smile.

"No, Hastings, I want to see the face of the lady on the stairs."

"Who do you think she is, a relation of Madame Olivier's?"

"More probably a secretary—and a secretary engaged not very long ago."

A YOUNG lad opened the door to us. "Can you tell me," said Poirot, "the name of the lady, the widow lady, who came in just now?"

"Madame Veroneau, the secretary?"

"That is the lady. Would you be so kind as to ask her to speak to us for a moment."

The youth left the room. He soon reappeared. "I am sorry," he said. "Madame Veroneau must have gone out again."

"I think not," said Poirot quietly. "Will you give her my name, M. Hercule Poirot, and say that it is important I should see

her at once, as I am just going to the Préfecture."

Again our messenger departed. This time the lady descended. She walked into the salon. We followed her. She turned and raised her veil. To my astonishment I recognized our old antagonist the Countess Rossakoff, a Russian countess who had engineered a particularly smart jewel robbery in London.

"As soon as I caught sight of you in the hall, I feared the worst," she observed plaintively.

"My dear Countess Rossakoff—"

She shook her head.

"Inez Veroneau now," she murmured. "A Spaniard, married to a Frenchman. What do you want of me, M. Poirot? You are a terrible man. You hunted me from London. Now, I suppose, you will tell our wonderful Madame Olivier about me, and hunt me from Paris? We poor Russians, we must live, you know."

"It is more serious than that, madame," said Poirot, watching her. "I propose to enter the villa next door, and release M. Halliday, if he is still alive. I know everything, you see."

I saw her sudden pallor. She bit her lip, then spoke with sudden decision.

"He is still alive—but he is not at the villa. Come, monsieur, I will make a bargain with you. Freedom for me—and M. Halliday, alive and well, for you."

"I accept," said Poirot. "I was about to propose the same bargain myself. By the way, are the Big Four your employers, madame?"

Again I saw that deathly pallor creep over her face, but she did not answer the question.

"You permit me to telephone?" She crossed to the instrument and asked for a number. "The number of the villa," she explained, "where our friend is now imprisoned. You may give it to the police—the nest will be empty when they arrive. . . . . Ah—is that you, André? It is I, Inez. The little Belgian knows all. Send Halliday to the hotel, and clear out."

She replaced the receiver, and came toward us, smiling.

"You will accompany us to the hotel, madame."

"Naturally. I expected that."

I got a taxi, and we drove off together. I could see by Poirot's face that he was perplexed. The thing was almost too easy. We arrived at the hotel. The porter came up to us.

"A gentleman has arrived. He is in your rooms. He seems very ill. A nurse came with him, but she has left."

"That is all right," said Poirot, "he is a friend of mine."

We went upstairs together. Sitting in a chair by the window was a haggard young fellow who looked in the last stages of exhaustion. Poirot went over to him. "Are you John Halliday?" The man nodded.

"Show me your left arm. John Halliday has a mole just above the left elbow."

The man stretched out his arm. The mole was there. Poirot bowed to the countess; she turned and left the room.

A glass of brandy revived Halliday somewhat.

"My God!" he muttered. "I have been through hell—hell. Those fiends are devils incarnate. My wife, where is she? What does she think? They told me that she would believe—would believe—"

"She does not," said Poirot, firmly. "Her faith in you has never wavered. She is waiting for you—she and the child."

"Thank God for that! I can hardly believe that I am free once more."

"Now that you are a little recovered, monsieur, I should like to hear the whole story from the beginning."

Halliday looked at him with an indescribable expression.

"Have you ever heard of the Big Four?"

"Something of them," said Poirot dryly.

"You do not know what I know. They have unlimited power. If I remain silent, I shall be safe. If I say one word—not only I, but my nearest and dearest will suffer unspeakable things. It is no good arguing with me—*I know*. . . . . I remember—nothing."

And rising, he walked from the room.

POIROT'S face wore a baffled expression.

"So it is like that, is it?" he muttered. "The Big Four win again. What is that you are holding in your hand, Hastings?"

I handed it to him.

"The countess scribbled it before she left," I explained.

He read it: *"'Au revoir, I. V.'"*

"Signed with her initials—I. V. Just a coincidence, perhaps, that they also stand for 'IV.' I wonder, Hastings, I wonder."

"The Radium Thieves," another fascinating adventure of the brilliant Poirot, will appear in the next, the June, issue.

The thrill-filled story of an American cattle-man betrayed to his enemies in a Mexican tavern—and of the gallant battle which thereupon ensued—by the gifted author of "The Lost Frontier."

His Blaze of Glory

By

E. S. PLADWELL

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

She sent a swift, worried glance rearward as she twirled in the rhythm of her dance.

THE scum of the earth was gathered under the low-beamed roof of El Nacional. The scum had been invited to witness some unique entertainment, and so everybody in the neighborhood was present except the unfortunates compelled to guard the herds of illicit cattle penned within the rails of various corrals hidden in the small valley just west of the blowsy Mexican roadhouse.

Tough-looking Mexicans and Americans sat at the tables under the rafters or lounged against the front of the bar at the left of the single small doorway. The place was hazy with tobacco-smoke, and noisy with the sound of boots patting the floor in unison with the rhythmic *thrum-thrum-thrum* of guitars played by three sleepy-eyed musicians in a shadowed corner.

A young woman, clicking castanets, danced in a cleared space at the center of the room. Lamps in niches in the rafters sent down yellow illumination which flashed upon her raven hair and threw swift, changing glints upon her smooth olive cheeks while the blackness of her costume mingled with the shadow which contorted over the floor as her lithe young body swayed and whirled. At times the light came past the shadow and flicked upon shapely high-heeled patent-leather pumps which twinkled, then vanished.

Dark-skinned Mexicans ogled her, twisting their sleek mustachios. Americans in the raiment of the cow-country, smelling of stables and sweat, sent glib remarks as she swung close to them. Other Americans in the shoddy near-smart regalia of the tinhorn gambler affected boredom but watched with oblique shrewdness.

Her defiant dark eyes looked past all of them except when some passing witticism caused her to stamp away, giving a resentful twist of her shoulder which tossed a beautiful black lace shawl closer to her body. Once she sent a swift, worried glance rearward toward one of several tables in the darker portion of the place, where John Hall sat playing solitaire. Through the slow-moving smoke-haze she saw his strong, clear-cut profile under a big tan hat, bent downward toward his cards as though he had no other care in the world.

It caused her to utter a short vexed sob as she twirled around in the rhythm of her dance. She wanted to rush toward him, to warn him, to urge him to jump out of a window if necessary; but these oglers were watching her too closely.

THEY continued to watch her after the dance. They clustered around her until sheer desperation caused her to march away as if offended at the whole crowd—which she was. Even then it was nearly a half-hour before she won clear and dallied among the gambling-tables, working toward Hall until she reached the dark corner alongside his chair.

"Go!" she commanded in a quick whisper. "They know all about you!"

He started to look up but decided to inspect the ace of diamonds in front of him. She whispered again:

"It is almost too late. The trap is set!"

"How about you?" he asked, of the cards.

Her big brown eyes were shiny as she gazed down upon the dirty blue-gray calico of his shoulder. Her reply was almost a cry:

"I cannot save myself. You cannot save me. *Adios, querido mio*—and remember me!"

Hall's right hand moved swiftly under the table and grasped her wrist.

"*Adios,* nothing! Where I go, you'll go!"

"There is no way!"

"We've got to find one. I'll not leave you among these swine; that's certain."

She tried to pull away, but his grip was too strong. She saw that his jaw was set in a stern line, and the nostrils of his straight nose dilated as if scenting battle. His gray eyes never ceased watching the crowd.

"You don't understand!" she whispered, terrified at his attitude. "My uncle knows you work for the Arizona cattle-owners; he knows why you're here in Mexico; his men are all around you; they're waiting for you to move!"

His face whitened, though he moved not a muscle, yet swiftly he observed that many in the crowd were staring at the girl behind him. Some Mexicans down the line were leaning forward, craning their necks; others regarded her with narrowing eyes, ignoring a dancer who was cavorting in front of them. It could only mean that her errand alongside him was understood. But why? Her position in the semidarkness was not unduly prominent.

Frankly he looked up at her. His eyes first blinked in the gleam of the splendid high comb which stood above the silky masses of black hair. Then in a flash he realized how her beseeching lips and heaving bosom had betrayed her anxieties to any onlooker. She was too young and too innocent for this sort of business. Her fervor had made her quite forget to be an actress!

A rueful smile played over his lips as he glanced again at the crowd which scowled at him.

"The jig's up, then," he admitted. "But you should have stayed away from me."

SHE too saw that the mob was nodding and muttering and making quiet signals. Her head came up.

"I take what comes," she said aloud. Then, in a whisper which broke toward the end: "Could I let them trap you—kill you? Is that the way you think I should love you?"

His muscles did not seem to move; yet his eyes looked bitter.

"The thought of their throwing a girl like you into this robbers' roost makes my blood boil!" he raged. "I'm going to shoot your dirty swine of an uncle if it's the last thing I do on earth!"

She tried to pull away from his hand.

"No! Then I have no protector."

"Protector! A cheap honky-tonk owner who takes his beautiful Castilian niece out of an American convent to make her dance in a place like this! Fine protector!"

"But if he is gone, there is no one else!"

"No one but me."

"But you must escape!"

He wondered how. There were many armed men in front of him, a few behind him, and several more at the tables along

the opposite wall of this low-ceilinged extension at the rear of the dance-hall. He sensed the unrelenting stare of their eyes. In desperation he might whip out the pistol at his hip and try to shoot up the whole place, but the girl was right in the line of fire, and there were several men around the corner of the main hall whom he could not cover. If he sent the girl away, she might be separated from him forever in the frantic confusion of the next few moments. He would certainly lose her if he made a dash for the near-by window; and anyhow, the window seemed to be guarded from the outside. He thought he saw shadows lurking there.

"We'll wait," he decided, sitting back. "Something may turn up. Stay here with me."

She sat down opposite him, trying to smile despite fears which made her lips quiver. He released her wrist and laid his hidden right hand openly upon the table, noting that this quiet gesture lessened the tension in the room. A slinking little American cowpuncher sat back in his chair and started rolling a cigarette. A Mexican shrugged his shoulders and his coffee-colored face opened into a smile which showed his white teeth. Another yawned and stretched, sending a covert nod to a friend.

"They remind me of cats!" observed Hall. "They've got the mouse cornered! They should have jumped me long ago."

"They wait," she whispered.

"What for?"

"Who knows? Perhaps my uncle. Perhaps more people."

HALL'S fingers toyed with the cards. A grudging smile curled his lips. The mingled noises of guitars, dancing feet, chips and beer-mugs created a buzzing undertone of sound which prevented his low voice from carrying far. He spoke almost in a natural tone:

"When did you find out they were after me?"

"When I started to dance. I heard two men talking while looking at you. My uncle had told them to come."

"So. All arranged beforehand. Uncle must have been well informed."

"Who knows?" Suddenly she drew a sharp breath. "Ah, do you fear *I* told him?"

He looked up for an instant. Gray eyes met the indignant brown ones.

"You? No—not you, Maria Dolores. I've seen too much to suspect *that*. He must have a private spy-system. He's supposed to be an innocent Mexican innkeeper, but I've a good idea that your fat Señor Uncle José Leon Salazar gets his little rake-off from every herd these crooks slip down across the line."

He continued to ruffle the cards. His eyes were watching the crowd again.

"Hang it, that's the thing I've waited to learn. I've got a line on most of these crooks; I know what ranches they watch; I know what cañons they drive the stolen herds through; I've posed as a rustler, and I've learned most of the rustlers' secrets, but I guess I'll have to forget your fat uncle and his friends— Hello! Now the party's going to get rough!"

THE front door had opened. Beyond the smoke-haze he saw a tall, gaunt, elderly figure stalk through the doorway, glaring with fierce eyes at the crowd. Truculence oozed from him. The marks of a long lifetime of sin and crime were limned on the crisscross wrinkles of his sun-roughened face, whose hawklike nose, heavy black brows and flaming blue eyes advertised an untamable temper. A white beard-stubble stuck straight out from his cheeks and jaw. An old black hat, pushed slantwise over his left eye, added a touch of rakishness to his sinister visage; a pair of large ivory pistol-butts stuck out of the tops of enormous old-fashioned leather holsters dangling over his thighs. Above the pistols was a cartridge-belt fully loaded. Below the pistols were baggy overalls whose tattered ends were shoved into the tops of high-heeled boots which had seen better days. Behind the heels of the boots were spurs almost as large as doughnuts.

But despite this robust ferocity, there were signs of an inner disintegration in the man, as if some malady was making itself felt upon what was once a tremendous constitution. It was visible in a queer pallor around his eyes, as they glared around at the crowd.

The noises of the place subsided. The guitars hesitated.

"He's likely to make things harder," admitted Hall, in an undertone. "That's the toughest blackguard east of the Colorado River!"

"Who is he?" asked Maria.

"Bill Hoag—Wildcat Bill. About the last of the old-time rip-snorters."

"He's likely to make things harder—that's the toughest blackguard east of the Colorado River!"

"Rip-snorter?" puzzled the girl, though her voice was unsteady. "What does he do?"

"Bandit, gunman, drunkard, fighter, bootlegger, everything. Dodged six posses and swam the Gila in flood, one time, just to shoot holes through a fellow he didn't like. Got mad at a sheriff about twenty years ago, locked the sheriff in his own jail, and then tried to burn down the jail. Nice citizen! What's he doing here?"

MARIA did not reply but laid a hand gently on his wrist. He saw she was trembling. Anxiously he looked around, seeking some place where he could shield her from the explosion likely to happen very soon. He glanced toward the rear of the place. Eight men lurked in the semi-darkness near the back door. Two of them were leering at him. He glanced at the card-tables. A half-dozen men were watching him. He shifted his gaze toward the fierce old frontiersman with the pistols. Many persons were gaping at the old scoundrel, but others kept staring implacably toward Hall.

"I've changed my mind," Hall decided over his shoulder again. "I was selfish in keeping you here. Better beat it, Maria Dolores. You're in danger alongside me."

"But no!" she protested, gripping his wrist tighter. "Where you go, I go! You said it!"

He nodded. His hands resumed shuffling the cards.

"Right, but I can't have you shot! You are in the way—you'd stop every bullet I didn't get. Would I care to escape if you are hurt? Listen: There's a tree on a knoll at the other end of the valley, beyond the corrals. It stands alone at the crest of the hill. You remember it? All right. No matter what happens tonight—to you or me—visit that tree whenever you can. I'll come back to that tree if there's life left in me."

"But my uncle—these men—this place!"

"I know. It makes me see red when I think of it. But there's nothing else to do."

He gave her time to consider the matter. He started to roll a cigarette while watching the old scoundrel up front, who had stalked to the middle of the dance-hall and was glaring at the loafers at the bar while making deep growls in his throat. There was an arrogance about the old hellion which caused Hall to stare with increasing wonderment.

"You lice!" exploded the aged sinner. "Rum-guzzlers, beer-swiggers, polluting yourselves with rot-gut, fusel-oil, swill from the gutter, *get away from that bar!*"

There was a moment of amazement.

Then a sudden roar of laughter burst from the crowd. Seven Mexicans at the bar recovered from their astonishment and

bowed ironically to the superior will. Four ragged Americans stiffened with insult and then grinned, nodded and shambled away, quite willing to participate in this new game.

But the old rascal was not appeased. His ferocious eyes flashed toward a dancer in red at the edge of the cleared space.

"Hussies!" he scoffed. "Painted hussies! Limbs of Satan! Drunkards, gamblers and painted hussies! A house of damnation!"

"Attaboy, Bill!"

Forty throats yelled it. Hands clapped with jocular applause. The red-faced miscreant acknowledged it with a ferocious frown while he shook his fist at the whole assemblage.

"Sots!" he howled.

Hall's eyes narrowed as he watched the spectacle.

"There's something queer about this," he remarked, noting that the girl's uncertain hand was still upon him. "These fools think he's entertaining them. He's not. He's either very drunk or he's gone crazy. Maria, for heaven's sake, get out of here!"

He heard her soft reply:

"*Adios,* then, until we meet again!"

There was a scuffle behind him which suggested that some of the watchers were taking charge of her, but Hall had no time to see it. The front door opened. In walked a stout, important personage with a long black mustache, who kept up his head and swung his arms with the air of a person consciously the master of everything in sight. His hat was an old derby and his raiment was ordinary brown stuff, but around his ample vest he wore a brilliant scarlet sash which added a dashing Latin holiday aspect to what was otherwise a fat, tough keeper of a roadhouse.

He closed the door—stood in front of it while his little black eyes peered around until they centered upon Hall, ignoring Wildcat Bill, who seemed to be bewildered as to the next stunt on his program. The old man stood like a figure of baffled wrath. Beyond him the red-sashed saloonkeeper bowed to Hall and honored him with a gracious smile before walking toward his table.

Several men arose and followed the fat host after he had passed them. Others, behind Hall, came to their feet quietly. The noises in the room died down.

The person in the red sash ambled up to the table while Hall continued to inspect the cards in front of him. The fat visitor halted, produced a cigarette out of a vest pocket, and lighted it while his quick, satisfied gaze darted toward his friends, toward the girl held by the swarthy men, and finally back to the blond young man again preoccupied with his game.

"Ah!" remarked the fat one, in a caressing voice. "I see the Señor Hall enjoys his cards alone."

"That's correct," acknowledged Hall, turning an ace.

"The Señor Hall has luck with cards?"

"Pretty fair."

"I am very glad. It is a good game. And much safer than being a spy, no?"

Hall looked up. He held the ace with the fingers of both hands. The hands were utterly inactive.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"A spy, señor? Oh, a spy is a very bad thing; he goes to places which are very dangerous; he learns very many things which he should not know; and when he is caught, it is very sad."

Hall cocked his head to one side while his gray eyes inspected the fat man's nose.

"Well, all right," accepted Hall slowly. "I'll bite. What's the answer?"

The fat host frowned with instinctive pique at the American's blunt refusal to fence, argue, exhort, or rise to the drama which the occasion warranted. Hall was too casual, too wooden, too unimpressed. The indifference of the blond exasperated the Latin, as it always does.

"You are a spy!" exploded the stout one, slamming a fist on the table.

The crash resounded like a thunderbolt, followed by a scuffling of feet as a dozen men crowded closer to the table.

There was a ghastly interval of silence until Hall drawled:

"Well, what of it?"

The answer caused the stout one's face to convulse with passion. He leaned forward and shook a vehement fist in front of the blond youth:

"What of it? You ask—a spy—a spy—we kill you—and you ask what of it—Ya-a-a-a-a! You ask what—"

Hall's indifference vanished.

IN a fraction of a second his left hand slapped down upon the fat shoulder and drew it toward him, like a shield. His right hand went backward and whipped out a revolver whose barrel flashed into the stout one's face. The cold muzzle came

to rest upon the top of the big nose. Its pressure whitened a circle of skin between the thick eyebrows as Hall jumped up, whirling the man around upon him and standing with his back to the wall.

It happened so swiftly that the armed men around him had no time to draw weapons; yet when he leaned against the wall-boards, he saw a dozen pistol-muzzles pointed toward him while knives gleamed in many dark hands.

The old man's cannon came forth again. Its bang caused Hall's horses to jump.

"Put those guns down!" yelled Hall. "Put 'em down or I'll blow him apart!"

Perhaps the desperation in his voice made them hesitate. Any one of them could shoot him instantly, but he could release the hammer of his own pistol with equal swiftness. It was held back by his thumb. It would snap down automatically if the thumb relaxed. So they held their weapons uncertainly while watching his least move.

He saw the sardonic grins on their faces. He had taken one trick, but he couldn't keep his back to the wall eternally; neither could he march his prisoner to the door while the mob closed in behind him. He was thoroughly trapped. For an instant his eyes were glazed by the agony of sheer helplessness; then the muscles of his face hardened as he accepted the lesser evil.

"I'm going out by the front door!" he declared, between set teeth.

Somebody chuckled. He saw two pairs of eyes in the background, regarding the plight of the fat saloonkeeper with malicious amusement. It made Hall realize that perhaps this stout person with the red sash had enemies who were perfectly willing to see him shot. If so, Hall was done! With narrowing eyes he watched these men, trying to gauge their rancor. And then—

A thunderous voice bellowed through the room: "Hands up! Everybody!"

Forty pairs of eyes, including Hall's, swung toward where the fierce old villain with the rakish black hat stood glaring from behind the muzzles of two enormous six-shooters.

The sudden apparition held the crowd spellbound.

They could not seem to believe it. Eyes widened and mouths opened in amazement; then some one laughed nervously.

Somebody else, at the other side of the room from Hall, made a quick motion as if to resent the old man's melodrama.

A cannon-shot rocked the room. Every lamp in the place jumped with the concussion. Hall saw a streak of flame leap from the pistol in the old scoundrel's right hand, followed by a gust of whirling smoke.

"I told you to put up your hands!" roared the old hellion.

Everybody obeyed. The moral lesson of that awful explosion was so impressive that every arm reached toward the ceiling, some of them still holding knives and pistols. Hall shared their rigidity. His ears still tingling from that terrific concussion, he eased down the hammer of his weapon, holding it aloft by the trigger-guard. He suspected some one had been hurt in that cannonade; he thought he had heard a stifled cry and the sound of something falling.

To his amazement, he heard the elderly tyrant bawl out his name:

"Are you John Hall? Eh? Come here!"

Hall calculated swiftly, nodded, and strode toward the gaunt old ruffian, letting the fat saloonkeeper slump upon the table. Hall accepted the old rogue's whim eagerly. It brought him that much nearer to the door. But the fierce old delinquent roared at him:

"Take them guns away from them people! Lay 'em on the bar!"

HAD Beelzebub come personally to act as a rescuing angel, Hall could not have been more amazed. Blankly he stared at the old apparition in the tattered blue overalls; then he whirled around and began to yank firearms or knives from hands and pockets until the collection was piled high in a glittering heap upon the bar. And still he kept working, for these people had come well armed. He began to observe that only a superscoundrel with a majestic reputation could have tempted them. Then he noted that the crowd stood in such a way that the old villain could cover them all, even to the grumbling coterie near the rear door, where the girl in black stood with hands uplifted like the rest.

Hall looked into her questioning eyes. His right arm grasped her shoulder, and he spun her around toward the rear door; but there was a table across the doorway!

"Nice trap," observed Hall. He reversed the girl's direction. "All right. Come. Get out of the line of fire. Follow me."

Hesitantly she allowed him to haul her toward the old scoundrel, who glared at her.

"Back!" he snarled. "Out of my way, woman!"

"No!" begged Hall. "Stop that!"

He knew the girl had been heckled to the limit. The pistol's terrific concussion had torn her nerves, and now the near presence of the old terror caused her to tremble like a leaf. Hall supported her with his left arm, dropping his collected weapons on the floor. The gaunt tyrant took umbrage at this.

"Young man," he bellowed, "the road to hell is paved with women! Out with her!"

"All right," agreed Hall with relief. "Out with her!" And he grabbed her hand and strode for the door.

"Stop!" roared the tyrant. "Wait for me!"

Hall checked himself in midstep.

"I don't understand you!" he yelled. "What's your game? Are you playing with me? Or what?"

"Playing!" The old rip-snorter sent a ferocious glance toward the disarmed crowd and then stalked toward the bar. "Playing, eh?" He sheathed his pistols, leaped upon the bar, reached beyond it, drew an armful of bottles from the mirrored buffet, and smashed them one upon the other until the solid wood and the weapons upon it were drenched. A rich alcoholic smell permeated the place as Hall and Maria waited, unwilling to abandon this weird but powerful ally.

"My bar!" screamed the fat owner, from the rear.

"Playing, eh?" bawled the old terror, glaring at the pop-eyed crowd. "Playing, eh? You sots, your house of damnation is tumbling!"

He jumped off the bar and lighted a match. A blue flame hung over its front wall and then leaped up over the whole bar.

"No!" shrieked the fat proprietor.

The blue flame spread from bar to buffet. It jumped toward a line of amber bottles in front of some cheap lattice-work. The lattice-work burst into a brilliant yellow flame. Smoke began to gather under the low rafters.

"The old man's crazy!" howled a voice at the rear.

Hall drew a sharp breath, holding the sobbing girl close at his side. Was this real or a nightmare?

But the elderly rogue gave him an amiable nod, and spoke with remarkable

It was a nightmare of tossing horns and crazy animals.

sanity: "Nothin' else to do. We can't tote all them guns with us. We can't let 'em git their guns back. Might as well burn down the whole shebang. It's safer. She's a house of damnation, anyhow. Let 'er burn. We'll stomp out this sink of sin!"

"*We!*" exclaimed Hall. "What do you mean. What's your game?"

"I'm sent down here by the Arizona Cattlemen's Association, son. They thought you might be in trouble so they hired me."

"*You!*"

"Yeh—me!" snarled the old rascal. "Come! She's afire now. Let's git. Drop that gal!"

"She goes with me!" insisted Hall.

The old malefactor's blazing eyes reproved him sternly.

"You're hired to look into rustlers, young man, not to pick up women in high-heeled shoes and silk socks! Git along! 'Tend to your business!"

Forbearing to answer, Hall quietly led the girl out to the starlit road. Behind them came the roar of the mob, the crackling of burning woodwork, and the wild profanity of the old man.

In a minute he rushed out. Behind him a cloud of smoke.

"Hosses!" he yelled. "Git some!"

He ran around the house and across a short field toward the nearest corrals, keeping away from the yelling crowd which streamed out of the saloon's back door. He opened the first corral gate, pointing toward the faint outlines of animals beyond another gate. "Git 'em!" he commanded. "I'll stay here."

Hall perforce led the girl to the second corral, which was unguarded. He found saddles in a shed and placed them on three animals.

A shot exploded from the dance-hall, followed by a popping and banging which sounded as if machine-guns were going off. *B-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!* The roof seemed to lift. Sparks showered above it. A yellow glare forced its way upward, growing larger until its reflection illumined the rails of the corral.

Hall lifted the girl into a saddle and led the other two snorting animals toward the old villain, who stood quietly watching the damage he had wrought. The whole place was exploding now. Flames licked toward the outside of the walls. The yellow glare grew brighter, gleaming on the forms of the howling, jeering, snarling mob which gesticulated toward the old man. Newcomers raced toward the house, then spoke with

friends and turned toward the old scoundrel. One of them reached toward his hip.

The old man's cannon came forth again. Its bang caused Hall's horses to jump. The crowd made a mad rush for shelter at the other side of the house.

"Hurry up!" urged Hall, almost frantic.

The old villain jumped into the saddle but turned toward the cattle-corrals.

"Where you going?" yelled Hall.

"Back yonder. We'll take some of them stolen herds home with us."

"No! We're lucky to escape with our lives!"

But the gaunt old battler rode past the gateway of a second corral. Hall wailed in his throat, "Crazy!" then headed his horse toward the road, spurred it, made it leap forward, and then reined in with such suddenness that the girl's oncoming animal collided with it. The light from the flaming building shone redly on his tormented face as he wheeled his mount around.

"Ride!" he commanded. "Ride fast, if you love me! Meet me at Robinson's ranch, across the border!"

"But you!" she gasped.

"You've got to go alone! I can't run away. He pulled me out; I've got to help him. It's only common decency. There's no other way. Hurry!"

Three shots flashed beyond the fence down the valley.

"I'm sorry," came her listless voice. "I wanted you with me."

Her disappointment tore at his heart. After all, he owed her his complete fealty; and yet he could not skulk away and leave his rescuer in the lurch.

"No!" he pleaded. "Ride! For heaven's sake, ride!"

Her animal was jumpy, but she held its head taut despite the struggling bit.

"Where you go, I go," she decided, bowing her head.

"No!" he begged.

Her hand touched his shoulder, just as another shot flashed beyond a distant fence. The crackling of the burning house was one continuous roar.

He shook his head helplessly, as somebody fired from behind the house. The shot was only a trifle louder than the crackling of the building, but swiftly he swung his horse around so that she was in shadow.

"I guess it's too late," he surrendered. "Those fellows are arming. They'd catch you anyhow." Contritely he reached out an arm and drew her close. "All right, then," he decided. "Where I go, you'll go, even to that lunatic among the corrals. We can't take the road—have to try the back trails. Come!"

TWO shots exploded in the darkness ahead, where some sort of excitement raged.

Hall passed in front of Maria as they drew away from the firelight and into smelly pens where the warm odor of animals still lingered. But the cattle were not there. The earth was rumbling under the pounding of heavy hoofs, while bawls and snorts advertised the feverish motion of a huge mass of steers.

"The old idiot has done it!" cried Hall.

More shots lashed out of the darkness some distance ahead. He reached back and grasped the girl's hand. It was hot and shaky, but he felt its loyal pressure, and it made him calmer.

"Slow down," he advised. "Stay behind me. We'll go easy till we get the straight of this thing."

The black mass of cattle seemed to be moving northward beyond corral fences which loomed dimly ahead of him. The mass thundered along with the speed of a cavalry charge, galloping over a hill at Hall's right. A sudden flash of fire whipped out at its tail, followed by an outburst of wild profanity.

"That's Bill!" said Hall. "Hurry! He's almost in front of us!"

A hurrying form on horseback materialized out of the darkness. It rushed across Hall's path and raced to the southward, making passionate remarks in Mexican-Spanish. The other profanity up ahead increased in gusto.

"Bill!" shouted Hall. "Wait for us!"

"*Us!*" snarled Bill. "Still got that durned fool woman?"

"Be decent!" advised Hall.

"Decent! My nose is shot off; my left arm's busted; my skelp's cut open; my hip's creased; my pants is torn—and now this doggoned young woman-chasin' whipper-snapper tells me to be decent! Hell! If I wasn't a Christian, I'd blow your damned head off!"

"Christian!" yelped Hall.

"Yeh, Christian! Shut up! Git going! Help me chase them cattle up yonder cañon!"

There was no time to argue about it. Hall and the girl perforce obeyed while

the amazing old fire-eater stampeded the herd for fifteen miles to the line. It was a mad rush, a nightmare of tossing horns and crazy animals, a wild pursuit uphill and downhill, where the cattle sweated away thousands of pounds of good beef, crashing through sagebrush and young timber while laggards went down and were stamped to pieces. Behind them rode the roaring patriarch and his two despairing assistants, firing off pistols, sometimes fighting rearguard actions, but always rocketing northward until the whole thundering outfit crashed through a barbed-wire fence, scattered some perfectly good American cattle, aroused a whole ranch of irate riders, and finally calmed down at the edge of a moonlit bluff which would have killed every last member of the quivering herd.

The haggard Hall, fearful of Maria's exhaustion, allowed himself to dismount among several puzzled riders who recognized him, just as the girl drew up. The whiskered Robinson, owner of the ranch, approached with a lantern in his hand.

"You came back real sudden," he observed dryly.

Hall ran to Maria, who fell off her horse and into his arms, and then tried to stand up. He supported her, murmuring encouragement.

The other men watched but said nothing. They had never before seen a beautiful young woman in a Spanish dancing costume and patent-leather pumps arriving behind a herd of mad cattle at three in the morning, so they didn't know exactly what to say.

"My fiancée, gentlemen," announced Hall, at last.

Their hats went off.

Hall's inquiring gaze went beyond them to a horse which was unsaddled and trying to munch dry grass between the thorny clumps of sage. Near the horse a man was leaning over a prone figure, bathing its face with water from a canteen. Hall strode there swiftly. The rest followed.

Old Wildcat Bill lay on his back, swearing softly toward the rising moon until the lantern forced his fierce eyes to blink and then to glare toward the newcomers. Below the eyes was a wet bandana.

"I done what I promised!" he yelled at Robinson. Then, to Hall: "Tell 'em about it."

Hall hesitated.

"I don't understand it. It's a nightmare, He rescued me, burned down the place, shot it up, led me all over the corrals, nearly got us killed, and chased the cattle fifteen miles, but I don't know what it's all about."

The aged battler raised himself up on one elbow. His voice was impatient:

"I'm sick, see? Doctors say I can't last long. So I j'ined the church. I figgered I'd been plumb wicked so I ought to start the other way before it's too late, see?"

AS the old scoundrel started coughing, Maria knelt beside him, binding his nose deftly with a white handkerchief, but he waved her away. His temper was rising.

"I reformed!" he snarled. "Hear me? Reformed! Git that into your thick head, you doggoned young whipper-snapper! Reformed! But the doctors said I was real sick. So reform wasn't enough; I've been too tough. My time's short. If I wanted to do anything to even things up, I'd have to start mighty quick, see?"

"Oh!" said Hall.

"Yeh. So when this here Cattlemen's Association started after them Mexican robbers, I offered to help 'em. Offered to git their cattle back."

Hall looked at Robinson, who nodded.

"Yep. We was some s'picious about it, but he argued real hard. Said he'd lived an evil life—wanted to go out in a blaze of glory. So we told him to go ahead and collect all the fool glory he wanted."

"A blaze of glory!" echoed Hall. "So that's why he rushed into those cattle corrals. He wanted to die a hero." Hall grew angry. "That old lunatic risked this girl's life, and mine, while he pestered around, looking for glory!"

Suddenly Hall grasped Maria.

"I nearly let this chuckle-headed old maniac get you killed. Forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive, my John. Are we not here, together?" she replied.

He patted her shoulder and turned away, not caring to show his real feelings in front of this audience. Alongside him the old scoundrel still glared upward. He wasn't badly wounded—hurt just enough to be peevish.

"Am I a Christian?" he rasped. "Aint I? Eh?"

The tough old frontiersman's absolute, pathetic misunderstanding of the word—and all the gentleness and humanity which it implies—caused Hall to grope for a fitting answer.

"Well, no," he decided, repressing a chuckle. "Not exactly—but gosh, how you tried!"

MODOC ROCK

The fascinating story of a star reporter's great adventure, skillfully set down by a man who has himself been a star reporter—the talented author of the famous "Buried Alive Club" stories.

Illustrated by
William Molt

By FRANK PARKER STOCKBRIDGE

LARRY REDMOND seemed to attract news as a magnet attracts iron filings. Envious rivals on other papers spoke sneeringly of his "bull-headed luck" and imitated his dress, accent and mannerisms in the futile hope of hitting upon the talisman that opened to him channels of information which were closed to them.

Even in the *Chronicle* office his facility in getting under the surface of events and discovering news which nobody else had sensed was regarded as somewhat uncanny. Only the owner of the *Chronicle* and Carson, the paper's managing editor, recognized fully that Larry Redmond's "luck" was but the inevitable result of a quarter-century of intensive cultivation of all of his perceptive faculties, of his memory and of the acquaintance of every person on Manhattan Island who had been, was or seemed likely to become, the custodian or source of news.

And since everybody was a potential actor in the great news-drama of the everyday life of the metropolis, Larry Redmond's acquaintances were to be found in every stratum of the city's social structure. His friends included the great and the lowly, the good and the bad, law-abiders, law-breakers and law-enforcers. They had been won to give him their confidence by the charm of his personality and the persuasiveness of his manner; he had won their respect by never violating a confidence. There was nothing within his power and the restrictions imposed by honor and good citizenship that Larry Redmond would not do for his friends in time of trouble, and so he bound them to him.

The inevitable result was that news sought Larry Redmond even more eagerly than he sought news. He could stand in front of Trinity, in the Waldorf lobby or in the middle of Times Square and, without moving from his tracks, gather more news than any three or four reporters for other papers could turn up in a day's hunting. Most of it, moreover, would be news of which the other papers had not even a hint. In consequence his income, under the liberal space and bonus system of the *Chronicle*, was larger than that of most managing editors—large enough for Larry to maintain a comfortable bachelor apartment in the Buckhampton, just off Fifth Avenue, with his own valet-cook-butler, to indulge his taste for sports within reason, and to establish for himself the reputation of being one of the best-dressed men in New York.

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Larry glanced over a sheaf of wet proofs. A dispatch caught his eye.

Incidents unnoticed or disregarded by others were clews to possible news when observed by Larry Redmond. He studied people and their actions and words, filed every unusual combination away in his pigeon-hole memory, whence he could withdraw it at some future time, to furnish the key to a mystery, perhaps days, months or even years later. Let a man or woman in his sight or hearing do or say something out of keeping with his or her known character, and the incident marked that person in Larry's memory as somebody to be watched, somebody who would some day "make news;" for news, as he succinctly phrased it, is mainly the record of persons doing things which do not conform to their accepted characters.

"It is no news that a known criminal has committed a burglary, or that a clergyman has preached a sermon," he would say, "but let the minister commit a crime or the burglar preach a sermon, and it becomes news of the highest interest." And by cultivating both clergymen and criminals, studying them as individuals rather than types, he found himself making many a shrewd guess that this, that or the other person would sooner or later do something so foreign to the public's concept of his character as to call for headlines in the *Chronicle*. It might be a word or a phrase, an accent or a gesture, an unconsidered trifle which Larry Redmond would snap up and secrete in its proper compartment of his mind's storehouse, to serve as a label, a warning signal, a key to be turned whenever its author should do a thing that made news. Perhaps it would be merely the discovery of contact between two persons whose lives seemed normally to revolve in separate orbits which could never impinge upon each other.

SO when Redmond saw David Pendennis and Martin Bean together, under circumstances which indicated that their acquaintance was more than casual, he registered that fact as something to be recalled when Pendennis or Bean should again get into the news. The mere fact was a red flag of warning that something was going

on, under the surface of things, which would be worth inquiring into when the bubbles began to rise to the surface.

Pendennis was getting into a taxicab in front of the Waldorf, and Martin Bean was handing the driver a suitcase bearing Pendennis' initials. Pendennis looked worried, and in his hand he carried a brown leather portfolio of the type commonly designated as a brief-case. Both of these facts were out of harmony with the man's character as Larry Redmond knew it. The man whom many hailed as the greatest inventor of the age was ordinarily a veritable Pollyanna; also he had the habit of carrying his papers stuffed into every available pocket until he bulged like an editorial waste-basket. His uniform response to the suggestion that he should carry a brief-case was that he would be sure to forget it somewhere and so lose something of value.

Redmond heard Bean tell the driver to take his fare to the Grand Central station, saw him shake hands with Pendennis and heard the inventor say: "I'll get at this at the first opportunity."

What had David Pendennis in common with the wiliest, most unscrupulous little promoter who ever put over a shady stock deal on the Curb market? Pondering that question, Redmond passed on into the hotel, and into its once-famous bar, now a stockbroker's uptown office.

It was past the closing hour on the exchanges, but little groups of men were lounging in front of the quotation board, discussing the day's market. Larry ran his eye over the closing quotations shown on the board and exchanged greetings with half a dozen men who detached themselves from groups, coming over to speak to him.

"Texiana Oil, three cents a share," said Redmond, reading from the Curb quotations as Jimmy Dakin, ex-crook, reputed to be the custodian of more scandalous inside information about stock-market manipulations and manipulators than any other man in New York, greeted him. "Was there ever any oil in their wells at all, I wonder."

"Sure there was oil there," replied Dakin with a knowing smile. "That's how Bean beat the case—that and—"

He rubbed the thumb and first two fingers of his right hand together in the familiar, cynical gesture which signifies the counting out of money for the purpose of "fixing" someone in authority.

"Did it cost him much?" Redmond pursued.

"About a hundred grand," replied Dakin.

"He couldn't have had much left, then," was Redmond's comment.

"Say, Larry, you don't know that bird!" was Dakin's jeering response. "If I was to tell you what he made off Texiana before the smash, when he was unloadin' her all the way up to three dollars a share, you wouldn't believe me."

"Probably not," said Redmond dryly.

"Say, he took one boob for a million an' a half, an' that's only one of the suckers that fell for his dope," persisted Dakin, in no wise abashed by Redmond's frank contempt. "You got to hand it to little Martin; he's *there!* I bet he's got five million salted, if he's got a cent, an' anybody that gets a nickel away from Martin Bean for less than a dime has got to use chloroform."

"What's he doing now?" asked Redmond. "I haven't heard much of him for the last six months."

"Say, I'll wise you to a good thing," replied Dakin, lowering his voice to a half-whisper and edging Larry a little farther away from the nearest group. "See that P.Y. stock, on the board? In the Curb industrials. See that figure?"

AGAIN Redmond looked at the quotation board. "P.Y." had opened at seven-eighths, or eighty-seven and one-half cents a share, had moved up during the day's trading to fifteen-sixteenths, fallen off again to the opening quotation and remained at that figure at the end of the Curb market's day.

"That's Planetary Wireless Company, isn't it?" he said. "What's Bean got to do with that?"

"It's Bean's new baby," whispered Dakin, with exaggerated caution. "Get on board an' ride—that's all. Get on board. He's just nursin' her along now, easin' her up a sixteenth at a time, just enough to make a market an' keep the quotations active—but wait till she cuts loose. Oh, boy! When Martin Bean gets P.Y. all set an' ready to go, she'll touch fifteen before he pulls the plug."

"When do you think that will be?" Redmond asked with a show of interest.

"Maybe six months, maybe a year. You know how long it took him to put Texiana Oil over. He's a smooth worker, Martin

Bean is, an' he takes his time, waits till they're ripe."

"Well, I hope he has something more tangible back of his Planetary concern than he had behind Texiana," remarked Redmond, turning to go.

"Hell, he had a oil-well, didn't he?" demanded Dakin. "That's more than some of 'em has got. It aint oil-wells an' mines an' railroads the boobs trades in; it's stocks. Show 'em a good, active stock, an' how many asks what's behind it? That's where Martin Bean's smart, I'm telling you. When it was mining stocks they wanted, he gave 'em mining stocks, as good as any of 'em. Then they went oil crazy, an' he sprung Texiana on 'em. Now they're all nutty over radio, an' little Martin is right on the job. If the craze lasts, he'll clean 'em for a billion. At that, he might have some kind of radio machine to make a front with if it comes to a showdown."

"That looks like Bean, now," said Redmond, glancing toward the opposite door. Jimmy Dakin started hurriedly in the opposite direction. "I got to call up a guy," he explained, over his shoulder, as he disappeared.

SO Martin Bean was promoting radio stocks. That much of Jimmy's recital Redmond was willing to believe. There was probably some truth in the rest of it. That might explain the acquaintance of David Pendennis with Martin Bean, but for one thing.

Pendennis was an Inter-Continental man. Indeed, the great Inter-Continental Communications Corporation, dominant in the radio field, was but the outgrowth of the partnership formed years before between David Pendennis, then a struggling young inventor, and John Waterbury, now head of the I.C.C.C., but then running a little electrical shop up in New England. Both Waterbury and Pendennis had told Larry Redmond the story: how Pendennis had brought his first electrical invention to Waterbury's shop for assistance in building a working model; how Waterbury, with Yankee shrewdness, had seen its commercial possibilities and undertaken the marketing of it; and how this and succeeding creatures of Pendennis' genius, exploited under Waterbury's skillful business guidance, had made fortunes for both men, had made Pendennis' name a household word wherever radio was known, and had become the foundation upon which the great Inter-Continental's business structure had been reared.

But Pendennis and Martin Bean! He could understand Bean's seeking out Pendennis, but not Pendennis' apparent toleration of Bean.

"At that, he might have some kind of radio machine to make a front with," Dakin had said. Hardly a Pendennis machine, though, unless—

What was the whisper he had heard, somewhere, lately? He went to the telephone booths and called up Arthur Vandeusen, executive head of the Triborough Exploitation Company.

"What's worrying David Pendennis?" he asked, after the exchange of greetings. "You always know everybody's troubles."

"I don't know his, though," replied Vandeusen. "David's pretty close-mouthed. I did hear that he was trying to raise a lot of money, a million or so, awhile ago, but I don't know what for."

"That's what I heard, I guess," replied Larry. "I wonder if he's been getting into anything. He's got about as much business sense as a rabbit."

"I fear you do the rabbit a grave injustice, Larry," laughed Vandeusen. "It's lucky for Pendennis that he has Waterbury to steer him."

Redmond thanked him and hung up. True, David Pendennis had John Waterbury to steer him; the two were more like brothers than mere business associates. But *had* he? Surely John Waterbury's hand had not been on the tiller of Pendennis' bark when Martin Bean's piratical craft had crossed his bows.

How long was it since he had seen Waterbury and Pendennis together? Months, certainly. To be sure, the inventor spent more and more of his time in seclusion, at his country place in the Berkshires, where he had some sort of private laboratory and where his invalid wife seemed to thrive better than in the city; but hardly a week had passed, up to a few months earlier, in which Larry Redmond had not encountered Pendennis and Waterbury lunching together in the Downtown Club. Hard to imagine a break between the two, and yet—

He gave the operator another number.

"Mr. Waterbury's secretary speaking," came a voice over the telephone.

"Is Mr. Waterbury in?" asked Redmond.

"Mr. Waterbury is out of the city," re-

plied the secretary. "He is expected back next week."

"Has Mr. Pendennis been in today?" Redmond pursued.

"He was in the office this morning, but he left before luncheon; I don't think he will be back."

"Please have me switched to Mr. Ebbsmith's phone, then," Redmond asked. It was probably foolish to pursue the matter any further, since Pendennis still frequented the Inter-Continental offices, but Marshall Ebbsmith, the corporation's secretary and Waterbury's confidential man for years, might drop a hint that would settle the matter one way or the other. But the girl who answered from Ebbsmith's room reported that the secretary was also out of the office and was not expected back.

He turned away from the booths and sauntered back through the lobby. As he neared the door, Ebbsmith came down the passageway leading from Astor Place, past the elevators.

Redmond, knowing Ebbsmith, decided upon a frontal attack.

"What's this I hear about a break between Pendennis and Waterbury?" he demanded.

"I don't know what you've heard, Mr. Redmond," replied Ebbsmith, sparring for time.

"That Pendennis was in financial difficulties and Waterbury was sore," replied Redmond.

Sending up a trial balloon shows which way the wind blows—and this one discovered an air-current more speedily than he had anticipated.

"I'm sorry, but I really can't give you any information about it," was Ebbsmith's answer.

There was something in it, then; he had fired a shot in the dark and hit the target. Not a bull's-eye, perhaps, but something; for had there been nothing his suggestion would have evoked a prompt and flat denial.

The words of Jimmy Dakin echoed in his ear. "He took one boob for a million and a half."

Redmond launched another arrow.

"Texiana Oil?" he murmured inquiringly, his eyes fixed upon Ebbsmith's. The shaft touched the gold that time; Ebbsmith's face told him so.

"See here, Mr. Redmond," the secretary protested. "I don't know what you have heard, but you know that I am not in a position to discuss Mr. Waterbury's affairs or those of Mr. Pendennis. Why don't you ask them?"

"Waterbury's out of town, your office tells me," Larry replied.

"Yes; he's gone up to Canada on a fishing trip, with some friends," Ebbsmith answered. "Mr. Pendennis is out of town too."

"Oh, well, it can wait until one or the other gets back, then," Redmond responded, nonchalantly. "There's probably nothing to it, anyway." But Ebbsmith's expression of relief at his apparent abandonment of the pursuit told him that there decidedly *was* something to it.

That was what had brought Pendennis and Martin Bean together, eh? And the inventor, like other boobs trimmed in the stock-market, was coming back for more of the same!

Well, there might be no news in it, no printable news; for neither Larry Redmond nor the *Chronicle* dealt in scandal merely for the sake of scandal, and whatever Pendennis had sunk in Martin Bean's schemes was his own money to make ducks and drakes of if he wanted to—at least Larry hoped it was. But he liked David Pendennis, and John Waterbury was his good friend, and he disliked exceedingly the idea that a skunk like Martin Bean had been responsible for the rupture of a fine friendship. He would see Waterbury as soon as he got back from his Canadian trip.

CHAPTER II

LATE that night, in the *Chronicle* office, Larry Redmond sat on the corner of the managing editor's desk and glanced idly over a sheaf of wet proofs just down from the composing-room. A dispatch with a Pittsfield date caught his eye:

> Mrs. David Pendennis, wife of the famous inventor, died this evening shortly after the arrival of her husband at her bedside. Mrs. Pendennis had been an invalid for several years, but had lately shown considerable improvement. Her illness took a sudden turn for the worse this afternoon, and Mr. Pendennis was summoned back from New York, where he had gone on business. He barely caught the Berkshire Express and succeeded in reaching his home just in time to hear his wife's last words. Mrs. Pendennis was Miss Ellen Coffin of New Bedford before her marriage to the inventor twenty years ago. She leaves one daughter, Carol, nineteen years old.

"Pendennis hurried to the landing-stage and started to row across the lake."

Pendennis must have just received the summons, then, when he left the Waldorf. That would account, and amply, for his worried expression and his haste. Larry wrote a friendly note of sympathy to the inventor before he went home.

Three nights later a dispatch from the *Chronicle's* Pittsfield correspondent evoked a call for Larry.

"You knew Pendennis well, didn't you, Larry?" the managing editor asked, handing him the telegram.

> David Pendennis, the famous inventor, committed suicide this evening by jumping into Modoc Lake. His country house, on the shore of Modoc Lake, in which his wife died three days ago, caught fire this afternoon while the family and servants were attending Mrs. Pendennis' funeral. Mr. Pendennis and daughter had gone to the home of John Waterbury, president of the Inter-Continental Communications Corporation, across Modoc Lake from the Pendennis place. When the blaze was discovered Mr. Pendennis rowed across the lake and tried to save his property. On realizing that the house was doomed, he leaped into the lake from the top of Modoc Rock, a high promontory near his dwelling, and was drowned before aid could reach him. It is supposed that the double shock of his wife's unexpected death and the destruction of his home drove him temporarily insane. The body has not been recovered.

"That's terrible," was the reporter's comment as he finished reading the dispatch.

"I'll see if I can get John Waterbury on the phone. I've a hunch there's something back of this that doesn't appear in this dispatch."

While waiting for Miss Crowley, the *Chronicle's* night operator, to get the Waterbury country place on the wire, Larry told Carson what he had seen and heard at the Waldorf.

"Money troubles drive more men to suicide than grief ever did," said Carson. "There might be something in your hunch. See if Waterbury will say anything to confirm it, if you can get him, wont you? Of course, it isn't the sort of thing the *Chronicle* could print without complete confirmation, but I'd be glad of the chance to hang something on Martin Bean."

IT took all of Larry Redmond's persuasiveness to induce the Waterbury butler to take the message to his employer that he was wanted at the telephone. When at last Waterbury answered, his anguish was evident, even over a hundred and fifty miles of wire. If there had been a break, clearly it had been healed.

"I wouldn't have come to the phone for anybody else, Redmond," said the Inter-Continental's head. "It's about Pendennis, I suppose? You have the news?"

"Yes; and I was terribly shocked and grieved," replied the newspaper man. "I wouldn't have called you, Mr. Waterbury, but for one thing which seemed quite important, in view of reports that have reached the *Chronicle* office. How badly were his financial affairs involved? Was there a motive in them for his act?"

"I can set *that* rumor at rest without hesitation or evasion," Waterbury replied. "David Pendennis did not owe a cent in the world, and I happen to know of one item of nearly half a million dollars in cash which his estate will yield to his daughter Carol, besides other assets which may prove even more valuable."

"Nothing could be more definite than that," Larry agreed. "May I quote you as speaking with authority?"

"If you like," Waterbury assented.

THEN, under Larry's questioning, he told the story of the inventor's death, as he had witnessed it.

"We had come back from the funeral to my house," he said. "I had asked David and Carol to stay here for a few days, thinking it might ease the strain upon them not to have to return to the house where everything would remind them of their loss. Unless you knew Ellen Pendennis, you cannot appreciate what her passing means to everybody who loved her, which means everybody who knew her. She was one of those rare characters who seem born to charm and to radiate their loveliness of soul upon all with whom they come in contact. My own dear wife was devoted to her to the moment of her own death. They were like sisters, and my own sorrow tonight is that of a double loss.

"Naturally Pendennis and I were both greatly depressed, and found it difficult to remain indoors. We were walking together by the shore of the lake, saying little but feeling drawn together by our mutual sorrow as we had never been before, intimate as our relationship had been for more than twenty years. At least, that was my feeling, and I am sure it was also his.

"It was then almost dark, so neither of us noticed the smoke rising from the direction of the Pendennis house, which is diagonally across the lake from my own, perhaps half a mile away, until it had become a thick cloud, shot with flame. Realizing what it must be, Pendennis hurried to the landing-stage, where several boats are always moored in summer, jumped into one of them and started to row across the lake. I hurried back to my house to give the alarm, for the Pendennis servants had also come back from the funeral to my place.

"All the men on the place were quickly on their way across the lake to give such assistance as they could. My boy Jack and myself followed, Jack rowing. A big rock, jutting out into the lake, shuts off a full view of the Pendennis house until one gets almost opposite it. As soon as we came into range, I could see that the house was doomed. I have never seen such a blaze. The main part of the house was very old, built about two hundred years ago, and the ancient beams and floors were as dry as tinder. This has been a very dry summer, as you know, and the whole building was highly inflammable.

"Unfortunately the tank, upon which Pendennis formerly relied for his domestic water supply, was torn down a year or two ago and replaced by a pneumatic pressure water system operated by an electric motor. We generate our own power here, in an old mill at the foot of the lake. I saw that one of the poles carrying the power wires had fallen, so that the electric pump could not be operated even if it were accessible. Pendennis had installed a gasoline-driven pump in the basement of the house, as a protection against accident to the electric current, and as I got near I could see him, in the light of the flames, running around the house, evidently trying to find some way to get at the emergency pump.

"Suddenly he dashed into the woods, north of his house, by a path which leads to the top of Modoc Rock. A moment later I saw him poised on the top of the rock; then he dropped like a plummet into the water.

"My first thought was that his clothing had caught fire and scorched him and that he had chosen this way of easing the pain. He was a powerful swimmer and diver, and often dived off the rock for sport. I had Jack row the boat toward the spot where he had disappeared under the overhanging rock, but he did not come up.

"Jack, who swims very well for a boy, stripped and dived until he was exhausted, and so did several of the workmen. The lake is very deep at this point, and none of them reached bottom. They are grappling now for the body."

"You believe, then, that it was a deliberate suicide?" Larry asked.

"I wish I could believe that it was an accident," responded Waterbury. "I saw him plunge, however, and that was deliberate. He was in perfect health and physical condition, and there were no rocks beneath, which he could have struck. I can only believe that the shock of the double tragedy had unhinged his mind. You know how nervous and excitable he often was. He could go from the most exalted high spirits to the depth of despondency in a minute, if a problem upon which the success of an invention depended were not readily solvable."

"I can't tell you how much I appreciate this, Mr. Waterbury," Larry thanked him. "It is one of the unpleasant things in a newspaper man's work, to have to intrude at a time like this. I wish I could have spared you."

"It has done me good to talk freely," was the generous response. "Drop in at the office and see me some day, when I get back; we'll have lunch together."

"Will you be coming back to town soon?" Larry inquired.

"I shall probably have to, now," said Waterbury. "I may remain up here for the remainder of the time I had allotted for my vacation, though. I was up in Canada on a fishing-trip when the news of Ellen's death brought me home."

Larry thanked him again, then went into Carson's room.

"Nothing in my hunch, I guess," he said, relating what Waterbury had told him. "I've got all the details of Pendennis' death, however."

He went to his typewriter and painted for the edification of the *Chronicle's* readers one of the word-pictures for which he was famous, of the tragedy of Modoc Rock.

CHAPTER III

A DOZEN times, during the fortnight that ensued before John Waterbury came back to New York, Larry Redmond wondered again over the incident he had observed in front of the Waldorf. Waterbury's statement of Pendennis' affairs had been definite and explicit; he could not question that. Nor did the other explanation, that Bean was negotiating with Pendennis for some radio device, seem reasonable. If there had been no break between Pendennis and Waterbury it was impossible.

Yet Ebbsmith had responded to Larry's inquiries in a manner that had convinced the newspaper man that there *had* been a disagreement, that Pendennis *had* been in financial straits, that he *had* been involved in Martin Bean's Texiana Oil stock.

He found himself watching the quotations on Planetary Wireless. P.Y. was decidedly an active stock on the Curb. It would go up an eighth, down a sixteenth, with gradually increasing volumes of transactions from day to day. Somebody who knew just how to manipulate a stock to arouse the interest of the "boobs," as Jimmy Dakin termed them, was getting it ready for a killing. He had seen the trick worked so often that he could read the signs on the tape. At his suggestion the *Chronicle's* financial editor made inquiries through all of his far-flung channels of information.

"Bean, if he is really behind Planetary, is doing the thing legitimately this time," the financial expert reported. "They've got control of a dozen or so little concerns, financed them and enlarged their output, and are getting into shape to give Inter-Continental a run for its money. It looks like real competition. Of course, the Inter-Continental has a tremendous advantage in its ownership of Pendennis' fundamental patents, but some of those will expire soon, and there's no reason why the Planetary can't make improvements on them and use them, in time. It's too bad the Inter-Continental hasn't a genius ready to step into Pendennis' shoes."

Martin Bean in a legitimate business? Larry whistled incredulously.

"Perhaps he's decided to turn honest, now that he's got a big enough stake," the financial editor suggested. "That has happened, you know."

"Yes; and the cow jumped over the moon," Larry retorted. "Once. I know Bean and his kind. They'll run straight as long as everything is breaking right for them, but let things go against them and see how fast they'll backslide. Better watch Martin Bean."

HE dropped in several times at the Inter-Continental offices. Perhaps Ebbsmith could be induced to go further, now that Pendennis was gone. The first two or three times the Inter-Continental's secretary was not in; on his vacation, his assistant explained. When he did come back he did not seem to have got much benefit from

his vacation. He looked to Larry Redmond's experienced eye like a man who had suffered a severe nervous shock and was on the edge of a breakdown.

Pendennis' death and that of Mrs. Pendennis had unnerved him, he explained. As John Waterbury's personal secretary for several years before he had become secretary of the corporation, he had been thrown into intimate contact with Pendennis; had been a guest at his house on several occasions. He had been on a yacht, out of reach of messages, when the double tragedy had occurred, and had not learned of either death until several days after the funeral of Mrs. Pendennis. He talked freely enough of that, but as to anything which Larry could lay hold of as a key to the door which he was still trying to unlock, Marshall Ebbsmith was as tight-lipped as a clam.

His yachting trip could not have been a very happy one, Larry reflected. Ebbsmith was of the blond type that sunburns easily, and his skin showed only slight traces of exposure to wind and weather. Probably down in his berth, seasick, all the time, Larry concluded.

Probably there was a perfectly innocent explanation of the things which so persistently puzzled him, but he did not like to be puzzled. Whatever Ebbsmith knew, he would not tell; and Larry's first contact with Allan Graves, who had succeeded Ebbsmith as Waterbury's personal secretary, satisfied him that that young man would reveal, either by word or manner, only what he intended to express.

Quiet, self-contained, always apparently sure of himself, courteous without being at all deferential, Waterbury's dark young secretary decidedly possessed what is commonly termed a "poker face." Skilled in reading countenances and judging men, Larry Redmond admitted to himself that Graves baffled him. He could be thinking any kind of thoughts behind that imperturbable mask, without giving the slightest outward sign of what was passing in his mind. Larry Redmond himself had the same facility in concealing his thoughts, and he appreciated it in others.

He had come, reluctantly, to the conclusion that his persistent hunch had no foundation outside of his imagination, when he met Jimmy Dakin again.

"You don't know the name of the boob that Bean trimmed for a million and half, do you?" he ventured, at random.

"Say, that was the guy that did the Dutch act the other day," was the ex-crook's surprising answer. "You know—that inventor. That's what I heard, anyway."

"That so?" responded Larry, with apparent casualness. "Couldn't he get any of it back?"

"Say, you don't know little Martin as well as I thought you did!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Don't you know they never get anything back out of him? He's *smart,* I'm telling you! He always has 'em sewed up where they can't make a holler; all legal an' everything."

What had John Waterbury meant, then, by saying that David Pendennis' financial affairs were in good shape, if Pendennis had got nothing back of what he had lost in Texiana Oil? For now Larry knew that his hunch had been good from the first.

CHAPTER IV

OVER the luncheon-table in the Downtown Club, Waterbury pledged the newspaper man to confidence.

"Since you have learned so much, let me tell you the whole story," he said. "I do it simply to set your mind at rest, not for publication. I think you will agree with me that it will serve no good end to print it, after you have heard it."

Pendennis *had* lost his fortune in Texiana Oil. All that he could convert readily into money had gone, and in the effort to get it back he had involved himself for a million and a half more!

"David had a queer twist in his nature," Waterbury explained. "Brilliant as his scientific and inventive genius was, and as well rewarded, he always hated the thought that he had not achieved his success absolutely single-handed. I had been the business man of the combination from the beginning. I could never have built up the Inter-Continental if I had not taken a firm hand, from the start, against Pendennis' interference in business matters. He was as simple and naïve as a child in such things, and would propose the most absurd and impractical ideas. I always listened to his suggestions, but never acted upon them.

"He never would have admitted it, probably never admitted it even to himself, but there was always an undercurrent of jealousy in our relations; he was jealous of my business success, not content with his own

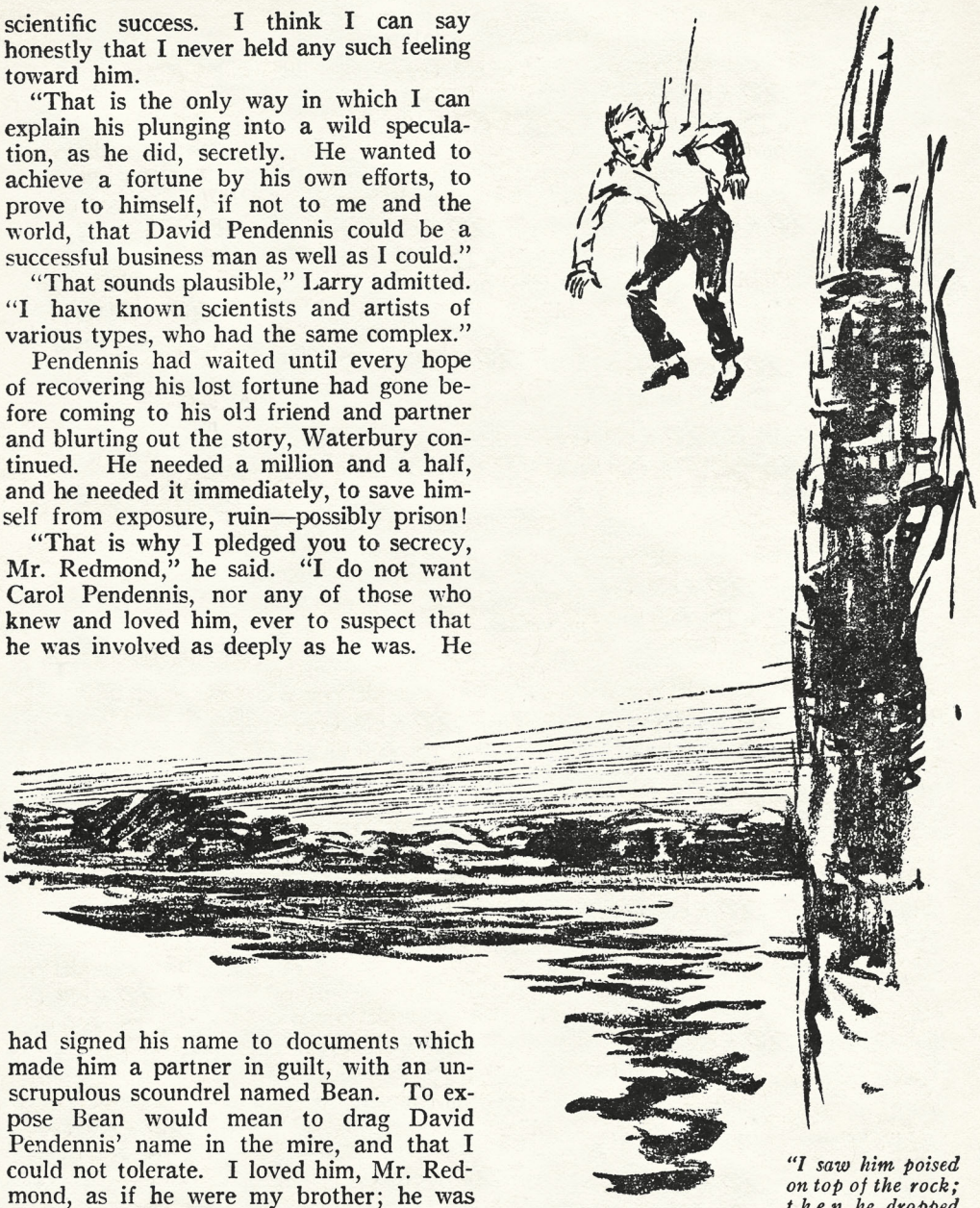
scientific success. I think I can say honestly that I never held any such feeling toward him.

"That is the only way in which I can explain his plunging into a wild speculation, as he did, secretly. He wanted to achieve a fortune by his own efforts, to prove to himself, if not to me and the world, that David Pendennis could be a successful business man as well as I could."

"That sounds plausible," Larry admitted. "I have known scientists and artists of various types, who had the same complex."

Pendennis had waited until every hope of recovering his lost fortune had gone before coming to his old friend and partner and blurting out the story, Waterbury continued. He needed a million and a half, and he needed it immediately, to save himself from exposure, ruin—possibly prison!

"That is why I pledged you to secrecy, Mr. Redmond," he said. "I do not want Carol Pendennis, nor any of those who knew and loved him, ever to suspect that he was involved as deeply as he was. He had signed his name to documents which made him a partner in guilt, with an unscrupulous scoundrel named Bean. To expose Bean would mean to drag David Pendennis' name in the mire, and that I could not tolerate. I loved him, Mr. Redmond, as if he were my brother; he was dearer than a brother to me."



"I saw him poised on top of the rock; then he dropped like a plummet."

Pendennis had then demanded that Waterbury lend him a million and a half. He had asked it as if he had a right to expect it, not as a favor. He had a week to raise the money. Waterbury, surprised and grieved, had explained how impossible it was for even a wealthy man to lay his hands upon such a sum on such short notice. The only thing he could suggest was the sale of Pendennis' patents.

The arrangement between Pendennis and the Inter-Continental had been a liberal salary and a royalty on such of his inventions as the corporation could utilize. It had been Waterbury's idea that it might be profitable to the corporation to own the Pendennis patents outright. He had called in Ebbsmith, as custodian of the corporation's records, and a rapid computation of the sums which had been paid to Pendennis as royalties on the hundred or so inventions which the Inter-Continental was using, with Waterbury's knowledge of the prob-

able development of the business in respect to each of them for the remainder of the patent term, satisfied him that they were well worth a million and a half to the corporation.

Pendennis had complained bitterly at the terms which Waterbury offered him. He regarded the suggestion as unfriendly, and had left Waterbury's office in anger. The next day he had come back, still convinced that his friend was wronging him, but ready to accept the money on any terms.

Waterbury, in the meantime, had sounded out his directors on the proposal to buy the Pendennis patents outright, and had had a quiet investigation made into the affairs of Texiana Oil.

"I induced your friend Lafferty to make a special effort to find out if there was any possible way of bringing Bean to book without involving Pendennis," Waterbury said. "He reported that his men had been watching Bean's movements very closely, but that there was no possible chance to fasten a criminal charge upon him. The Federal authorities were trying to build up a case against him, but so far as Lafferty could discover were making little progress. All were convinced of the criminality of the Texiana Oil operation, but Bean had shrewdly taken cover behind the law at every point. As for Pendennis' liability, that seemed clear enough; if there was to be a criminal prosecution at all it would be Pendennis, whom Bean had used as a cat's-paw, who would suffer. I confirmed this report in part, through acquaintances in the District Attorney's office."

He had not told his directors of Pendennis' dire need, and they had balked at the sum, a million and a half. They were willing to authorize the purchase of the patents for a million, however, and Waterbury had strained his own personal resources to have another half million immediately available. On Pendennis' second visit he had made him the offer of a million for all the patents which the Inter-Continental was using, and a half million more for an assignment to Waterbury himself of all patents still pending in the Patent Office but unissued, together with all the inventions for which he had not yet applied for patents but had reduced to drawings and specifications, pending complete development.

"I DID that to protect Pendennis as well as the Inter-Continental," Waterbury explained. "In the state of mind in which he was, there was no telling what he might have done or tried to do with the inventions which had not yet been put into use. It was not safe to let him have the chance to offer them in the open market and possibly obtain more money to throw after what he had lost, nor could I afford to endanger the Inter-Continental's interests by the chance of something of real value to us getting into a rival's hands. But David, while he accepted my terms perforce, did not attempt to conceal his feeling that I was doing an unfriendly thing in insisting upon security.

"It was a painful thing to do, but I knew the time would come when David Pendennis would realize that I had acted for his best interests, so I put the best face on the matter that I could and tried not to be hurt by his attitude.

"He came in on the following day and brought with him all the documents relating to his undeveloped inventions. He executed the necessary assignments and got his million and a half. He took occasion again to charge me with having deserted him in the time of his trouble, and I did not see him again, except when business matters made a formal meeting necessary, until the day of Ellen's funeral. It grieves me to realize that it took that tragedy to bring us together again, but I can never cease to be thankful that the reconciliation between us was complete, in the hours before his last rash act; that David Pendennis, when he plunged from Modoc Rock to his death, knew, at last, that I was truly his friend."

"How long ago did the rupture occur?" Larry asked, as Waterbury paused in his narrative.

"More than six months. They were probably the most painful six months I shall ever be called upon to live. I sincerely trust so."

"You said, when I talked with you over the telephone the other night, that Pendennis' affairs were in good shape," Larry began. "I do not quite understand—"

"That was the truth," Waterbury interrupted. "Naturally, I used every effort to get the best possible price for the pending patents he had assigned to me. Some were bought by the Inter-Continental, others, which could not be used in a way to injure our business, I sold elsewhere. I had never regarded the assignment to me as anything but a trust for Pendennis' benefit, so after recovering my own half million I arranged to have the rest ready to pay

over to him. When I left for Canada I instructed my secretary, Graves, to inform me by telegraph when certain transactions had been completed, and I found his wire at the house on my return from Ellen Pendennis' funeral. I was able to tell David, as we walked down to the lake together, that I could turn over practically half a million dollars to him at any time."

"Was he surprised?" asked Larry, as they left the club.

"He was astonished," replied Waterbury. "He realized, then, that I had never ceased for a moment to be his friend. His very last words to me, before we discovered the fire, were, 'John, I have done you a great injustice.' I cannot tell you how thankful I am that I had told him the news, when I did, instead of waiting until the next day, as I had contemplated doing."

LARRY REDMOND felt his respect and admiration for John Waterbury, which had long been great, increasing as they walked toward the Inter-Continental offices. It was not often that he encountered friendship and devotion of such strength and purity among the men with whom his daily work brought him into contact; too often the exigencies of his occupation kept him from seeing any manifestations of human nature but the ugly and sordid ones. He felt grateful for the glimpse Waterbury had given him of something which would help to sustain his underlying faith in the essential honor and decency of the human race. Now that he had heard the whole story he would not say anything to Waterbury about having seen Pendennis with Martin Bean. It would be a pity to permit anything to cloud Waterbury's comforting remembrance of that last hour together with his lifelong friend. Whatever there might have been between Bean and Pendennis was all in the past, now, at any rate.

He would, however, keep an eye on Martin Bean.

"What did Pendennis live on for those six months?" Larry asked, as they went up in the elevator. "Did the Inter-Continental continue his salary, after they had bought all the rights in his patents?"

"They could hardly do that," said Waterbury. "That did not occur to David, though; he never knew that it was being covered by—well, say a friend. Come into the office a minute, wont you? I want to show you a salmon I landed up in the Restigouche country; it has just come from the taxidermist's. You can print something about that, if you like, but not about what I have just been telling you."

"Certainly I shall not print a word of that," Larry assented.

CHAPTER V

GRAVES was in Waterbury's private office as they entered, engaged in transferring some documents from a filing cabinet, which stood by the president's desk, into a large suitcase on the floor.

"I'll take care of the rest, Graves," Waterbury said, dismissing his secretary. "What do you think of that for a fish?" he asked Larry, indicating a huge salmon, mounted in a glass case, which stood against the wall, on the floor.

"That's a beauty!" Larry exclaimed. "A forty-pounder, or I'm no judge."

"Forty-two pounds, seven ounces," Waterbury replied, proudly. "Had me over my hip-boots in ice-water for an hour; up to my neck once, before I landed him. Looks as if the fellow had done a good job with him, doesn't it?"

"It looks all right to me," Larry answered. "Where are you going to hang it?"

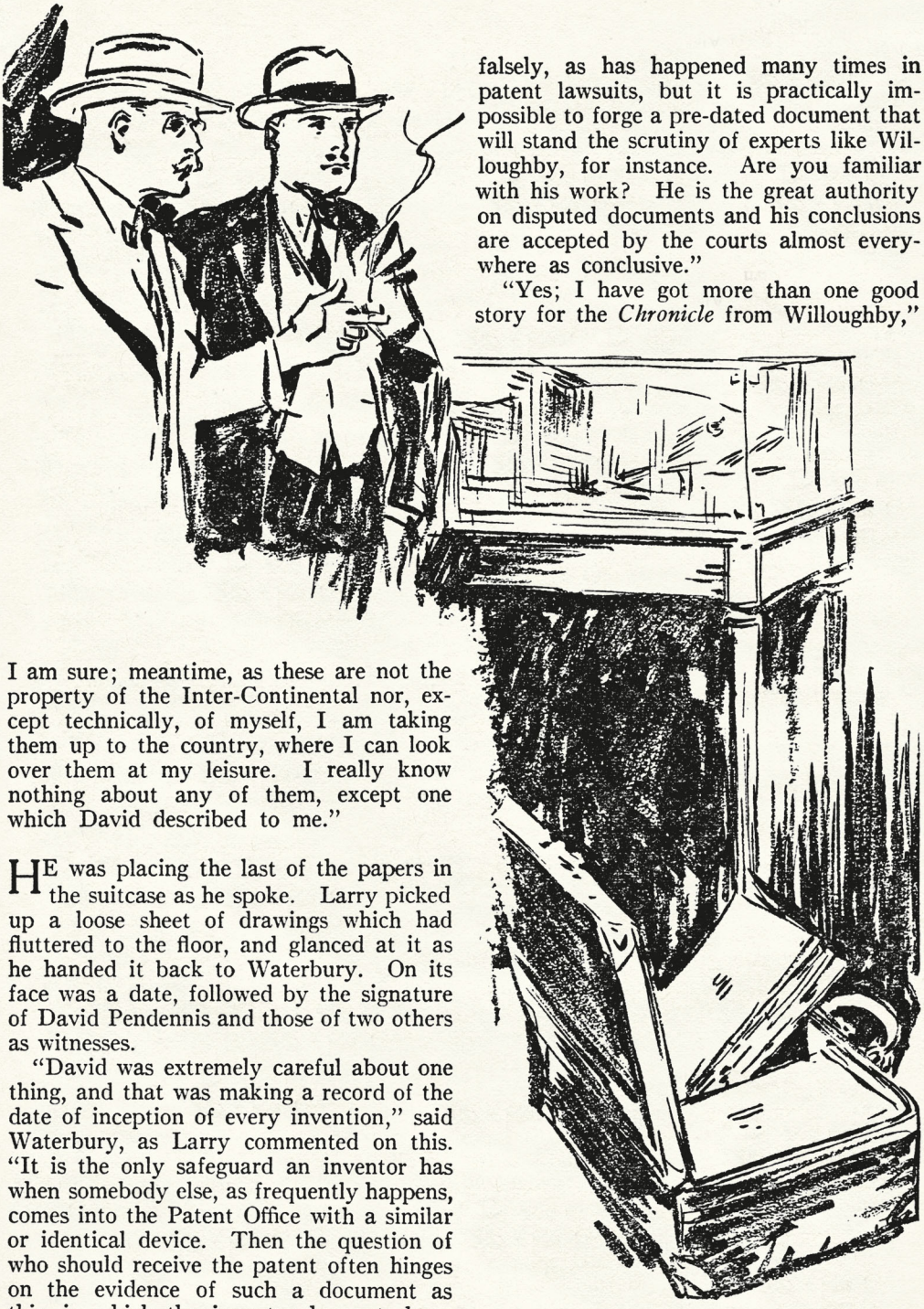
"Oh, up at my place in the country. I just had it sent over here to see if the job had been done right."

"I'll write a little piece about that," said Larry, after Waterbury had finished telling him of his battle with the salmon, and had turned to complete the work on which Graves had been engaged.

"All right; as you like," Waterbury responded. "See, here are those other Pendennis inventions, the ones that were not yet ready for patent applications. I put them all in this filing cabinet, thinking that when David came around to a reasonable view of things I would turn them back to him for development. Now I hardly know what to do about them. I do not want to intrust them to anybody who is not somewhat of an electrical genius, nor one in whom I have not the utmost confidence.

"I don't know at the moment where to lay my hands on such a man, who could take these drawings and descriptions and carry the inventions through to completion. I would appreciate it, if you hear of any such, if you would call my attention to him.

"The right man will turn up in due time,



falsely, as has happened many times in patent lawsuits, but it is practically impossible to forge a pre-dated document that will stand the scrutiny of experts like Willoughby, for instance. Are you familiar with his work? He is the great authority on disputed documents and his conclusions are accepted by the courts almost everywhere as conclusive."

"Yes; I have got more than one good story for the *Chronicle* from Willoughby," I am sure; meantime, as these are not the property of the Inter-Continental nor, except technically, of myself, I am taking them up to the country, where I can look over them at my leisure. I really know nothing about any of them, except one which David described to me."

HE was placing the last of the papers in the suitcase as he spoke. Larry picked up a loose sheet of drawings which had fluttered to the floor, and glanced at it as he handed it back to Waterbury. On its face was a date, followed by the signature of David Pendennis and those of two others as witnesses.

"David was extremely careful about one thing, and that was making a record of the date of inception of every invention," said Waterbury, as Larry commented on this. "It is the only safeguard an inventor has when somebody else, as frequently happens, comes into the Patent Office with a similar or identical device. Then the question of who should receive the patent often hinges on the evidence of such a document as this, in which the inventor has set down the fundamentals of his invention, dated, signed and witnessed. It is conclusive evidence in an interference hearing before the Commissioner of Patents, and in patent infringement suits the Federal courts accept as convincing almost no other evidence. It is easy to bribe witnesses to testify replied Larry, handing the paper back to Waterbury, who turned it over and called his attention to an indorsement upon the back. It was a memorandum, imprinted with a rubber stamp, reciting that the invention to which the paper related was one

"I'll take care of the rest, Graves," Waterbury said. "What do you think of that for a fish?" he asked Larry.

of the inventions included in a general assignment from Pendennis to Waterbury. It bore date of about six months previously, Pendennis' signature, and the signatures of Marshall Ebbsmith and Allan Graves, as witnesses.

"It was Ebbsmith's idea to have every sheet indorsed in that fashion," said Waterbury. "He is a very careful young man, punctilious about all such details. It may prove to have been a wise precaution, in view of David's death. Nobody knows," he went on, putting the paper into the suitcase with the others, "how much the contents of this bag may eventually be worth to Carol. Whatever there is in these inventions is hers, of course; I could not think of profiting by them."

"Where is Miss Pendennis now?" asked Larry. "Has she any relatives?"

"She is at my house in the Berkshires, and I hope she will decide to remain a member of my household," replied Waterbury, as he locked the suitcase and attached the key to a bunch of keys which he took from his pocket. "David never changed his will, in which I was named sole executor of his estate, and the Surrogate's court has appointed me Carol's guardian until she becomes of age. Pendennis was legally a citizen of New York, you know, although he lived most of the time in Massachusetts, as I shall probably do hereafter. I never had a daughter, but Carol is as dear to me as a daughter could be. My boy Jack is all I have left, since—"

He hesitated and Larry nodded his understanding. Waterbury's older son, David, had gone west at Chateau-Thierry.

"Hereafter?" asked Larry, picking up Waterbury's word. "You are not going to retire from business, are you?"

"As far as I can, yes. I shall resign as president of the Inter-Continental at the next meeting of the directors and act hereafter merely as chairman of the board. Tillottson, our vice-president, an extremely able man, will be elected president."

"That's news!" Larry exclaimed, as Graves entered in response to Waterbury's ring. "May I print that?"

Waterbury seemed not to hear his question, as he gave his secretary instructions to have the salmon sent back to the taxidermist's for shipment to his country place, and to have the suitcase checked for the three-fifty Berkshire Express.

As Graves picked up the suitcase a thin, leather-covered little book fell to the floor, opening as it fell. Larry stooped and picked it up. It was a bank pass-book, and the entries of deposits photographed themselves on his mind at a glance.

"Yours?" he asked, handing it to the secretary.

"Thanks; yes," replied Graves, taking the book from him. Larry tried to intercept a glance which would give him a clew to a new mystery. It seemed to him that the secretary's calm was the least bit ruffled, that he seemed to be wondering whether the newspaper man had seen anything.

"I THINK it would do no harm to publish the facts about the Inter-Continental's change of personnel," Waterbury said, as the door closed behind the secretary. "Only a few know of it yet, which is why I did not answer you while Graves was in the room. You are entitled to priority, I

should say. What is it you call it—a 'scoop?' "

"A 'beat' in New York; a 'scoop' in the provinces," smiled Larry. "You will still retain an office here, of course?"

"Oh, yes; I shall have to come to town frequently, I suppose," Waterbury replied. "I shall keep Graves in my personal service, however, and make him do as much of the running back and forth as he can.

"I may feel differently, after a while," he went on, "but I feel now as if I never wanted to be bothered with the details of business again. The loss of David Pendennis has taken all the joy out of work for me. I have plenty, the Inter-Continental's position in its field is secure, I can honestly feel that I have built well and soundly; now let younger men take the helm while I try, among other things, to get better acquainted with my motherless boy. You must come up, when you can take a fortnight, and see how lovely our Berkshire country is in summer. I should be delighted to have you."

"That is very appealing, Mr. Waterbury, even though I have the New Yorker's yearning for what a friend calls the 'cool, green asphalt' whenever I go out of town for more than a day or two. I can't make it this summer, as I have already made engagements which will use up all the leave the *Chronicle* allows me, but if you should feel like renewing your invitation for next year, I shall be glad to accept it."

"That's settled, then," said Waterbury. "Next summer you spend at least a fortnight with me."

HIS time had not been wasted, Larry reflected, thinking of the sensation the news of Waterbury's retirement would make in industrial and financial circles. But what occupied the front of his mind was the figures he had seen in Graves' bank-book.

"Capable young man, Graves?" he inquired casually, as he picked up his hat and walking stick. "Been with you long? I don't remember seeing him until recently."

"A fine young fellow," Waterbury answered. "Almost as capable as Ebbsmith, who is the perfect secretary. Graves has been with us three or four years, but not in the executive offices. He rose from the ranks; started in as a stenographer in the commercial department, I believe. I imagine he comes of good stock; his manners are good. His family is English, I believe."

"Means of his own?" asked Larry, his hand on the doorknob.

"I hardly think so," said Waterbury. "I pay him a liberal salary, and I suppose he puts something away out of it; he is not married."

Where, then, Larry asked himself, as he went down in the elevator, had Graves got fifty thousand dollars to deposit in his personal bank account that very day? For that was the entry, the ink hardly dry, that had caught the newspaper man's eye as he handed the bank-book to the secretary.

It didn't fit, and things that didn't fit were the material out of which, Larry Redmond had long ago learned, news was made.

CHAPTER VI

TIM LAFFERTY, chief of the New York Detective Bureau, confirmed what Waterbury had told him about the investigation of Texiana Oil, when Larry next dropped in at the Center Street headquarters.

"Not a Chinaman's chance to hang anything on Bean," said Lafferty. "He's as crooked as a dog's hind leg, but he had himself covered both ways from the jack in the Texiana business. We're keeping an eye on Planetary, though. If he lets his foot slip just once—pfooey!"

"Does he know that?" Larry asked.

"Does a goldfish know that he's got an audience?" Lafferty came back. "Martin Bean's got more brains than all the goldfish that ever swam. Don't overlook that!"

It would be interesting to keep an eye on Bean and P.Y., anyway; and for a twelvemonth Larry Redmond found this occupation even more interesting than he had anticipated.

Bean was "running straight," so far as anybody could find out, and his Planetary Wireless Company was gaining a place of real consequence in the industrial world. It even worried the great Inter-Continental.

"They can't do us any real damage," said John Waterbury, coming back to town early in the autumn, "but they're nibbling at us all around the edges. I find that I can't take things quite as easily as I'd hoped to. I've taken rooms at the Plaza for the winter, though I'll still spend as much time at my country place as I can spare from business. Don't forget that

you're booked for a fortnight with me, next summer."

P.Y. shares climbed, steadily, without spectacular leaps but with a steadily increasing volume of trading in them on the Curb market, all that winter. By spring P.Y. had touched fifty dollars a share. "Eye See," as Inter-Continental was known in the cabalistic shorthand of Wall Street, remained steady, on the "Big Board," solidly bedded upon the conservative foundation of its known assets and earnings, at around seventy-five. The Planetary put out half a dozen new devices and improvements which sold well. Then they entered the broadcasting field, with programs and methods which proved both popular and profitable.

"It's too bad you haven't found another Pendennis," Larry remarked to Waterbury, one day in June. "The Planetary people seem to have some young geniuses. Can't you get hold of one of them?"

"They haven't developed anything yet to make it seem worth while," was Waterbury's reply. "All of this broadcasting business is merely incidental, with us. Our Rock of Gibraltar is our message business, transatlantic, overland; 'Inter-Continental Communications' in our corporation's title means precisely what it implies. 'Planetary!' Humph!"

"There's a rumor around the Street that they're going to do something to justify that title," Larry replied. "It's a strong rumor. I haven't traced it to its source, but it undoubtedly emanates from Planetary headquarters. A lot of the folk who were after Martin Bean's scalp a year ago are riding with him, now, in the Curb market, and are ready to swallow anything he puts out. I've been surprised at the size and reputations of some of the people who have fallen for the glittering profits he promises.

"Among people of more than ordinary market intelligence there is a definite impression that the Planetary has something 'up its sleeve,' which will make it a formidable competitor of Inter-Continental," he went on. "Some go so far as to predict that you'll be forced out of business, or into a consolidation. There may not be much fire behind that smoke, but isn't there some?"

"I've heard all of that," Waterbury answered. "Stock-market gossip, nothing else. If Planetary had anything up its sleeve, we'd know about it. Confidentially, we have been approached, indirectly, with a proposal that we buy control of Planetary. We didn't consider it for a minute. They haven't a thing we want."

"They're pressing you in the stock-market, though," said Larry.

"They've been trying to raid us a little," Waterbury admitted, "but that doesn't worry us."

IT *did* worry him, though, as he confessed to Larry Redmond late in July, on the eve of his departure for his annual fishing excursion in Canada.

"I've got Inter-Continental pegged at fifty," he said. "They can't crowd us any lower than that, I believe. I've got to get away, or I'll be a nervous wreck. I'll be back in ten days, and then we'll fix it up for a fortnight at Modoc Lodge. The market will be taking its summer vacation by the middle of August, and I can take things easy."

The ten days had not passed, however, before that happened which jarred loose the "peg" upon which Waterbury had relied to hold Inter-Continental shares at a figure which would not drive their holders into panicky unloading.

Planetary Wireless Company came out with the announcement of the greatest invention in their field since Marconi had first harnessed the Herzian waves—directed radio!

The patent, broad, basic, revolutionary in principle as well as in application, had been allowed by the United States Patent Office and those of all the other civilized nations, their announcement declared. Secret tests of the new wonder-working device had demonstrated its practicability to the limit. It made radio communication as certain and as secret as the telegraph or cable, faster and cheaper. So the Planetary's publicity engineers proclaimed. By directing the ether waves in a single beam, instead of sending them broadcast, for anybody to pick up, an unexplained effect was obtained which eliminated "static" entirely, under any atmospheric conditions.

And the name of the genius whose invention was owned by the Planetary Wireless Company was David Pendennis!

"WHAT do you make of it?" Carson asked Larry, handing him the Planetary-press agent's "blurb" as he strolled into the *Chronicle* office at one o'clock, the beginning of the morning newspaper man's

working day. "Looks as if our little friend Martin had put something over on Waterbury."

"Something phony about this," replied Larry, glancing through the announcement. "Got anything from Washington?"

"Wire from Dennison confirming the Patent Office end of it. Application filed by Planetary after Pendennis' death, under the terms of an assignment of the whole thing to them, executed by Pendennis three days before he died."

"The day I saw him with Martin Bean!" Larry exclaimed. "Now I *know* there's something phony about it. Evening papers got this?"

"First editions," said Carson, tossing one of them to him. Larry barely glanced at the headlines. He reached over for the noon editions piled on Carson's desk, and turned to the bottom of the first page, where the opening quotations on the Stock Exchange and the Curb were printed.

"Eye-See down five points at the opening," he read. "P.Y. opened at eighty and sold up to eighty-three in the first half-hour.

"Wall Street takes this thing seriously, evidently," he went on. "Let somebody else cover the general story, wont you? I want to get at the inside of this. There's a catch in it somewhere, and I think I can find it."

"Just what I was going to suggest," the managing editor agreed. "If you're right, —and I hope you are,—it ought to make a whale of a yarn. 'Inventor's estate'—Pendennis had a daughter, didn't he?"

"Girl of twenty or so, now," said Larry.

"Great!" exclaimed Carson, who thought in headlines. "Débutante Daughter of Dead Inventor Defrauded of Millions.' I guess that wouldn't sell *Chronicles!* Go to it, Larry!"

EBBSMITH was out, the girl in his office informed the newspaper man over the phone. He was in town, but was going away again later that afternoon. Graves was not in either—out of town. The girl in that office could not tell him how to reach Mr. Waterbury. Mr. Tillottson, the president of Inter-Continental, was at luncheon, but would be back at two.

"I'll see what I can pump out of Tillottson," Larry said to Carson as he hung up the telephone, "but Waterbury personally is the source from which I will have to get the inside story, if there is an inside. He's up in Canada fishing, somewhere, unless this news has reached him and he has started back. I'll try to get hold of him by telephone and may have to go up there. I'm due for a vacation, anyway."

"You're the doctor," the managing editor agreed. Larry Redmond got results when he was given his head and a free hand, Carson knew.

Something had disturbed the routine of the Inter-Continental offices, whether the startling news from Planetary or something else. That was apparent at a glance, as Larry went from one private office to another, looking for somebody whom he knew well enough to ask for information as to Waterbury's whereabouts. Filing-cases were being ransacked; dusty packages that bore external evidence of having long been stored on shelves were being opened, clerks were going through desks, examining their contents paper by paper.

Tillottson gave evidence of being under a strain. "I can't tell you a thing," he snapped. "I don't know anything about it. You'll have to wait until Mr. Waterbury comes back."

"Where is he—" Larry began, as the Inter-Continental's president whirled to answer the telephone. The newspaper men gathered from the first few words that he was talking to a stock-brokerage office.

"Yes, buy everything that is offered," Tillottson ordered. "Those are Mr. Waterbury's instructions. All right, I'll send over some more collateral right away."

He whirled back toward Larry.

"You'll have to excuse me," he said. "I'm very busy."

Tillottson's secretary came in as Larry was leaving the president's office. He nodded pleasantly at the newspaper man.

"Pittsfield's on the line, in the booth," he said to Tillottson. Larry lingered as the president hurried past him toward the next room.

"Mr. Waterbury?" he asked the secretary, who smiled and nodded affirmatively.

He did not understand why Waterbury had not come direct to New York from Canada, instead of going to his country place, but he knew where he was, at any rate. He took the next elevator down and hurried to the nearest public telephone station. Twenty minutes later he was talking to the Inter-Continental's chairman.

"I wish you would come up here in a nonprofessional capacity, Mr. Redmond,"

said Waterbury. "I believe you could be of the greatest possible assistance to me. Can't you make it?"

"Something going on that you don't want published?" Larry asked.

"Something which it would be more of a temptation to print than I have any right to ask a newspaper man to resist," replied Waterbury. "I'll tell you what I will do, though, if you can get the *Chronicle* to give you a vacation. Come up as my guest and see this through with me, and when it is all over, I will leave it to your judgment what to publish."

It took Larry but an instant to decide.

"Something phony about this," replied Larry. "Got anything from Washington?"

Waterbury was a "square-shooter." Larry liked him immensely. He wanted to help him, if he could. And there was something in Waterbury's words and tone that told him there would be the biggest kind of news, eventually.

"I'll call you again in half an hour, after I've talked to the office," he agreed. "If I can make it, I'll accept your invitation."

"Good enough," said Waterbury. "I'll look for you on the Berkshire Express."

Carson, after Larry had explained the unusual situation to him, agreed readily enough. Larry called up his rooms and directed Tom, his colored factotum, to pack his bags for a fortnight in the country and bring them to the Grand Central. Then he got Waterbury on the phone again.

"I'll meet you at Pittsfield and tell you all about it," said Waterbury.

"It's about this Planetary claim to the Pendennis invention, of course," Larry ventured. "Let me make a guess. That invention was among the undeveloped ones which were assigned to you, and you can't find the documents. Am I right?"

"That's it exactly," replied Waterbury, "but there's more to it than that."

"Perhaps destroyed, you think?"

"I had come to that conclusion last night, but this morning they were offered to me for half a million dollars!" was the amazing answer.

CHAPTER VII

HIS hunch had been right, then; right from the beginning, Larry Redmond reflected, as the train pulled out from the Grand Central and he lounged comfortably in a leather chair in the club car. There was, indeed, something "phony" about the Pendennis-Bean affair. His intuition, judgment, whatever it was that had given him the warning signal, almost a year ago, that Bean and Pendennis had no normal occa-

sion to know even of each other's existence, had not misled him in any respect.

Three possible explanations of the curious situation which Waterbury's words had disclosed, occurred to him at once:

Texiana Oil, of course, had brought Bean and Pendennis together in the first instance. Bean's Planetary Wireless must have been built up to prepare the way for today's disclosure of the Pendennis "directed radio." Pendennis had not learned his lesson, then; he must have been still greedy for money. Bean had been shrewd enough to see the immense possibilities for profit in a speculative radio stock, and doubtless the little promoter had had nothing else in mind, at the start, than the exploitation of Pendennis' name and reputation for stock-market purposes. It would not have been the first time that an unscrupulous promoter had dragged the name of a great inventive genius through the mire, to his own profit and the other's eternal disgrace. Pendennis had been just the sort to lend himself to a plausible schemer like Martin Bean, as his part in the Texiana affair had proved.

Fate had intervened, fortunately for Pendennis' reputation; but not until Bean had, somehow, got possession of the most revolutionary product of his genius. How had he gotten that?

Forgery, a falsified deed of assignment? Too dangerous even for Martin Bean, Larry decided. If the assignment of the invention were genuine, then Pendennis must have either deliberately undertaken to defraud Waterbury, or he had been deceived, trapped in some way by Bean. Larry chose that as the most probable of the three possible explanations.

Bean must have believed that all documentary evidence in Waterbury's possession, all evidence of the invention and of its ownership, had been destroyed, or he would never have dared to take it into the Patent Office, to announce his ownership. There was the possibility, of course, that Bean had been honest, that he did not know of the existence of Waterbury's prior claim to the invention. Pendennis could hardly have failed to tell him that, however. And there was the possibility, too, that Waterbury was mistaken, that this particular device had not been among those which had been assigned to him. Yet Waterbury had been positive in his statement on that point.

Larry had seen Graves handling those papers, transferring them from the filing cabinet to the suitcase. Graves had deposited fifty thousand dollars in his personal bank-account on the same day. That would be a low price for Martin Bean to pay for the destruction of such documents. Larry could not keep his mind from the problems which the affair presented. Graves —if it were he—had not destroyed the papers, then, but had held them until the time was ripe to demand his price for them. Half a million dollars! An ambitious young man, if it were Graves. Graves was the kind who could get away with a thing like that. Cool, self-possessed, with a perfect poker face. A different type entirely from his predecessor. Ebbsmith could no more conceal what was going on behind his eyebrows than a child could.

IT would have to wait until he saw Waterbury, Larry concluded, as the train slowed for One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. There was something familiar about the back of a passenger waiting on the platform there. After the train had started again Larry took a stroll through it. He saw several persons whom he knew; it would have been difficult for Larry Redmond to board a train or a ship anywhere without running into somebody he knew. He saw nobody whom he identified as the man with the familiar back who had got on at Harlem. The drawing-rooms in both of the Pullmans were occupied, one by a card-playing party of four, the other by somebody who kept the door closed.

Larry tried to read, but found it more interesting to watch the changing landscape, as the train climbed up through the Harlem Valley, and to think back, reassembling everything he had heard and seen that could have any bearing on the disappearance of the Pendennis documents.

At Hillsdale several passengers got off. A rank of high-powered, chauffeured cars stood awaiting most of them. Wealthy residents of the Berkshire country, Larry knew, often used this station, preferring the thirty- or forty-mile drive to remaining on the train to the nearer station of Pittsfield. With a good car they could get home an hour earlier than by continuing over the sinuous railroad route through the Lebanon Valley. He scrutinized the row of cars and their waiting occupants for the possibility that Waterbury had sent over here for him, though he was sure the word had been Pittsfield. He saw no one whom he

recognized as attached to the Waterbury ménage, until the train had started up. Then he saw the man who had got on at Harlem throw a handbag into one of the waiting cars and climb in after it. The man was Marshall Ebbsmith.

Larry strolled through the train again. The closed drawing-room door in the next car was now wide open. "Gentleman got out at Hillsdale," said the porter. "Like to sit in hyeh, suh?"

The newspaper man accepted the proffered courtesy. "I belong in the other car," he said, "but here's something for yourself."

OF course, he reflected, as the porter closed the door, there was no reason on earth why the secretary of the Inter-Continental should not travel in a tightly closed drawing-room on a hot August afternoon, if he so chose. Doubtless he had company business to go over, and needed the privacy. But something didn't fit.

Why had Ebbsmith got on at One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, instead of at Grand Central? Some reasonable explanation, beyond doubt, could be given for that; Larry could not pretend to know enough about the Inter-Continental's affairs to stamp it as curious that its secretary should have had business in Harlem. Perhaps he lived up that way and had gone home to pack his bag. Many people lived nearer to the Harlem station than to the Grand Central, and many took the through trains there. Yet it somehow seemed odd to Larry that Ebbsmith should have been on the same train with himself, starting from the same place and unquestionably bound for the same destination, yet get on and off at different stations and keep himself concealed during the entire journey.

He glanced around the drawing-room. Its previous occupant had been tearing paper into little pieces and throwing the scraps out of the window. A tiny white fragment had lodged under the edge of the window screen. Larry looked around and found a bit of yellow paper under the edge of the rubber mat upon which the nickel-plated cuspidor reposed.

The yellow paper was of the weight and texture of a telegraph blank. Two typewritten letters, as if they had occurred at the end of a line, were all that marred its surface. They were simply *"nd."* That meant nothing. Thousands of words ended in *"nd,"* including his own name.

The white paper had some letters on it, too. It was a trifling scrap, no bigger than a man's thumbnail. It was tightly creased across, and on one side, parallel with the crease, were the fragments of two lines which had been imprinted by an engraver's die, in blue embossed letters. They were:

hby
au St.

The paper had been torn off between whatever had preceded the *"h"* and the *"a"* and those two letters.

"Hby." Larry turned the cryptogram over in his mind. *Ashby, Crosby*—no, that didn't have an *"h"* in it. The second line was obvious; *"au St."* was the end of *Nassau Street.*

Nassau Street—Willoughby! He knew the office of the expert on disputed documents was at 150 Nassau Street. The crease meant an envelope. An envelope bearing on its corner the embossed return card of Willoughby had been torn up by somebody who had occupied that compartment since it had last been cleaned.

Ebbsmith? Perhaps. It might have been anybody else, but it might have been Ebbsmith. Larry put both scraps of paper into his pocketbook.

CHAPTER VIII

JOHN WATERBURY met the newspaper man at the Pittsfield station, with his big single-seat roadster.

"When I learned that Ebbsmith was taking the same train I wired him to look you up," he said, "but he did not get my wire. He could have brought you over from Hillsdale, as it happened; one of our neighbors gave him a lift from there. Too bad you didn't see him."

"Quite all right," replied Larry. "I didn't see Ebbsmith on the train at all." Which was quite true.

"He brought an interesting document with him," Waterbury went on. "It is the key—at least the only key I have—to the mystery of which I told you over the telephone."

He took a long envelope from his pocket and handed it to Larry, as he took his seat at the steering-wheel. He turned the car out of the traffic around the station and drove slowly through the elm-shaded streets of the Berkshire metropolis while Larry examined envelope and contents.

It was a plain linen envelope, addressed in typewriting to John Waterbury, with the added inscription *"Personal and Confidential."* There was no other writing or printing on the outside of the envelope. It had been neatly slit open at one end, and from it Larry withdrew a letter, on a single sheet of paper, and a smaller, commercial envelope, also addressed to John Waterbury.

"Read the letter first," Waterbury suggested.

The embossed letterhead was that of Robert Willoughby, 150 Nassau Street. The letter read:

> Dear John: This note and the envelope were written by the same man on the same typewriter. It was an Underton portable, equipped with Elite type and with a special spacing mechanism. I have had an enlarged photograph of the note made and will check up at once with the manufacturers to find the serial numbers within which this particular machine comes. I think I shall be able to identify it beyond question. Meantime, it would be well for you to make inquiries as to the possession of an Underton portable by anybody who would be in a position to have sent this message. The paper and the envelope tell nothing; they are both of very common grade and type. The writing was done by an expert, as the even touch and impression indicate.
>
> Cordially yours,
> Robert Willoughby.

LARRY turned to the smaller envelope, the one referred to in Willoughby's letter. It too had been carefully slit at one end. At the other end was a slight stain, a couple of inches long, extending from the end of the envelope toward the center, and about an inch wide. There was a similar discoloration on the back of the envelope, and the paper where it was stained felt slightly roughened to the touch.

He noted these things, then took out the paper which the envelope covered. It read:

> Mr. John Waterbury: I will deliver the Pendennis patent papers for half a million dollars cash or coupon Liberty bonds. You have until midnight to accept this offer. If you refuse, I shall take the papers to another market.
>
> Show a light from midnight until daylight in three upper windows at the northeast corner of your house. You will receive instructions tomorrow morning what to do next.
>
> A Friend.

"Remarkable," said Larry, refolding the papers and passing them back to Waterbury. "When and how was this delivered?"

"It was stuck into the cleft of a weighted stick, standing in the lawn in front of the house, where one of the gardeners found it about six o'clock this morning. I had risen early, to give Ebbsmith some financial instructions before he left to take the early train to town, and happened to see the man discover it. I called him, and he brought it to my room. I had Ebbsmith take it in to Willoughby, for I realized the possibility that it might contain a clue which could be followed up rapidly."

"It's easy, Willoughby has told me, to identify the particular machine on which any document has been typed," Larry said, "but that takes time. Have you located an Underton portable?"

"Graves has one," replied Waterbury. "I don't know that that means anything, but it may be significant."

"Does Graves know about this note, so far as you know? Or Ebbsmith? Did you show it to him?"

"No; I went to my study and scribbled a note to Willoughby, enclosing this note, and addressed and sealed the envelope myself. I merely asked Ebbsmith to give it to Willoughby and get his reply, if any, back to me as soon as possible. I have been debating all day whether or not to call in detectives, but when you telephoned I decided not to, if you would be good enough to come up and give me your advice."

"You don't intend to pay half a million, I take it?" Larry asked.

"Naturally not; but I thought it would be wise to show the signal tonight, as demanded in the note, and so get another possible clue."

"Who knows that the Pendennis documents have disappeared?"

"That is rather a 'secret of Polichinelle,'" replied Waterbury. "Everybody up here and, I suppose, everybody in the offices in New York. We have been turning everything upside down for several days, in search of them."

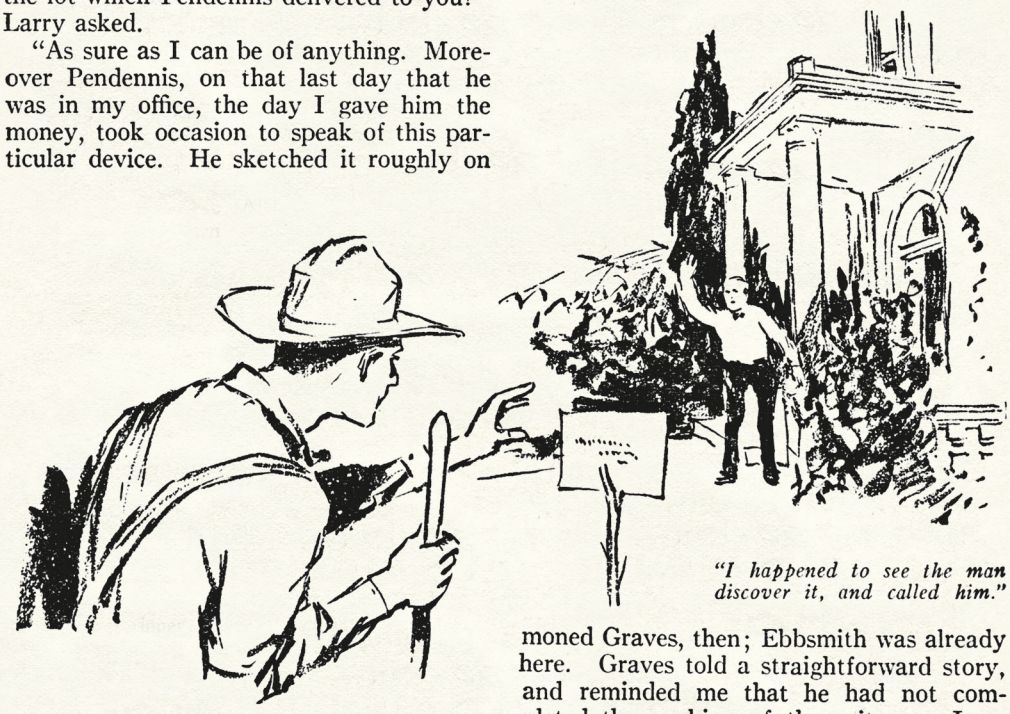
"I can assure you that the job is being thoroughly done in New York," smiled Larry. "The announcement in today's papers was not news to you, then?"

"No; our patent attorney's office learned of it from Washington several days ago, and Tillottson got in touch with me at once. I cut my fishing trip short and came directly here. I was so certain that I had the papers proving absolutely that Pendennis had given me a prior assignment of

that invention that I would not have bothered to look for them myself except that Graves was also on his vacation, and the office did not know where to reach him. I am glad that I came, however, as the affair is turning out."

"You are sure that the papers were in the lot which Pendennis delivered to you?" Larry asked.

"As sure as I can be of anything. Moreover Pendennis, on that last day that he was in my office, the day I gave him the money, took occasion to speak of this particular device. He sketched it roughly on



"I happened to see the man discover it, and called him."

a couple of sheets of paper, and repeated his allegation that I was using him unfairly. This single invention, he declared, would be worth many times a million and a half."

"Did anybody hear him describe it?" Larry pursued.

"No; Graves had stepped out and we were alone. When he came back I gave him the sketches Pendennis had drawn and told him to file them with the other Pendennis invention papers. He was the only person except myself who had access to that file."

"Your testimony ought to be convincing," Larry suggested.

"Not unsupported; and I cannot find an iota of proof," Waterbury objected. "I am an interested party, and unless I can produce unimpeachable witnesses to testify that Pendennis had invented this directed radio before the date of his general assignment to me, I would merely make a laughing-stock of myself.

"There were thirty-two different folders, each containing the papers relating to a different device, in that Pendennis file," he went on. "When I opened the suitcase here I found only thirty-one. I had never opened it until I came on just now for the purpose. I was looking for a man qualified to go on with Pendennis' work. I summoned Graves, then; Ebbsmith was already here. Graves told a straightforward story, and reminded me that he had not completed the packing of the suitcase. I remembered that, too. You were in the office that day."

"I remember it distinctly," said Larry. "What theory does Graves advance to account for their disappearance?"

"He says, and others in the office have confirmed this, that Pendennis came in, on the day that Mrs. Pendennis was taken for the worse. I was away in Canada at the time; it was just a year ago. Graves' story is that Pendennis asked to be allowed to look over some of the papers in the file; that he, Graves, seeing nothing improper in that, supposing that it was for the purpose of refreshing his memory on the details of something which he was developing further, permitted him to do so. Naturally, not being fully advised of the differences between Pendennis and myself, he did not think it necessary to keep a close watch on Pendennis. He thinks Pendennis took the papers then. I hesitate to believe that."

"You do not want to believe that he did something deliberately wrong, that would

injure you," said Larry, "yet the assignment to Planetary is open to the same interpretation."

"That is it, precisely," said Waterbury. "What do you think I ought to do about this note? Does it sound plausible to you?"

"I think it is pretty positive proof that whoever abstracted those papers from the file did not destroy them," said Larry. "It is proof, too, that, whatever Bean may have had to do with their disappearance, he hasn't them now, and probably does not know that they exist. He is the only other market possible."

"I had hoped against hope, when I first learned of the assignment from Pendennis to Planetary, that we might prove that a forgery," Waterbury went on. "We got a photograph of the original assignment, however, from the Patent Office records, and Willoughby declared the signature genuine.

"Until this morning, then, I was convinced that the original papers had been destroyed; that Pendennis had either turned them over to Bean or that he had brought them back to Lenox with him. In either case they would no longer be in existence, for Bean would have destroyed them immediately. They were too dangerous to keep where there was a possibility of their ever being found. And, if Pendennis brought them home with him then they were destroyed, like everything else in his house, in the fire that followed Mrs. Pendennis' funeral.

"That was my belief, as I said, until this morning, when the mysterious message appeared. What do you make of it?"

"I CAN'T risk a snap judgment," Larry replied. "An idea just occurred to me, though. A bold front is half the battle, and the offensive is the best defense. Bean must believe that the papers no longer exist. It is possible that he has paid for their destruction; that is merely a wild surmise. Now, unless they are actually delivered to him and destroyed in his presence he is not going to be prepared to refute the allegation of their existence, and of your possession of them, provided that is sprung upon him without warning, under conditions where he must make an instant decision as to how to meet the allegation."

"That sounds logical enough," said Waterbury, "but how is it to be accomplished?"

"How much more hammering down of Inter-Continental shares on the Stock Exchange can you stand?" countered Larry, irrelevantly.

"A good deal, but I don't relish the idea of standing it," replied Waterbury, with a grim smile. "I think we've touched pretty nearly rock bottom; the shares at present quotations represent a total valuation of not more than the company's quick assets. It will not take much effort nor much more money to hold them where they are. When it comes to raising half a million dollars besides, however, as this note demands, I would be put to it to know where and how to lay my hands on it."

"Then why temporize with the anonymous extortioner at all?" asked Larry. "I take it that Miss Pendennis has never received anything from the Planetary for her father's invention. They would have had to tip their hand if they had opened the subject with her."

"Not a cent," replied Waterbury. "I begin to see what you are driving at."

"And nothing was found among her father's assets to indicate that he had ever been paid for assigning it to the Planetary?"

"No."

"Then you are in a perfect strategic position," Larry resumed. "Suppose you, Mr. Waterbury, as Miss Pendennis' guardian and trustee, began suit against the Planetary to recover payment for the Pendennis invention, the purpose being to get Martin Bean into court and on the witness-stand, to testify to the details of his agreement with Pendennis.

"What is its immediate effect? It is a tacit admission on your part that you have no claim on the Pendennis patent. Bean and his associates, if they have—as they must have—any apprehensions as to what your attitude will be, will be reassured. Bean will take that as notice that the evidence which might upset his rights under the assignment which he holds has actually been destroyed."

"I begin to see the strategy of your suggestion," said Waterbury.

"Now, the Unknown who sent the note," Larry resumed, "will see in this move a warning that instead of two possible high-priced markets for his goods he has only one, and that doubtful. For Bean does not need these papers with which to win; he has only to know that you haven't them. You have given up; that is what your suit will mean. Our anonymous friend will see

a danger which did not exist before, a danger intensified in his imagination by your refusal to display the signal demanded of you tonight, that refusal confirmed as final by your acceptance of Planetary's rights, subject only to a proper compensation to Pendennis' estate.

"The danger to him will be that Bean will simply laugh in his face, secure in his belief that the papers do not exist. Because Bean will reason, if such an offer is made to him as has been made to you in the anonymous note, that the papers must have been offered to you first and that you have declined to buy them; which will be the fact. You are the first logical market for them. Their possession would be worth many times more to you than their destruction would be to Bean. At the first intimation that the papers were in existence, moreover, Bean—whose training and experience has all been in the stock-market—would close out his long line of Planetary shares and pocket a profit so huge that he could afford to let the papers come into your possession. He probably would close out his short line of Inter-Continental at the same time, and so be out of the market and sitting pretty, no matter what happened."

"Admirably reasoned, Mr. Redmond," agreed Waterbury, "but where does it get us in the matter of the ownership of the Pendennis patents? That, after all, is the important thing."

"It puts the burden of proof on Bean, to prove his ownership, for one thing. It puts him in a dilemma, on one horn of which he confronts the necessity of paying Miss Pendennis a huge sum of money; on the other, that of relinquishing his rights under the assignment which he holds from Pendennis. Either alternative will be expensive for him. I shall not attempt to predict what he will do, but it is reasonable to suppose that he will choose the course that will cost the least, which will be to negotiate for a compromise settlement with Miss Pendennis. That would put you in a position to dictate terms. I can think of several ways, and a lawyer could think of many more, whereby the Inter-Continental could intervene at that stage, challenge the Planetary's rights in the patent, force them into court to prove their rights, get Bean on the witness-stand, subject him to cross-examination, and then confront him, unexpectedly, with this anonymous note, backed up by your testimony, Mr. Waterbury, and all the other corroborative evidence you can muster.

"In the meantime, time is given for further search for the missing papers, for the author of the mysterious note and for evidence of the plot which, I am satisfied, led Pendennis to sign that assignment to the Planetary. And if the whole plan fails, Mr. Waterbury, you will at least be no worse off than you are now, while the chance of your being much better off is excellent.

"It takes time to prepare a lawsuit, but it does not take time to publish the news that a lawsuit is being prepared. In an hour from now I could have the story in the *Chronicle* office, for publication in tomorrow morning's paper. It could be an interview with you, convincing to everybody who reads it, that you have no idea or expectation of challenging the Planetary's ownership of the patent. I know that Bean reads the *Chronicle;* nearly all men with Wall Street interests do.

"The weakest spot I see is that before the market closes tomorrow Bean will have cleaned up another million or two through the leap upward of Planetary shares which is bound to follow the publication of such a news item, with the skillful hand of Bean manipulating the market."

THE car had reached the gate of the Waterbury place by this time, a mile back from the main-traveled highway, on the slope of a wooded hill that dipped down toward Modoc Lake. Waterbury slowed the car down and seemed to be in deep thought as the vehicle wound through the wood toward the house. Just as they emerged into the clearing in which the house stood he stopped the car.

"I think your plan will work, Mr. Redmond," he said. "One thing is certain; I shall never pay a cent for the Pendennis papers, and I shall not even temporize with the extortioner who claims to have them! Write your article, and we can decide on the next step after we see what the result of its publication may be.

"But I am not giving up the effort to locate the papers, and to find the rascal who has them. I will spend whatever it costs in that pursuit, and to get at the truth about David Pendennis' relations with Planetary."

This brilliant story of a great reporter's solution of a puzzling situation continues in the next, the June, issue.

"I'll see you at eight, Dixie," Mr. Lurb called.

The Keen Number

Wherein our old acquaintances Tub and his blithe companions pursue their motor adventure in the West and encounter varied excitement.

By WHITMAN CHAMBERS

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

THE great, untrammeled West! A noble phrase! The West is great, all right,—if you mean *large,*—and I suppose there are parts of it that the tourists haven't trammeled.

It undoubtedly looks nice enough from an observation platform. But from the front seat of a jolting automobile it's the rocks—in more ways than one. And with the "Tub" and the "Eel"—well, I'll make my next tour of the National Parks in a comfortable loge chair in a movie!

It might not have been so bad if it hadn't been for the Tub. The Tub is large and fat and dumb. Although entered in the family Bible as Fenwick Dallmoreton Lurb, he gained the appellation of the Tub in early life and grew up with it—grew up plenty. The "Barrel" would have been a more descriptive nickname. The "Dub" would certainly have been more fitting.

Fenwick Dallmoreton Lurb could devise more ways of getting himself and his friends into trouble than there are flivvers on the Lincoln Highway. That wouldn't have been so bad if he hadn't been so conceited about it. To hear him tell it, the Tub was the original Wise Guy; and as for sheiking, he had Romeo, Juliet's boy friend, looking like a selling-plater in the Coffroth Handicap.

Anyway, to complete the introduction, the Tub was the dumb-bell, the Eel was the enthusiast and I was the goat in this aforementioned tour of the great open spaces where men are men and the plumbing is not so good.

We rolled into the auto camp at the Grand Cañon on a Tuesday afternoon. I remember it was a Tuesday because ordinarily on Tuesday afternoons I took a swim in Strawberry Pool at the University of California. And on this particular Tuesday, instead of wallowing around in a few million gallons of water, I was compelled to purchase—*buy,* understand!—one gallon of water and pack it two hundred yards before I could wash my face. Nice place, this untrammeled West, where a man is compelled to pass out coin of the realm for a gallon of water!

BUT that is getting ahead of the story. Pulling into a grove of pine trees as directed by the rangers, we picked out a spot in the center of a few million other

tourists and piled out of the car. I was hot, tired, dusty and dispirited. The Tub and the Eel, apparently, were only dusty.

"Well, let's walk out to the rim and give the Cañon the once-over," the Eel (known to football followers as Johnny Holt) suggested enthusiastically.

"I'm willing," I agreed—it promised to be less strenuous than pitching camp.

The Tub did not answer Johnny's suggestion. He had turned his back to us and at that moment was speculatively regarding a near-by camp.

"Come on, Tub!" Johnny said shortly.

The ponderous shoulders shrugged. "Keen number, huh?" the Tub grunted almost reverently. "That little dame with the Oregon license on her car."

The Eel sighed, following Mr. Lurb's rapt gaze. Twenty feet away, under the awning of a green umbrella tent, a young woman was busily beading her eyelashes.

"Rather incongruous, isn't it?" I suggested. "Khaki riding trousers, blue denim shirt, shoes run down at the heels—and beaded eyelashes!"

The Tub turned on me indignantly. "She's got to keep her hand in, hasn't she?" he demanded.

"Sure!" Johnny scoffed. "Beaded eyelashes are essential in the Oregon backwoods, where she probably came from. But why waste time watching her do her stuff? We've traveled a thousand miles to see this Grand Cañon. Now let's take it in."

"Go ahead." The Tub nodded toward the rim of the Cañon. "You boys take in the scenery. I want to get acquainted with that sweet little mamma."

"What?" I gasped. "You're not going to look at the Cañon?"

The Eel grasped my arm. "Come on! Why argue with the big dub?"

Accordingly we left him to his own devices and went over to view the Cañon.

I shall merely say that the Cañon is all it is cracked up to be, and then some.

WHEN we returned to the camp half an hour later the Tub was nowhere in sight. The "keen number" from Oregon had also disappeared. Johnny Holt surveyed the pile of duffle in the tonneau of our car with an angry eye.

"Just like that fat dub!" he stormed. "Making himself scarce every time there is a little work to do! This has got to stop!"

"Try and stop it!" I grinned.

"Oh, I'll stop it," the Eel vowed, "if I have to take him out in the desert and stake him to a yucca tree a hundred miles from the nearest female. 'Keen number'—huh! A spavined washerwoman with a face like the missing link would be a 'keen number' to the Tub—if there was any work to do!" The Eel sighed wearily. "Come on. We've got to get camp pitched before dark."

Camp was pitched and dinner was spread out on the folding table when the Tub returned. He seated himself morosely and started to wade into the bacon and beans.

"What's the matter, Tub?" I asked. "Wasn't your usual line working well today?"

"Line was working all right. She fell for me hard."

"They always do," Johnny commented, "—to hear *you* tell it."

"Well, aint it the truth?" the fat youth demanded.

"All right, we'll admit all that," I put in. "But if she fell so hard for you, why so disconsolate?"

"She's pulling out at six in the morning," the Tub answered lugubriously.

"And at eight you're pulling out," the Eel told him. "We're going down the Bright Angel Trail, to the bottom of the Cañon."

"Bright Angel! Say, what is this place? Heaven?"

"You'll think it's hell if you don't start doing your share of the work," said Johnny.

"Applesauce!" the Tub shrugged. "But tell me about this trail. We're not going to *walk* down it, are we?"

"We're going to ride down on mules," the Eel informed him.

"Me?" On a mule?" the Tub gasped. "Say, don't you think I got any dignity?"

"Not much," the Eel admitted. "However, if you go at all, you'll go on a mule. They don't allow horses on the trail. Too dangerous."

"Huh!" The Tub's round eyes blinked warily. "Did you say dangerous?"

"Uh-huh!"

"Then count me out."

"I'll do that very thing, with one wallop on the point of your fat jaw—unless you turn to, on these dishes," the Eel told him.

"Aw, try an' do it!" the Tub returned, with none too much enthusiasm. Nevertheless, he turned to on the dishes, while Johnny went over to the hotel and made reservations for the trip down the trail.

EIGHT o'clock the next morning found the three of us waiting at the corral at the head of the trail. There was quite a crowd standing around, for we learned afterward that the big events of the day at the Grand Cañon were the arrival of and departure of the trail parties. The Tub surveyed the crowd and the saddled mules and the head of the trail skeptically.

"They must be taking movies. There's one o' them Wild West movie cowboys in the corral there."

"Get on the boat, Tub," Johnny admonished. "That's our guide."

"Our which? Aw, get out! What's he wearing chaps for, and that loud handkerchief and the cowboy hat?"

"Local color, my son," the Eel informed him.

"Local applesauce, if you ask me." The Tub edged away from us, apparently interested in the conversation of two elderly men who stood near by. It was one of the Tub's ways and we paid little attention to him. When the guide called for the members of our trail party, the Eel and I slipped through the gate into the corral, along with the rest of the party: a sour-looking dame of thirty—giving her the benefit of the doubt—who might be a school-teacher; a sour-looking man of forty, who might be the principal of her school; a sweet little blonde mamma of twenty, who seemed on very good terms with the guide; and the latter individual, whom, we learned shortly, was known as "Tex."

Tex was helping the blonde person to mount her mule when the Tub leaped the fence and rushed up to us.

"Hey! Big business!" he cried in a hoarse whisper. "Listen, see that tall bird over there talking to the guy in the gray knickers? I just heard him say that he'd give a thousand dollars to break up that romance." He nodded toward the corral. "The little blonde dame and the guide—see? I figure that the tall guy is the dame's father. She's fallen for this movie comedy cowboy and the old man wants to break it up. That's where I come in. I'm going to earn that thousand."

"You're crazy!" the Eel scoffed. "That was just a figure of speech."

"Sure it was a figure of speech! One thousand! Come on—I want a witness. Quick, before we have to pull out!"

The Tub leaped the fence again and strode toward the tall man who was talking to his friend in the gray knickers. The Eel and I reluctantly followed.

"Sir, I overheard a remark you just made," the Tub was explaining as we walked casually up behind him. "It was an accident, I assure you, sir. I didn't mean to eavesdrop. However, I heard you say that you would give a thousand dollars to break up that romance." The fat youth nodded toward the corral. "Does that offer still hold good, sir?"

To give the Tub credit, he made a good appearance. He wasn't a bad-looking young man, and he put his proposition earnestly and in a business-like manner. The tall man, who was some sixty years old and looked it, stared at the Tub for a long moment. "It's rather a strange proposition, young man. What are you—Cupid's nemesis?"

The Tub blinked. "No, I'm just plain American," he returned. "Fenwick Dallmoreton Lurb is the name, sir."

"Any relation to Thompson Lurb, of the Lurb Motors, Incorporated?"

"His son, sir."

The older man raised his gray eyebrows. "H-m—I've heard of your father. He's a go-getter, if there ever was one. Apparently you take after him."

"That's what everyone tells me," the Tub admitted modestly.

"Very well. Go to it, Fenwick. The thousand is yours if you can break up that romance—if such it could be called. The gentleman who at this moment expects to marry my daughter is—well, not the type of man I should choose for her. My name is Nathan Cauldwell. If you can make my daughter forget her infatuation for that guide, come to me at the hotel and I'll pay you a thousand dollars."

"I understand perfectly." And the Tub nodded hastily, evidently conscious of the impatient shouts of the guide behind him. "I'll do my best for you, sir."

WE leaped the fence again and mounted the mules, as directed by Tex. Dazed at first, it was not until we were lined up ready to start down the trail that I realized just what the Tub had done. He had virtually taken a contract to shatter a tender romance of the great open spaces. It didn't please me. Romance is all right, if it is your own romance. But poking your finger into some one else's romance is not only very bad taste, but is apt to prove dangerous for the finger.

The guide decreed the order in which we must go down the trail. "Dixie, you first, behind me. Then this gentleman in the knickers." (Same being myself.) "Then Miss Lawrence." (This was the school-teacherish person.) "Then Mr. Galloway." (This was the school-principalish person.) "Then the long gentleman and, last of all, the fleshy gentleman."

Such a description of the Tub was most complimentary, but he failed to take it in that spirit. "My name is Lurb," he announced coldly. "And I don't believe I care to bring up the rear of this caravan. I'd rather be nearer the front."

Having thus announced himself, the Tub kicked his mule in the ribs with the evident intention of moving up in the line. The mule, however, had other ideas. He seemed opposed to moving in *any* direction.

The Tub grew red. He prodded his mule, kicked him, slapped him with the reins. He appealed to him gently. He coaxed him, he urged him, he threatened him. All without avail. The guide, grinning broadly under his five-gallon hat, at last came to the fat youth's rescue.

"Bill, get moving," he ordered, in a conversational tone. And the mule obediently stepped out at the end of the cavalcade.

"Hey, you!" the Tub called. "I told you I didn't care about playing the calliope in this procession!"

The guide did not answer, but the Eel did. "You're not playing the calliope—you're playing the fool! Now pipe down."

The party swung off down the trail. For half a mile there was no further disturbance from the rear. The guide and the blonde person whom he addressed as Dixie, carried on a spirited conversation, seemingly oblivious to the dangers of the narrow trail.

"Do you know what we'd do in Texas with a man who played with a woman's heart?"

Mr. Galloway and Miss Lawrence, the schoolish persons, exchanged a few inanities about the glories of the Cañon. The Tub and the Eel, like myself, were silent.

Half a mile down the trail Tex stopped his mule and announced that, owing to the steepness of the trail, we would be compelled to walk for a while and lead our animals. This was the Tub's cue. Tossing his reins to Johnny, he edged around the rest of the party and presented himself to Dixie.

"Lurb is my name," he told her, as grandly as though it had been John Coolidge. "Pretty place, the Cañon, isn't it?"

She looked him over and smiled the most winsome of smiles. She was all peaches-and-cream, with carmine lips and pearly teeth. "It ith a pretty plathe. My name ith Dickthie."

I grinned in spite of myself. I might have known that this little peaches-and-cream blonde would affect a lisp.

"Dixie," the Tub murmured raptly. "Most adorable name! I've always loved the name of Dixie. I suppose that is because I was born in Dixie. Yes, indeed. Well-known Southern family, the Lurbs. Have you been at the Cañon long, Miss Dixie?"

"Two weekth, Mithter Lurb."

"Wonderful! Leaving soon?"

"Oh, no! We're going to thtay all thummer."

"Great! And what do you think of the Cañon?"

"It'th very pretty, don't you think?"

"You bet it is."

I refrain from repeating more of this most intelligent conversation. How does he do it, you ask? He doesn't—he only thinks he does.

AT Indian Gardens, the halfway point of the trail, the party rested for a time. So far as I was concerned, the rest was welcome—riding in an automobile is hardly the proper training for riding a mule down a steep trail. The Tub, however, would have none of it. He and Dixie took a walk. As they strolled away, the Tub holding her arm and giving vent to a stream of nonsensical gibberish, I realized that he was getting over strong. I remarked as much to Johnny.

"Huh! Who couldn't get over with that blonde moron?" he demanded. According to Johnny, all women who looked more than once at the Tub were morons.

When the party made ready to depart the Tub and the blonde mamma were still among the missing. Tex came over to me, scowling a bit.

"What's the name of that fat friend of yours?" he asked.

"Fenwick Dallmoreton Lurb."

"I didn't ask for his pedigree. I asked for his name."

"I beg pardon," I apologized. "His name is the Tub."

Tex grinned. "Good enough!"

He opened his mouth and bellowed: "Hey, Tub! Oh, Tub!"

The Tub came running, very red of face.

"Say!" he admonished the guide. "My name isn't Tub! It's Fenwick Dallmoreton Lurb."

"Is it now?" the guide smiled easily. "It seems to me you answered readily enough. Besides, you'd hardly expect me to shout a handle like that, would you?"

"Aw, rats!" the Tub growled, and swung aboard his mule.

THE balance of the trip down to the Silvery Colorado was without incident. The Tub had apparently become rather well acquainted with his new *amour*. Proximity was no longer necessary to conversation, at least on the part of Mr. Lurb. Despite the fact that a hundred feet or more separated him and Dixie, he went right ahead with his usual line of wise cracks. He was making progress, too. Tex and Dixie, instead of carrying on a little conversation for two, rarely spoke during the remainder of the ride to the bottom of the Cañon.

The Tub sat between me and Dixie while we ate our lunch at the foot of the trail. Tex ate his lunch with the guides of the other trail parties, holding himself carefully aloof from Dixie. His manner toward her was distant, to say the least. Toward the Tub, it was almost hostile.

The wedge was in. The thousand dollars— Oh, well, I assured myself, why worry about the love affairs of a moron? Two morons, for that matter! As witness:

The Tub: "D'you like to dance, Dixie?"

Dixie: "I adore danthing, Fenwick."

The Tub: "Me, too. The girls at home tell me I shake rather a mean Charleston."

Dixie: "I love to Charlethton, too, Fenwick."

The Tub: "Not much to these lunches, is there?"

Dixie: "I'll thay there ithn't. I could eat another pieth of cake."

The Tub: "Here—take mine. Never did care for cake."

Which statement was proven a vile falsehood a few moments later, when the Tub calmly filched my own slice of cake. "All for the good of the cause," he whispered to me. "Remember, we're partners in everything. When Cauldwell pays me off, that thousand will be one-third yours."

For some unaccountable reason Tex put the Tub immediately behind Dixie when we started back up the trail. It might have been because he felt that Mr. Lurb's line would prove trying to anyone, even a moron. Again, it might have been because the Tub's wise cracks were scaring the mules. The Tub cast me a confident smile as he took his place. In a way, it was a questioning smile, as much as to say: "How are we going to spend that thousand?"

It was four o'clock when we gained the rim of the Cañon. The Tub's ardor had cooled in direct ratio to the warming of his ample form by the hot rays of the afternoon sun. He was tired and sunburned. And, if my own legs were any criterion, the insides of his calves were blistered from contact with the saddle. Fortunately, he dismounted near the corral fence. Without its support, I suspect he would have collapsed. Fourteen miles of steep trail on mule-back is no joyride for a thin man. For a fat man it comes near to being murder.

"I'll see you at eight, Dixie," Mr. Lurb called to the little blonde. "That is, if I'm able to walk. From the way I feel now, they may have to ship me to a hospital for an overhauling."

We helped the Tub back to the camp, not because we felt any too commiserating, but merely because he couldn't have negotiated the walk alone and we didn't want to leave him lying around on the rim of the Cañon. We weren't afraid that he'd fall over; we just hated to have the scenery messed up for the tourists.

At five minutes to eight, however, the Tub was again himself, despite a pronounced limp and the absence of a little of his cocksureness, a very little.

"Well," he announced casually, "I got a date to take a walk with Dixie. Keen number, aint she?"

"Low-grade moron!" the Eel grunted.

"Who? Me or Dixie?" And the Tub bristled.

"Both."

Mr. Lurb smiled and bowed. "Then we'll be well mated."

"Mated!"

"I am going to ask her to marry me tonight."

"Marry you tonight!" the Eel exclaimed.

"No, not marry me tonight," Mr. Lurb corrected. "I am just going to ask her tonight. We wont be married until tomorrow."

"Really!" Johnny commented bitingly. "And how, may I ask, are you going to support a wife in your present condition of servitude?"

"Who said anything about supporting a wife?" the Tub demanded. "I'll get a thousand bucks from the old man, wont I? And after that—well, old Cauldwell is rich or he wouldn't be spending the summer here, not at the rates they charge at the El Tovar. So why worry?"

"Fast worker, aren't you?" the Eel grunted.

"Say, big boy, if speed was money, I'd have John D. looking like a starving Armenian."

"Oh, get on your way! I'm tired of listening to your childish prattle," growled Johnny.

"Ta-ta!" The Tub waved to us airily, and limped toward the hotel.

"Say, what do you think of all this business, Johnny?" I asked seriously as we watched the Tub out of sight. "Do you think it's quite fair to the little blonde and her father?"

"Aw, why worry? Johnny grinned wisely. "Let's let Dixie and the old man do the worrying."

"Then again," I said thoughtfully, "it would be quite a relief to get the Tub off our hands. He is an awful nuisance."

"Correct! But in the meantime, let's hit the hay. I'm dead. Don't think I'll recover from that jaunt for a week!"

SOMETIME after midnight we were awakened by the Tub.

"Hey, you guys!" he shouted, loud enough for at least half of Arizona to hear. "Wake up! It's all settled!"

"Settled!" the Eel growled sleepily. "You'll get settled on your ear if you don't pipe down!"

"But aren't you going to congratulate me?" Mr. Lurb demanded eagerly. "Dixie has promised to marry me tomorrow afternoon. We're going to elope. Think of it, boys! The sweetest little woman in all the world!"

"No," the Eel corrected, "the sweetest little woman outside of an insane asylum."

"Aw, you're just jealous!"

"Say, see here, Tub," I put in. "Do you realize what you are doing? Marriage is a mighty serious step. You don't want to go into it blindfolded. Better wait a while. She'll keep! You seem to have cut that guide out all right, so why rush things?"

The Tub sighed deeply. "Sweet little Dixie! You'd rush too, if you were going to marry the sweetest little girl in the world."

"Huh!" Johnny scoffed. "I wonder how sweet she'd be if her old man didn't have any money. Answer me that one, fat boy."

"That wouldn't make a bit of difference," Mr. Lurb vowed. "This is not a marriage for money. It is a marriage for love. I'll admit that our affair started out

wrong. When I first started to do my stuff, I was thinking of that thousand dollars. But now—ah—it is love alone that counts."

"And you'd marry her just the same," the Eel suggested, "if you found the old man was penniless?"

"Absolutely. Why, I'd work my fingers to the bone for that little girl. I—why, I'd even get a job as a guide here! I'd wear a trick outfit. I'd do anything—"

"Then go to bed!" the Eel interrupted. "Unless you want to have that wedding indefinitely postponed by a funeral in your immediate family."

"Aw, rats!" the Tub growled morosely. "You birds have got about as much romance in you as a horned toad has. Say, by the way, I want to borrow the car tomorrow afternoon. We figure on running over to Flagstaff to get married. How about it, Johnny?"

"Nope! One-hand driving doesn't go on these roads."

"Now listen, Johnny," the fat youth pleaded. "I'll keep both hands on the wheel all the time."

"And both eyes on the road?"

"Absolutely!"

"And your lips to yourself?"

"Positively!"

"All right. Now hit the hay and pipe down."

The Tub hit the hay or, more correctly, spread out his blankets on the ground and rolled into them. But he did not pipe down immediately. For a long time I could hear him humming sentimental songs in a barely audible tone. When I finally went to sleep it was with a troubled conscience.

We slept late the following morning, and when we finally rolled out of our blankets we found that we were stiff and sore from the trip the day before. Even the Tub's lightsome humor was conspicuous by its absence. He groaned with every movement.

"You don't act much like a man on his wedding morning," the Eel told him.

"Huh! What do you expect? Want me to get up and do a spring dance?"

"Sure! Why not?"

"Well, in the first place, spring has went. And in the second place, the insides of my legs are one solid blister. Boy, if anybody ever suggests getting on a horse to me, I'll shoot him. Actually, it makes me shiver even to think about it! My legs are raw!"

My own were little better, but I was not inclined to sympathize with him. As the hour of the projected marriage drew near, I became less and less enthusiastic. It seemed a terrible thing to wish an atrocity like the Tub on a poor little unsuspecting girl like Dixie, even if she *were* a moron.

WE had a belated breakfast, finishing it after eleven o'clock. The Tub donned his best suit and made his toilet with great care. As twelve o'clock approached—he was to meet her in front of the hotel at twelve—Mr. Lurb's spirits rose. He spent the last fifteen minutes delivering an eulogy on blonde mammas in general and Dixie in particular, much to our disgust.

"Well, the time is nigh," he said at last. "Do you boys want to walk over with me?"

We nodded, but without any great enthusiasm. Walking was considerable of an ordeal for us all.

"I'd let you drive over," Johnny explained, "only if you drove that wreck of a car up in front of the El Tovar, they'd probably arrest you for cruelty to animals. However, I might get a saddle-horse for you."

"Ouch!" the Tub groaned feelingly. "The mere mention of it makes me sick at my stomach!"

When we reached the hotel, Dixie was not in sight.

"I'm offering even money that she's been kidding you along," the Eel declared. "I'll even give two to one that she doesn't show up. I'll—"

He broke off suddenly.

"Better go easy, Johnny," I advised, catching sight of the blonde moron. "Here she comes. And Tex is with her. H-m—what do you suppose she's bringing that guide along for? Say, Tub, this looks funny to me."

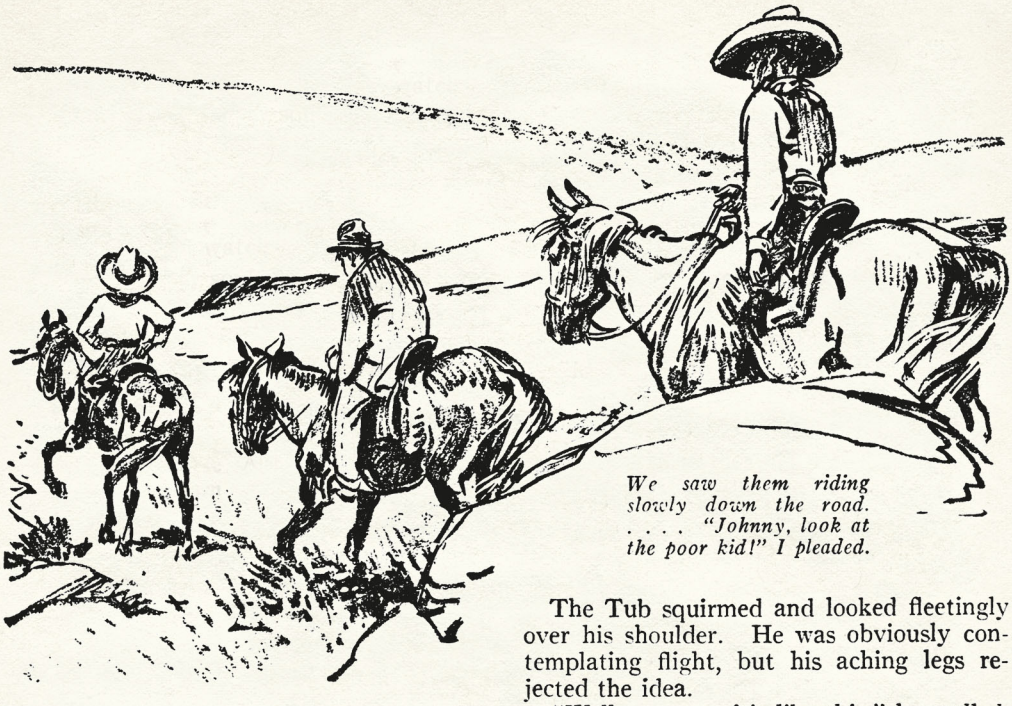
"Huh!" Johnny grunted. "Looks funny to me, too! What kind of a dress is that she's got on?"

Dixie and the guide had come around the corner of the hotel—not out of it, as we had anticipated. And the dress Johnny had asked about was not a dress at all—it was a white apron.

The Tub paled. Apparently the same thought had struck him that had struck me.

"Good Lord!" he groaned. "She's a—a waitress! A waitress! We must have made some kind of a bad mistake. She can't be Cauldwell's daughter at all!"

Johnny chuckled. "What difference does that make? Suppose she *is* a waitress? You love her, don't you? You'd work your fingers to the bone for her, wouldn't you?



We saw them riding slowly down the road. . . . . "Johnny, look at the poor kid!" I pleaded.

You must remember, Tub, you weren't going to marry her because her old man had money. No! Not much you weren't!"

"But—but there must be something wrong," the Tub stammered. "We got the wrong lay yesterday morning. Gosh, I—I'm sunk!"

"Hello, Fenwick, dear," the blonde person hailed her groom-to-be. "I'm thorry I wath late. But the head waitreth wouldn't let me off until twelve."

" 'Sall right," the perplexed Tub answered morosely.

"You don't mind if Tex cometh along, do you?" Dixie went on. "He'th my brother, you know, and he'll like to thee the theremony."

The Tub took himself in hand. "The which?" he asked, grinning in a sickly fashion.

"Our marriage, dear!"

"Oh, yes. That's right—we were going to be married today, weren't we? Yes, of course. Only, Dixie, dear, I don't think I'll be able to make the trip. That ride down the trail yesterday ruined me. The insides of my legs are all blistered."

DIXIE'S face fell, but the big guide came to her rescue. "You don't expect to use the inside of your legs to drive over to Flagstaff, do you?" he asked. "Besides, I can drive the car for you, if they're *that* bad!"

The Tub squirmed and looked fleetingly over his shoulder. He was obviously contemplating flight, but his aching legs rejected the idea.

"Well, you see, it's like this," he stalled. "The car is busted down and we can't use it. Isn't that right, Johnny?"

For a moment I thought that Johnny would betray a friendship of years' standing. Indeed, I actually feared that he would fail to back up the Tub. How I misjudged him!

"That's right, Tub," Johnny nodded positively. "The car's busted down. Take us at least a week to fix it."

"See? What'd I tell you?" the Tub cried jubilantly.

"Oh, but that needn't worry us any," Tex came back. "It's only a matter of sixty miles or so. We'll ride over."

"We'll which?" the Tub gasped.

"We'll ride over to Flagstaff."

"On—on what?" The Tub's whisper was barely audible.

"Horses, of course."

Mr. Lurb's legs began to tremble. Indeed, the thought of riding sixty miles, or even sixty feet, caused an odd, sinking sensation in the pit of my stomach. I thought for a minute that the Tub was going to faint. He rallied nobly, however. Squaring his beefy shoulders, he said firmly:

"Say, this thing has gone far enough! It's time you people learned how to take a joke. I'm not going to marry you, Dixie—I was just kidding you along. A little summer romance, don't you know? No harm in it. Just playing at the game of hearts. Really, I can't marry you, Dixie."

For a long moment there was a dead silence. Dixie's face was very red and her lips were trembling. I wasn't sure whether she was going to laugh or cry. Tex, however, was scowling angrily. When he spoke it was calmly—the sinister calmness of the bad man.

"Pardner, do you know what we'd do down in Texas with a man like you? A man who played fast and loose with a woman's heart?" He paused, staring straight into the Tub's blinking eyes. "Well, we'd put daylight into you, that's all. This aint Texas, but I'm a Texan. Now draw your own conclusions."

THE TUB looked at Dixie, then at me and then at Johnny. At last his gaze dropped, his shoulders slumped; he was plainly beaten.

"I'll—go," he murmured weakly. "Only—maybe—we can use the car. Hey, Johnny?"

But Johnny shook his head. "That's out. You've acted like a rotten cad, Tub, and I'm off you for life. Get that straight. I'm through! Come on, Grant, let's get back to camp."

He grasped my arm and dragged me away. Over my shoulder I caught a glimpse of the Tub's white face as he stretched out his arms to me appealingly.

"Johnny! Grant! For God's sake!"

Johnny was deaf to his plea. I was too dazed to know what it was all about. I didn't recover until we got back to camp. Then I told Johnny Holt what I thought of him.

"A fine friend you are!" I berated him bitterly. "Letting the poor old Tub be dragged into a thing like this!"

"Well, he said he loved her, didn't he?" Johnny demanded.

"But he was only kidding himself. You know the Tub hasn't any sense when it comes to women."

"Well, this little affair will knock some sense into him."

"If it doesn't kill him!" I cried angrily. "How would *you* like to be compelled to ride sixty miles, at the point of some wild Texan's gun?"

"It's his own fault, isn't it?" Johnny remarked. "I'm sure *I* didn't propose to that dame for him! He went in with his eyes open, didn't he? He asked her to marry him—now let him play the game like a man!"

"But he's not a man—he's only a kid!" I returned. "And she's a waitress, a hotel waitress!"

"What if she is? That's no disgrace, is it? The Tub could do a lot worse. Besides, she's a pretty keen number."

"But she's a moron!"

"Aw, get out! She's got as much sense as any blonde female her age. Now, dry up, Grant. I want to make up a little sleep—legs were too sore last night to sleep much."

I groaned, thinking of the poor Tub on that sixty-mile ride. He'd be dead in less than a mile!

Fifteen minutes later we saw them riding slowly down the road in the direction of Flagstaff. Dixie was leading. She had changed to the khaki riding outfit she had worn the day before and she rode her horse jauntily. The Tub followed along behind her. He sat gingerly in the saddle, his chin on his chest. I could almost hear him groan with every step the horse took. The Texan, grim and silent, brought up in the rear of the cavalcade.

"Johnny, look at the poor kid!" I pleaded. "Can't you see you're killing him? You could do something if you wanted to. Let them take the car, Johnny—please!"

Johnny laughed harshly: "Huh! I suppose in a minute you'll be asking me to think of his poor old mother!"

"Well, it wouldn't do any harm," I told him.

"Wouldn't do any good, either. Because his mother isn't poor and she isn't old. So that's that. I'm going to turn in for a while."

That, indeed, was that. Plead though I would, Johnny was deaf to all entreaties. At last I gave up and lay down on my blankets, heartsick and unhappy.

Apparently, I fell asleep, for the next thing I knew it was dusk and the Eel was calling to me: "Dinner's on the table, Grant. Come and get it."

I rose and sat down at the table without speaking. I was firmly convinced that I was off Johnny Holt for life. The Tub had been a bit foolish, of course. But surely he didn't deserve such a terrible punishment. Sixty miles on horseback with those blistered legs. And then forced to marry a waitress on top of that!

"Johnny, I'm going to take the morning train and go home," I announced at last.

"Suit yourself," was the Eel's only answer.

"That was the rottenest trick I ever saw played on a man," I went on.

"No," Johnny grinned, with maddening equanimity. "It was the best joke I ever saw played on a darned fool. Say, wont the gang back home get a laugh out of it when they hear about it? Lord, it sure was funny!"

"Funny! Huh! I'm afraid your sense of humor is badly warped," I replied coldly; "also your sense of honor. I'm leaving in the morning."

"Suit yourself, Grant."

WE were just rising from the table when a bedraggled figure crawled into our camp. I say crawled, advisedly—it certainly did not walk. In the faint light I was for the moment at a loss to identify it. Then came a familiar voice, hoarse with pain, hushed with fear.

"Johnny, for Gawd's sake, help me get out o' this—them wild Texans have been chasin' me for fifty miles! I'm dead. Dead, I tell yuh!"

"Well, well, well," Johnny grinned. "If it isn't the Tub! You made a quick trip to Flagstaff, Fenwick."

"Shut up, will yuh? Not so loud! I never went to Flagstaff—I ran my horse off the road up the line here and took to the brush. That trick cowboy is looking for me now. You'll have to get me out o' here!"

I was at the Tub's side by this time, helping him to his feet. He was a sorry spectacle. His clothes had nearly been torn off of him by the brush, and his perspiring face was caked with sweat and dust. He was so weak he could hardly stand.

"What did you say I *had* to do?" Johnny asked mildly.

"Aw, Johnny! Now listen, will yuh? I'm dead, I tell yuh! I can't walk another foot. And that wild Texan is after me. He's got a gun, too. Please, Johnny—take me away, will yuh?"

"Suppose I get you out of this mess," Johnny offered. "Will you promise to keep away from women for the rest of this trip?"

"Absolutely, Johnny! I'll never look at a woman again as long as I live!"

"We'll take that with a grain of salt," Johnny commented. "If I get you out, will you promise to do your share of the work from now on?"

"I promise," the Tub wailed. "I'll do *all* the work!"

"Fair enough. Let's go!"

In no time at all we broke camp, stowed the duffle in the tonneau, laid the Tub on top of it, covered him with a blanket, and headed down the road toward the entrance to the park. The Tub never moved after we laid him away; in five minutes his snores were so loud that Johnny had to open the cut-out to drown them out.

IT was not until the Grand Cañon was well behind us that I breathed a sigh of relief. The Tub was safe from the blonde moron at last!

After a time I noted that Johnny Holt was shaking with silent laughter.

"Well, I suppose you still think it is funny to let one of your best friends be compelled to ride sixty miles and then marry a blonde moron," I remarked coldly.

"He didn't ride more than a mile or two, did he?" Johnny returned. "And he didn't marry any blonde moron, did he?"

"Yes, but how did you know—" I broke off, struck suddenly with an amazing thought. "Johnny, was this thing all a put-up job?"

Johnny laughed heartily. "You surely didn't think there was any man alive that would *force* a marriage between his sister and a dumb-bell like the Tub, did you?"

"Well, I—I don't know much about these Texans. And how about that old bird the Tub talked to yesterday morning? That man Cauldwell?"

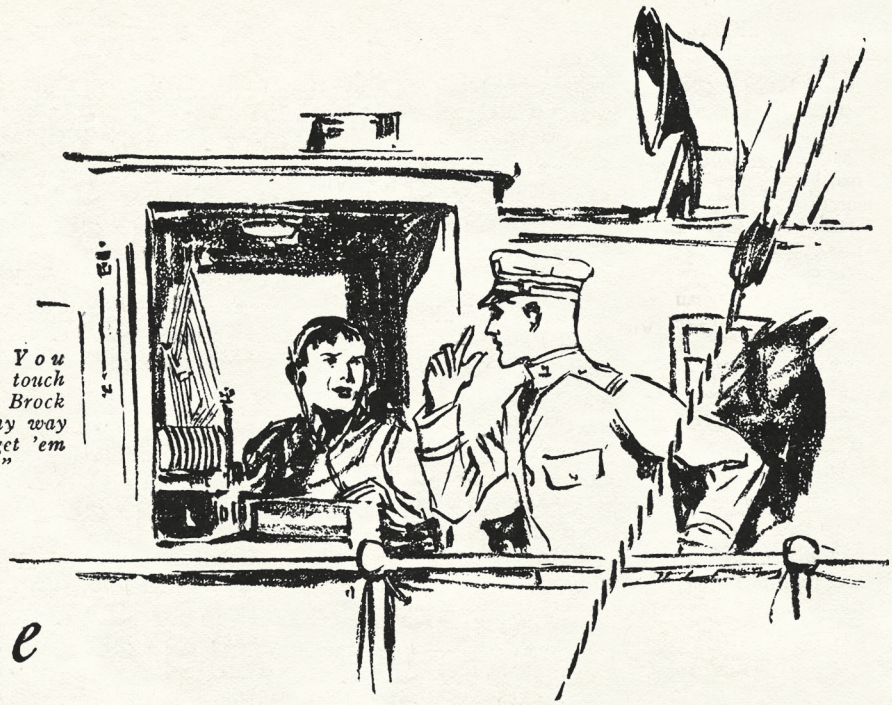
"A friend of my father's. I met him when I went over to get the tickets for the trail trip. Talked him into playing the game for me. Old Tex took me down ten bucks for his part. And the horses this afternoon cost me six more. But wasn't it worth it?"

I saw a picture of the dejected form of the Tub, riding away to the slaughter. "Well, maybe," I admitted. "Still, it was pretty rough on the old Tub!"

"Aw, it'll do him good," Johnny shrugged. "If he doesn't do his share of the work and keep away from these keen numbers during the rest of the trip I'll—well, I'll threaten to tell the boys back home that he almost married a blonde moron. That'll bring him around."

"Blonde moron," I mused, "—no, you're wrong. No moron could act a part like that little girl did. She's got brains, even if she is a waitress."

"Waitress, me eye!" Johnny grunted. "That little dame *was* Cauldwell's daughter —she's worth a million in her own right!"



"Jack! You keep in touch with the Brock station any way you can get 'em best!"

The Fortune Hunters

By STEPHEN HOPKINS ORCUTT

The officers of the good ship Argentine Liberator discover a plot against a young woman passenger—and sundry exciting events then transpire: a thoroughly enjoyable story.

Illustrated by William Molt

THEY'LL tell you in Santos and Rio that coffee-drinking has increased to such an extent, all over the world, that the Dutch Indies no longer meet the demands of the East, and that the bean is now shipped direct from Brazil to Australia, China and Japan. Anyhow—a cargo-boat cleared from Santos for Hongkong with coffee, touching at Rio for some other small shipment a few days before the Brock liner *Argentine Liberator* left for Capetown. And a citizen of the world who made a very good living in devious ways sailed on her, after an exchange of cablegrams with a man in Manila who finally agreed to meet the traveler upon his arrival in Hongkong.

When he did so, the two went directly to a bungalow at the Peak where two attractive women lived with their servants and put the men up whenever they happened to come that way—sometimes taking a flyer in whatever speculation the men happened to be trying out at the time, but more frequently in the rôle of old and disinterested friends. So far as Government circles were aware, both women were absolutely respectable—rather popular with the younger set, invited everywhere. When Soresby had been shown to his comfortable room on the upper floor, Billings seated himself for an hour's discussion.

"Beyond a general impression that you think I'm better qualified to pull something off than you are, Soresby,—and the inference that it may run to money,—I haven't any too clear idea as to what you have in mind. But your cable sounded promising and things were dull in Manila, anyhow—so I thought I'd come up and see the girls for a week or two whether your scheme looked good or not. Now shoot."

"I don't suppose the news-syndicates gave you much out here concerning the death of a wealthy man in Rio under somewhat suspicious circumstances, and his willing the bulk of his property to a young Brazilian claiming to be his natural son? No—probably not. His lawyers had reason to believe there was something queer about the affair—cabled his niece in New York, who was sole heir under a former will, to come down and look into the matter with them. She did so, bringing a friend as traveling-companion. The last will was proved a forgery—the Brazilian a murderer—and the girl inherited the entire estate, under the real will, running to something over two million dollars as nearly as I could learn. As the Brazilian tried to have the girl killed in the voyage down, and as the mate of her steamer had been instrumental in finding documents which proved her case, the attorneys in Rio advised her to sail again on his steamer, remaining on board for the round voyage if she felt like it, where neither the Brazilian nor any of his tools could get at her. There really wasn't much risk, because the scoundrel was under indictment for murder and had no possible object in meddling with the girl after she got the money—but the attempt to kill her on the voyage down was a good deal of a jolt, so she and her friend sailed for Capetown on the *Argentine Liberator*—"

"Brock liner? The one that's been having so many adventures of late?"

"That's the boat—and Coffin, the mate, was the one who helped to clear up the affair for the girl. That young fellow seems to have more luck than anyone else I've heard of! Well—from the gossip around Rio, I learned that the girl's mother and an uncle-in-law in London are all the relatives she has left, nearer than second or third cousins. She is of age and has no guardian—nobody to interfere with her when she feels like marrying some one who takes her fancy. The more those facts sunk into my mind, the more they stuck. I began picking up data about the Brock fleet—particularly, the *Argentine Liberator*. Almost invariably they get cargo from some British port to New York, Philadelphia or Baltimore. Three times out of four, they load there for some Asiatic port by way of the Cape or South Africa or both. Out here, they discharge at some Dutch port, Singapore, Manila or Hongkong. Going home, they have a little more difficulty in getting cargo—sometimes Vancouver or Frisco and then around by Panama, sometimes an Australian port first—but more than half the time they go back through Suez. That girl was already interested in Coffin—she and her friend liked the steamer and the officers. I took the chance that they'd stay aboard as far as Hongkong anyhow, and cabled you—knowing I could probably make it before the *Argentine* turned up. So far—we're in luck. The boat cleared for Frisco from Sourabaya, via Celebes—but got afire, jettisoned her cargo and has been ordered up here, which is the Brock headquarters in the East. The two girls are still on board."

"BUT where do I come in?" queried Billings with a puzzled look.

"First we find out whether the girl remains on the *Argentine* or transfers to some other boat for London or Frisco. Then we sail on same boat. Eventually—you marry her."

"Oh, the devil! I usually avoid marrying! One experience of that sort kept me guessing for a year—too many complications! Still, a couple of millions might be worth the risk. If the girl married me at all, she'd probably have confidence in my judgment about investment—I'd get the handling of *some* money. Even one million would be worth considering. Why didn't you go after this yourself, Soresby—play a lone hand?"

"Too old for her—haven't the looks or the education that you have. And it's not altogether a one-man game. You'll need some one to get outside information while you're rushing the girl, some one to sense the general opinion on board, to warn you against unforeseen complications. I'm figuring on fifty thousand dollars the day you marry her, and another fifty thousand the day you begin investing her money. You're good for three or four times that right now, unless you've dropped what you had from the Bombay deal and—"

"Suppose she's already batty over that mate, Coffin?"

"They said in Rio that he seemed to like her friend the better of the two—and in the last eighteen months he's had first chance at some pretty swell dames, with money and without it. It's thought that Coffin will go considerably higher, and that he already has money of his own. Anyhow—he doesn't seem to be in the marrying game at present."

"What's your idea in the way of a start? Get introductions here in Hongkong?"

"No. That might lead to their asking too many questions about us, here. A better plan will be to have a solidly respectable party come aboard to see us off when we sail. Mary Colgate, with her cousin, two or three of the Government women they know—couple of men from the banks, middle-aged ones—a solid merchant or so. The ship's officers will recognize such people at a glance and comment upon it afterward—gives us just the right send-off. It'll not be at all difficult—with the assistance of Mary and Stasia."

THIS gives you the lay-out of what nobody aboard the *Argentine* would have considered possible when they steamed into Hongkong harbor. Captain Connyngsby and his officers were somewhat apprehensive as to how their owners would look at their jettisoning of the entire cargo—partly on fire, and a serious risk at any time. But they had been in no way responsible for accepting the inflammable cargo—which had been ordered by an assistant manager of the Hongkong branch, by cable to Sourabaya, in the absence of Mr. Eversley Brock on a Siamese hunting-trip. And when they reached port, they were congratulated by him upon saving their ship and passengers under very trying conditions—the only loss to the owners being the delay in going around by Celebes and some moral obligation for the transportation of four passengers to San Francisco, where there was still a full cargo for the boat if she reached there within a month. These considerations weighed with Brock until he had about decided upon taking anything he could get for San Francisco when they arrived—but Connyngsby had the luck to get a full cargo of "China general" from a mandarin friend in Canton who preferred business to fighting—destination Vancouver—which answered their purpose even better, as they could always load with lumber, there.

Miss Katharine Lee, the heiress, and her friend Marjorie Banton, had booked through to Frisco on the boat anyhow, and saw no reason to alter their decision about remaining on board. The Cartersons—a married couple from London on a vacation-cruise, taken from the supposedly sinking *Coombarra* in the Indian Ocean—had also decided to proceed that far and were being treated to enough unusual thrills to get them very much interested in the boat and her officers. A Mrs. Bollingford had furnished a good deal of comedy on the way from Sourabaya and after many changes of mind would have gone on with them to Vancouver, but found, when she came to book at the Company's offices in Queen's Road, that they couldn't give her accommodations—Connyngsby having talked by radio about her with Mr. Brock before coming in. The woman was too much of a trouble-maker. A Mr. Porthick and his wife also found themselves unable to book—having lost their heads and made trouble while the boat was on fire. But the Evanstons, who had come aboard at Capetown, and two very decent Hollanders from Batavia with the wife of one and sister of the other, remained for the Pacific voyage. Six more were booked in Hongkong—Soresby and Billings among them—and Ned Coffin happened to be in the Company's office when they came in, on the day before sailing.

GLANCING at them casually, Coffin would have given neither of them any further attention but for a characteristic twitch of the shoulders in one of them which struck him as vaguely familiar. Watching until he got a full view of Soresby's face, he knew that he had seen the man before—recently—but in some place a good many miles from Hongkong. It haunted him. Then, in less than five minutes, he was certain that the man had been one of a box-party at the opera in Rio when he left the girls during an entr'acte and stepped into it for a few moments' chat with some Brazilian acquaintances. This was a jolt. He couldn't figure how the man had reached Hongkong before the *Argentine's* arrival. Stepping behind the counter, he beckoned to Mr. Brock's private secretary, who was just going into the private office, and asked if he could be seen at once. In a moment she stuck her head out of the door and beckoned to him.

"Have a chair, Coffin—and a cigar! What's on your mind?" asked Brock.

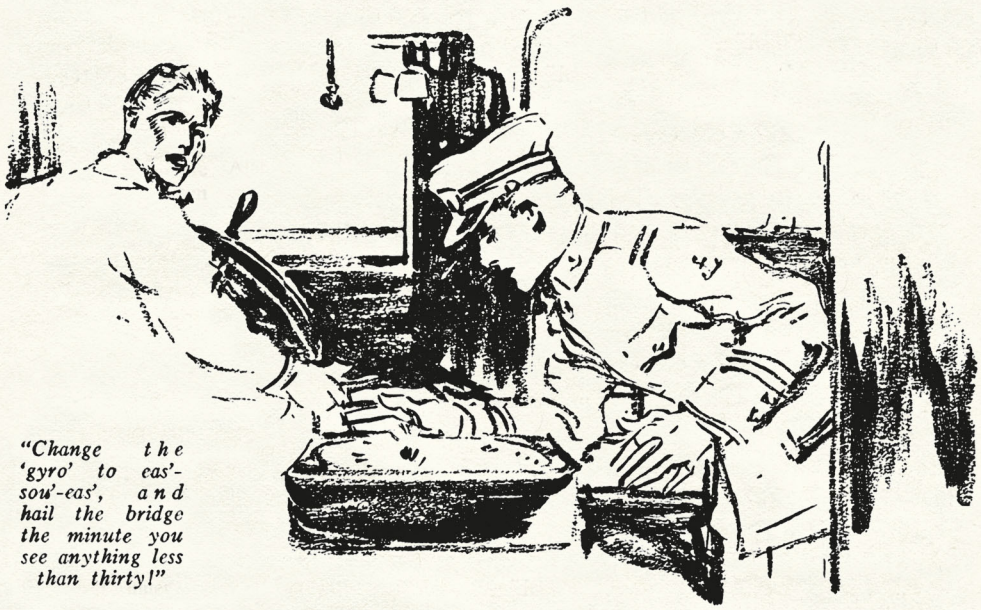
"Will you step to the door of your office, sir, and have a good look at the pair who are booking their passage at the counter in the front office? Then stroll over and ask the passage-clerk something—so that you get a close look at both those men. Might say to the clerk in their hearing that he'd better not book anyone else until you know whether the accommoda-

tion will be available. I'm not joking, sir—we should know quite a lot about those men before they sail with us!"

"Oh, that's quite well understood, Coffin! We know you well enough for that. I'll do as you suggest at once."

In a few moments, he was back in the private office, with the door closed.

known that she was leaving Rio with us. Now this fellow turns up in Hongkong, the other side of the world, before we arrive. Of course it's entirely possible—nothing spooky about it—provided he happened to strike some cargo-boat coming around through the Magellan and across here direct—or a yacht. I can't see how he



"Change the 'gyro' to eas'-sou'-eas', and hail the bridge the minute you see anything less than thirty!"

"They're rather solid, respectable-lookin' chaps, if you ask me—but I've told our *comprador* to have one of his boys track them every minute until they go aboard and hand in a report. Now—what's the story?"

"Miss Lee's affair, chiefly. We've given you and Mrs. Brock all the details. Both of you seemed to be interested at dinner last night."

"Faith, we certainly *were*—most amazin' complications an' intrigue the girl went through before gettin' her inheritance!"

"Well—five days before we left Rio, this man Soresby was in a box at the opera with Brazilian friends of mine when I had taken Miss Lee, Miss Banton and Mr. Pennington, there. I went around into the box for a chat with my friends—saw this man at close range, but wasn't introduced to him. He seemed to be received in pretty conservative circles out there. Of course the Rio papers were full of Harry Lee's murder—the forged will—and his heiress—before we left. And until sailing-day, to the best of my knowledge, it wasn't possibly could have had any knowledge that we would make Hongkong this trip or that the girls would still be aboard of us, if we did—or that they would remain aboard as far as Vancouver—but there you are!

"If he wasn't sure of those facts—or wasn't gambling on 'em—why the devil did he break his neck to get here ahead of us? There's no possible object save that of revenge to make young Guanabarra hire some agent to dog the girls and harm them. He's in prison—Pennington swears he'll see him executed or turn the municipal Government upside down. There's no possible way by which he might get any of the Lee money, now, even if the girl were dead—because his whole story is proved a lie by the letter Lee wrote Pennington on the morning he was killed—the letter I found in his secret wall-safe. And such a man as Soresby isn't hired to do any dirty work of that sort for any sum which still might be at Guanabarra's disposal. Also—the friend booking with Soresby is even more respectable in looks. If they'd simply been

here in Hongkong ahead of us, I wouldn't have bothered you about them, but the booking across with us and the girls is what gets my nanny—that doesn't seem to explain itself upon any supposition not connected with them in some way."

"Faith—I'm beginning to fancy it has that appearance myself, Ned! We can easily cancel their transportation, you know. Eh?"

"Let's consider that a bit. If they leave on the C. P. R. in a couple of days, they'll beat us in by thirty or forty hours at least—be waiting to spot and track the girls when we arrive. We'd have no idea where to look for 'em or what sort of disguises they might assume. We could put the girls on the P. & O. for London just before the *Argentine* pulls out—take those birds with us but not the girls. But if they really are up to anything, they may have confederates remaining in Hongkong after they leave. None of our crew will be given shore leave, here. Presumably those two men can't have any confederates aboard of us—which leaves them matched against our whole crowd, and we should be able to handle 'em. Suppose you dig up all the data you can before we sail—even to cabling the place Soresby's friend came from if necessary, and asking the banks about them. Eh? You stand rather close to some of the bank managers, don't you, sir? Then we can decide at the last moment whether we'll risk having 'em aboard, on the basis of what you learn. Easy enough to delay sailing a few hours if necessary."

"H-m-m—I fancy you've about covered every point I can think of, Ned. There'll be no considerin' any risk to Miss Lee on one of our boats after the attempt to shove her overboard three days out from Barbados. We mean to protect our passengers—at any cost—because we freq'ntly get a rather picked lot who send business our way by what they say in the hearing of big shippers. But Miss Lee's case is exceptional—we can't afford havin' anything happen to her after the way the press-johnnies have written the boat up. I'll put a man from one of the banks on the trail of those two chaps as well as the *comprador's* boy—an' let you know before three, tomorrow. What?"

THE more Coffin thought of the matter in every light, the more improbable it seemed that there could be any connection between Soresby and the young Brazilian murderer—but that was no proof that the man had no object of his own with Miss Lee which he would approach with more subtle and presumably with less criminal methods that might be bad for the girl in the long run but at least wouldn't threaten her life. At three next afternoon, he was back in Brock's private office to learn what had been picked up—and the Hongkong manager was smiling with evident relief.

"Begins to look as if there were nothing to it, Coffin. Both Soresby and Billings are known in Asiatic ports as capitalists who have made money in speculation of various sorts—all apparently within the law. Billings has a very decent balance at the Hongkong & Shanghai Bank—Soresby a smaller one at the Dutch Bank, but they say it sometimes runs to a good many thousands. Two of the officers on the Governor's staff know them fairly well, and several of the Peak families, also. They are friends of Miss Colgate and her cousin Miss Macpherson—usually, their guests when in Hongkong. Soresby came direct from Rio through the Magellan on the cargo-boat *Mongol City,* which arrived here five or six days ago. Billings was in Manila, where he is quite well known—came up presumably to meet Soresby and go into some speculation with him on the Pacific Coast. Rogers, the passage clerk, tells me they requested that their names do not appear on the *Argentine's* passenger-list—said their reason for taking our boat in preference to the *Empress of Australia* was that her being a limited-accommodation cargo-boat offered a better chance for keeping their names out of the news-sheets over there. The inference was—in fact they almost admitted to him—that they hoped to put through a deal which the least publicity would upset entirely—anything connecting their names with it. Now—all this would seem to account for them in every way, wouldn't it?"

"It's fairly good proof that they can't be emissaries of that Brazilian scoundrel Guanabarra, but it doesn't get around the fact that Soresby knew all about Miss Lee in Rio—got to Hongkong ahead of us—and picked out the one boat she happens to be on for this trip across the Pacific. We'll say he has no murderous intentions toward her—their standing and bank-connections would seem to vouch for that. But I'll gamble pretty high that she is the sole object of their booking on our boat and not

any possible deal in Vancouver—and we'll sure try to block it if we can, whatever it happens to be. Billings looks to me like a fellow who would be quite attractive to most women—guess he usually is. Soresby is rather colorless—too much so, I think."

"H-m-m—confound you, Coffin! You've got me suspicious again. I'm not sure what's best to do!"

"Let 'em go with us—that's the easiest way. Then we've got them where we can get a look-in at the game, anyhow."

Brock was still nervous enough over possible complications, to come aboard with his wife just before sailing-time. She had been a classmate of Betty Stevens—who had made the previous round voyage on the *Argentine Liberator*—had invited Coffin up to dinner with her and been as much pleased with him socially as Sir Jason and Eversley Brock were with him as a seaman and officer—so that when he reached port this time, another dinner-invitation at the Peak was waiting for him and the two girls who recently had been through such stirring experiences. As they were now chatting in a group under the awning on the boat-deck, Soresby and Billings came aboard with several of their friends who were seeing them off—and Mrs. Brock said to the mate, guardedly:

"That's quite a solid-looking party for a couple of criminals, Ned. Major Garraway and Captain Pierce, of the staff, with two of the ladies from Government House—two bankers—Miss Colgate and Miss Macpherson from the Peak—two men from the exporting-houses. Eh?" (Of course no mention of their suspicions had been made to Miss Lee or Miss Banton.)

"Oh, I'll admit that men with such connections aren't the ordinary cutthroat sort—as I did to Mr. Brock. But men in whom you find nothing apparently out of the way may be fairly dangerous, at that. Sometimes—worse things can happen to a girl than being killed outright. And when they do, they're usually at the hands of men so irreproachable and smooth that nobody ever sees any tangible evidence against them."

"I agree with you, there—perfectly. But I can tell you one thing about women which you may not have learned as yet—when they do get into that sort of trouble, the woman almost invariably walks into it herself, with her eyes open, in a way that makes it difficult for anyone to warn or help her. I don't know how level a head this particular girl may have—but her friend has sense enough for two. Do you know—I'm rather intrigued by your Mr. Billings. Exceedingly good-looking, don't you think—in a man's way? I fancy I'll let Mary Colgate introduce me before we go ashore—just to see if the man really is as magnetic as he seems. Then I'll present my husband—(watch Mr. Brock's face when I do!)."

AS the *Argentine* went out through the Ly-ee-mun at the east end of the beautiful harbor, she didn't pass as close to the Ladrones as she would in going out through the Lamma Channel—so had plenty of sea-room south of the Island before setting her eastward course. And as Coffin looked at the glass before going below for his dinner, this struck him as a bit of luck at the start. From thirty-inches in the Ly-ee-mun, it had gone down to twenty-eight and a half within two hours and was still dropping. He ordered extra lashings on everything and life-lines across the decks. Might be only a heavy blow—but it looked and felt like a typhoon. Air and sea were breathlessly still except for a long oily swell. At sunset, the sky was like copper, grayish-black along the north-eastern horizon—and there was a vibration, somewhere, as though a bow had been drawn across the lowest string of a bass-viol too far away to be distinctly heard.

Going aft to the radio-shack on the boat-deck, he found the second mate, who also acted as "sparks" for the boat, swinging the loops of his radio-compass around as he listened for a faint signal somewhere to the no'theast'ard. With the static he knew to be gathering all around them, Coffin wanted every whisper he could get through, and switched in a super-heterodyne receiving-set with a four-foot cone suspended from one of the ceiling-beams—and got the code-signals from Swatow loudly enough to be deafening: *"Typhoon approaching down Formosa Strait."* This settled the question he'd been debating in mind.

"Jack! You keep in touch with Swatow and the Brock station at Hongkong—any way you can get 'em best! I'll have some dinner sent up to you. Jot down memoranda every few minutes of the cross-bearings from those two points. Better get your dinner down before it's spilled all over the place! We'll not lose enough mileage to be worth considering if we go outside of

Formosa—and there's no sense in keeping up the Strait in the face of what's coming —too many reefs and too narrow waters! Tell the old man if he calls your phone before I see him!"

Running back to the wheel-house, he glanced at a square box with a circular face, around which a tiny red light was dancing.

"Thirty fathom'! Change the 'gyro' to eas'-sou'-eas', Quartermaster, and hail the bridge the minute you see anything less than thirty! You should be getting forty and fifty in an hour or so!"

THE Brocks believed that it was money in their pockets to adopt every new device in navigation which had been tested sufficiently to prove its worth, and all of their larger boats were equipped this way—with gyro-compasses, both types of sonic-sounders (one hundred fathoms and three thousand fathoms) and five-kwt. transmitting equipment with microphones for broadcast-telephony in addition to the regulation code-instruments for C. W. arc-transmission—supplemented, of course, with duplicate high-powered receiving-sets. With such all-round equipment, none of the larger Brock liners was ever out of touch with powerful shore-stations, which would relay for them if they failed to get the big Brock stations in Wales, Hongkong or the Cape.

Going below, Coffin suggested to the chief steward and acting-purser that he had best get the fiddles on the tables as soon as possible—then bent over Captain Connyngsby for a moment, at the head of his table, to whisper that a blow was coming down Formosa Strait and that he had changed the course to go outside the Island. The master nodded approvingly, and whispered: "Quite right, Ned! We'd best be clawing away from Pedro Blanco as fast as we can—then there'll be nothing within sixty or a hundred miles of us but the Vereker Bank and Pratas Shoals. I'll be on deck before it hits us, I fancy—hadn't gotten as far as Swatow yet, had it? Prob'ly up around Foochow or Amoy. Tuck in a good dinner an' plenty of coffee while you can. You sent a steward up with Jack's, of course? Aye!"

The mate's few words with Connyngsby passed unnoticed except by Miss Lee, who sat on his right, but when the stewards began putting the fiddles on the tables before they served anything more, there was prompt speculation and discussion. At the moment there was only the scarcely perceptible long swell they'd had ever since leaving port—but quite evidently there was something else coming, and they began questioning the officers who were then below with them.

"Rather stiff blow comin' down from the no'th-east—that's all. The more you eat before it gets here, the more you'll enjoy it."

Soresby and Billings, who were halfway down the Captain's table, went on chatting with the acquaintances they had made on either side of them as if the "fiddles" were merely everyday incidentals, and did much to quiet the apprehensions of the four more nervous passengers who had come aboard with them at Hongkong. Over at the mate's table, Marjorie Banton—who had chosen for herself the chair at his right, much to his satisfaction and that of the engineers at the other end—glanced at Coffin inquiringly. He nodded as he sipped some soup and sugared his second cup of coffee.

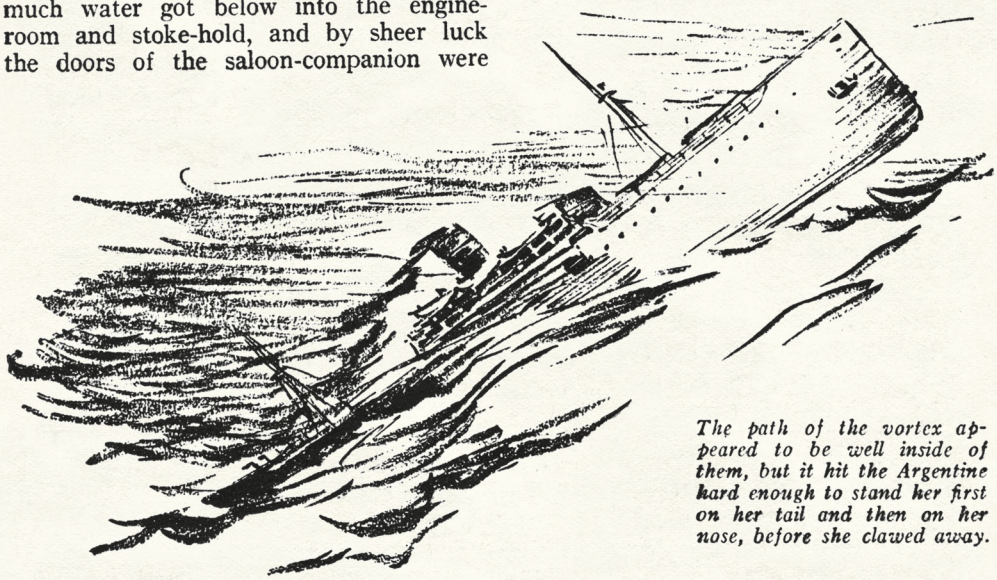
"You folks going to have any music below, this evening? It'll be too wet and lively for you on deck, I guess."

"Why—I suppose so. Might even dance a bit."

"No. That's more dangerous than passengers seem to understand when the boat's kicking around—too likely to have a lot of you hove clear across the saloon and piled up to leeward—broken limbs. Stick to the singing and piano-playing—but," he finished in a whisper, "get away from that piano the minute the wind hits us! It hasn't fetched loose yet—but you never can tell when it might, with all that weight."

Typhoons have frequently been described by abler writers than this one—by Conrad best of all. But they vary with each particular case and each individual ship in their effect—some boats being of the type built to ride out most anything, and others so clearly marked for Davy Jones that their survival is one of the ever-recurring miracles of sublime seamanship. A typhoon bearing down Formosa Strait in a southwesterly direction was like a pinwheel hurling everything by centrifugal force against the Chinese coast unless it happened to be far enough away from the vortex to fly off into the open sea between Japan and the Philippines. From the radio reports Fowler was getting, the path

of the vortex appeared to be well inside of them, wrecking the coast-towns as it passed—but it hit the *Argentine* hard enough to stand her first on her tail and then on her nose, though the gyro-compass prevented it from sending her around the clock before she clawed away. Thanks to the tarpaulins which Coffin had had lashed over the engine-room gratings, not much water got below into the engine-room and stoke-hold, and by sheer luck the doors of the saloon-companion were not smashed in—so that beyond what came through a couple of ports that were shattered with the impact, the saloon was dry enough to eat and sit in, next morning.



The path of the vortex appeared to be well inside of them, but it hit the Argentine hard enough to stand her first on her tail and then on her nose, before she clawed away.

Connyngsby told them frankly that the change of course undoubtedly had saved a good deal of smashing and discomfort—the forty-five miles gained in the hours before the typhoon struck them getting the boat to the outer edge, away from the vortex. But he said nothing about the hair-raising moments when he and Coffin had watched the sonic-sounder rise suddenly from a hundred fathoms to thirty-seven and then, as the racing engines shoved them bodily farther east, saw the little red flame indicate fifty—sixty—eighty—one hundred and twenty fathoms again—grinning at each other in weak relief. That graze of the Vereker Bank had been too near for much sense of humor in it. No matter how well a ship is steered or handled, a typhoon will make a plaything of her as far as navigating position goes, for a while—until she claws herself free.

During the evening, while the motion was terrific enough to banish any thought of sleep, Billings and Soresby had made up a bridge-game with two ladies who sat next them at dinner—their husbands preferring to look on. Neither of them had spoken to Miss Lee or Miss Banton since coming aboard—but both girls liked their looks, liked the quiet assuredness with which they took the typhoon as all in the day's activities of any steamer, making themselves and those around them as comfortable as possible. But after the game was over, Katharine happened to let go one of the steel pillars in the saloon a second too soon, slipped—and was pitching headfirst down to leeward when Billings quickly threw one arm around another pillar and caught her as she went by. She might not have been much hurt unless she had struck a sharp chair-back or table-edge, but she knew there had been more than even chances of it, and thanked him, pleasantly—after which they exchanged a few laughing remarks, and he went back to the group he had been talking with. Nor did he attempt to take advantage of the occurrence next morning. He spoke to her once or twice, but still kept with his earlier acquaintances on board. And this showed his better knowledge of women than hers of men. No woman likes the inference that she can't attract a man if she wants to.

MARJORIE BANTON had seen the occurrence of the night before and had been watching their meeting next morning, so was in a mind for discussion when Katharine remarked that for some reason Mr. Billings didn't seem to like her.

"Do you know, Kate, I'm just wondering if the man isn't trying to make you like him! I don't think he would strike anyone on board as being inexperienced either with men or women. If he and his friend are speculators, as some of the other passengers say, they certainly aren't pikers at it. I think either one of those men would back his judgment with a hundred thousand dollars—and just light a fresh cigar if he lost it. Two of the four who came aboard at Hongkong with them say that Mr. Billings keeps a deposit-account with the Hongkong & Shanghai amounting to a quarter of a million—that he may be worth two or three times that—makes occasional losses, but usually wins more than he loses."

"Then—if he really should be fishing for me, as you say, it couldn't be on account of my money—could it?"

"Well, he certainly wouldn't need it as badly as the more hungry type of fortune-hunters, but that's not saying he'd overlook what you have, entirely, either. He might think if he could do so well upon his more limited capital, he could do a great deal more with the two combined—which isn't altogether unlikely, at that. But we're talking nonsense, honey! I rather like the man—Mr. Soresby, too. Not so good-looking and he's middle-aged—but he seems to have a sense of humor and a lot of experience."

COFFIN had told the Captain, Dr. Thayer and McTavish, the chief, what he knew of Billings and Soresby and what he suspected, in order that the boat's official family might keep them pretty closely under observation—but he was apprehensive in spite of that and by no means satisfied with the information he had. After some consideration, he sent a long radio message to his friend Alfredo da Veronha, in Rio—and in eight hours received a detailed answer which confirmed his suspicions as far as Soresby was concerned, with some data on Billings also. But it was from the Cartersons that he finally got the information which gave him pretty good cards to play if matters came to a show-down. He had noticed that while Billings and his friend seemed increasingly popular with all the rest of the passengers, the Cartersons were merely courteous when there was any occasion for speaking to the pair—keeping away from them at other times. Presently, the mate asked Carterson if Billings had given him offense in any way.

"Not personally, old chap—he's far too much of a diplomat for that. But one can't quite stick the way he treated his wife, down Indo-China way. Some of his friends have made various excuses for him in my hearing—but they're the sort which don't go with English or Americans."

"Hmph! So he *has* a wife, then?"

"At least one—an' very much alive at lawst accounts. Chap of that sort might have others, I fancy—in diff'rent parts of the world. Not too scrupulous, d'ye see. He's fairly well liked along the China Coast—so one doesn't fancy spreadin' what might be considered slander against the fellow. Sort of thing one avoids if possible, you know."

"See here, Carterson! I've pretty strong reasons for suspecting that those two men are scheming to get hold of as much of Miss Lee's money as they can manage—perhaps do other things which might be even worse for her. If you know anything definite against them, hadn't you better loosen up?"

"Aye—that'll be quite sufficient reason, old chap, though I've seen nothing to indicate anything of that sort, up to this. Our house, as you know, is rather closely affiliated with Butterfield an' Swire—so our boats are in an' out of most Asiatic ports. When I came out here as a young chap, learning the shipping-trade, I put in several months at the Hanoi office. Billings was rather popular in sporting circles at the time—must have been twenty-eight or thirty, as he's a good bit older than he looks. He married a handsome young French widow who had over half a million francs of her own, an' no near relatives. Well, d'ye see, she was batty about him—let him reinvest her funds, trusted him entirely. An' the investm'nts went wrong, d'ye see—or so he explained to *her,* at all events. Cleaned her out of every piaster—it was supposed that he went broke himself.

"He had about fifty hectares of rice-paddy near a little town on the Yunnan railway, with a decent enough bungalow an' coolie-shacks on it. This he made over

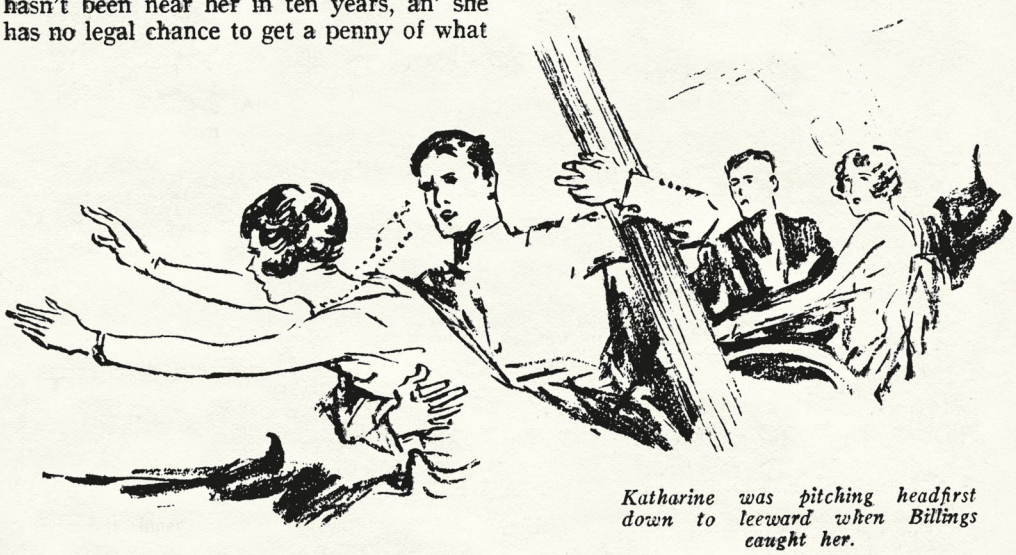
to her as the only possible reparation for her money which he'd lost. The poor little fool thought it quite noble of him, d'ye see—voluntarily gave him a quit-claim for everything he'd had of hers—an' then, bein' of good family, proud as the deuce, she retires from the world an' goes up to live on those rice-paddies until Billings pulled himself together again. Been there even since. Once he had that quit-claim in his pocket, he cleared out for good—hasn't been near her in ten years, an' she has no legal chance to get a penny of what he has now even if she had any idea how much it may be. She's just dropped out—livin' up there with a white housekeeper an' her coolies. Most of her friends have forgotten her—couldn't say whether she's alive or dead. But the padre who married 'em is still living, an' the marriage is on his parish records—easy enough to prove by a dozen witnesses in Hanoi."

"Say, Carterson—are you dead sure of this—positive Billings is the same man?"

"Oh—absolutely! I've known the fellow by sight a dozen years or more. There were pictures of the bridal pair in the illustrated supplement of *L'Avenir du Tonkin* of that date. Doubtless you could turn up that copy in the public libraries of Hongkong or Singapore if you cared to go back that far an' dig—but who'd ever think of doin' it in any discussion of Billings? A back-number of an old news-sheet in French! There aren't so many English who are int'rested in Indo-China as all that!"

"Hmph! I think I know of a dozen who are—and two or three Americans besides. H-m-m—two bells in the evening. Mr. Brock will be just about finishing dinner up at the Peak—if he's dining out, I'll catch him at the office in the morning. Come along up to the radio-cabin with me, will you, Carterson? I'd like to have you alongside to give me the data while I'm talking with him."

When they had later joined Fowler in his operating cabin and waited until he had finished relaying for a smaller boat with a little battery-installation, Coffin switched the antennæ on to the big five-kwt. transmission equipment with its ten water-cooled five-hundred-watt tubes and began speaking quietly into the microphone: "Brock—Hongkong. Brock—Hongkong. Brock—Hongkong"—on eighteen hundred meters.



Katharine was pitching headfirst down to leeward when Billings caught her.

Fortunately, Eversley Brock and his wife were dining at home that evening, and had just finished their meal when they were called into the library by the phone bell. Both were much surprised at the information Carterson had volunteered—and Brock said he would have inquiries made at once in the little town of A-Mi-Tcheou on the Yunnan railway, northwest of Hanoi, while his wife looked up the old copy of *L'Avenir du Tonkin* in the public library. By the next afternoon, a full report came through the air to Coffin—corroborating what Carterson had said in every particular; and they both commented upon the

infinitesimal chance of his happening to be on the boat at the time when the information he had could be effectively used against Billings. The coincidence was almost one in a million—one that Soresby couldn't possibly have foreseen, any more than Coffin's being sufficiently friendly with the Da Veronhas in Rio to make the inquiries he had, or definitely remembering his face from that few brief moments in the opera-box.

IN spite of all these different factors, however, they probably would have gotten away with their plan had Coffin been like the average person who hates to mix in a woman's personal affairs after going out of his way to drop a hint that she may be victimized. Most of us would give the hint even at the risk of the lady's afterward cutting the acquaintance if she considered the information nothing but slander—but after getting nothing but the blaze of natural anger for our pains, we'd have dropped the matter and let her go her own way. The strategic conditions were all in Billings' favor. When a girl has learned to be suspicious of all the men she meets as possible fortune-hunters, she is in just the mood to fall for any attractive man who has given proof that he isn't one of that sort—whether she loves him at first or not.

In his anxiety to shield her from whatever the schemers might be intending, and acting upon a hint from Marjorie, Coffin began spending more time with the girl—preventing as much as possible her being in Billings' company. This of course pleased Katharine immensely—but she soon noticed that if she happened to be chatting with Billings, the mate became silent and let the other man do all the talking. One day she asked the reason.

"Ned—why do you shut up like a clam whenever Mr. Billings is around? You can be one of the most entertaining men I ever met when you feel like it—and Mr. Billings certainly can also. But when he's around you act as if you had a grouch, let him get away with all the talking! What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"Frankly, Kathie, I'm a good deal like a cat—feel things instinctively. In spite of Billings' popularity on board, his good looks, education and attractive manner, I've got a hunch that he's bad medicine, somehow, and it worries me to see you falling for him at all!"

"Why should it? You don't care anything about me—really don't give a hang what I do when it comes right down to facts. Of course you're a mighty good friend for any woman to have—I've proof enough of that, and I know if I were in serious danger you'd come running without a second's delay. But good boy-and-girl friendship is all it amounts to, isn't it? You don't really care any more than that?"

"Just at present—with five or six more years of seafaring ahead of me—that's all I dare care about any woman, Kathie. And you don't care any more than that for me, either."

"How do you know I don't?"

"Well—that's my impression, anyhow. And until I can settle down ashore, it's the only reasonable basis our friendship can go on."

"Suppose I say I'm willing to wait—and see how it looks, then?"

"Suppose, meanwhile, you come across some chap that you fall in love with—*squash?* Let's call it friendship for the present—and just drift. Then there are no regrets or entanglements no matter what turns up. Eh?"

"I—I guess you're the best friend I've got, Neddie—and you're a dear. But you certainly don't love me!"

HAD Billings tried to rush the girl she would have instantly drawn a sharper contrast between him and Coffin—and some of the yellow would have shown. But his betrayal of slowly awakening interest was one of the most artistic bits of work Marjorie Banton ever had seen. She called the mate's attention to it—saying that she herself was a little in doubt as to whether it was really art or not. And Katharine was by now in just the receptive condition to have it sweep her off her feet. Being fairly certain that she never would get Coffin, voluntarily, she was also at just the age where she wanted to be loved by some attractive man who had little or no interest in her money—and Billings seemed exactly to fill the bill. Before he became openly enough interested in her for the other passengers to comment upon it, she had reached a point where she would have given him all the kisses he tried to get—if nobody was looking. And about this time, Coffin began to fear he had let matters go too far. Both he and Marjorie warned the girl that she was heading for trouble if she let herself get too much in-

terested in the man—and were asked what business it was of theirs. She was more than twenty-one, practically alone in the world, had nobody to please or consult but herself. So—well, where did they come into it, anyhow? That position is rather unassailable when you come to look at it all round. When Coffin, Thayer and Miss Banton went up to Captain Connyngsby with the proposition, his hands went out in a helpless gesture.

"My word! She's infatuated—balmy! She'll not believe a single word we say, you know! What's to be done in a case like that? We can't put her in the brig for caring about a chap like Billings—nor put *him* in irons for caring about *her!*"

Coffin was grinning—as he did when he was thoroughly angry.

"In the circumstances, sir—I think we *can!* I've been hoping this mess might be cleared up without having to show the girl what a perfect fool she's making of herself. It'll be something she'll hate to think about for the rest of her life—possibly make her hate the lot of us, which we'd all be mighty sorry to have happen. But the matter has gone dangerously far already—and we've got to stop it at any cost! I haven't told the rest of you all that Carterson, Jack Fowler and I have dug up—or what I've managed to get from Rio. But it's plenty—and I don't see any way out of using it. So I suggest, sir, that you send one of the quartermasters for Billings and the lady—have 'em up here in your cabin—tell 'em it's something concerning radio-advices received from Hongkong, and if either of 'em refuses to come, let the man say it's Captain's orders—no refusal considered. We'll need Soresby also—just to see the reactions on both men when I get through talking."

"I say, Ned—hadn't we best drop the whole matter? We've no authority over Miss Lee, you know!"

"Do you want Philip Fernshaw of Lloyd's to feel that we stood by and let his niece be robbed of her fortune—abused, humiliated—without doing everything we could to stop it? I think we'd all rather avoid that—wouldn't we?"

THIS was something Connyngsby hadn't considered—and it also reminded him that the Brocks, his owners, were going to be very much displeased if anything happened to the girl. So he sent for the three as suggested—rather wishing that his mate had had no suspicion of anything wrong. It was just one of those situations where even the Master of a ship feels that he may be interfering in a personal matter which doesn't concern him. So when Miss Lee and the two men appeared—all with some atmosphere of protest—the Captain was at his genial best, passing cigars to the men and a glass of port to the girl.

"Sorry to bother you for a few minutes, but Mr. Coffin has been getting some radiograms which he thought you should hear—or read, if you care to. Er—possibly he'd best explain in his own way, if you'll permit—an' listen closely. What?" He nodded to the mate, who had no suggestion of a smile on the face he casually turned to them—but spoke with a most disarming courtesy.

"Miss Lee, do you recall my leaving you with Mr. Pennington a few moments, one night at the opera, in Rio—and going around for a brief chat with friends in one of the boxes?"

"Why—yes—perfectly! We thought two of the ladies were lovely."

"Do you remember the guest in their box who got up and moved his chair aside when I came in?"

"I remember seeing a man do that, but didn't look at him closely."

"That was Mr. Soresby—whom my friends, Senhor da Veronha and his family, have known off and on for several years. One of these radiograms is from them. They say he asked a number of questions concerning Mr. Harry Lee's fortune—the probable size of it, the niece who inherited, whether she was of full age or had a guardian. He seemed unusually interested in the case—wanted a lot of the minor details. Made a number of inquiries concerning the Brock liners—the ports they usually made on each round voyage. Then he went down among the shipping-houses looking for some boat leaving for Hongkong direct by way of the Magellan Straits. Found one—sent three or four cables to a man in Manila by the name of Billings, whom they remember as having been associated with Soresby in running a few shiploads of slaves between West Africa and Brazil—very profitably. Of course the Brazilians don't look at slave-running as we do because they need cheap labor too badly—but it's one of the worst violations of maritime law—severely punishable if proved against anybody."

"What's your object in going into all

this, Mr. Coffin? I must say I don't like the inference and think it very unfair of you to put it in the light you seem to be doing!"

"I've only given you the prologue, so far —but it all fits together perfectly. Now we come to Mr. Billings—who came up from Manila for the sole purpose of meeting Mr. Soresby and sailing with him on whatever steamer you happened to pick out from Hongkong. Copies of Soresby's cables to him prove that. (Fortunately Da Veronha is pretty solid with the Government officials in Rio and was able to obtain them.)

"Mr. Carterson was at the Hanoi agency of his shipping house twelve years ago when Mr. Billings married a young French widow, Celeste Léjaune DeVoudrai. He saw Billings frequently—has seen him since in various ports. Remembers distinctly all the circumstances of Billings' investing his wife's entire fortune of half a million francs in projects which afterward went to smash—as he told her. He deeded over to her a small rice-paddy property in Yunnan where she has been living ever since —and then deserted her. She has never seen nor heard from him since the second year of their marriage.

"She's too proud to ask for a divorce if she could—and he knows better than to attempt anything of the sort. Believing him honest and in love with her, she gave him a quit-claim for all the money he'd had from her in exchange for those little rice-paddies—so she'd have legal difficulty in getting back any of the thousands he is now supposed to have. Mrs. Billings never sees any of her old friends —is ashamed to, as a ruined and deserted wife. But some of them, at Mr. Brock's instigation, have turned up pretty good evidence that he never lost her money at all —except a quarter or third of it over the gambling-tables. He still has the bulk of it, or enough from later speculations to more than cover it. And she is just about ready to let the courts decide whether he will or not.

"Now, Mr. Billings—any comments, or suggestions?"

The man had lost most of his color—but not his nerve.

"Merely that it happens to be a most unfortunate case of mistaken identity—that's all! I never have been married, and of course never had any money transactions with a nonexistent bride."

"Are you willing to face this Mrs. Billings in one of the French courts at Hanoi —and make those statements? Don't forget the picture of the bridal couple published in the illustrated supplement of *L'Avenir du Tonkin*—which Mr. Brock and his wife saw in the Hongkong library a few days ago—or Mr. Carterson's positive affidavit as to your identity. If I say so, extradition papers will be made out in Hanoi tomorrow on a charge of embezzlement—and possible bigamy, if you happen to have married again."

"Deuce take it, Coffin—what's your object in all this? What do you want?"

"Well—I think we all want to drop this matter right here and forget it. None of us in this cabin want it to get about among the other passengers and have them spread the gossip when they get ashore. It's up to you and Soresby. Just get one thing straight—both of you—and don't make any mistake about my being in deadly earnest. If ever I hear even a rumor that you have handled one penny of Miss Lee's money, compromised her in the slightest way, or worked upon her feelings until she's half inclined to whitewash you—I'll give the whole story to the newspapers—have the papers gotten out against you in Hanoi —and evidence of slave-running, obtained in Rio and Pernambuco, will be turned over to the British Admiralty courts.

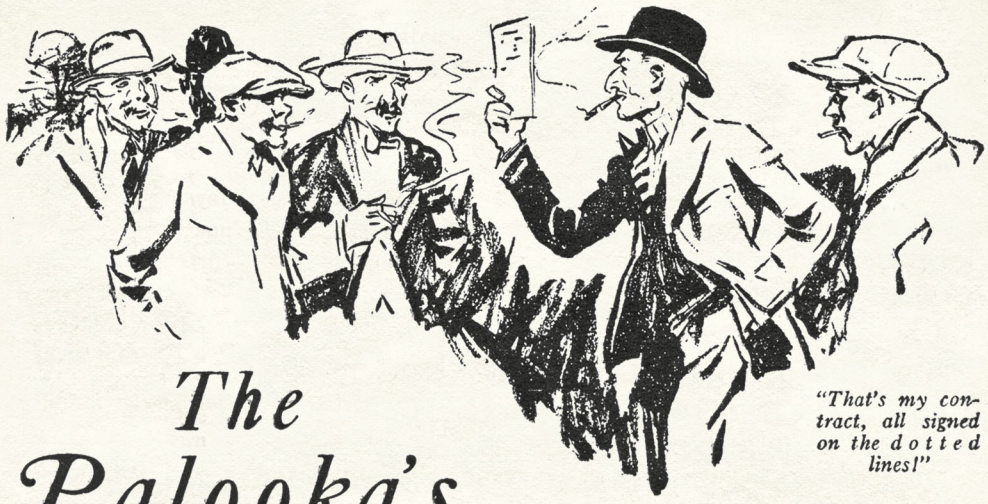
"If anything happens to me, the Brocks will see that it's done—they say that's a promise. Now—do we understand each other—or not?

"Miss Lee, I'm sorry we had to butt into your personal affairs, but your uncle is a friend whom all of us would very much regret losing—and our owners always have made a point of protecting their passengers, although the bulk of their trade is cargo."

AFTER a moment of embarrassing silence, Katharine Lee proved to have considerably more character than they had given her credit for. Looking frankly into the surrounding faces, she said:

"It is I who owe you the apology! I should have a lot more sense than I seem to have had. Mr. Billings—I don't see that it will be necessary to carry the acquaintance much farther than this!"

When all the others had left, Connyngsby opened a bottle of champagne and made Coffin sit down while he and Dr. Thayer silently drank to his health.



"That's my contract, all signed on the dotted lines!"

The Palooka's Punch

By
RAY C. PEARSON

Here we have a lively story of the box-fighting game—of a plot, a romance and a great battle. Do not fail to enjoy this one.

Illustrated by
William Molt

THE breaks of the game had gone against Benny McHugh. Any other manager of fistic talent would have risen in wrath and called on Buddha, Most Powerful, to bring on hellfires, slowly to sear and burn and torture the double-crossers and ingrates. But vengeance was not in McHugh's heart. He had been tricked—of that he was well aware; but he had been tricked before, and the resolution, made when he entered pugilism as a manager of boxers, to play the game square, had not weakened. He had determined that he would travel the straight and narrow to success or failure, wherever it might lead.

There was a way out, the easy way, McHugh knew. He might throw up the sponge and leave the racket flat. But that would show a saffron streak coursing down his broad back. And no McHugh was a quitter. He remembered the mighty John L. Sullivan had once said that a game fellow never squeals in the pinch. And now he was in a pinch. He thought there must be in the McHughs some of the same blood that raced through the veins of John L. He was determined to carry on; he wouldn't squeal.

Now, as he sat disconsolate and alone in his little office in the Tower Building, pondering grimly the turn that had brought this latest reverse, the gang at the Colonial gymnasium was crowding about Steve Malone, buzzing their congratulations because of his acquisition of Mike Crane, lightweight battler.

"You've got the coming champ now," affirmed Joey Creel, a rival manager. "You surely pulled a cute one when you stole Mike from McHugh. Crane's ready to go up the line right now and cop the title. There aint nobody in his way that can't be pushed over when Mike starts chin-popping with his sou'paw mitt. Aint you the slick bird? You'd crack the safe in a pen! Now listen for the squawk from McHugh. He must be playing mad-dog. Well, he had a gold mine and didn't know how to pan out, so he should get out of the picture."

MALONE was slick. He admitted it. Always nattily attired in the latest modes, he boasted of his twenty suits of clothes and many gorgeous silk shirts. His head was small and his face thin; his nose was aquiline and sagging sharply to an accentuated point, conveyed the impression of inquisitiveness. The lips were thin, and when he smiled there was created about

his mouth a smirk that indicated cruelty. But it was Malone's eyes that were the tip-off. Set close, too close to the bridge of his nose, two gray orbs, too small to be in keeping with his other features, peered out of a pallid background with piercing directness.

Right or wrong, by fair means or foul, Malone must win. It was the inexorable nature of the man. He was cold and heartless and found pride in it. He listened with polite attention as Creel spoke; then a smile parted his thin lips, and the beady eyes stared piercingly as if to question the sincerity of his praise. As Creel finished, feeling it his turn to say something, he turned and faced the gang.

"Take a good squint at the manager of the next lightweight champion of the world," he gloated, as he reached into an inside pocket of his coat. The movement produced an envelope which he waved gleefully before the eyes of his listeners.

"That's my contract, all signed on the dotted lines. I'm going to manage Mike Crane for the next three years; and unless I boot the guess, Mike will be the world's champ when the summer rolls around!"

In some lines of sporting endeavor there are those who do not hesitate to violate the ethics which demand fair dealing. The line that separates fair play and the practices which fall under suspicion—even downright crookedness—is thin, so thin that it is easily crossed. Men of conscience, true sportsmen, know where that imaginary line is drawn, and they do not cross it. But there are others who do not recognize the invisible barrier; they are out to win—victory and the spoils alone lure them on. The idol they worship is success.

Malone had achieved a modicum of success with his stable of three battlers, but in the eyes of honest men his reputation had suffered. Suspicious eyes trailed him wherever he moved; his every act must be analyzed by those fighting-wise persons who are ever alert. Always Steve was striving, by hook or crook, to reach the prize plum of pugilism—to manage a world's champion. Now with Mike Crane under his wing his path appeared strewn with roses.

"One champ and three pretty fair meal-tickets," mused Malone. "That makes a sweet stable!"

His thoughts rambled. "Zowie, what a sock that boy unpacks! I'm going to ballyhoo him into a match with the champion, Franky Morgan. I'll get Gilsen, his manager, all steamed up to the possibilities of a box-office clean-up, and of course he dopes it that Morgan will knock my boy's dome into the Atlantic Ocean, so it wont be hard to hook up the match. I'll be the biggest manager in the racket when the summer rolls around!"

If there was in Crane's fistic make-up anything to be desired, Malone was the one to discover it.

"He's dumb," the manager admitted. "Of course that can't be cured, but I wish Mike wasn't so soft. He gets all wet when the orchestra at the movies plays the soft strains of 'Mother's Old and Gray.' He thinks the old lady's sons should cough up some of the swag they make bootlegging and buy her a Rolls-Royce. He'd sock the naughty boys on the chin if he wasn't so sorry for the old gal.

"McHugh's slipped him a lot of bunk about not unnecessarily hurting his opponents, and when he musses up one of these mugs in the ring, he gets sad. Well, I guess I can remedy that. I'll get my welterweight Iron-face McCarthy to slap him around a bit and plant some viciousness in his thick skull!"

Malone did not know then, but he learned very shortly, that he had another problem to solve. One night he was dining in a restaurant when Mike Crane, a girl clinging to his arm, took a table on the other side of the room.

"He's gone girl-crazy too," thought Malone.

The next day when Mike appeared at the gym, Steve led him to one side.

"So you've fallen for the broads," he sneered. "Who's that jane I saw you feeding last night?"

"That's my baby," answered Crane. "Aint she the swell mamma? We're going to splice up when I win the title. I got her promise."

"Like hell you are!" Malone almost shouted, as he turned on his heel. "You leave the women alone!"

WHEN the news on the sporting pages proclaimed to the world that Mike Crane, contender for the lightweight championship, had severed managerial relations with Benny McHugh and had signed up with Steve Malone, it created much comment. The scribes had not scratched beneath the surface in rounding up the

material for their stories; therefore they neglected to reveal the underlying cause responsible for the change in managers. They simply explained that Crane had secured a new pilot, because he believed he'd have a better chance to get a shot at the title under Malone's wing.

Malone himself was the author of this report. He told the newspaper boys just that much, then turned loose a flood of conversation about what a really great fighter Crane was, and how he would cop the championship just as soon as a meeting with the titleholder could be arranged. He had started the ballyhoo.

As for McHugh, he had little to say to the writers. The reporters didn't trouble to call at his office. Instead they used Malone's phone to query him.

"What'll we say for you?" Kelly of the *Blade* asked.

"Just say for me that I hope Mike hooks the title. Of course I'm sorry I've lost him, but it's all in the game," answered McHugh, and hung up the receiver.

That much information was public property. The readers did not know that Malone, self-satisfied and jubilant over what he termed a clever *coup,* strutted about the lobbies of the big hotels that night accepting congratulations from those who blindly trail the successful.

And there was the contrast. In one of those old mansions on the near North Side, long since converted into a rooming-house, Benny McHugh hung his hat and coat on a hook in the closet, wearily flopped into a rickety rocker, alone and discouraged. His thoughts were on the disaster of the day, the break that had well-nigh wrecked his small boxing stable.

"Almost shot?" Aloud the words issued from his lips. Questioning words, those! He was surprised by the sound of his voice. "Almost shot," this time he repeated to himself. "Hell's fire—Crane's gone, and there's only the high-school kid left in my stable. The Kid's a palooka. All he can do is polish platters at my expense. You got to have 'em dumb and tough to get anywhere in this racket. The only punch the Kid has is the one he lands on my meal-ticket."

Surely the future held little hope for McHugh. Twenty-five percent of Crane's earnings had kept the office going nicely. Now that wouldn't be coming in. And what about Monee?

Monee Randall was his stenographer. She was the best typist McHugh ever had had. He always said that he would never let her go; but now things had happened and something had to be done. He wondered what she would say when she learned that Crane had deserted the stable. He knew that Monee liked Crane. They often had dined together, and in the office he had noted that they talked freely and understandingly. Maybe that would make some difference, he thought, but how that difference could help him he could not guess.

"I'll have to spread the bad news in the morning," he reflected. "I'll have to do without a stenographer now. Maybe Dick Sprague can find a job for her in his office!"

His last thought before he tumbled into bed for a troubled sleep was that he would seek a new position for her before dismissing her.

IF the papers failed to reveal the details of the sordid transaction which brought Crane into the clutches of Steve Malone, the beady-eyed manager supplied the information for the gang at the gym. It was the principal topic of conversation for many days, and it provided many a good laugh for those of Malone's followers who crowded eagerly around him to listen to the story of how he had stolen the title aspirant away from "big-hearted Benny," as Malone facetiously dubbed him.

Malone was a shrewd judge of boxers. There was no question about that. For a year he had been carefully watching Crane, always noting improvement which, barring mishap, seemed certain to carry the boy to the top in the lightweight ranks. He knew that any boy who packed a one-punch kayo and was fairly clever, as was Mike, could not be denied. He had seen Mike topple the tough Frisco Lane with one sock of his left hand. And when Crane hooked up with the phantom Cal Forker, there was another kayo, this time in the third round, when Mike's left crashed on Cal's jaw with murderous force.

So Malone, ever alert, always was a ringsider when Crane engaged in battle. He was not wasting time when he neglected the affairs of his own battlers to journey to distant cities to watch Mike perform. These jaunts he turned to profit by laying a bet on Crane. When Mike knocked out Lane, that sudden victory put one thousand smackers in his pocket. His bank-account

was fattened another grand when Crane flattened Forker.

But always the cunning Malone was planning and scheming and waiting—waiting for the time when some turn of Fortune's wheel would enable him to steal the management of this boy who seemed destined to wear a champion's crown at a not far distant day. Once he had sought to take Crane away from McHugh in a transaction which bore some semblance of honor. He thought that the lure of gold might tempt Benny, and had dangled five grand in front of his eyes. But Benny quickly countered: "I'm not selling Crane to anyone," and then added: "You see, Malone, I don't buy or sell humans."

Malone laughed it off. "All right," he replied. "Once a sap, always a sap. You'll be sorry one of these days when Crane gets knocked for a row of sad dreams!"

Crane's next match was in an Omaha ring. His opponent was Tommy Curran, a local product. Curran was not a top-notcher; possessed of little science, he had risen to favor because he was rugged and aggressive. No one, not even his home-town admirers, conceded him a chance to win. Accordingly Crane was an established favorite at odds of two to one. Malone, as usual, occupied a ringside seat. So certain was he that he could predict the result of the bout that he laid two thousand to half that much that Crane would score a knockout, and an Omaha gambler quickly snapped up the short end.

But Crane did not kayo Curran. At the end of ten rounds, the limit, the referee raised the hands of both boys, indicating that he had declared it a draw. Mike, a smile on his face, climbed through the ropes and dashed to his dressing-room. Curran remained in the ring a few minutes to receive the congratulations of his friends.

MALONE, furious with rage, saw the stakeholders hand his money to the gambler. It was not the loss of the money that angered him; it was the way Mike had fought. Not once had Crane shot his famous left to Curran's whiskers. Mike had not tried to kayo Tommy.

"So that mug's turned crooked," Malone mumbled to himself. "He could have rocked Curran to sleep in a round. All he had to do was slap over his left, and the referee could display some intelligence by counting up to ten. Well, he can't cross me that way without a show-up!"

In a moment Malone was racing to Crane's dressing-room. He entered without the formality of knocking, and found Mike donning his street-clothes. McHugh was in the box-office checking over the receipts with the promoter and a boxing commissioner.

Facing Crane, Malone turned loose in wrath.

"Well, what's the big idea letting that palooka hang around for ten rounds? You carried him and burned up two grand for me. You've crossed me out of my dough. Now what you got to say? Come clean with it."

Crane, not too courageous at any time, turned white as the smirking Malone talked, his small gleaming eyes resembling two narrow slits in a blanket. He feared Steve.

"Well," he stammered as his slow-thinking brain began to function, "well, it was this way. I knew Curran wasn't right when we started boxing in the first round. I couldn't make him. He acted like a mug who didn't know what he was doing and didn't care. So when we slipped into a clinch on the ropes, I whispers into his shell that I'm going to slip over the kayo in the next round. But that news didn't get a rise out of him. He just whispers right back that he'd be glad if I did it at once.

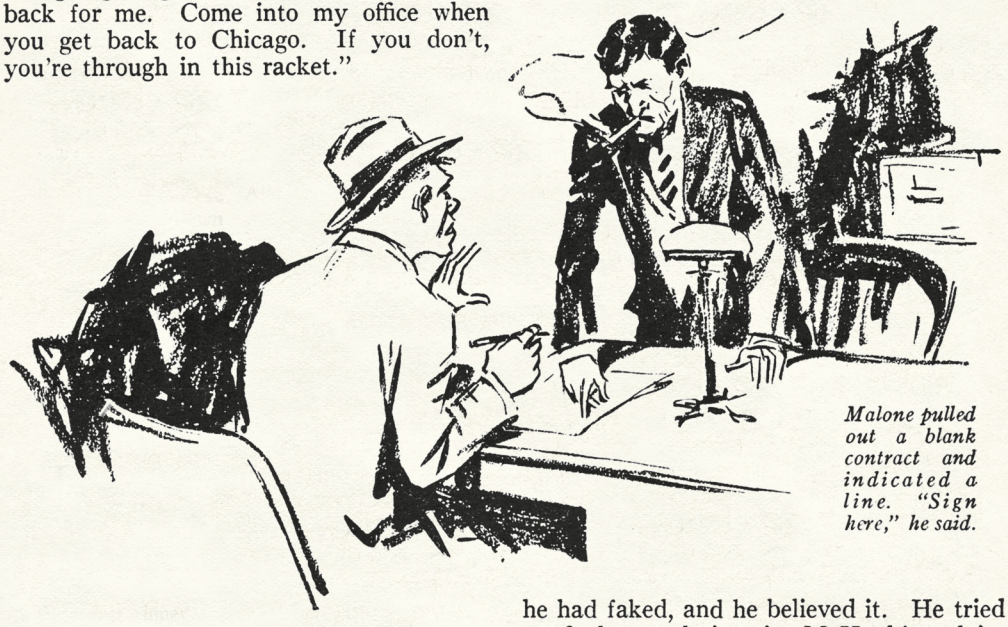
"I thought it a funny way for a fellow to feel after hearing that he was going to be popped out, so the next time we get hooked up in a clinch, I asked him why he was in such a hurry to get knocked out. And he tells me that his old man got knocked over by a wild auto that day and was hurt bad, and that he might be needed at home. I felt sorry for the mug, and I thought he might hurt his nut on the floor when I socked him, so as I didn't want his family to have any more trouble, I let him go along. I'm sorry you lost your coconuts, Steve."

Malone knew that Crane wasn't crooked. He often remarked that Mike didn't have enough brains to turn a trick. He was just soft and dumb. And as Mike talked, Malone's wily brain was grinding rapidly. An idea came to him, the creature of a mind such as only Steve possessed.

WHEN Crane had finished, Malone, anger unabated, lashed into him.

"So it wasn't a shootin' match, eh? You've turned crook. You carried Curran when you could have slapped him down

with a punch, and you admit it? The Marquis of Queensberry rules say that when a fighter doesn't do his best, he's a faker. You're a faker. You'd better not tell anybody anything about it, or you'll get barred out of every ring in the country. You laid me out for two grand, and I'm going to get it back, and you'll get it back for me. Come into my office when you get back to Chicago. If you don't, you're through in this racket."



Malone pulled out a blank contract and indicated a line. "Sign here," he said.

Malone turned on his heel and was gone. He hurried to the depot and hopped aboard the midnight train for Chicago. He believed he had turned an unpleasant situation into one of great promise. It was tough to drop two thousand. That stung. But now he was determined on action which he believed would bring Crane under his managerial wing.

"I've got that socking fool where I want him," he thought. "I've got him scared goofy, and it wont be hard to get him away from McHugh. He'll climb on my bandwagon and listen to the music before long. Of course, Mike wasn't trying to cheat when he didn't explode the dynamite on Curran's chin. I'll show him that sympathy don't go in this racket. But I've got him thinking he faked, so that answers the purpose just as well. When he comes to my office, I'll tell him that if he doesn't bust his contract with McHugh, I'll brand him so all the world will know he's a cheater. He's dumb enough to fall for that line of chatter."

Crane lost no time in leaving his dressing-room after Malone departed. As he walked the four blocks to his hotel, his thoughts raced. He realized that he had made a mistake in admitting to Steve that he hadn't tried to stop Curran. He knew now that he should have kept that to himself. And in his jumbled brain there was confusion. Steve had convinced him that he had faked, and he believed it. He tried to find consolation in McHugh's advice which he always received before entering the ring—not to hurt his opponent unnecessarily, but that was futile. Malone had hammered it into his brain that he was a cheater, and Steve had lost his money—

It was half an hour after Mike reached his room before McHugh appeared. Benny's countenance pictured disgust.

You're a fine bimbo to think of winning a championship," he opened up. "Who paid you to hold up the palooka?"

"Well, I guess I made a mistake, Benny," Mike answered. "The kid's old man got hurt by an auto, and he was so worried he could hardly fight. I was sorry for him and didn't try to hand him the kayo. I hope you aint sore about it."

McHugh's face lit up in a smile. It wasn't a happy smile, and there was derision in his words.

"Well, Curran put it over on you pretty," he almost shouted. "Every time he fights and thinks he'll get slapped down, he pulls that same gag about the old man getting pushed over by a Rolls-Royce. Why, his old man never got close enough to a Rolls to know how many

wheels are on it. Why didn't you weep when he spilled the hot one, so I'd get wise to what was going on?"

MIKE did not tell his manager of Malone's visit to the dressing-room, and two days later when he stepped out of McHugh's office in Chicago, he did not inform Benny that he was going to call on Malone in the National Building. Timidly he stepped up to Malone's desk.

"What you want?" he asked in a voice which, strong at first, drifted off to almost a whisper.

Steve smiled and arose. "Come into my private office," he said as he led the way, closing the door after them.

"Now, we're going to talk business," he resumed. "This fellow McHugh has you anchored. He gets you nothing but small-time matches, when you should be out there grabbing at the title. You've got to get away from him. You can cop the championship under my management. When does your contract expire?"

"I think I'll go along with Benny," answered Mike. "He's always shot square with me." Crane was looking out of the window. He did not care to look Malone in the eye.

Malone was silent for a moment before speaking again.

"No, I don't think you will." Steve's words were threatening. "I've got you where I want you, you know. You crack your contract with McHugh and sign up with me, or I'll expose that crooked stuff you pulled out in Omaha."

Crane weakened. Steve had pictured disaster for him. He would be branded as a cheater and run out of the game, if he did not bend to Malone's will. He feared the man. On the other hand he saw Benny McHugh, whom he admitted was responsible for all the success he had achieved in pugilism. He did not fear McHugh, but he respected him. But he must make a decision, and fear caused him to choose what he believed would bring the least unpleasant consequences. His one-way mind was taxed to the utmost in this desperate situation when Malone spoke again, this time in a hard, rasping voice.

"Well, snap out of it, Kid. You fight for me or quit the game. When does your contract with McHugh expire?"

"McHugh and I never had a contract," Mike mumbled. Surely Dame Fortune was smiling on the conniving Malone.

"How come you had no contract?"

"Well, it was this way. When I started fighting, we talked about a contract, but Benny said it was not necessary to sign any papers. He said that if anything came up to jazz the works, we'd talk it over and decide whether we'd continue the partnership, or part company. He said he'd accept my word and I could accept his. So that's the way we went along, and we never had no arguments."

It was impossible for Malone to conceal his joy. He leaped to his feet and grabbed Mike's hand.

"That's fine," he shouted. "Couldn't be sweeter! You had no contract with McHugh, so all you'll need to do is sign up with me. There wont be any danger of a legal scrap. No come-back to this deal at all. I'll make you the lightweight champ of the world. Shake, old kid."

Then he reached in a drawer and pulled out a blank contract. This he placed before Crane, handed him a fountain pen and with finger indicated a line.

"Sign here," he said, patting Mike on the back.

Crane signed. He did not know, then, that for the next three years he had signed away fifty per cent of his ring earnings.

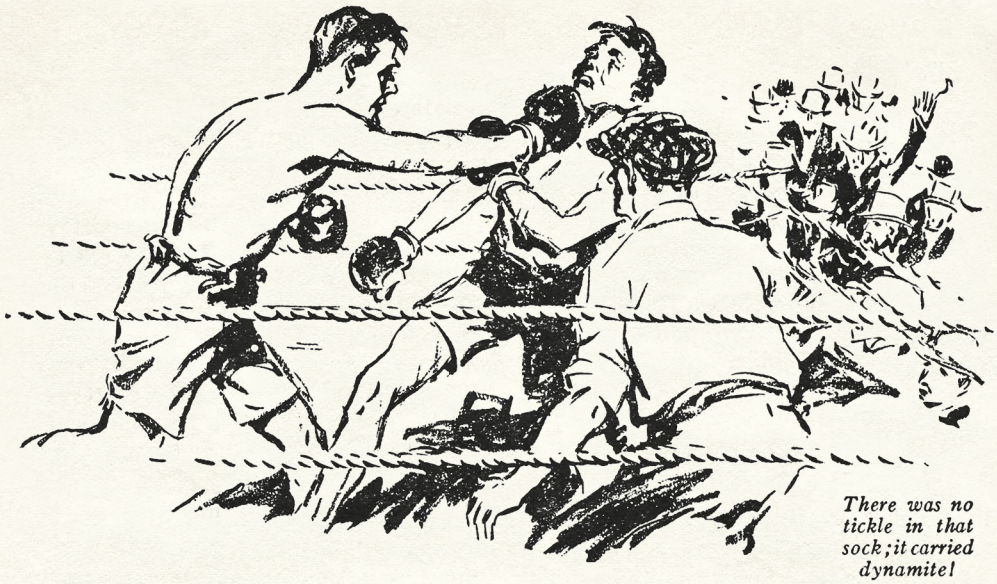
BENNY McHUGH arrived at his office earlier than usual. Through the hushed hours of the night he had slept little. Thoughts of the shabby work of Malone and the ingratitude of Crane had raced through his brain. Dark clouds were hovering over him. The future seemed hopeless.

When Miss Randall appeared at the usual hour, she was unaware of the event that had cast the shadow of gloom over the little office, but she sensed that something was wrong when McHugh's morning greeting, she thought, seemed less friendly than usual.

McHugh managed to keep busily occupied for a time, but he accomplished little of importance. The silence was ominous, and Monee's nerves began to tingle. She rose and walked to Benny's desk.

"Any dictation this morning?" she asked, and smiled as the manager elevated his head to face her.

Then McHugh told her. Monee listened intently as Benny explained that Crane had turned deserter. As he talked, his eyes were riveted on Monee's features. Anxiously he sought to find some expression there



There was no tickle in that sock; it carried dynamite!

that would reveal the inner feelings of the girl. He wondered if she would resent Crane's action, or if she cared enough for him to condone his ungratefulness. When he finished, she laughed,—a strange little laugh, McHugh thought,—turned and walked back to her desk.

"Buck up, Mr. McHugh," she called across the office. "We're not licked yet. Little Monee has an idea in her bean that Mike Crane is going to be sorry."

McHugh found little assurance in Monee's admonition. He thought the situation too serious to warrant optimism. He tried to find consolation in what Miss Randall had always said when he was confronted by serious problems. She had drummed it into him that there always was a way out if one used brains. Yes, he had got out of those other difficulties, he was willing to admit, but this break was the toughest of his career, and he confessed to himself that he was incapable of thinking himself out. She had helped him before, but he could not conceive how she could be of any assistance to him now. He did not know that back in the inner recesses of Monee's bobbed head every brain-cell was working at breakneck speed.

It was late in the afternoon when Sammy Carroll, the high-school kid, tangoed into the office to learn if McHugh had made any progress in arranging matches for him. It was the same old story.

"They don't want a palooka who can't punch," McHugh told him. "You can't hit hard enough to jar the powder off a girl's nose."

Just turned twenty-one, clean, intelligent and beaming with the ambition of youth, the high-school kid was not hard to look upon. He didn't have the cauliflower ears caused by the devastating punches of rivals. His cleverness had enabled him to escape the bruises and marks which make it easy to distinguish a pugilist. The gang at the gym called him the Sheik. He accepted their gibes pleasantly, and when they called him a looking-glass fighter or the punchless wonder, he simply smiled.

But leather-pushers of Carroll's type seldom rate high in the pugilistic racket. It is the boys who unpack the wallop who are in demand. And Mike Crane was a punching fool.

Two days later, when Carroll stepped into McHugh's office, he found the manager alone. "Where's Monee?" he asked.

"Monee's left," answered McHugh. "I couldn't keep her. With only a palooka in my stable there wasn't enough work to keep her busy, so I had to let her go."

For the first time Benny saw the smile disappear from Carroll's face, and in its place there came a scowl.

"Palooka, eh! Well, this here palooka is going to forget his Charleston stuff, and somebody's going to get busted."

Benny did not tell Sammy that he had found a position for Monee in Dick Sprague's office.

WHEN the summer rolled around again, Steve Malone had ballyhooed Mike Crane so strenuously that nothing could keep him out of a match for the championship. The newspapers said that Franky Morgan must fight Crane or retire. Then

came news which startled the sporting world. Morgan, heeding the tearful pleas of his mother, had tossed away the boxing-gloves and announced that he would never fight again. In the announcement of his retirement Morgan designated Mike Crane as the boy most likely to become his successor. He urged that Crane box his most formidable rival, the result to determine the new champion.

Malone, jubilant over this sudden turn in events, hopped on a train and sped to New York to close the match which he was certain would make Crane the lightweight champion. He found Promoter Tex Chandler awaiting him, and they quickly went into conference in his office. Chandler produced a list of prospective opponents.

"Kelly looks the best of the bunch," said the promoter. "He's tough, too, but he wants the earth for fighting. Cline, Bell and Carroll are good crowd-pleasers, but you're liable to tip 'em over too quick. Carroll is a clever bird and would make a great scrap if he could punch. Who'd you pick?"

Malone, shrewd and cunning and always with an ace under his cuff, parried the question for a few seconds.

"I think you'd better throw Carroll into the ring with Mike for a starter. He's clever, and the mob likes that kind of stuff. Then, after Crane polishes off the high-school kid, he'll take on any of these other mugs."

"That's O. K. with me, if I can sign up Carroll," agreed Chandler.

Malone departed, and the promoter rushed a wire to McHugh in Chicago, asking terms for the match. Next morning the answer came, and the promoter almost toppled off his chair as he read:

"Accept match. Carroll will fight Crane for nothing. You pay training expenses. Engage DeWolf for trainer."

Chandler quickly called McHugh on long distance, and the match was closed. The date for the battle was a month hence.

That night Malone hurried back to Chicago to tell Crane the big news. He chuckled as he thought of what a set-up Carroll would be for Crane. Mike would pop the palooka to sleep in a couple of rounds. Then Mike would be the champ, and they'd be in the big money.

The first thing Mike did after hearing that the title match had been closed was to dash to a phone. He called Monee Randall at Sprague's office. That evening they went to dinner together. As they sat at the table Mike, bubbling over the *coup* that Malone had put over in getting the high-school kid for his opponent in the title whirl, gazed into Monee's dark eyes. She was not smiling, and he wondered why.

"I'm going to be the champ pretty soon," he purred. "Wont I be the berries? Then I'll forget the racket for a while, and we'll get spliced and settle down in a nice little flat near the lake."

"Get spliced." The words grated. Monee felt as one touched by a flaming brand. But she managed to smile—a forced smile.

"What's the big hurry about ringing the wedding bells, Mike?" she parried.

"Well," he replied, "didn't you promise you'd hook up with me when I got to be the champ? When I bury my left in the palooka's whiskers, he'll hear the birdies sing; and when he wakes up, I'll be the champ."

Monee hadn't forgotten that promise. She had told him one night that she would marry the champion, but her thoughts were not of wedded bliss. She had sought to end the persistent pleas of Mike to marry her, and that seemed the easiest way. She was not eager to wed, and besides she did not believe that Mike ever would be the champion. She liked him, she admitted, but she did not love him. Now things had changed, and Crane bade fair to win the title. Her silly promise had placed her in a serious predicament, and she must get out somehow.

She reached over the table and gave Crane's hand a little pat.

"It kind of scares me to think about getting married," she said. "So let's not talk about it any more until you really are the champion."

WHEN Monee reached her home, it was to pass a sleepless night. Her big problem was burning into her soul. She did not want to marry him; she could not. A way must be found to prevent Mike from winning the championship. That was the only way she could escape. But how?

As she pondered, an idea came to her. Crane had double-crossed McHugh; and Benny, the straight shooter, wouldn't turn a trick to square the account. But Mike had caused her to lose her job in McHugh's office; and that, she felt, was sufficient justification for retaliation. She knew that Crane was in love with her, and she re-

membered that everything is fair in love and war. If everything is fair in love and war, why not a little double-crossing in love and pugilism?

She had decided on her plan of action. It was a desperate chance, but might succeed. She wouldn't allow herself to believe it could fail.

The following week Crane and Carroll answered the call to appear in New York and train for the battle. Their camps were widely separated. One day Crane received a letter from Monee.

"Don't train too hard, Mike. You don't need to train at all to beat the high-school kid. Don't forget the nice little flat near the lake," she wrote.

Crane did not train hard. Several times the explosive wrath of Steve Malone was vented on him because of the desultory way in which he was preparing for the title battle. Then Mike would pep up for a while, only to fall back later to his easy-going ways. He was confident that he could name the round in which he would kayo the high-school kid.

Meanwhile Carroll was training as never before. Jimmy DeWolf, the famous trainer, was in charge of his camp, and for hours at a time DeWolf tutored Sammy in the art of punching. Cleverness was sidetracked, the one object being to develop a knock-out punch in Carroll's right fist, and gradually Sammy began to show evidence of hitting power. Then one day, three days before the fight, DeWolf told him he had acquired the knack of punching.

"You're on edge right now and must hold it," he said. "We'll throw a little surprise party for Mike Crane."

It is customary for prize-fighters, their days of strenuous training at an end, to relax. That period of relaxation—the hours just before the battle—demand quiet and freedom from excitement. The principals in a title match usually go to bed for a two-hour period of sleep before starting for the arena. Mike Crane was preparing for his pre-battle nap when there came a knock on his door. He opened it, and a messenger-boy handed him a telegram. Feverishly he tore off the envelope, and a smile spread over his face as he read:

"Confidential: Save the palooka until the fifth round. I'm betting the family jewels that you kayo him in that round. Don't forget the nice little flat near the lake." It was signed "Monee."

When Malone came to awaken his man and prepare for the trip to the arena, he found Mike wide awake. He had not closed his eyes in sleep. He was thinking of Monee. All thoughts of the fight were blotted out of his mind until Malone rudely jarred him back to earth by reminding him it was time to hurry to the stadium.

MANHATTAN STADIUM was a turbulent, noisy sea of humanity when Mike Crane entered the ring, a smile of confidence on his face. Two minutes later Carroll hopped through the ropes. Their appearance was the signal for a wild demonstration. The cheering lasted five minutes. Crane was the favorite, a top-heavy odds of two to one. Few believed that the high-school kid had a chance for victory.

The referee called the boys to the center of the ring to give them instructions. They shook hands, stepped back, and the gong clanged. The battle was on.

It was evident from the start that Crane, showing confidence in every movement, was in no hurry to bring the battle to an early finish. To him there could be but one result—victory. When he got ready, he would shoot his deadly left hook to the high-school kid's jaw, and he would drop, and that would be the end. Then he would hurry back to Chicago—to Monee.

He always had said that Carroll was one of those fighters made for him to lick. He could sock all those clever mugs to sleep. And Carroll was making just the sort of battle Mike expected, cleverly jabbing, ducking and prancing around the ring. Those jabs were not hurting Mike. He expected them from such a clever, looking-glass fighter, and he had beaten other boys who were just as clever. The round ended, Carroll holding the shade on points.

The great stadium reverberated with the cheering as the boys went to their corners. The fans had feared Crane would make a short fight of it and that they would not get a run for their money. But now they saw that Mike was taking his time, and it pleased them. They were certain Crane was teasing the high-school kid, and would pop him out whenever he got ready.

Jimmy DeWolf had watched from Carroll's corner every move made by Crane. He did not think that Mike was stalling. Jimmy was an old head at the game, and as he watched, he discovered that every movement by Mike was mechanical. He quickly sensed that Crane's mind was far afield; far from thoughts of the battle at

hand. In the minute of intermission between rounds DeWolf leaned over and whispered in the high-school kid's ear.

"We've got to get him quick, Kid," he said. "We've got to get him before he finds himself. We'll take our shot in this round." Then he hurriedly gave Carroll a few instructions; the bell rang and the second round was on.

The spectators were surprised to see Carroll adopt new tactics. He stopped prancing, and three times in succession he swung his right to Crane's jaw. But the blows did not carry force.

"Try again, Kid," Mike chuckled. "Why, you're only tickling me."

Then the unexpected happened. Carroll's teeth clicked together; his heels went to the floor, and with all the power he could summon, he crossed his right to Crane's jaw. There was no tickle in that sock; it carried dynamite! Mike's eyes turned glassy, his body became tense and rigid, and he plummeted head first to the canvas.

The great crowd yelled wildly as the referee started to count, but as he tolled off seven seconds, he saw there was no further need of counting, and motioned to Mike's seconds to carry him to his corner. Crane was out, completely out. A new champion had ascended the throne.

Crane's seconds worked busily over him to bring him back to consciousness. They doused cold water in his face, rubbed his limp form and applied smelling salts, but it was two minutes before he opened his eyes. Then he mumbled a few words, words that his seconds did not understand. It was something about a little flat near the lake.

When the new world's champion lightweight and his manager, Benny McHugh, hopped off the train in Chicago two days later, Monee Randall and Dick Sprague were at the station to greet them. There was a twinkle in Monee's eyes as she advanced and congratulated Carroll.

"I guess you wont like me, Monee, for popping Crane on the chin," he ventured.

"Why not?" she countered.

This reply puzzled him. "Well, I—I thought you were going to marry Mike," he said.

Now Monee was smiling. "I was, but I'm not," she answered. "When you hit Crane on the jaw, the wallop jarred my heart something terrible. Now for the love of Mike, Sammy, let's forget about him!"

They did forget, and for the love of Mike, they got married the next day.

The Charge of the Golden Emperor

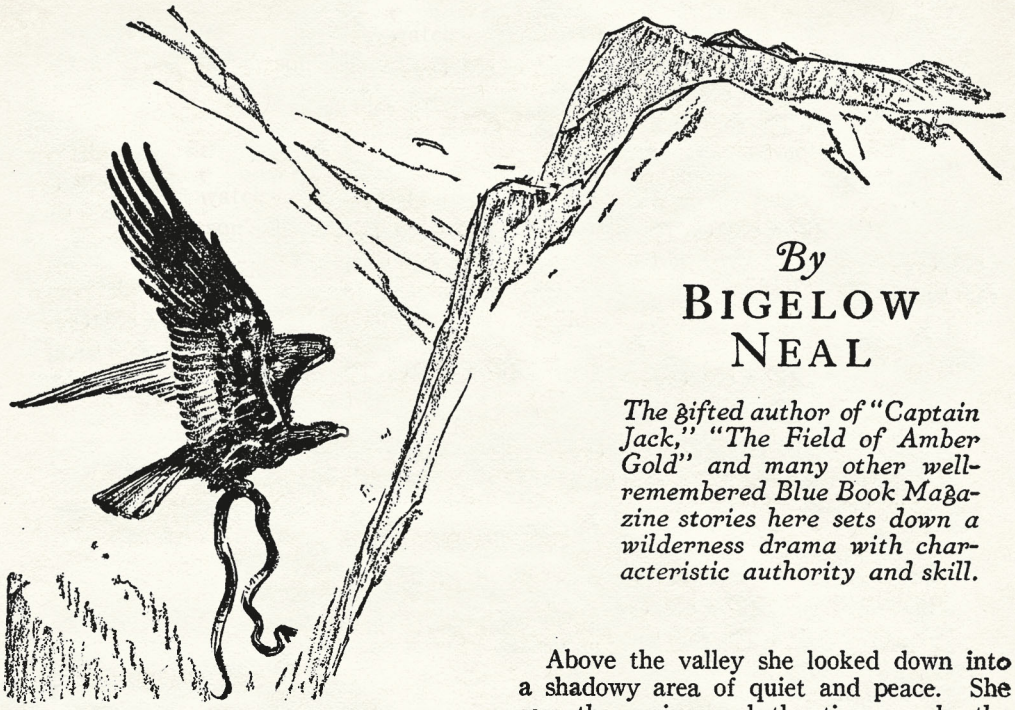
Illustrated by Frank Hoban

FAR above the valley of Clear Creek a tiny monoplane of black hung poised against the sky. From the earth it appeared but a speck of color pinned beneath the dome of heaven, but from the pathways of the clouds the monoplane ceased to be a pin-point of black and became a great golden-crested eagle—the emperor of the clouds.

The valley of Clear Creek lay under the hush of evening. No sign of sound or movement came from the limply hanging leaves of the cottonwoods. So calm it was, that occasionally the monarch of the air saw his own reflection floating on the glassy surface of water far below.

Endowed with wonderful eyes, no movement upon the ground below escaped his telescopic vision. A mouse darted across a patch of alkali, and the big bird banked and shifted his position to be above the tiny rodent, but the mouse gained the protection of invisibility in tall grass, and once more the eagle hung stationary in space.

There's a spot in the valley of Clear Creek, below the overhanging nest on the eagle's butte, where a spring flows from the crumbling face of a lignite-coal vein. Its waters, spreading over a small area of bottom land, have formed a bog where lacelike patterns of shallow water alternate with miniature islands. In winter it is sheathed with terracelike layers of ice; in summer the crests of the islands are covered with waving plumes of water-grasses and rushes, beneath whose arches of shimmering green the water-courses form natural



In a moment the great bird was climbing slowly upward. From his talons dangled the limp form of the killer.

By
BIGELOW NEAL

The gifted author of "Captain Jack," "The Field of Amber Gold" and many other well-remembered Blue Book Magazine stories here sets down a wilderness drama with characteristic authority and skill.

runways for such water-loving animals and birds as are too small to risk appearing in the open. There where the warm sunlight filters through the leaves, frogs bask throughout the day, waiting and watching in solemn-eyed immobility for the telltale drone of the unsuspecting fly; and snipe come here in search of water wigglers or to stand on one foot in the cool water and drowse through the heat of the day.

SPRING had come, and for days the skies had been lettered with the Roman numerals of flying geese and ducks. One morning the hoarse cry of a crow; the next —a sunrise call of a meadow lark; and now—the long-drawn, plaintive *"Kill-deer, kill-deer,"* of a ring-necked plover.

She came from the southland, from as far, perhaps, as the northern shores of South America. Hour after hour, mile after mile, the beating of her slender blue-gray wings had borne her steadily into the north. All but tireless, they had never faltered. She was answering the inherited call of countless migrating generations which had followed the same path.

Above the valley she looked down into a shadowy area of quiet and peace. She saw the spring and the tiny marsh, the clusters of water-grass and rushes. Again she heard the voice that had driven her two thousand miles or more toward the northern lights, and it told her that she had come to the promised land. Her labors were at an end, and with the realization of coming rest, she sounded the first cry of her long flight—sent it floating softly up and down the valley—*"Kill-deer, kill-deer, kill-deer."*

That was how, at the very beginning, she came to dread the warlord of the skies. For he heard, and saw, and came. Without warning, other than the whine and whistle of air-cutting feathers, he struck. Perhaps it was the gathering twilight below; perhaps the smaller bird heard the rushing of the one above and dodged just in the nick of time; but at any rate the eagle missed, and the killdeer plunged headlong for the ground and safety The big bird poised for another, surer charge. A second time he shot downward. He was almost upon her. His long yellow talons curved downward to strike. But the time of the little killdeer was not yet come. From below, filling the air with their shrill cries of rage, came a miniature cloud of white-throated kingbirds. The eagle recognized defeat. Faced by these arch-pests of the birds of prey, the emperor of the skies gave vent to a scream of anger,

turned and labored back to the aërial fastness whence he had come.

THE killdeer dropped to the ground and disappeared in the tangle of the swamp. Threading her way among the rushes to an open space large enough to accommodate her body, she came at last to rest. But with the coming of dawn she was feeding along the outskirts of the marsh. Then it was that a male of her kind dropped gently to the ground before her.

He stood for a time, and teetered as plovers do, unmindful of her presence. When he saw her, his bearing underwent a change. Without preliminaries of any kind he began to strut. He knew a number of dance-steps and also how to make the feathers on his breast stand out until he swelled to twice his natural size. He was very proud, not only of the snowy-white on his breast and the black bands around his throat, but of the fluff of brilliant orange hidden by the tips of his wing-feathers. This he held in reserve, held it for the last crushing blow to her indifference.

At first he swelled out his breast and strutted. Then he teetered. He circled around her, drawing closer and closer, holding his neck proudly arched and allowing the sunlight to flash on the white and blue-gray of his breast and wings. When so close as to border on undue familiarity, he stopped and teetered again. He felt he was doing well, but apparently his feelings were not contagious.

At loss for a proper course, he teetered once more, and in doing so, teetered himself into a new idea. If the avenue of approach through her eyes was blocked by a detour sign, there might be a way to victory through her crop. He caught a dragon-fly and brought it as an offering, but she was looking at an imaginary object in the sky and paid no attention whatever to the tempting tidbit. Still there was one more chance. Suddenly he began to strut, dragging one wing upon the ground. The sunlight flashed orange and gold on the fluff above his tail. The battle was won. She followed him into the air, and thenceforth their ways were inseparable.

They built their nest on slightly higher ground, a little to one side of the spring, where the gnarled and stunted arms of a sagebush thrust themselves above a clump of sand-grass. At first it was nothing more than a depression in the earth, the footprint of some heavy animal. With the wiry roots of the grass men call "nigger-wool" they wove a cupshaped form within the track. They searched the prairies for pieces of horsehair and discarded feathers, and lastly the female bird plucked soft white down from her own breast and made a cushion for the bottom of the nest.

In time four eggs appeared, cream-colored, with spots of green and chocolate brown. Then one day the mother bird did not leave her nest but sat quietly and patiently. For weeks she went only for brief flights along the creek or a run through the grass in search of insects. But never for long was she away from her nest, and even then the process of incubation moved steadily forward, for as the eggs cooled down, the whites and the yolks contracted, drawing fresh air through the shells for the rapidly forming chicks within. Once each day she stood above the eggs and trod softly, turning them gently from side to side.

FOR others the nesting season had come as well. In a clump of buckbrush only a little way from the killdeer a prairie chicken brooded and slept, and down in the wild rice along the shore of the creek a gray mallard duck sat in dreamy silence awaiting the time when the eggs beneath her would turn to golden life. The swaying branches of chokecherry and thorn-apple cradled the homes of kingbird and magpie, while on the sandstone ledge above the valley the mate of the Golden Emperor held a trio of great chalk-white eggs against her breast, and she too waited.

One thing there was, that all these wild children of the prairies had in common—*fear*. During the nesting season even the fleetest of wing was more or less at the mercy of some enemy. The killdeer, the prairie chicken and the mallard feared the mink, that silent terror of the night; the kingbird feared the magpie; the magpie was in constant dread of hawks. Just as the mother eagle must be ever vigilant against the destructive jaws of the coyote, so too the little killdeer watched the shadow, swinging pendulum-like across the valley, which marked the ever-threatening presence above of the king of flight. One other there was that carried the constant threat of death: the giant bullsnake. Moving unseen and unheralded through the

grass, he struck with neither warning nor mercy. They who rear the wild children of the prairie must live in constant watchfulness and dread.

Late one afternoon the watcher in the sky detected a movement, and then a stealthy, gliding object of yellowish-brown, creeping upward toward the eagles' nest.

The nest, a concave-surfaced pyramid of sticks, rose from a rock-ledge on the slopes of a scoria-crowned butte. In the depression at its apex the Golden Emperor could see a splotch of white, marking the position of his floundering, big-mouthed offspring awaiting their evening meal. Because he recognized the sneaking thing on the hillside, and because he knew his mate

The yellowish-brown on the hillside resolved into a coyote, fleeing for his life.

to be away searching for food, he saw that the peril of death hung over the little ones in the nest. Once again he rose on the air, turned almost on his side and lunged across the valley to a point above the nest. His wings closed and he launched himself into space. As he shot forward and down, he gave vent to a long, high-pitched scream of warning and defiance.

For a thousand feet he dropped, and then from behind and above came a roar like an express train thundering through the mountains. He heard and recognized the sound. Opening his wings he veered to one side and watched his mate in her downward plunge. The yellowish-brown on the hillside resolved itself into a coyote, fleeing for his life. Out on the alkali a cloud of blue and white dust sprang into life, like the bursting of shrapnel. Through the dust floated wisps of hair and an occasional feather. Farther on, the dust formed again, and still again, before the coyote reached the safety of the underbrush along the creek.

The mother-eagle climbed from the valley to perch on the edge of the nest, and the Golden Emperor soared upward to his original position against the sky. His powerful eyes swept every nook and cranny of the valley below. His young, he knew, were hungry, for the mother-bird had returned empty-taloned. Upon him, then, depended their chances for food. Already the sun was near the horizon. At any moment a rabbit might move or a prairie-dog wander from his hole. It mattered little; when an eagle hangs hungry in the sky, no thing is safe below.

ONE day the half-closed eyes of the drowsy killdeer opened with a start, for she had heard a new sound and one that did not come from the prairie. Pres-

ently it came again, a muffled *tap-tap-tap,* from one of the eggs. In time it grew more insistent, and the intervals between the taps became shorter. Now she heard the splintering of breaking shell, and one of the eggs turned in its place as the little fellow within moved his head for a new attack. Evidently he was content with his effort, or else tired from his exertion, for there was a long period of silence while the mother bird waited with restless anxiety. Then he began again, and tiny pieces of broken shell attested to the energy with which he worked. Beginning at the point where he had broken through, he cut a ragged line about the egg, but when two-thirds around he stopped again, then braced his feet and pushed. The shell gave way with a dull crunch, and a miracle had come to pass: the once liquid content of the egg became a living bird.

The mother killdeer was crooning now, soft notes of concern and encouragement. She was watching, too, watching a place at her breast where the feathers were moving.

Then he came out into the light of day.

Perhaps she saw and knew and was satisfied, but to an outsider it would look as if there had been a great mistake, for the little fellow that thrust his head into the sunlight was a killdeer only by courtesy, a killdeer simply because he wasn't anything else. His color was that of dry sand. No feathers were in evidence, nothing but down. Nor had he a tail, or even wings worth mentioning. His body was about half the size of a peanut. When he floundered to a more or less upright position, the effect was more ludicrous still, for what he lacked in body had been made up in length of leg and the bigness of his head. The legs were about the size of a straw and apparently much too long, while the head was unnecessarily wide and his mouth a thing of wonder.

For a while he contented himself with floundering, but eventually his activities led him to a position from which he fell over the side of the nest. When rescued by the beak of his mother, he tried it again, and so on until darkness brought sleep to him and new sounds of splintering shells from the other eggs.

The next day found all four of the eggs hatched, and the mother bird was forced to stand so that the wildly tumbling youngsters might have room to move. All that day and part of the next she strove to keep her ambitious brood within bounds. Unlike the young of many birds, the baby killdeer are not fed in the nest, for after a day or two they are strong enough to follow the old bird in search of food.

WHEN the time came to start on their first adventure, the mother killdeer moved out of the nest and called them to follow. Three responded but the other remained in the nest trying vainly, on account of a crippled foot, to climb the slope which led to liberty. It would seem that the troubles of the little mother were not over.

The little cripple was normal in every other way, but day after day he remained in the nest while the mother carried the choicest bits from the bog to satisfy his ever-growing appetite; and when food in the water-ways became scarce, she resorted to grasshoppers from the dry ground above. In time he might be able to fly and so learn to shift for himself, but meanwhile the chances for him to reach that stage were growing slighter day by day; for as the season advanced and warm weather became the rule, the danger from enemies increased. It might be from a magpie flying low, or more likely a snake; and yet, as time wore on he grew and grew. At last the yellowish down on his wings became marked with points of blue, and pinfeathers began to open. In a very few days he would be ready to fly, for even now he could lift himself from the nest by the aid of his fluttering wings.

And then came another evening when the golden eagle searched the valley floor for signs of food. It was nearly sundown when the killdeer brought her brood from the bog and now she stood drowsing by the nest. Suddenly there came a sound, a low, rasping note from the dry grass. Looking up, she found herself face to face with her greatest foe. Half in the tall grass and half extended on a patch of barren alkali, lay a giant bullsnake.

For a moment paralyzed by the threat of death to the tiny cripple, the mother bird stood rooted to the spot. Less than a yard separated the cruel jaws from the fledgling in the nest, and even at that moment a ripple ran through the body of the snake, and slowly inch by inch he began to move.

When he was halfway across the rapidly narrowing space the protective instinct of motherhood came uppermost. Dropping one wing and dragging its tip in the dust,

she began to run back and forth before the nest, but if she expected to attract the snake's attention in that manner she was doomed to disappointment. When the space was narrowed to a matter of inches, she became desperate. With all the fury of which her tiny body was capable, she threw herself full in the face of the killer of the prairies. And now her courage had scored a point, at least, for the snake recoiled with a sharp, explosive hiss, throwing the last two-thirds of his body into the form of a compact letter S. The forward third draped across the coils and rose to terminate in a slowly waving head. The cold, lidless eyes glared balefully; the jaws opened, and the crimson tongue vibrated like the string of a violin, while above all sounded the battle-cry of the serpent, harsh, rasping, terrorizing.

In a moment, when he struck, the fury of his charge would carry him across the nest. Once more the little mother threw herself in the path of death, to receive full in her breast the impact of the driving head. As the snake recoiled for yet another blow, the killdeer lay in a little fluttering heap, uninjured but gasping for the breath which had been driven from her lungs by the shock. The snake was ready again. This time he would finish the battle and reach the nest. This time the doom of the baby killdeer was sealed.

IN moments of dire peril, when the last hope seems gone, the birds have one thing in common with man. That is the last anguished appeal for help. As the snake gathered himself for the final stroke, the killdeer sent forth a wild, high scream. Nor was her appeal to go unanswered; for far above in the realm of cloud and wind, sharp ears heard the cry. The prayer of the little mother had registered, and the silent floating monoplane became a darting bolt of blue, for the cloud king had seen and was coming with the speed of the wind.

For a little way the king of flight was satisfied with the pulling power of gravity, but he became impatient, and opening his wings, swept the air once, twice, thrice, driving himself, head downward toward the earth. The murmur of wind in his flight-feathers rose to a shrill whine. His curved yellow beak cut the air like the point of a knife. Again he threw all the power of his wings into a downward drive, and now the whine became a roar, and his speed like that of a bullet. He was coming, a golden-crested streak of blue-black fury, and the automatic lenses of those telescopic eyes were focused on the waving head below.

The bullsnake was still poised for the final blow when there came a sound like the roar of a tornado, a flashing cloud of black and a hurricane blast of rushing air. The grass and sage lay flat; a column of dust spurted from the alkali; and then as the charging emperor of the air banked, changed ends and lunged, talons foremost, there came the sound of swift impact and the crunching of lancelike talons through cartilage and bone. In a moment the great bird was off again, climbing slowly upward to the nest on the butte. From his talons dangled the limp form of the killer snake.

Up from below, ringing loud and clear on the evening air, sounded the joyous notes of the killdeer.

HAROLD MAC GRATH

The distinguished author of "The Puppet Crown," "Drums of Jeopardy," "A Splendid Hazard," "The Man with Three Names" and many other famous novels, is at his best in this fascinating story of wild youth and a strange heritage.

We All Live Through It

The Story So Far:

FINE fellows, all three of them, but wild as hawks because of the pace they had learned during the war, and hunting trouble—which, as you shall see, they garnered in generous measure.

MacGregor met Hazelton in the lowly dungeon cell of a New York police station, whither they had been severally conducted, the one following an inebriate brawl with a taxi-driver and the other after a similar tipsy shindig with a waiter. MacGregor recognized a kindred spirit in Hazelton, and finding him broke, hired him as secretary.

Wiltbank and MacGregor had been wealthy neighbors on Long Island, buddies overseas and companions in devilment afterward until Wiltbank exhausted the half-million his father had left him—and found himself in the office of his father's lawyer Silas Fordham, listening to amazing news: according to Fordham, the elder Wiltbank had left a double will.

By the unusual provisions of this supplementary document, which Fordham declined to show, another half-million was bequeathed to Wiltbank, provided he lived for an entire year at the ancestral Long Island house, the Oaks, forsaking gay parties and drinking no alcoholic liquor during the period. If he failed to observe these conditions to the letter,—and he would be watched,—the money would revert to his father's pet charity, the Wiltbank Orphanage.

At length Wiltbank accepted the astonishing offer and left. When the door had closed behind him, the portières parted and a quaint old man whom Fordham addressed as Harrison entered the room. The whole fantastic arrangement, it seemed, had been made by Harrison—who had been a circus clown, whose wife had left him and their little daughter for another man, and who later had bought out the circus and made a fortune.

Right here the eternal feminine comes tripping into the plot on dancing feet. For Harrison's now-grown daughter Kitty had been forbidden the stage or the circus, and in consequence had longed for both. Recently she had disappeared, and almost coincidentally, a masked dancer known as *"L'Inconnue"* had made a great success in New York. And—among the many admirers who had in vain sought the acquaintance of *L'Inconnue* by means of love-letters and stage-door assiduities, was none other than young Captain Wiltbank.

He made her acquaintance soon after-

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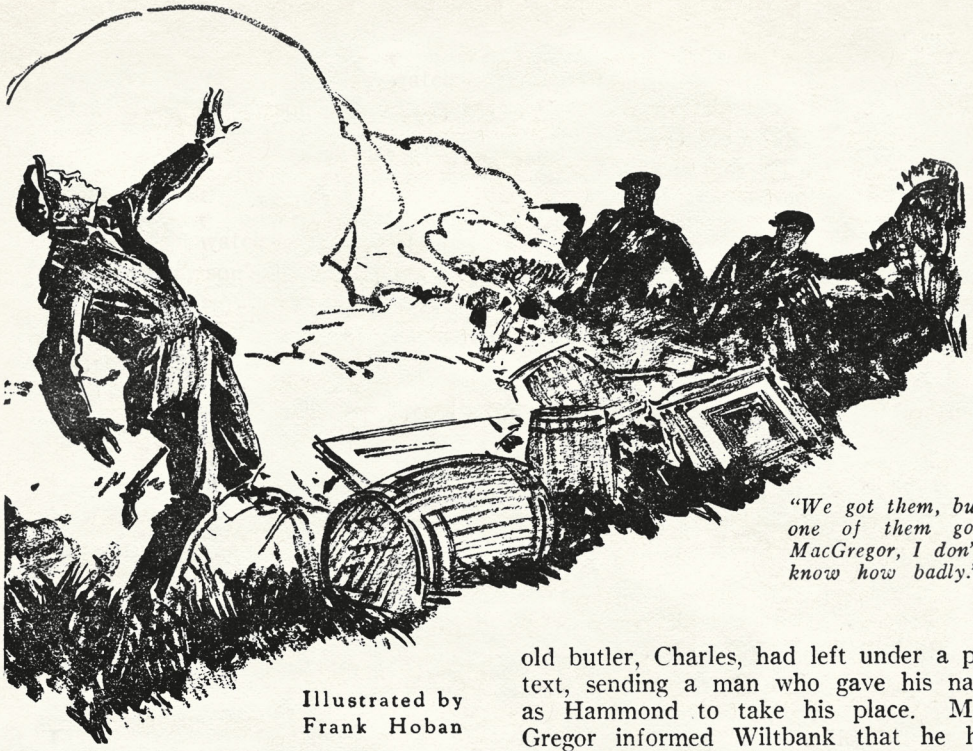


"We got them, but one of them got MacGregor, I don't know how badly."

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

ward, none the less, though he didn't know it. For on the train bearing him to his twelvemonth of monastic retirement at the Oaks was this same Kitty Harrison. And as she passed down the aisle a sudden lurch of the car catapulted the lady more or less into his lap. . . . . So we find the Captain and his friend MacGregor at the Oaks, and the lady, for reasons of her own, at the so-called hotel in the little neighboring town of Hakett.

Not long after their arrival, however, MacGregor brought in a troop of gay companions for a farewell party—the appointed year did not begin till midnight. But although Wiltbank himself drank nothing, the party threatened disaster none the less; for a storm came up, and when the visitors, after enthusiastic inroads upon the Oaks' well-stocked cellar, started to leave, it was found that some one had drained all the gasoline from the cars which had brought them—and it was many hours before a fresh supply could be brought from town. It was while they were waiting that a strange young woman called, placed a baby in Harrison's arms with the implication that it was Wiltbank's, and vanished. And one Edgar Parbody, watchful representative of the orphanage, called and took cognizance of the situation.

Nor was this the only perplexity. The old butler, Charles, had left under a pretext, sending a man who gave his name as Hammond to take his place. MacGregor informed Wiltbank that he had come upon the new butler absent-mindedly juggling a half-dozen plates with all the skill of a professional performer; and soon thereafter Hammond requested permission for his daughter Kitty to stay at the house—Kitty, who in conversation with her father disclosed to him that she was the mysterious *L'Inconnue*. After the arrival of the foundling, however, Kitty returned to the hotel, much to Wiltbank's disappointment and chagrin.

As if this were not enough, another puzzle beset the young master of the Oaks. He came upon a letter addressed to him by his dead father confessing an illicit *grande passion* in which he had run away with his inamorata only to lose her the same night in a railway accident in which he himself was badly hurt. *(The story continues in detail:)*

WILTBANK pored over his law-books; Mrs. Wolcott fed him; Harrison waited upon him; and all three waited upon the mysterious foundling. You can't have a foundling in the house without noticing it. Again Harrison suggested the orphanage, but Wiltbank was adamant; he was going to find out who owned the baby if it took ten years. Kitty succeeded in pasting the pieces of Wiltbank's card upon a blank postal-card and was chagrined to find that she had read it correctly the first

time. MacGregor spent one day in town on business and returned with an innocent breath. Hazelton visited his sister and she returned the visit. Even the sea had flattened out. Lulls.

Then one morning there was a hullabaloo. Johnny, after receiving his rural free-delivery, legged it to the Oaks as fast as he could go, forgetting in his excitement that he could have got there more quickly by the use of a car. He burst in upon Wiltbank without warning.

"Sign on the dotted line!" cried Johnny, waving a long envelope.

"What?" asked Wiltbank, laying down his book.

"Those old hard-boiled eggs have consented!"

"To what? What's the matter with explanations first and hurrahs after?" said Wiltbank, smiling.

"The mortgage. Those old birds have consented to take it up in January. That's the hurrah, you ol' son-of-a-gun!"

Wiltbank, open of mouth, leaned back in his chair. He had consented to the notion only to iron out Johnny's ruffled conscience. That the MacGregor trustees, who, he had reason to know, never paid any attention to Johnny's appeals, however desperate, should have agreed to take over the mortgage, sounded as if they had been overtaken by aphasia.

"They came through!" chortled Johnny.

"But I've got to pay the interest to the MacGregor estate, just the same. And I can't, having no means. But God bless the spirit which prompted this action on your part."

"Keep your hair on, you loon! The first interest is to be paid one year from next January, and a lot of things can happen between now and then. Fordham's a brick. I went to him first, and he told me all the Waddletums and Widdletums you had to go through."

"A year!" Wiltbank gasped.

"And say! Fordham told me on his honor that the orphanage would not get a cent till next October. Wait a minute. He said neither you nor the orphanage. Get that? Neither you or the orphanage."

"But he told me I was through!" Wiltbank caught his head in his hands. "I'm going crazy!"

"It may have been a slip of the tongue, but I didn't catch him up on it. Anyhow, you'll have the house for a whole year. Jimmy, your father made another will, all right, but he didn't quite know what he was doing. Now, we're going to have a little blow-out at my house tonight."

"Johnny!"—warningly.

"Hazelton's got a sister, and she's a nice child. She'll be there. And she's the right kind of a sister, too. Came along one day and asked me to set George on his feet." Johnny looked away embarrassedly. "Damn it, what could I do but promise?"

Wiltbank knocked the dead ash from his pipe. "What time?" he asked.

"Seven," said Johnny, warming to his old comrade's tact. He did not want any bouquets, any pats on the shoulder. He felt that he had been jockeyed into this reformer's corner, and didn't care to be complimented about it.

LATER in the day Harrison heard Wiltbank whistling as he went upstairs, whistling when he came down again.

"George, MacGregor is the finest chap in the world."

"After the damage he did that Friday night, sir?"

"He has taken up the mortgage on this place, and I sha'n't have anything to worry about till a year from January."

"Then you'll be keeping me on?"

"For the year, or till Charles returns." Certainly he would keep his juggling butler as long as he could, when he intended making a news-bureau out of him in relation to Kitty.

While Wiltbank was on the way to the MacGregor place, Harrison telephoned to Kitty.

"Is that you, Kitty?"

"Yes, Daddy. I'm so lonesome!"

"Why don't you go home, then?"

"I will, if you'll go with me."

"There's no use bringing that up. I'm staying here till he puts me out." Pause. Kitty broke it:

"Is that baby still there?"

"Yes. Cute little codger. It's a boy."

"A couple of bootleggers have the room next to mine. I've overheard a bit of their talk. Some big *coup* is on."

"Well, don't buy anything." Harrison could hear Kitty's chuckle. "Suppose I get off tomorrow afternoon and pay you a little visit?"

"It would make me very happy. Do you love me, Daddy?"

"With all my heart. I always have. You're all I've got."

"Let's go home."

"How can I?"

"Simply by getting on the train."

"No."

"Oh, Daddy, it's all wrong!"

"We don't agree there, Kitty."

"Do you think that baby was a put-up job?"

Harrison looked seriously at the transmitter. "How is anyone to know? He claims he is keeping it to bring the mother into the open."

IT is utterly futile to try to read thoughts simply by staring into the telephone transmitter; and that was what Harrison and his daughter were trying to do. Harrison was worried to a certain extent. He did not care to have Kitty get any romantic nonsense into her head about Wiltbank. She was at a dangerous age and in a dangerous mood. If she would only go home!

"Good night," he said.

"*Dormi bene.*"

"What's that mean?"

"Don't have any foolish nightmares, or something like that. Tomorrow. And no more misunderstandings."

"Never any more. Good night."

As Harrison hung up the receiver, he heard Mrs. Wolcott entering the kitchen, and he followed her.

"That baby is such a cunning little thing," she said. "It smiles and gurgles all the while. But I'll tell you this right now: It hasn't the Wiltbank eye any more than you have."

"How can you tell at this age?"

"We women know."

"Oh! How do you know it doesn't take after the mother?"

"It's a man-child."

"He ought to send it to the orphanage."

"And then he would never know who the mother is."

"You seem to have a good deal of faith in Mr. Wiltbank."

"All the faith in the world," declared Mrs. Wolcott vigorously. "I've been in this house since Jamey was eight."

"I suppose that settles it. Yet he has been pretty wild of late."

"He's got over that. And he doesn't look it."

"Neither does his friend. And where will you find a wilder boy than MacGregor?"

"His best girl gave him the mitten."

"She was in luck."

"What sort of folks have you been accustomed to?" Mrs. Wolcott shot back.

Harrison lost his tongue for a minute.

"Well, it's nothing to me whether the baby's his or not. The woman was emphatic," he said finally.

"The more fool you, for not yanking her into the house and questioning her. Some one is trying to give Jamey a bad name, and they'll succeed; but that will never make the baby his, not by a long shot. Has he touched anything to drink since the baby came?"

"No," Harrison had to admit. "But maybe his conscience—"

"Bother your conscience! Here's your supper, while I take the baby its milk."

Harrison ate his supper moodily.

How little we know what's going to happen the next minute! We get all our things packed for a summer's vacation, and then some utter stranger has to slip on a banana peel in front of our house, and we find ourselves involved in a long damage-suit!

CHAPTER XXI

WILTBANK sat in the MacGregor living-room with Johnny, Hazelton and his sister Alice, and was curious to know what it was that was missing from the room. Something which had always struck his eye formerly was gone; but for the life of him he could not tell what this object was. Besides, he could not concentrate very well, what with the verbal bombardment that was going on.

He took a liking to Hazelton and his sister. She had the prettiest bob imaginable, and there was lots of fun in her. It was easily to be seen that she adored this scalawag brother of hers. Did she know that recently the boy had spent the night in the calaboose? To Wiltbank the situation was droll. Take these two together, Johnny and Hazelton, on a tear, and dynamite, in comparison, would be a congenial substance to handle; with neither of them meaning any harm. He could readily picture the sister, waiting on pay-day, often waiting in vain, for the pay-envelope, poor kid! And now she had got her brother out of New York—from a den of tigers into a den of wildcats.

He did not blame Johnny for not being a home-body. The house had been furnished during the whatnot days of the early eighties: chairs you looked suspiciously at

before you risked sitting down, sofas in which you could not sit back, family photographs in oblong black walnut frames, carpets on the floors instead of rugs, a square piano— By George! Now he knew what it was: Millicent Travers' photo was gone from the piano top. And Johnny had sworn to keep it there till he died! Wiltbank stared at Alice Hazelton whenever he dared. Of course, there might have been an accident; the thing might have been knocked off the piano and irreparably broken. He had always been advising Johnny to consign the relic to the ash-can. But that was Johnny's principal characteristic: if he said he would do a thing, he did it, rightly or wrongly. The lovable young jackass!

The dinner was first-rate, and Wiltbank noticed with a deal of satisfaction that neither cocktails nor wines were offered.

Wiltbank saw light. To reform a man, you did not smother him with laws, tracts, lectures; you did not threaten him with a club; you put responsibility on his shoulders, and if he was half a man, he accepted this responsibility; otherwise he wasn't worth the powder to blow him up.

Johnny had a fine collection of old English sporting prints, and while he was showing them to Hazelton, Wiltbank conversed with the girl.

"Your brother will like it here."

"It is such a relief for him to get away from noisy streets," Alice replied. "The view and the air are so wonderful." She lowered her voice. "I wish to thank you for what you did for George that dreadful night—got him out of jail."

Wiltbank was startled, but recovered quickly. "Pshaw!" he demurred, "we were all in the same boat, only I happened to keep out of jail. We were all of a piece that night."

"I'm so grateful all around," she said. "George hasn't really been steady since he was blown up in the picric explosion at Syracuse. He's lost the sense of responsibility."

"A lot of us lost that," acknowledged Wiltbank.

The absurdities of life! An unknown boiled owl in a police cell next to Johnny's had given Johnny—or had restored to him—a sense of responsibility. And no doubt Hazelton would buck up, believing his responsibility was seeing that his employer was kept out of trouble. It had a droll twist.

"I was a nurse in France during '18 and '19," Alice said. "George was all alone till I got home. Maybe that had something to do with it. You haven't any relations?"

"None that I know of."

"Say, Ally," cried Hazelton, "sing something, will you?"

Alice went to the piano at once. Wiltbank liked her lack of self-consciousness. She sang familiar ballads bravely and pretended that she didn't know Johnny's piano was senile with decay.

"Johnny, where's that picture of Millicent Travers?" Wiltbank whispered.

"I chucked it into the fire." Johnny grinned. "I'm weakening. I swore I'd never take it off the piano. Say, I've wired my bins. Why don't you let me fix up yours?"

"I'm not worrying," said Wiltbank.

"You never can tell. Those bins are the best part of your future stake. If you want a customer, I can find one."

"I dislike the notion of selling. I want everything to remain just as it is till I have to pack up."

"You're going to stick it out?"

"For my own sake, Johnny."

"Ever think of *L'Inconnue?*"

"No. Why should I? It was because I hadn't anything else to do, I suppose. It was mighty fine of you to take up that mortgage. I'll always remember that."

"And I'll always remember that shell-hole, where you nearly got yours trying to get me out."

THERE was war-talk; and Alice listened with wide eyes at the casual manner with which these young heroes referred to the Apocalypse. She herself had seen only the horrors, never the Olympian excitements.

At nine-thirty she was ready to return to the village.

"Oh, George, I forgot to tell you. I've met the most beautiful girl at the hotel. A Miss Hammond."

"Hammond?" said Johnny. "Oh, she's the daughter of Wiltbank's butler."

"So she told me. But she might be a princess from her looks and manners—I mean a story-book princess. All the real ones I ever saw were so homely."

"How long will Miss Hammond remain in the village?" asked Wiltbank, afraid lest they heard the tremor of his voice.

"I did not ask," said Alice. "Now, George, there's utterly no need of you go-

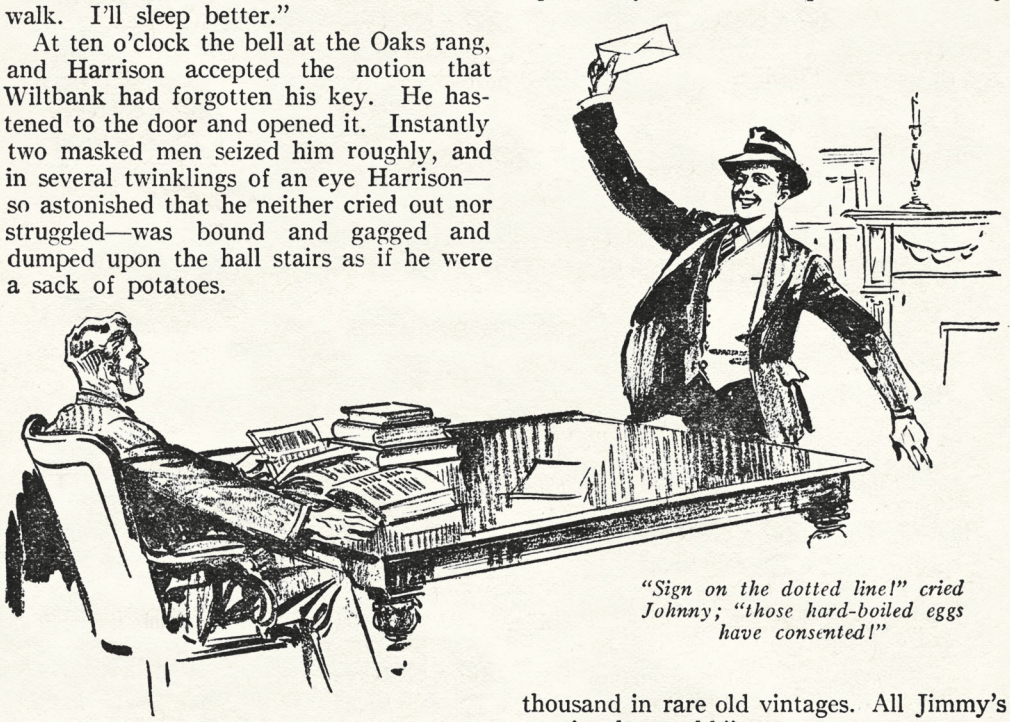
ing to the village with me. It hardly takes twenty minutes."

"All right," the brother assented, giving MacGregor a peculiar look.

"But you're not going yet?" said Johnny to Wiltbank.

"Oh, I'm in no hurry; but ten will be the latest. Then I'll hike. I want the walk. I'll sleep better."

At ten o'clock the bell at the Oaks rang, and Harrison accepted the notion that Wiltbank had forgotten his key. He hastened to the door and opened it. Instantly two masked men seized him roughly, and in several twinklings of an eye Harrison—so astonished that he neither cried out nor struggled—was bound and gagged and dumped upon the hall stairs as if he were a sack of potatoes.



"Sign on the dotted line!" cried Johnny; "those hard-boiled eggs have consented!"

"Now for the old woman. But no rough stuff. Knock; when she opens her door, get the key and lock her in. There's no phone in her room."

Mrs. Wolcott did not shriek. When she saw the masked face, she ran to the baby and caught it fiercely to her breast. It was only when the key turned in the lock, outside, that she realized that the house was in the possession of thieves. She then did the one sensible thing for her to do: sat in her rocking-chair and crooned the baby to sleep again. For all she knew, the butler might be dead; but she remembered with relief of hearing no pistol shots. She knew what had happened. Those two prowlers had attacked the house.

MacGregor and Hazelton permitted Jimmy Wiltbank ten minutes' start; then they buckled on two formidable army revolvers—none of your jamming automatics for an old hunter like MacGregor—and went forth into the night.

"Tonight or some other night," said MacGregor.

"They didn't come into the Outlet last night," replied Hazelton. "But the sea is so flat they could land on the beach."

"Don't ask any questions, if we do run into them. Just yell for them to stick 'em up. Forty thousand in pictures and fifty thousand in rare old vintages. All Jimmy's got in the world."

Hazelton smacked his lips in the dark and sighed.

"Keep to the woods," warned MacGregor. "We can command the beach then. And mark thirty yards to my left and keep it. Old Mrs. Wolcott has seen prowlers and we have evidence of a good-sized powerboat. Gee, what folks wont do for hootch these times!"

"Have you hopped on the wagon?"

"I am nailed to the cart whenever I'm with you, George, and don't you forget it. I'm going to walk it out of you."

"But you'll be going to New York when you feel like it."

"Do you want a drink?" asked Johnny, in a cold voice. "I've got an emergency flask on the hip."

"No. I don't want a drink," answered Hazelton, promptly. Suddenly he knew that he did not; and that it would be a long time before he surrendered even when he did want the stuff.

"This is like old times," said Johnny. "Have you got the pep for a good scrap if we run into one?"

"I can tell better when we run into it."

"Atta boy!"

WILTBANK ambled along, sometimes looking at the stars, at other times letting his gaze rove over the water. There was a touch of Indian summer in the night.

So she was still at Hakett? What a twisted thing life was! No perfection in anything. Wiltbank laughed.

When he had had everything, love itself was as nothing. Now it came smothering down upon him when he was broke, when the future was as uncertain as the sea there. He would have a year at the Oaks. But what good would that do him? Wouldn't it keep him soft? Would he ever be able to rouse the old battle spirit, the moral battle spirit he had left behind him when he had gone to war?

Supposing he hadn't wasted his money: would he have gone in for law with the notion of making good at it? Wouldn't it have been something of a pastime?

Naturally he worried about the foundling. It would give him an eternal black eye hereabouts; and he wanted to live hereabouts and acquire the respect of his neighbors. The baby had driven Kitty out of the house; he made no doubt of that. Whether she feared or detested him he might never learn. He could not blame her. His reputation as a waster—even though much exaggerated—coincided with the episode. It was a damnable hoax. . . . .

He was not observing as he went up the brick path to the door. He got out his key—and remembered no more till he felt a pressure against his left shoulder and a throbbing, violent pain on the side of his head. He turned slightly and saw his butler, trussed like a Christmas fowl; but the little man's bright blue eyes twinkled. Wiltbank tried to speak and only mumbled something unintelligible. A handkerchief had been drawn across his mouth and tied behind.

A pistol-shot—a fusillade of them! Then supernatural quiet.

Wiltbank struggled violently but futilely. So did Harrison. Both relaxed against the stairs, in anguish.

Then came a crash; window-glass to the wood floor. This was followed by thudding feet. Some one was hurrying around aimlessly, apparently. Suddenly through the door to the living-room came Hazelton, white and wild-eyed. In a moment he had both Wiltbank and Harrison free. He shook Wiltbank. "Got any strength?"

Wiltbank swayed and stumbled. "They cracked me on the head."

"I'm all right," said Harrison.

"Then come with me," said Hazelton. "We got them, but one of them got MacGregor—I don't know how badly; couldn't tell in the dark."

Hazelton and the butler vanished. Wiltbank rested his head in his hands. . . . . Johnny!

Presently they brought him in and laid him on a rug. Johnny lay there, very still.

CHAPTER XXII

DIZZILY Wiltbank watched the goings and comings of Hazelton and Harrison, watched the still form on the floor. Then he saw Hazelton with water and bandages, which meant that Johnny was alive. The blow on the head had not only made him groggy but had partially deafened him; so that he heard little or none of the noise. Each time he tried to get up, the hall spun and his knees buckled. Johnny—and he couldn't go to him!

"Just keep still for a while," yelled Hazelton. "You'll be all right."

"But Johnny! In God's name, what's happened?"

"Johnny's plugged, but he's alive. We've sent for the doctors and the sheriff. Those birds outside are in a bad way, too. They were cleaning out your cellar. MacGregor's hunch. We ran plumb into them. Half your cellar is stocked on the lawn. They didn't expect you back so soon."

"Where is he hit?"

"Through the shoulder, and there's a crease along the side of his head. That made me think he was gone. He got one off the reel. I got the fellow who shot MacGregor. Your butler's all right. Game little codger. Your pictures are down, too. Oh, it was a big clean-up. They locked your housekeeper in her room. I'll fix that head of yours in just a minute."

"But Johnny?"

"We can't tell till the doctors come."

HALF an hour later the verdict was given. MacGregor would live, but it would take two or three months to bring him around.

"May I see him?" asked Wiltbank.

"Tomorrow—but no excitement tonight. They gave you a pretty good rap, too. There'll be a bump for two or three days. Those crooks will both live to be hanged. But my advice is, build a vault for that wine-cellar and hire an armed guard," said the doctor. "I didn't know there was such stuff left in this world. Now, you toddle to bed. Up and around you'll be a nuisance. I'm staying through the night; and if my diagnosis isn't right and there is a serious change, I'll wake you up."

"Go to bed," advised Harrison. "Mr. Hazelton has sent for his sister, who is a trained nurse. Your friend Johnny will pull through."

"George, you're a good old scout. No, no!"—as Harrison offered his arm. "I can make my room all right."

Harrison followed him with his gaze till Wiltbank turned the landing. Loyalty. Friendship. Harrison rubbed his nose violently and proceeded into the kitchen. He was hungry, or he believed he was. Loyalty. Each willing to give his all for the other. Wastrels. What a queer old world it was! It seemed to him—was it because he was old?—that the great things in life came out of friendship.

WHEN Alice Hazelton received the news and call from her brother, she, who had seen with a clear mind many dreadful things in France, lost her head temporarily. She ran to Kitty's door and knocked.

"Who is it?"—sleepily.

"Miss Hazelton." The door opened presently. "Something terrible has happened out at the Oaks. Shooting. He may die!" Without further explanation Alice rushed down the hall to the stairs, and vanished.

Kitty leaned motionless against the door jamb. Shooting—he might die! Terror gripped her body. The thing she had secretly been dreading had happened. Oh, she knew! Terror let go of her, and fury took hold of her—fury of action. In ten minutes she was dressed and running about the streets madly in search of a vehicle. It never occurred to her that she might have telephoned, got her information, and then decided her actions. At length she found the Ford which had carried her out to the Oaks, engaged it, at a price which stunned the owner; and shortly she was bumbling along the road to the Oaks. Her daddy—just when they perfectly understood each other!

"Hurry! Hurry!" she cried.

"I'm steppin' on it, ma'am."

Her father! It could be nobody else. She knew it. He would in his folly play such a game. It was written that such an end should come to such an adventure.

"Hurry!" she repeated.

"I'm givin' her all she's got, ma'am; but I aint takin' no extry risks."

Kitty was bumped from side to side, catching at anything that would steady her. When she finally saw the lights in the windows of the Oaks, she wanted to scream. When Harrison, wondering who it was, opened the door, she collapsed in his arms.

"Kitty!"

"I—I thought it was you!" And she began to sob.

"You thought it was me?" There are times when we speak naturally and not grammatically. "Why, Kitty, this is a very beautiful world after all."

"But who was shot?"

"MacGregor. Bootleggers. If MacGregor and Hazelton hadn't come along, they would have looted the house. They had the paintings and half the wine on the lawn."

"Will he die?"—shocked.

"No. He's tough. Besides, Miss Hazelton will nurse him."

"I'm so sorry! But where was Mr. Wiltbank during all this?"

"Both of us were bound and gagged and thrown at the foot of the stairs. They didn't hurt me. I'm old. But they blackjacked Mr. Wiltbank, and he's in bed with an egg on top of his head."

"And everything seemed so quiet!"

"Then's the time to watch out for bricks. I thought I knew something about men, but these young fellows fool me. Wastrels," he added, with an upward gesture. "Wastrels, and yet in the supreme moment—men. It's a queer world to understand, Kitty. I don't know much about women; but is there the same loyalty between women as there is between men? To save a small fortune for his friend, MacGregor exposed his life. To wipe the slate clean of his fool's act the other night, he has a bullet in the shoulder."

"I'm sorry. But Miss Hazelton said some one was dying, and of course I thought it must be you. I'll be getting back now. It is useless to ask you to leave this house."

"Absolutely."

"Very well. Telephone me in the morn-

ing. If Miss Hazelton needs any of her things, I'll send them out tomorrow."

"So you came out here, hell for leather, because you thought it might be me?" He held her tightly in his arms, then let her go. "That'll keep the old pump warm for some time."

"Why didn't Mrs. Wolcott do something?"

"They locked her in her room with the baby."

"What time is it?"

HARRISON took out his watch. "It's twelve o'clock."

He gazed wistfully at a portrait in the case. "How beautiful she was, Kitty! How and where did she die? For I know that she is dead, else I should have heard something. She was too beautiful to live and not be discovered. Was it my fault, Kitty?"

"Daddy, Daddy! You torture me with this abiding heartache."

"When I go hence, will you let this watch go with me? Wherever I go, I want to show it so some one will recognize her and guide me to her. The dead understand everything, so they say. She will understand. But you and I will never misunderstand each other again."

"No, Daddy. And if you would only come home and let me prove it!"

"Tut, tut!"

"How long will it take Mr. MacGregor to get well?"

"Two or three months. I suppose it is written in the book that he will marry, settle down and become a country gentleman. His sense of generosity is his greatest failing. He has taken over the mortgage on the Oaks, and Wiltbank will not be troubled for a year."

"I'm sorry for him, too. To have had everything and to have thrown it away! Take care of yourself."

He helped her into the Ford; and as she was driven away a novel plan came into her head. She would have the mother in Hakett within a week. She would offer a prize worth reaching for. She did not want to be unjust; she wanted the truth. The bits of talk she had gathered about the village convinced her that the villagers believed Wiltbank guilty of everything but murder. A deal of the chatter was nonsense; but where there's smoke there's fire. Of Wiltbank senior they had only the highest praise.

It was so hard for her to judge. Her experience had been limited to dodging stage-door johnnies; she knew nothing about them by contact. The letters Wiltbank had written her might have been written by an accepted lover. She had, by this time, reread them to the point where boredom became overcast by loneliness. To escape loneliness.

Yet he was a profligate. The lures of Broadway had got to him. He had thrown away his birthright for a sign-light, so to speak. A woman had left a baby on his doorstep. What had happened before that wild Friday night could not act upon his future or concern it. Otherwise she would have known whence the baby had come. She would have attributed it to the diabolical irony of her father. Very well. She would find out about that foundling by a process as old as Gutenberg himself.

The next morning she went to the post-office and sent out four money-orders to four metropolitan newspapers. These money-orders were accompanied by a want advertisement. Kitty knew something of the power of the press.

AT noon that day, Johnny returned from his dark wanderings. He was too weak to talk; but he could smile, and he seemed to see no one to smile at but Alice Hazelton.

When Wiltbank came in, his head in bandages, he sat down at the sound side of Johnny, and the two held hands. Words weren't necessary. But to Wiltbank there was a subtle irony in it all. Hazelton—Johnny's cell-neighbor in jail—had saved Johnny's life: the man upon whom Wiltbank had looked with careless contempt. The private secretary who was only a joke; a man to whom Johnny had made a promise in a befuddled moment and was too pigheaded to back out of it. The Great Dramatist shuffled his characters about strangely indeed. There was always some one in the cast not down on the program.

"My daughter called last night," said Harrison to Wiltbank later.

"Oh, she did?" said Wiltbank, carelessly.

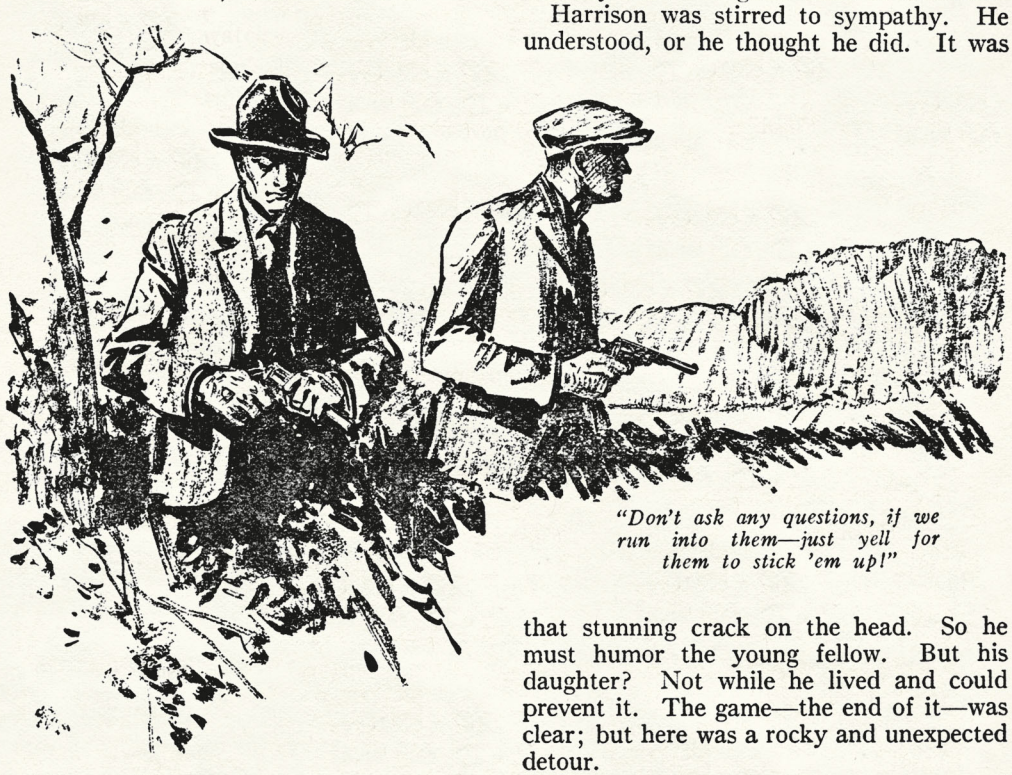
"She was very sorry. She thought at first that I had been shot. Miss Hazelton did not give her the facts."

"I see."

Wiltbank then went on into the library and shut the door with a bang. Harrison scratched his chin. The young man did not seem to have as much curiosity as

the situation demanded. Still, what more could he ask? To his astonishment the library door opened suddenly, and Wiltbank beckoned with a crooked finger. Harrison entered the library, oddly stirred.

"Close the door," said Wiltbank.



"Don't ask any questions, if we run into them—just yell for them to stick 'em up!"

"Yes, sir."

Wiltbank paced the room for awhile, then halted in front of Harrison.

"Would I be acceptable to you as a son-in-law?" Wiltbank demanded savagely.

Had he taken the form of one of the prehistoric colossi, Harrison could not have eyed him with more dumfoundment.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN a world of words, Harrison found none ready to his needs.

"I am asking you a question," said Wiltbank.

"I beg your pardon!"

"Perhaps I am a trifle sudden," Wiltbank was willing to admit.

"I'm telling you that I'm in love with your daughter. Have you any objections?"

"But you do not know her!"

"What the devil has that to do with it?"

"And what does she know about you?"

"What does she know about me? That I'm a good-for-nothing; that I have run through my patrimony; that I have no future; that about all I could do for a living would be a clerkship in a haberdashery. I will say that I've good taste in neckties."

Harrison was stirred to sympathy. He understood, or he thought he did. It was that stunning crack on the head. So he must humor the young fellow. But his daughter? Not while he lived and could prevent it. The game—the end of it—was clear; but here was a rocky and unexpected detour.

"I'm sorry, sir; but I have no control over my daughter, mentally or physically." Which was true enough, he thought dejectedly.

"I am merely apprising you of a fact."

"You want me to tell her?"

"Lord, no! What good would that do? I merely want you to know it. So that some day, if you come across a bigger fool than I am, you'll have a comparison to go by."

"I—I don't know what to say. Perhaps your head, sir—"

"Of course it's my head. A man doesn't fall in love by way of his feet, does he?"

What puzzled and alarmed Harrison was the undertow of downright savagery in Wiltbank's tones and gestures.

"What I'm trying to find out," went on the victim of the bootlegger's blackjack, "is whether I am objectionable to you."

"I am a servant."

"That has nothing to do with it. If you were a hodcarrier and she your daughter,

it wouldn't make any difference. Why did she leave so suddenly?"

"The wild night—"

"But she was a passive part of it!"

"Perhaps the baby—"

"Ah! This house of moral turpitude, as Parbody called it. So she ran away because the event shocked her?"

"Well, sir—"

Wiltbank caught him by the shoulders and whirled him about-face.

"Look me in the eye." Harrison was compelled by force of circumstances to do so. "Is there anything to suggest to you that I am both a liar and a welcher? Some one has perpetrated a cruel hoax. That bullet— How it would have simplified everything if I had got it instead of Johnny, and on the mark!"

"You mustn't get that notion, sir. It's always darkest—"

"Platitudes!"

"'No man is useless while he has a friend,' wrote Stevenson. And you have a very loyal friend upstairs."

"Good old Johnny! But the village will always believe that kid mine."

"If your conscience is clear, what do you care what the village says?"

"Every human being depends upon public opinion, if he would live at peace with his neighbors."

Harrison wanted to say: "You should have thought of that some time ago." What he did say was: "There is nothing that we cannot live down if we live right."

"Yes, yes; I know. But let us come back to the original subject. Would you object to me as a son-in-law?"

"I have waited upon you at table. If you married my daughter, could you quite forget that?"

"You are evading me."

Harrison was sorely puzzled what to do with this madman. He could not tell him that he was the last man on earth he would choose as the husband of his daughter. Still, his heart ached for the young fellow. The absurdity of the situation would come to him when his head cleared; and Harrison hoped it would clear soon.

"I was a circus clown, too. Kitty was born under the big top."

"Haven't I been a sorrier clown than you ever were?"

Harrison did not take umbrage. Perhaps he had been a sorry clown. "Suppose, sir, we make it a truce. Let us bring up the subject again, say, six months from now?"

Wiltbank sat down on the lounge. "I wanted to learn if there was any one but Johnny who respected me. You don't. I can't blame you. You'll not abuse my confidence?"

"No, sir."

"Nor give her any notion what a complete ass I am. I had to get this off my chest. What I've told you, though, stands from now till kingdom-come."

"I promise to say nothing, sir. If, at the end of six months, you wish to bring up the subject again—"

"Or at the end of six thousand years. . . . . You don't suppose I fell in love with her because I wanted to?"

"I am too much bewildered to think clearly, sir."

"On that point we are brothers. Well, I've got it off my chest. And yesterday you couldn't have got it out of me with hot pincers." With that he held his bandaged head in his hands.

"I might make a suggestion, sir. Place the baby in the orphanage."

"The woman brought it, and it's going to stay here till she comes for it; and that's the last shot at that target."

Speech left him, and he studied the rug intently. The patterns seemed to run into each other.

Harrison saw that this was his opportunity, so tiptoed out and softly closed the door. There was cold sweat on his forehead. It was as though he had been running along a perfectly level road, the perspective of which was visibly unbroken, suddenly to find an abyss at his feet!

TEN days later MacGregor was strong enough to be conveyed to his own home, and with him went Hazelton and Alice. Wiltbank, his head normal, set himself down to his law studies, and a pleasant quiet fell upon the Oaks.

One of the strange adventures in life is this: in passing we touch another, wreak havoc, and go on, without ever knowing what we leave behind. The passing of the bootleggers had such an effect upon the houses of Wiltbank and MacGregor: certain kinds of havoc.

Wiltbank became shy and reticent with Harrison, though the latter pretended that he had forgotten the interview.

The hosts of winter were coming over the hills; the wild duck were dappling the Outlet. The strange baby said *"goo-goo"* more often than *"yow;"* and Mrs. Wolcott

declared that she was never going to let it go. Johnny held Alice's hand whenever he could, his excuse being that he might Drift Off with nothing to hang on. Hazelton took a bottle of whisky up to his room, set it on the dresser and never took out the cork: a fact which often filled him with astonishment.

Of MacGregor we once indicated that the handwriting was on the wall. We now know that it related to his single blessedness. It was doomed. He fell in love just as he fell into trouble—wholeheartedly. In his own phraseology, he made no bones about it. This was the Girl, and there was no use beating about the bush.

"George," said Alice to her brother, "Johnny has asked me to marry him."

Hazelton frowned. "Isn't one in the family enough?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, isn't one trouble-maker enough? Don't get me wrong, Sis. Johnny's ace-high with me on all points. But recollect all the trouble I brought to you. Has he promised to cut it out?"

"No. And I admired him all the better for that."

George flushed. "I did make a lot of promises, didn't I? But this time I haven't promised anything."

"Because you know you'll never return to the old ways. I love him, George; I'm ready to take the whole of him, the good and the bad, just as he is."

"I always said you were a game little sport. Make it a year from now. Wait till he can get into town. I don't exact it, but it might be just as well. But there's one thing I want thoroughly understood. When the day comes, my job will be elsewhere. I'm no sponge."

WE come upon the morning when Kitty received a reply to her advertisement. The letter was brief and insulting. "The writer claims no reward. Mr. Wiltbank knows why the child was brought to his house and not taken to the orphanage."

There was a finality about this, and Kitty accepted it. Fury rolled over her and almost submerged her. Then she came to, sat down and wondered why she should wax furious over something which in no wise concerned her. The man had written on a card that he loved her. Still bored and wanting excitement. He had never been inside her orbit. Nice looking, yes; the manners of a gentleman; but a wastrel. The word appealed to her, though she was not aware of it.

She wore this condemnatory mood into a frazzle, then began to cry softly. Lying to herself—as she had done for weeks—was a poor game. The truth could no longer be hidden. Out of those beautifully written letters she had built an image: a dream prince. She had gone to the Oaks, something like Cinderella, to learn if any part of this dream had substantiality. It hadn't.

Love. Dew on cobwebs. Frost in the moonlight. A dream thing. But ah, how desperately we try to fit this dream to the actuality, and never do or can! Love calls, and we answer; and what comes back from the Valley of Echoes? Disillusion.

What should she do with the letters now, the image having been shattered? Rend them and scatter them upon the wind? A longing came to her to return to the stage; action, excitement, and forgetfulness; but she hated the smells and the falseness of the theater. She would go home and await her father's return.

The room became stuffy, though the radiator was cold. She needed long reaches, the sea, the sky. So she put on her things and strode down to the beach. That she proceeded toward the Oaks was purely accidental. She had the letters in her handbag. She would find a shelter somewhere and give the letters one more reading before she put them away forever.

And irony directed Wiltbank's steps to the same shelter. Have you ever speculated upon this fact, that whenever we reach a philosophical basis and agree to go on and make the best of the remnants, irony is sure to step on our toes?

Wiltbank had got himself together. He had resigned himself to the inevitable. It seemed to him that he was on the upward march. His feet were no longer obstructed by the fogs of indecision.

UNEXPECTEDLY he came upon Kitty. She was sitting between two dunes, gazing seaward with half-closed eyes. He dared not turn and make off; she might catch him at it. And while he hesitated, she turned her head. Seeing him, she jumped to her feet.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I did not see you. I did not mean to intrude."

"You are not intruding," she replied. "The beach is not private." She brushed the sand from her skirt.

"Why did you leave the Oaks?"

She was ready. "Too much like a tavern."

"The foundling—"

"My dear Mr. Wiltbank, you do not have to excuse your conduct to me!"

"I am a gentleman. I should not tell one woman I loved her while I was under obligations to another."

The boldness of this retort embarrassed her. "I wish you good morning."

She turned to walk away; and it came upon him that it would be forever. Immediately he rushed to her side, swept her into his arms and kissed her. He released her at once.

"I shall have that much to carry through life, anyhow," he declared, recklessly.

"You made some remark about being a gentleman." Her voice was unsteady.

"The lover got the best of me. I offer you no apology."

"Which is thoughtful, since I should utterly refuse to accept one. By the way, I have something of yours." She opened her handbag and extracted the packet of letters. She tossed them at his feet, then made off with a vigorous stride.

For awhile he followed her with his eyes, till some dunes intervened, then he stooped for the letters. His own—to *L'Inconnue!*

CHAPTER XXIV

WILTBANK should have, in conformity with established literary precedents, sunk upon the sand and buried his face in his hands. Instead, he rammed the letters into a pocket and laughed; but it was laughter of a quality which is not good to hear. The gods had a tentative hand in it. He turned toward home, intermittently giving vent to this laughter. *L'Inconnue!*—and he had all but forgotten her existence!

Dear God, how beautiful she was! He leaned against a tree for a moment. Energy seemed to have gone out of his legs. *L'Inconnue*—and she had believed in those idle effusions of a man who hadn't any rudder! Well, he had kissed her; neither of them would ever forget that; and to both of them the taste would always be bitter. Life flowed back into his legs again, and he rushed on. He entered the house noisily, banging the hall door.

"George!" he called. "George!" He hadn't Lethe to bathe in, but there was some old King William in Bin Nine; for an hour or two he wouldn't care a hang about anything. "George!" he shouted.

Harrison appeared. He wore an apron and in his hand was a silver teapot which he was polishing.

"Go down to Bin Nine and bring me up one of those bottles and a carafe of water. Needn't bother about the ice."

Harrison's hands fell slowly to his sides. He wasn't quite sure that he had heard the order correctly.

"Bin Nine, did you say, sir?"

"King William, noble Scot. You have the keys."

"But your order, sir, was for me to refuse you upon this point."

"Oh, that was when there was a Spanish galleon, doubloons, pieces of eight, and all that in the offing. What we observe in the offing now is a junk barge."

"You order me to get you whisky?"

"I order you, *pronto*. And bring it into the library."

"I am very sorry, sir."

"Never mind about the sorrow till tomorrow. Then you can get me Johnny MacGregor's favorite breakfast food—a bromo-seltzer."

"Something serious has happened, sir, or you wouldn't ask me to do this."

"Give me the keys."

Harrison surrendered them reluctantly; and Wiltbank tossed them several times into the air and caught them.

"George, what a wonderful thing a key is! Have you ever given the key its proper consideration? It keeps out the people you don't like. It protects your bonds, if you have any. It lets you in at four A.M., your shoes in your left hand. Even old St. Peter is painted with a key. There's a key to everything but the riddle of life."

Harrison went into the kitchen to fill the carafe and to get a glass from the pantry.

"He's gone down cellar for a bottle of whisky," he said to Mrs. Wolcott, who was trimming pies while the infant slept.

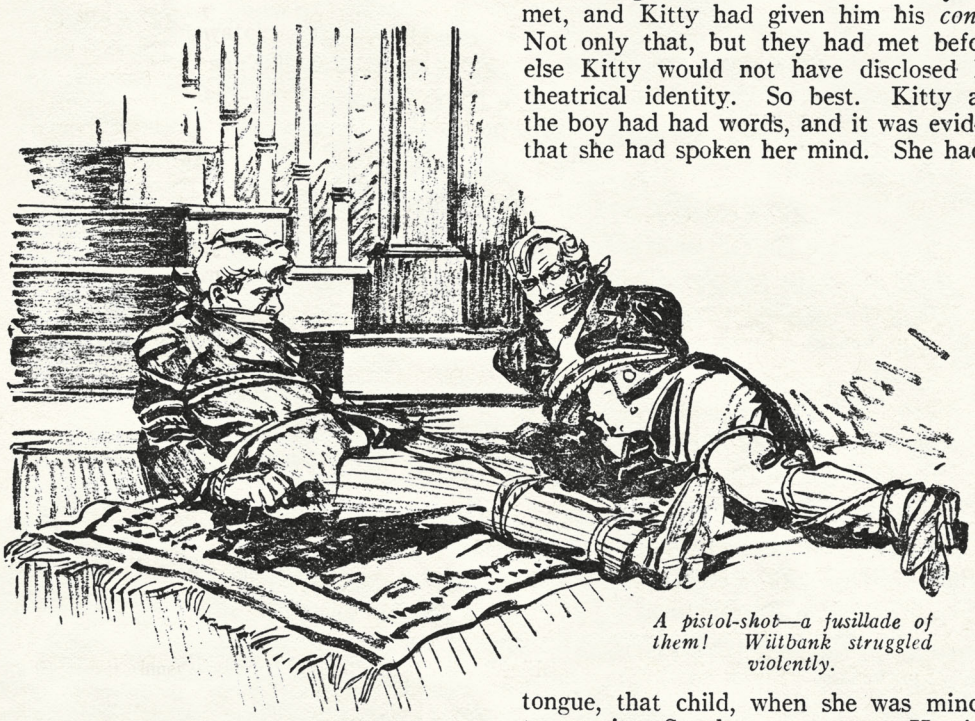
"Whisky?" She threw aloft her floury hands. "Can't you stop him?"

"The whisky is his," said Harrison, shrugging. "I don't know what's got into him. Something mighty serious has hap-

pened to put him into this mood. He hasn't touched a drop since he came home."

"Do you suppose it's something about the baby?"

"No. He walked toward the village this morning. Something happened while he was there."



A pistol-shot—a fusillade of them! Wiltbank struggled violently.

"They may have insulted him. Hakett would, if there was a baby here that couldn't be accounted for. I just could cry!" said Mrs. Wolcott, fingering her apron. "He's been more like himself lately. He was dreadfully wounded."

"Does he ever speak of it?"

"No."

"Does he ever complain of headaches?"

"No. He needs a woman to look after him—a wife."

"A wife, when he can't even trust himself?"

"Look what that little Hazelton girl has done for Johnny MacGregor."

Harrison was not desirous of getting into an argument on matrimonial adventures; so he carried the carafe and the glass into the library, and had the wood-fire going as Wiltbank came in with a dusty bottle in his hand. He set down the bottle and waved a dismissal.

"Sha'n't I open it for you, sir?"

"You're going to be absolutely guiltless, George. I met your daughter on the beach. I did not know that she was *L'Inconnue,* the celebrated dancer."

Harrison nodded, not at Wiltbank but at a thought. So that was it? They had met, and Kitty had given him his *congé.* Not only that, but they had met before, else Kitty would not have disclosed her theatrical identity. So best. Kitty and the boy had had words, and it was evident that she had spoken her mind. She had a tongue, that child, when she was minded to use it. So that was over. Harrison sighed with relief and satisfaction. . . . .

At one o'clock—two hours later—he knocked on the library door to announce that luncheon was served. He received no answer. Cautiously he opened the door and peered into the room, his mind ready to receive a certain picture. Wiltbank was leaning, elbows on knees, and staring into the ruddy embers of the fire. The seal on the cork of the bottle had not been broken.

"Luncheon is ready, sir."

"Is that you, George? Never mind about luncheon for me. Here are the keys. Take the bottle back to the bin. I should have wasted it. Now that I understand, I do not blame your daughter. She is a celebrity, and I am nobody, and broke at that. So we sha'n't bother to bring up the subject six months from now."

"She is not returning to the stage, sir."

"Why not, when she can roll up a fortune? What a tantalizing thing a mystery is!"

"I compliment you on your victory, sir.

I should have been sorry to see you touch that stuff again."

"I saw her dance. She intrigued me. I asked to meet her. She declined. I sent her a dozen love-letters; and the droll part of it is, I meant every word, even though I hadn't seen her face. She came here to learn if I were the sort rumor had named me; and she learned that I was. All the bricks in heaven, on top of my head! George, I don't quite get it. You know what I think? I'm still in France, with a cracked noddle, and I haven't come out of it yet. You're a pretty good sort. I don't mean because you're her father. Charles was just a servant. There's a man hiding back of those brass buttons of yours."

"Thank you, sir."

"I should like to be alone now, if you don't mind."

"Better have some luncheon."

"Couldn't eat anything."

"May I have the afternoon off?"

"Yes, certainly."

NOW a strange thing happened while Harrison was passing along the hotel hallway to his daughter's room. A plump, white-haired man, with a flabby pathetic face, stuck his head out of a door; and before he could retreat, Harrison had him by the arm, and pushed him back into the room.

"What in the name of Tophet are you doing here in Hakett?" Harrison whispered fiercely.

"I had to come, sir. I know I promised. I was out there the night of the shooting. I had to stay around. I've known him since he was a little boy, before his mother died."

"You go back to New York tonight, or the other thousand will never reach your pocket," said Harrison, roughly.

"Will you give me your word of honor, Mr. Harrison, that you mean him no harm?"

"On my honor, Charles. Has any one seen you?"

"Only the hotel clerk. He's new and doesn't recognize me. How is he, sir?"

"Well. And he hasn't touched anything in weeks. Remember, you climb out of here on the night train."

"Yes sir—but I'm lonesome for the Oaks. You never wrote me as you promised."

"From now on I shall. But if you meddle in the least, you'll regret it."

Harrison then sought his daughter. But he was so disturbed by the appearance of the old butler Charles, that he lost some of the finer points of vocal inflection.

"Why didn't you tell me you had received letters from Wiltbank?"

"It wasn't necessary, was it? And I'd rather not talk about it at all. I'm glad you're here. I was going to telephone you to come in. I am leaving for home tonight."

"That's something like," said Harrison. "He says he's in love with you; but he'll get over it."

"He told you?"—aghast.

"It was the day after the bootlegger cracked him on the head. He wasn't quite himself."

"That foundling is his, Daddy."

"How did you find that out?"

"I put an advertisement in the New York papers. The woman herself answered it. Is she blackmailing him?"

"No; I don't believe so. He'd fight blackmail, tooth and nail. Besides, he hasn't anything. What's the comment in the village?"

"The village is quite happy over the scandal. It indicates their opinion of Mr. Wiltbank!"—scornfully.

"Huh. I know all about villages. They are most of them mean."

"You are defending him?"

"I am expressing my opinion of villages."

"Oh! When will you be home?"

"When my job is done." He was worried about Charles, however. If the old fool would not stay put, he might make trouble. The old family servitor; loyalty in bulk. Yet it was rather hard on the old boy, adrift in New York, without service to keep him active. "Write me once a week."

"I'll answer your letters. I'm going to get you some new rugs for your study."

"As many as you like." Rugs, he thought. She could not be very much disturbed over the Wiltbank episode, to talk of rugs. "Kitty, when you marry, marry a man of character, stamina, patience; a man who can provide for you by his own energies and not by the energies of his forebears. Inherited money is a bad thing for a young man, generally. Take both Wiltbank and MacGregor; inherited money has all but destroyed them. Upon their own, they would have been first-rate citizens. They had a stout rope to begin with, and now they have only the frayed ends."

He kissed her a fond good-by, and she clung to him fiercely. He went down into

the street, where it came to him that Kitty hadn't said a word about her encounter with Wiltbank that morning. But she was going home, and that was the important thing.

So the woman had written? Harrison frowned. The clown in him was impervious to all the education he had acquired. As a little boy he had put bent pins on his teacher's chair. He would die in the motley, probably. Oh, well!

But Wiltbank had ordered a bottle of whisky and had returned it to the cellar untouched. That was something to mark on the tally-board.

CHAPTER XXV

THE rains came, then the snows; the cold dead hand of winter gripped the land. There was a glittering angry sea that roared and lashed against the forbidden line. Cheerless without, the Oaks was cheery within.

Wiltbank had got him a dog—a Sealyham terrier. He was astonished to recall that in his boyhood he had had a regiment of dogs and had only now returned to his love of them. The Sealyham was a grave little puppy, taking the world seriously from the start. Nearly every afternoon they brought down the baby, settled him on a padded quilt, and then watched the baby and the Sealyham. Puppies, human and canine, afforded a half-hour of comedy.

"I wonder if I ought to get a nurse?" said Wiltbank.

"Nurse? Nonsense!" cried Mrs. Wolcott. "She'd spoil the boy."

"I say, what the deuce shall we call him?"

The trio stared at each other blankly. The baby ought to have a name, even if a temporary one.

"I'll call him George," said Wiltbank with a smile at Harrison. "You saw him first."

"I've no objections," replied Harrison.

"George it is, then."

"Wiltbank?" The word was out; Harrison could not recall it.

"No-o. That might not be fair to him. I'm keeping him till his mother comes. Besides, my name would head him into mischief."

Harrison saw that Wiltbank had caught only the sound of his name, not the sinister application of it. Harrison swore at himself inwardly. He hadn't meant to say anything like that.

"You weren't very mischievous when you were little," said Mrs. Wolcott.

Wiltbank chuckled at her. "If Johnny and I weren't robbing your cooky jars, we were robbing his. Funny thing, how good a stolen cooky tastes. How the dog and the kid liven up the house!"

Mrs. Wolcott sighed. She had always hoped that he would some day have one of his own. But it didn't look that way now.

These days Wiltbank had no car, but three times a week Johnny's car came for him through the drifts. Johnny was up and about, but he was still wabbly. He really had had a close call. At noon he was permitted to have a glass of port wine. To Johnny this was medicine, for he abhorred port. It filled Wiltbank's heart with bitterness to watch those two—Johnny and Alice.

They were frankly in love with each other and did not care who knew it. No agonies of approach, no barriers to scale, no castles to storm; they had met, fallen in love, and would marry when they pleased. True, she had nursed him for weeks. But what Wiltbank mused upon was their good fortune. The road was smooth. Wiltbank wasn't envious; he was only comparing his own muddle with this ideal affair.

There would be bridge, tea, and at five Wiltbank would be driven home. The time between the return home and dinner he would usually pass in front of the fire, the snoring Sealyham on his knees. What a comforting thing a dog was! Life close by, life one did not have to explain things to, life that was a barrier between utter loneliness. Neither the butler nor Mrs. Wolcott could be taken up on a companionable basis, much as he liked them. But a dog seemed to understand without being spoken to.

The last of February was stormy—dry snow and a cutting wind. Wiltbank did not expect to hear from Johnny that day; but at three the sedan lurched and twisted up to the porte-cochère.

"Shall I be able to get back?" Wiltbank asked of Johnny's chauffeur. "That's a bad-looking sky."

"Don't you worry; I'll get you back. Mr. MacGregor wants to give you a surprise. Of course, I'm not supposed to say anything, sir; but you'd better get out of your plus-fours and into a cutaway."

"Company?"

"Yes sir."

"Give me two minutes. What kind of company?"

"The best there is, sir. You'll say so when you see."

WHEN he arrived at MacGregor's, Wiltbank found only one stranger; and the collar of this stranger buttoned at the back of his neck. A parson!

When the opportunity offered, Hazelton got Wiltbank aside.

"The village. Too much talk about Alice being out here alone, so to speak."

"Married?"

"In ten minutes."

Wiltbank ran to Johnny and Alice, and hugged them both. Johnny, safe at last!

"But I haven't got you a present!"

"Flapdoodle! I want a wife," said Johnny, "and not half a dozen sugar-bowls and salad forks. God bless her! You know, Jimmy. . . . . Say, what a lot of queer things have happened since that night I landed in the hoosegow! But pipe what I got out of it. Yea-bo!" In a whisper: "Have you found out anything about that kid yet?"

"No. Funny little codger, too. Can you make my house tomorrow night?"

"Dinner? Sure, if the storm breaks. Say, can you imagine me getting spliced without a punchbowl at my elbow? The truth is, there's her brother. Best fellow in the world; but if he ever sees me stick my beezer into a dark glass, he may run loose again. Got to keep an eye on him."

"So you've come home too?"

"Abso-looly!"

Later—Hazelton to Wiltbank: "I'd offer you something on the quiet, only, if he ever smells it, good night. You see how it is."

Wiltbank laughed, but he kept the cause to himself. Johnny afraid for Hazelton, and the latter afraid for Johnny!

While Johnny MacGregor took oath to cherish, and so forth and so on, Harrison received a telephone call from the village. The caller was a woman.

"Very well; I'll be right in," he said, and hung up the receiver. Clown, always the clown. He took down the receiver again and asked the village garage to send him a taxi at once. If you could have looked inside of Michael Harrison, you would have seen a surprising thing. He was in a blue funk. Old flabby-jowl Charles had been enough; now this beldame had to turn up!

Half a dozen times, in making the village, the Ford threatened to breathe its last in a crusted drift; and Harrison each time had to get out and lend a shoulder. As it is with the family of Pan, the more calamitous the episode, so it concerns themselves, the higher rises their humor; so when the car halted before the hotel, Harrison was pure comedian. At that moment there wasn't a woman alive he couldn't handle, and this one was going to be a choice prickly pear—her tones over the telephone assured him of this.

He found her in the chilly parlor. She had a good-looking knowing face. She made room for him on the red plush sofa.

"Let me begin," he said. "First-off, nobody can blackmail me."

"Second-off, my dear Mr. Harrison, nobody's going to try to blackmail you," replied the woman. "But lately I chanced to find out who Michael Harrison is."

"Well?"

"Two millions, and maybe more."

"You accepted my offer."

"Because I saw a decent home for the kiddie while I was doing the sticks. We broke down in Carolina. Then I thought I'd nose around a little; and so I found out. An old circus clown, with a bunch of kale as high as the Woolworth. You offered me five hundred down and the same amount when your play was up. Shame on you—and a beautiful kiddie like mine! What your game is, I don't know. I'll let that ride, because it's the kid's only chance of ever getting into society. I want twenty-five hundred, here and now, or I'll toddle out to the castle, tuck the kid under my arm, and go back to New York."

"Come on, then. We'll toddle out to the castle and get the kiddie." Harrison laughed sardonically and got up. "My Rolls-Royce awaits without. Come along."

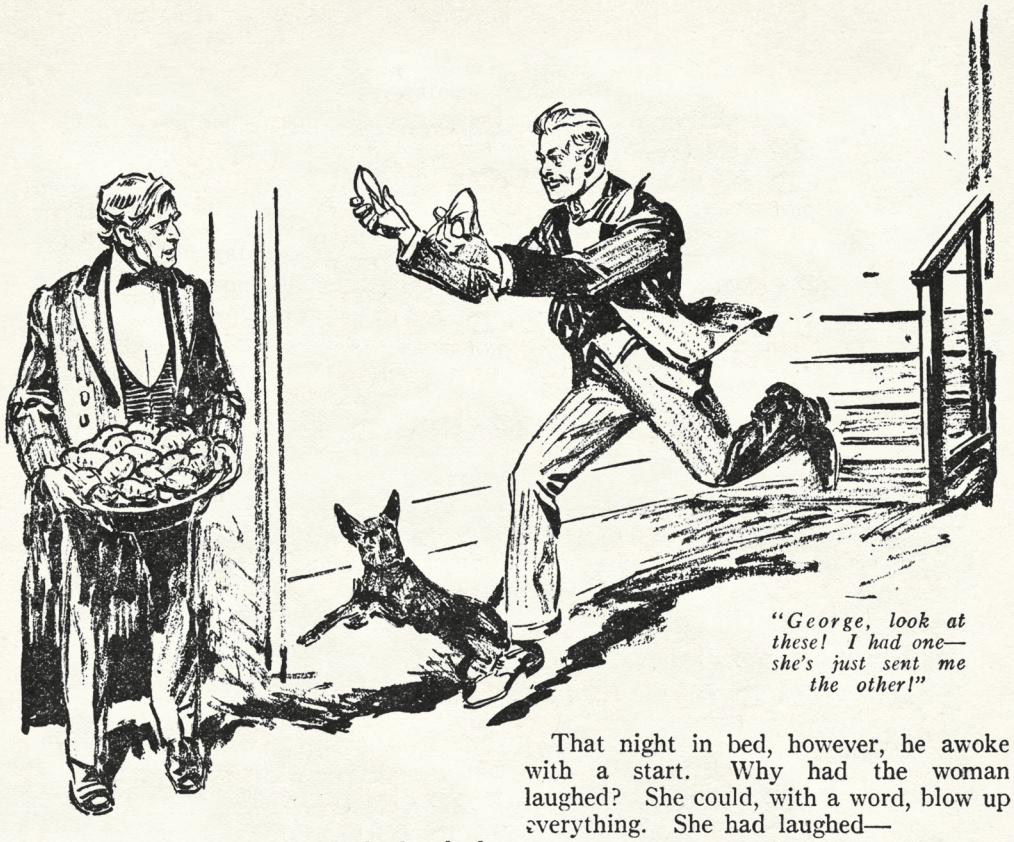
She accompanied him to the waiting Ford. "I'll make it a thousand," she said amiably.

Harrison laughed again. "It's blackmail of a sort."

"Yes; but you can't lead me into any court for it. One thousand."

"Not a German mark. When I'm through with the baby, I'll bring him to you; but till that hour you lay doggo, or you'll get the boy minus the other five hundred. Here's twenty to cover your expenses for a fool errand. You jumped readily enough at the original proposition."

The woman took the twenty.



"George, look at these! I had one—she's just sent me the other!"

"You're a hard-boiled egg," she laughed.

"My dear woman, the shell goes right down to the yolk."

"By-by!" she said, and laughed mockingly again.

Harrison got into the car and ordered the curious driver to return to the Oaks. He had bluffed out of it; but his palms were sweaty.

The woman watched the car till the swirling snow rolled in behind, then laughed. Tight, was he? All right. It would cost him more than twenty-five hundred in the end. She went back into the hotel and asked the clerk about trains. Of all the dumps she had ever been in!

That night Harrison played with the child longer than usual. Funny thing about those little fingers. Their squirming meant nothing; then all at once they were squirming in your heart. When Kitty was born, he had been afraid of her; suddenly those helpless little pink fingers clutched his heart, and still clutched it.

In her letters she never mentioned Wiltbank, and he did not like that at all. It signified a certain lack of frankness. But in his letters he told her everything that went on, even to the whisky-bottle that had gone back to the cellar unopened.

That night in bed, however, he awoke with a start. Why had the woman laughed? She could, with a word, blow up everything. She had laughed—

FEBRUARY passed, and March, April, May. As regards the Oaks we might very well use Mark Twain's model for keeping a diary on board a ship. *"Got up. Washed. Went to bed."* Nothing happened—that is, nothing with a thrill in it. The even tenor—which in its non-vocal sense means continued calm—flowed on unbroken.

Worth mentioning, however, are the facts that in April, MacGregor and his bride went on their honeymoon to Atlantic City, because Johnny wouldn't have the wherewithal to go to Europe till after July first (his trustees being cautious beggars); that the baby was going to have a new tooth; that Fordham had promised to take Wiltbank into his law-offices after September; and that nobody went into the Wiltbank cellars but Harrison, and he only to bring up firewood and vegetables and to fix the furnace.

Up to June everything was as dull as ditchwater, a word itself grown dull by usage. After that, things began to happen. Comedy, love, tragedy, true to form, entered a free-for-all.

There came a package to the Oaks, a package registered and stamped special de-

livery. A lad on a bicycle brought it. The Sealyham was always full of alarms when the bell rang. The dog insisted that the package should be opened at once. He loved to worry paper. Wiltbank opened the package, and his eyes bulged.

In his hand lay a little silver slipper!

Light did not burst upon him at once. When it did, he spun on his heels, and dashed up the stairs to his bedroom. The slippers were mates. Downstairs again, the Sealyham yelping inquiries.

"George!" Wiltbank, slippers in hand, ran about the lower house. "George!" In the end he met Harrison emerging from the cellar, in his hands a dishpan filled with potatoes. "George, look at these!"

Harrison looked, this side and that, for gangway.

"What's the matter, sir?"—patiently.

"I had one. She's just sent me the other!"

"Yes sir," replied Harrison, still puzzled.

"I chased her out of the theater alley one night. In her haste she lost this one. Now she's sent the mate! Kitty—"

The potatoes began to drum upon the floor.

"Kitty?" said Harrison. "Her slippers?"

The Sealyham got between Harrison's legs, and the pan followed the potatoes.

"What, in the name o' Goshen—" began Mrs. Wolcott.

Wiltbank took the bewildered Harrison by the arm and hauled him into the library.

"My daughter's slippers?"—vaguely.

"Both of them—her famous dancing slippers. Have you any objection in regard to me associating with you as a son-in-law?"

"She sent you the other slipper?"

"I'm telling you that I just got it."

"I never saw her perform, so naturally her slippers—"

"You never saw her on the stage?"

"No. She ran away. The day she came into this house was the first time I'd laid eyes on her for a year."

"She ran away to go on the stage?"

Bewilderment jumped from one to the other.

"Yes. It was in the blood. I ran away when I was ten, to join a circus. I did not want you for a son-in-law, not when you first spoke to me about it. I did not trust you. But after you sent that whisky back to the cellar—" Harrison sat down, took the slippers from Wiltbank's hands. He mooned over them for a space.

"You see, it was like this: I fell in love with her before I ever saw her face." By now Wiltbank believed this to be perfectly true. "I wrote her those letters. Remember? She threw them at my feet the day I kissed her."

"You kissed her?"

"Well, I thought it would be the last chance I'd ever have. But this slipper proves that she has forgiven me—for everything. Will I do as a son-in-law?"

"Have I anything to say about it? And how will you support her?"

"Oh, we shouldn't marry till I'd made good in Fordham's office."

"The social distinctions—"

"Rot! These days a man doesn't marry the society column along with his wife. The sale of the contents of this house, properly invested, will bring me around four thousand a year; and Fordham gives me twenty-five hundred to start with."

"Why didn't you dispose of the stuff at once?"

"Because I love the old place, and it's going to tear the heart out of me when I leave it. Because I woke up. Because I had to prove to myself that I could live up to the terms of that will, even when I had lost out. Well—because I fell in love and found something to fight for."

IRONICAL laughter bubbled in Harrison's throat, but stopped there. He turned the slippers round and round.

"You never can be quite sure about Kitty," he said. "She's very ironical at times. This other slipper: it might mean that since you had one, the other would be quite useless to her."

"Are you afraid that I'll ever slip back to the old stuff?"

"Does anyone know what we shall do tomorrow?" countered Harrison. "Supposing I wire Kitty and ask her what the sending of the slipper means?"

Supposing it was irony, thought Wiltbank. His beautiful soap-bubbles lost some of their iridescence.

The doubt of lovers! It balloons and shrinks; it soars like a feather, to fall like pig-iron. One minute it has vanished; the next minute it engulfs the whole world. We ourselves would not go through that phase again, not if we had our choice of the nymphs of Paradise. She loves me—she loves me not!

"All right. Wire her," said Wiltbank, taking the slippers and putting them on the

mantel. "Come on, Jack!" he called to the Sealyham. "We'll go for a hike."

WE don't know where the two went, but we have our suspicions. It is said that the impulse to return to the scene of our crime is irresistible. No doubt Wiltbank sat down by the two dunes, where he had come upon Kitty and kissed her. Perhaps he even went so far as to explain the affair to the Sealyham, who most desired something he could chase along the beach. As we did not follow him, we cannot say. We are more concerned with Harrison's movements and cogitations.

He stood by the window and watched the young man swing down toward the beach, admired the flatness of the back, and wished he was young like that. He turned away from the window and crossed over to the mantel. Kitty's magical dancing slippers; and he, her father, had not known that she could dance! To find Kitty truly, and then to lose her! An old dog-in-a-manger. Besides, if Kitty wanted Wiltbank, all the parental arguments known would be as futile as fog. A parent had control over the child so long as the child depended upon the parent. Kitty, with her gifts and beauty, could, in five years, make a fortune of her own.

Why did he balk at the notion of Wiltbank as a son-in-law? The devil's mantle had fallen off, and the boy stood up in his own skin. Human, kindly, likable, loyal; but he had not the gift of self-support, evidently. Was that the objection? Had he, as parent, been dreaming of impossible heights for Kitty? A merchant prince, or any man great in his own field? Law. Fordham was great because he had fought and struggled to greatness: like Michael Harrison. But would this boy ever know what it was to fight for his bread?

Harrison's gaze roved. How well he remembered this room and the handsome man who had once been master here! Michael Harrison, circus clown. To have made folks laugh the major part of his life, and now to have a laugh all his own. To amuse himself as characters sometimes did in books. Well, well—if Kitty wanted the boy, she could have him. But not just now; the time wasn't ripe.

He took down a slipper, turning it this way and that: Curious thing, this little silver slipper. Thousands and thousands had seen it flicker to and fro behind the footlights. The Unknown! He had read about the act in the newspapers and had concluded that it was merely good showmanship, and that sooner or later the dancer's identity would be made known with a grand flourish. And all the while it had been his own Kitty! Having accomplished success of unusual magnitude, she had straightway forsworn it. There was a fiber in her like slack wire.

Harrison then made up his message to Kitty and telephoned it in to the village telegraph-office, forgetting that that corporation had neither soul nor confidence. He was informed that Mr. Wiltbank's credit was good; but who was H., who was sending? Mr. Wiltbank's butler? If he would call Mr. Wiltbank to the phone, the credit could be arranged. Otherwise, no. Harrison shrugged and hung up the receiver. Wiltbank's help was out of the question.

By walking to the nearest farm, nearly a mile away, and risking an encounter with Wiltbank, Harrison succeeded in bribing the farmer's lad to take the family Ford into the village. He got back to the Oaks ten minutes before Wiltbank and the dog came home.

"You sent the wire?" Wiltbank asked immediately.

"Yes sir."

"Drop the 'sir,' George. Between you and me there ought to be no formality."

"My daughter's reply will decide that, sir."

"What did you wire her?"

"Why she sent the slipper." Which was some of the truth, but not the important part of the truth.

AT dinner Wiltbank asked: "Don't you miss the noise and color of the circus?"

"Sometimes. But I never forget that I am now too old to make a fool of myself publicly. Oh, I can do lots of tricks yet; but if I tried tumbling, I'd probably break my neck."

Wiltbank asked many questions, and Harrison answered them promptly. He was always ready, and even eager, to talk of the days under the big top.

"To make millions of people laugh!" mused Wiltbank.

"And suddenly to find that nothing can make you laugh. That is why I quit. I got to the place where I heard people roar with laughter and couldn't understand what the noise meant."

After dinner Wiltbank retired to the li-

brary. He found that he could not study, or read, or sit still and smoke. Waiting for the ring of the telephone was a mental crucifixion. It wasn't possible that she could be so cruel as all that, after ignoring him all these months, after he had got used to the notion that she was gone out of his life forever. It did not seem possible that she could tear him apart just for the sport of it.

Nine o'clock, half-past nine, ten. At ten-thirty the telephone jingled. Excitedly he called for Harrison.

"You take the message," suggested Harrison, "so you will not have any doubts."

"But the message will be for you!" Wiltbank trembled. If there was a blow, he felt that he wasn't up to taking it first hand.

"Very well, sir; you stand beside me. With your ear close to mine, you can get the message as clearly as I can."

To this Wiltbank agreed.

" 'George Hammond,' " he heard, " 'the Oaks. The slipper was utterly useless to me. Kitty.' "

Wiltbank sighed.

"You see, sir?" said Harrison, himself relieved, for he hadn't had the least notion how Kitty would act upon his request.

"Yes, I see. But why remember me, after all these months?"

"Kitty is my daughter, sir. I am familiar with her history, certain traits in her character; but beyond that she is as much a stranger to me as she is to you."

"What a funny old world! Oh, I don't blame her. But it seems to me that she needn't have bothered me. I had given her up."

Mrs. Wolcott rushed into the hall. "Come quick!" she cried.

"What's the matter?"

"The baby's tooth has come through!"

Wiltbank laughed bitterly. He wondered if, when all were on the Ark, Mrs. Noah asked the Captain if he had brought the cat. His heart bursting: and he was asked to witness the phenomenon of the first tooth! Nevertheless he went upstairs; he was in need of comic diversion.

CHAPTER XXVI

BACK to the library again, lights out, nothing but the stars, his pipe in his teeth, the Sealyham across his knees. All said and done, what had been his particular crime? He had never cheated; he had wronged no man or woman; he had played the game. He had been a spendthrift—ironically. He hadn't thrown away a fortune simply to attract attention; he had been impelled toward extravagance so mysteriously that never would he understand the reason.

As for this second fortune, he had kept his thinking away from that as much as he possibly could; it was all so absurd, so astoundingly childish, that thinking upon it invited madness. He knew now why he hadn't forced Fordham into court. His father's weird confession! Wasn't that a sign of a tottering mind? He had fooled Fordham; that was patent. To go into court and give his reasons for doubting his father's sanity would be to invite disclosure; and that would be horrible. The world had looked upon his father as a man of unblemished honor; his son must not cast a shadow across the shield. How and when and where had his father met the woman? It would never be known.

He slid the dog from his knees, rose and turned on the desk-light, then he locked the doors. He returned to the desk and took out the book which contained the pitiful confession and the photograph. The circle—a woman had spoiled his father's life; a woman was going to spoil his son's. He ought to burn the confession. If he died accidentally, it would come to light. He had inherited a tragedy; it was not necessary that the public should also inherit it. So he took the confession and the photograph and laid them in the fireplace, applied a match, and stood staring down at the flames till they became embers, till the embers became black ashes.

The Three Musketeers! He wondered if he ever would be able to read it through again? He returned to the desk with the intention of restoring the book to its vacant place on the shelf, when by chance he glanced windowward. He saw there a face he had known all his life.

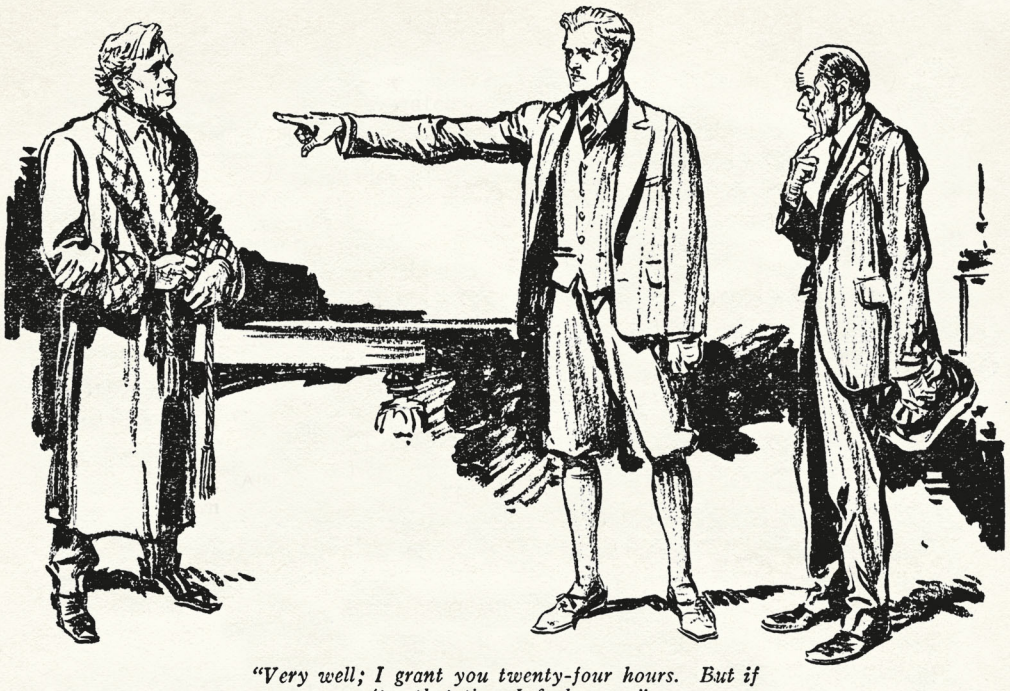
"Charles!" he cried.

A minute later he was outside, and two minutes later he had his former butler by the shoulders.

"Charles, what do you mean by skulking? Why didn't you write? What are you trembling about?"

Bombarded by these questions, Charles stood speechless, tears rolling down his flabby cheeks.

"Speak! What's the matter with you?"



"Very well; I grant you twenty-four hours. But if after that time I find you—"

"I wouldn't have come, sir, only I heard about the foundling; and then I knew that something was wrong. I couldn't stand it any longer, though I'd faithfully promised Mr. Harrison."

"Harrison? Who the devil is Harrison, and what's he got to do with your peeking into windows at the Oaks?"

"The man who took my place, sir. The new butler."

"But his name is Hammond!"

"No sir; his name is Harrison. He bribed me to give my job to him for one year. But when I heard about the foundling—"

"Come into the house. Either you're crazy or I am."

"There's something wrong, sir, though he seemed to me an honest man."

"Come along with me. We'll get to the bottom of this, *pronto*."

Inside, Wiltbank mounted the stairs, three at a bound, to the servants' quarters. He beat on Harrison's door.

"What is it?"

"Wiltbank. Be in the library inside of ten minutes. Charles has come back."

HARRISON gestured resignedly to the gods. Somewhere, out of this scheme of his, he had hoped for Gargantuan laughter, laughter that would bring tears to his eyes, twist his vitals. Evidently only the gods were going to laugh.

When the three of them met in the library, they presented a congruous picture: Harrison in his faded dressing-gown, Charles in his baggy unkempt clothes, and Wiltbank in rough and ready plus-fours. Harrison's face was inscrutable; Charles' described terror; Wiltbank's expression was warrior-stern.

"What is your name?"

"Michael Harrison."

"You bribed Charles to turn his job over to you?"

"I bought his job for a year. That is the correct situation."

"Why?"

"Because I think this the most beautiful home I have ever known," answered Harrison, with a smile which would have softened the purpose of Ate.

"This house?" The unexpected turn confused Wiltbank.

"This house—your father's house."

For the life of him, Wiltbank could not stop his glance from flashing to the black ashes in the fireplace.

"But under false pretenses."

"Only the name was false; there were no pretenses. I am truly a clown. I made a good butler."

"I was beginning to like you."

"I shall always like you. Is it the silver? You will find it intact." Harrison turned upon Charles. "What made you break your promise?"

"I never had any home but this. Nearly thirty years. But you swore," said Charles, "that no harm should come to Mr. Jamey."

"And what harm has come to him?"—mildly.

"The foundling. They in the village will always believe it to be his."

"He had only to send it over to the orphanage, and it would have been forgotten." But Harrison was nevertheless shocked to learn that the village of Hakett believed what they did. To Wiltbank he said: "Will you grant me twenty-four hours?"

"For what reason?"

"That I may tell my story in the presence of my daughter."

Kitty—the gipsy beauty of her once more in this house!

"Twenty-four hours," he repeated. The thought of seeing Kitty again turned his anger from a stern to a fallow thing. "Very well; I grant you twenty-four hours. But if after that time I find you—"

"You will find me: you will find that Michael Harrison is no more than a sentimental, romantic old clown."

And the smile of Pan flickered across his lips and was gone.

CHAPTER XXVII

WILTBANK confessed afterward that from the hour he sent Harrison to bed to the meeting in the library, he had wavered, like a boy walking along the top of a high board fence—one minute inclining toward hot anger, the next minute toward intense curiosity. He was certain that Harrison had not embarked upon a criminal enterprise; but he was equally certain that in some way the old fellow had made a fool of him. Eventually curiosity took the lead, but fluctuated like a thermometer in central New York in the spring.

When Johnny MacGregor and his wife appeared upon the scene, Wiltbank uttered an audible sigh of relief: these two would be on his side.

Then came Fordham. Wiltbank's thermo-curiosity went to the top of the bulb.

"You are in on this?"

"Yes, my son," said Fordham. "But the real truth of it all I know no more than you."

"It's about the will?"

"My son, I would not rob Michael Harrison of a single word, not if I were given an extra score of years. But as your friend Mr. MacGregor says, keep your hair on. This isn't going to be anybody's funeral."

"But I have been made a fool of, somehow."

"Life makes fools of us all."

Next came Parbody. His appearance was as an electrical shock to both Wiltbank and Johnny. Parbody took his seat mincingly, as if he feared to catch the mumps or something in this house of moral turpitude. Johnny eyed him malevolently; he would never forget that abject apology which hadn't got him anywhere.

Kitty was last to arrive. She crossed the room directly to her father's side and kissed him, and stood with her shoulder against his. Upon Harrison's face was benign imperturbability, upon Kitty's the transfiguration of white-hot pride. "I *love him!*" It radiated from her eyes.

A rustle from various points of the room, a protest of impatience, and Harrison assigned Kitty to a chair close beside him. When she was seated, Kitty looked at Wiltbank for the first time, and smiled. To Wiltbank it was the summer dawn coming up over the rim of the sea.

Then Michael Harrison began: "I was born a clown. In my childhood I bent pins, put salt in the sugar, and things like that. What I mean is, I was born to go through life making other people laugh. A few months ago I rebelled. I decided to make myself laugh before I completely lost the gift."

Parbody hitched himself to the end of his chair. "I beg your pardon, but I don't quite understand. You are Mr. Wiltbank's butler?"

"I was. As you may go fishing in season, so I went butlering—for rest and sport. And if you will have patience, Mr. Parbody, your pardonable curiosity will be satisfied. I repeat, I am a clown. No doubt when they pack me away, I'll set the worms to dancing. My daughter disagreed with me. She held that I had no right to set down terms, to pretend that there was another will, that the money was Mr. Wiltbank's and that I had no right to jockey with it. But I wanted my laugh."

"Money?" Wiltbank did not address anyone; he merely uttered the word interrogatively.

"Yea-bo!" cried MacGregor.

His wife touched him. "Hush!"

MacGregor subsided. He knew that the darky in the woodpile was coming out, with an armful of chickens. He saw what others failed to see, being by instinct a clown himself.

Harrison pointed to Wiltbank. "I grew up with this boy's father. That is, we were little boys together. We played baseball on the vacant lots, ran away from school and went swimming. His father owned the village bank; I was the son of a drunken journeyman painter who beat me whenever he had nothing else to do. Don't look shocked. Probably I deserved all the lickings I got. They weren't always timely, but they were always justified. When I was ten I ran away and joined a circus. Eventually I became a famous clown—famous in show circles. One day I had the chance to buy a half interest in the show. I needed twenty-five thousand dollars. And I had as much chance of raising it as I had of finding Charley Ross. Then I happened to remember my boyhood friend. By persistent hunting I one day located him here. He had grown to be a handsome man, kindly and gentle. Banks haven't much use for the circus business. They don't like to lend upon things they can't keep their eyes on. With money I could make the show a big and prosperous one. I knew all the ropes."

HARRISON paused. Johnny lighted his pipe. Parbody nibbled his cane. Fordham stared at some memories he saw in the rug. Wiltbank stared at Kitty, who smiled again.

"Mr. Wiltbank agreed to lend me the needed capital. I gave him five notes for five thousand each, to be taken up in five years, one each year. I became a proprietor. When the first note fell due, or about a week before, I received an envelope postmarked Hakett. In it was a letter and the five notes torn into many pieces. The letter said: 'Make it a partnership. If you do make a success of it, give the money to my son after I am gone.' I understood. In that way, if the show went on the rocks, I wouldn't owe Wiltbank a copper cent. He was quite positive—knowing nothing about the circus game—that I was going to lose. But I pasted those notes together and had each note sealed by a notary, to keep them from becoming outlawed."

Fordham smiled at the ceiling. So that was it? The dear old merry-andrew!

Harrison paused again.

This permitted Kitty to glance about the room, and she saw the two silver slippers on the mantel. And Wiltbank saw that she saw them. The lamps seemed to be radiating powdered gold-dust.

"Well, when I sold out to the combine," continued Harrison, "I was given a million, half of which was and is Mr. Wiltbank's. I have doubled my half-million. But I had no legal right to risk the other half. The contract, the agreement, was finished. Your father died,"—addressing Wiltbank, —"and you were fighting in France. So I had to wait. When you returned home, I still waited. I found that I had something more to do than turn half a million over to the son. I had a debt of gratitude to pay. I owed the departed father the welfare of the son. I checked you up. You were on the way to the bow-wows. You were throwing away your patrimony with a careless abandon which astonished and terrified me. Supposing I gave you your other inheritance: wouldn't you be likely to toss it after the first?"

Wiltbank bent his head in shamefaced agreement.

"We were both bozo," interpolated Johnny, "because there was nobody then to give a damn what became of us. We felt it but couldn't explain it. But wait a minute, while I'm busting in on this: Jimmy Wiltbank never did a mean thing—an underhand thing—in all his life."

"The son of his father," said Harrison. "Well, to go on: I then invented the will, piling up ridiculous terms, one of the terms being that if you went to court about it, you'd lose the whole thing. It was to make you fight, son; it was to give you something to fight for. To pile on you all the traffic would bear. I owed it to your father that you should find yourself again. It wasn't quite enough to invent a will; it was necessary for me to see how you intended to play the game. Hence, my presence in this beloved house."

"How about Prince Kafoozelum?" interjected Johnny.

"Who?"

"His Majesty the kidlet upstairs."

"I'm sorry about that," Harrison confessed. "I rented it. I had no idea how the folks outside would look upon its mysterious presence here. I have told you that I am a clown, and sometimes our jests are rough."

Thereupon Kitty laughed. "I found the

mother, Daddy, and bribed her to tell me the truth."

Wiltbank's blood became like some fabulous *liqueur*. The second slipper was explained!

"Mr. Harrison," said Parbody, standing, "where does the Wiltbank Orphanage come in? Have you treated us fairly?"

"In a way, no. But out of my extra profits I am going to give the orphanage a hundred thousand—to pay for the laugh I expected to get and didn't."

Parbody fumbled with his cane and hat and came near losing both.

"Hey, Rube!" shouted Johnny.

Harrison threw a startled glance in MacGregor's direction, then chuckled. The old circus call for help! He then approached Wiltbank, and smiling whimsically, held out his hand. But Wiltbank did not take it. He put both hands on the old fellow's shoulders.

"Are you real?"

"Real?"

"Yes. Aren't you out of some fairy-story book?"

"Probably that's just it. But how the devil am I to get back into it?"

"Dinner is served," announced Charles, pompously.

Wiltbank, Kitty and her father—the others gone—at last had the Oaks to themselves. Kitty ran upstairs to see the baby's new tooth. She was afraid of Wiltbank; she couldn't tell exactly why. Something in his eyes.

Harrison and Wiltbank sat down on the lounge before the empty fireplace.

"You don't mind, do you?" asked Harrison.

"It is hard to believe that a man like you exists. If you had simply passed over the money, it is quite possible that I'd have booted the second inheritance after the first."

"Do you know, your friend MacGregor solved the riddle. You were both bozo—whatever that is—because neither of you had anyone who cared."

"How about me for a son-in-law?"

Harrison smiled. "That's between you and Kitty. She's a queer bit of furniture. She doesn't take after her mother or after me. She's a kick-back. She has a mind of her own. Never forget she's human, and that she has her faults. But she's honest; I don't know anyone more so. If she wants to go somewhere, go with her; if she wants to do something, help her do it. There's a lot of gipsy in her. She sometimes jumps over convention. She gets that from me, that part. Your father and I had a fight the first time we met at the old swimming-hole. I tied knots in his shirt. 'Chaw-raw-beef,' we called it. He licked me, and we became friends. We old fellows like to talk about our boyhood. You see, we are in the Big Terminal, pawing around for the Door that lets us out. You're going into Fordham's office?"

"Yes."

"Good boy. Keep you busy." Harrison got out his watch and opened it. "There's Kitty's mother—died years ago. You can see there is little or no likeness."

Wiltbank stared into the case. It seemed to him that the walls and ceiling had closed in and down upon him, making it difficult to breathe. He could feel his palms growing wet. God! The face in the watch was the same as that in the photograph he had burned last night!

CHAPTER XXVIII

WILTBANK held himself together—by a miracle. His sensation—translated afterward—was similar to that he had known in France, when, before dawn, he had led his men to the attack. He became a shell of a man, all his vitals gone out of him. Horror. And in this moment he understood his father's desperate cry from the dark: he himself wanted to cry out the truth, the truth! His father, the kindly, gentle but abstracted man; this clown and demigod, this friendly room which henceforth would always hold a specter! Half an hour gone, he had been unbelievably happy—even a minute gone; now he hadn't known that hell could be so deep.

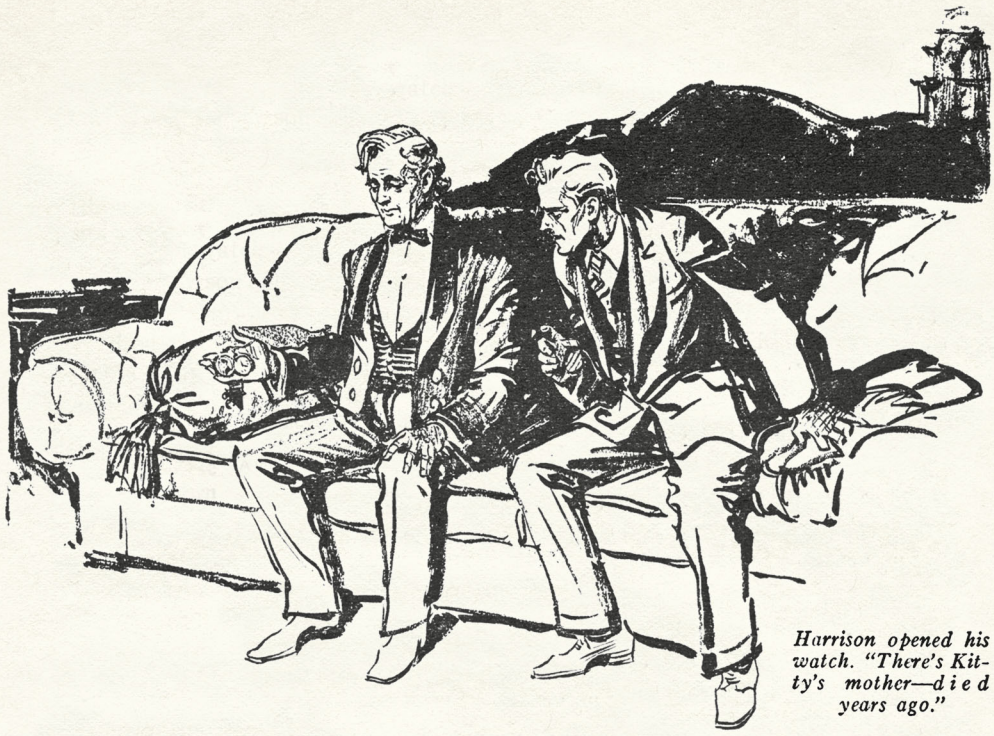
He heard himself speaking. "She was very beautiful."

"Yes." Harrison closed the watch and restored it to his vest pocket. "The gipsy in Kitty. You remember how she dropped in on me, just to scare and confuse me. I got mad and put on the motley. Did I give it to you a bit too strong, son?"

"No."

"I'm sorry about the baby. That was a shabby trick."

"All's well that ends well." Oh, God, to be alone, alone! Wiltbank stood up. "I'm going out for a stroll. I've had so many surprising bumps—"



Harrison opened his watch. "There's Kitty's mother—died years ago."

"Take a stroll along the beach."

"Yes."

"All right." Harrison smiled contentedly. "I'll tell Kitty when she comes down."

The Sealyham wanted to go; he begged and whimpered.

"No, Jack."

The screen door nearly caught the dog's nose. Jack stared through the screen for a while, then returned to Harrison and began to ask questions. What had hit the master? And why did his voice sound so cold?

"Two's company, Jack," explained Harrison, "and three's a crowd. Kitty will be following, and they wont want you. I know. It's a tough world. You stay here and take a snooze with me."

Wiltbank meanwhile walked furiously toward the beach. Paradise—then hell! He did not curse his father, but he cursed the impulse which had impelled his father to leave such a confession behind. A blind confession. Why hadn't he given the names and the conditions? Why the stark tragedy without the means of avoiding those concerned in it? The damnableness of that! Yet, even if the names had been there, he saw that he would not have associated Harrison and Kitty with the terrible story. The thunderbolt would have remained hidden till this hour. Kitty's mother!

Conscience-money. He could not accept this fortune, based as it was upon his father's treachery. Every dollar of it would carry the portrait of this half-man, this half-god, with a soul so beautiful that it was unbelievable in a world so matter-of-fact. A clown, who had forgotten how to laugh!

He must not curse his father, who had paid terribly, day by day and night by night. Love—outside of convention. With a penalty for two generations to pay, father and son. Love—and between him and Kitty suddenly yawned a chasm ten thousand miles deep and ten thousand miles wide.

"Oh, God, what shall I do?" Wiltbank cried aloud to the sky, brilliant with moonlight. The eternal mockery of Up There!

To crucify that lovable old man—who was happy because he had done something more beautiful than any other thing Wiltbank had known—because he was his father's son!

On, on, over the silvered sand, unmindful of the beauty on all sides of him; on to the Outlet, which forced him to turn about.

He saw the calm luminous waters of the sea. To walk into it, on and on, till it closed over his head. What a solution this would be. The water invited him, it even *pulled* him. Cowardly? Only a purposeless death was cowardly. For a long time

he stared at the sea, but made no step in its direction. At length he turned and retraced his steps. There would be some other solution.

Hidden in a book which his father had known he would seek again some day! Why? Why did men leave behind them these terrible legacies? Dying, did they expect divine forgiveness by confessing to those who loved them and wrecking their lives in turn? The panicky soldier in retreat, tossing aside all impedimenta? Purposeless: that was the terrible irony of the thing—purposeless! Oh, he understood his father. All his nights haunted by a most dreadful specter. He could forgive him. But, dear God, why couldn't he have carried the secret into the grave with him?

To break Harrison's heart, to break his own, probably to break Kitty's—if he took the course his conscience demanded he should: or to live a lie forever with guarded lips.

He flung himself upon the sand, his face hidden in folded arms. Weep? No. His body had gone dry; there was neither blood nor tears in him. . . . . Kitty—to give her up! Why, he loved the old fellow, with his Pan-like face! . . . . To break his heart, invade his mind with abiding horror!

Out of his agony came reason. Was it his conscience he was warring with? Might it not be a bit of man-code he had inherited along with other attributes: something to do with civilization rather than conscience? He himself had committed no wrong. Why, then, break three lives for a notion he was not absolutely sure of? To tell that old man the truth, to spoil the fading afternoon of a faun: to embitter him till the end of his days.

Suddenly it came to him what he must do. He would pay his father's score—by never disturbing the peace of the old man, by never speaking a word of love to Kitty, ever.

His body relaxed.

CHAPTER XXIX

WHEN Kitty came down again, she ran to her father and embraced him. The Sealyham, having but one master, two friends and practically no acquaintances, slid off Harrison's knees and soberly trotted over to the corner rug, where, turning around several times, he lay down, one eye open. The rustle of skirts bothered him; it was a new and unaccountable sound. Mrs. Wolcott had skirts, but they never rustled; perhaps that was because she never moved fast enough.

"A little white tooth," said Kitty. "The mother isn't worthy of a child like that."

"She's a trouper. Hasn't had much time to be a mother. I'll tote the kid back when I return to New York. Our friend James has gone down to the beach. The house wasn't big enough for him. If you could have seen him when he got that second slipper! He ran around the house like a madman to find me; and I stuck a pin in his balloon. I had to. I didn't want him for a son-in-law; he wasn't in the picture, matrimonially."

"That is, you had a duke or something picked out for me, and I wasn't going to have anything to say? That was always the trouble—your picking out things for me, life and all that. But, oh, Daddy, how beautifully it has all come out! I believed you were just impertinent and that no good could come out of such a frolic. Did you find your laughter?"

"Not the kind I wanted; yet I chuckled in my sleeve often enough. But there's one thing I can't solve."

"What?"

"That our friend didn't force Fordham's hand at the start. Something queer about that. Still, I took the chance. Fordham said it never would go through. Probably it was the queer mood that was riding the boy. He saw a chance to fight himself out of the bog he was in. Well, it comes out all right. What a wonderful house this is!"

"Isn't it?"

"Do you want the boy, Kitty?"

"But you don't want him!"

"I've changed my mind about him."

"But how do you know his mind hasn't changed about me?"

"If you had seen him with that slipper! What a beautiful night it is!"

"You wish to get rid of me?"

"For half an hour." He took her into his arms and kissed her. "You and I, never to misunderstand each other again! Run along."

So Kitty ran along, wanting to, yet not wanting to. She thought it a little strange that Wiltbank had not waited. She wondered which way he had gone. When she came to the beach she looked up and down but could see no living thing. Per-

haps . . . . . How beautiful everything was! The broken bands of silver on the rollers as they bent and slithered up the sand. Perhaps he would be— Well, she would go that way. He had something of hers that she wanted back. She laughed. The untamable gipsy in her again! But she did not find Wiltbank between the two dunes where he had forcibly kissed her. Strange, that she should feel pleased not to find him between the dunes. Run after him? Well, why not? She wanted him. She laughed again.

When she did find him she was frightened. On such a night, to lie inert upon the sands! She knelt and touched his shoulder timidly.

"What is the matter?"

Astounded, Wiltbank raised his head. He had heard no sound other than the monotonous swishing of the rollers. . . . . Kitty! On guard, he thought, on guard! A touch, a word, and this girl might wring the whole thing out of him. He raised himself, to see that she was kneeling beside him.

"Kind of wanted to be alone," he said, sitting up. "The whole thing was so big and unexpected."

"I heard you sigh. The kind of a sigh when our mind is being tortured. Are you sure that nothing is the matter?" Kitty sat on her heels.

On guard! "Well, I wanted to get away, alone. I've been a wastrel, and I don't know but I may be one again."

Kitty laughed. The sound to him was like little bells far off. It was going to tear the heart out of him; but he could do it.

"And you feel like that!" She took hold of his arm. Something in the pressure of her fingers warned him that there was a quality of fierceness in her. "Have you got those letters?"

"Letters?"

"Yes; the ones I threw at you, the ones you wrote me when I was dancing."

"I have them."

"Well, I want them again. Have you read them over?"

"No."

"Do you remember at all what you said in them?"

On guard! "No. Why should I? I was bored, and you caught me somehow." What a lie! But it was necessary to utter it.

"Then—it was play?"

"You see, I wasn't quite myself those days. I meant no harm."

"Why did you send me your war-cross?"

"To trap your interest, probably."

"Liar, liar, liar!" said the wheeling gulls.

ELSEWHERE we have said that Kitty was not of the clinging-vine type. The age-old notion that a woman should do none of the wooing she had relegated to the dustbin of nonsensical things. This is not to say that she would pursue a man without provocation. She had had provocation. During the hour in the library and the hour in the dining-room this man had constantly made love to her with his eyes. Then, there was her father's statement about the second slipper. There was also the line he had scribbled on his visiting card. But most of all, he had made love to her with his eyes. Now he was running away. From what? Kitty knew much about life, and that human puzzles were best got at by directness.

"Is there anything in your past that you are ashamed of? Have you committed an act which father and I could object to? Something that puts you beyond the pale?"

He bent his head. Let her believe something like that.

"There is?"

He did not stir.

"Oh!" she said, and rose. She made a gesture which reminded him of the one she had made the night the foundling arrived. She turned and began to walk away, slowly, as if she did not want to be too far off if he called.

She had gone perhaps a hundred yards. The pull was irresistible. She turned, to behold him full length upon the sand again. So she ran back and once more knelt beside him.

"Why did you tell me, then, that you loved me?" she cried.

"I?" He sat up again. "I?"

"Yes. Every time you looked at me. Oh, Jimmy, I'm not the ordinary kind of woman. I am not ashamed ever of anything I do. If you can say honestly that you don't love me, so be it. But don't lie to me if you do love me. My father says you are as honest and loyal as the day. MacGregor would not love you else. Have you ever done anything that men call dishonorable?"

"No." Why hadn't she gone on? He had no strength.

"Didn't you tell me with your eyes, in

the library and at dinner, that you loved me? You did, you did!"

"I couldn't help it." The strength was gone out of him. This woman could do with him what she pleased.

"You didn't want to help it then. What has happened between that time and now? There was nothing on your conscience during those hours. You're not married?"

"No, no, no!"

"Do you really love me?"

"Yes."

"But you do not ask me if I love you."

"I never shall."

"Well, just the same I'm going to tell you that I love you with all my heart. What are you going to do about it?"

"God knows, Kitty! All right. Between us stands a barrier, which I failed to recollect. Family history."

"Family history. You needn't give me yours; instead, I'll give you mine. When I was a little girl, my mother ran away with another man. Shall I permit that to spoil my life? Shall it come between me and the man I love? Oh, yes, it hurt; it still hurts. But shall I stand aloof when happiness reaches out to claim me? No. Half the trouble in this world, Jimmy, is tragedy we inherit; and woe to those who coddle it. So long as you can honorably take my hand, what do I care what your father was guilty of—or your mother? Don't manacle yourself to a past the making of which you had nothing to do with."

She was right! What a colossal fool he had been about to make of himself!

"Kitty, you are your father's daughter. I don't believe you're real either!"

"Oh, but I am! I have all the faults of my sex, some of them modified, perhaps. I'm like all women in one respect. Out of your letters I built the image of a man—who could not possibly live this side of heaven. Then I compared you with the dream."

"And I have fallen woefully short?"

"No. Our dreams are really shells, stuffed with sawdust. You are real. You have faults. So have I. We happen to want each other. Don't we?"

"Dear God, yes!" How he wanted her!

"Whoever heard of such lovemaking? Wait! I like it. Truths now, instead of finding them out afterward. What has somebody else's past to do with you and me? I'm Kitty Harrison and you're Jimmy Wiltbank. We're *now!* Last fall you took something of mine without leave. I want it. I want it right now!"

With a queer cry, he took her into his embrace and kissed her madly: and knew that love and conscience were unrelated. Ten thousand specters, if this woman but stood by his side! The right or wrong of his surrender he would leave to the day of judgment.

"Well!" she said, out of breath. "It was worth waiting for. I wanted it, you know, so I could give it back to you of my own free will."

Which she did, and with a will.

TOGETHER they entered the library, tiptoe. Harrison had fallen asleep in a corner of the lounge. There was a dead cigar between his inert fingers.

"Pan!" whispered Wiltbank.

"Isn't that odd? That's what I always call him to myself."

She reached over and shook her father, who sat up and rubbed his astonished eyes.

"One o'clock!" he said. "Where've you two been?"

"We're going to be married, Daddy. We want your blessing."

"Heaven bless you, my children, but let me go to bed."

The telephone rang.

"Never mind, children; I'll see what it is."

Three minutes later he came staggering into the room, *laughing*. His face grew purple. This laughter grew surprisingly; it became Gargantuan. Harrison fell upon the lounge and punched the pillows. The tears began to roll down his cheeks. Kitty had never seen him like this, and she was a bit frightened.

"Daddy, what on earth has happened?"

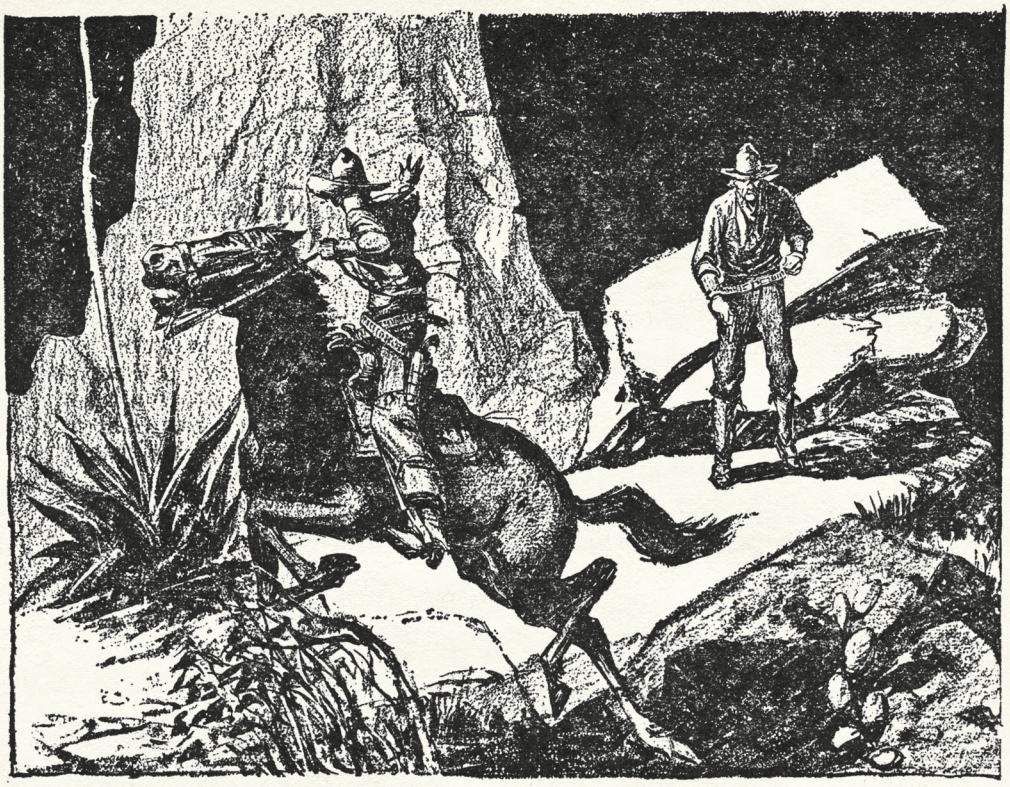
It was several minutes before he could speak. "The baby!" Then he rolled among the pillows again.

"What has happened to the baby?" Kitty demanded.

"A telegram from the woman I rented the baby of!" Harrison wiped his eyes. "She wires me she's sailing for South America and that she has wished the baby on me for keeps!"

Again the roars began. Michael Harrison had found his laugh at last. And Wiltbank, his arm around Kitty, found his own throat filled with laughter. With a man like this in the house, what earthly chance had any specter?

THE END.



The PAY-OFF

By H. C. WIRE

Illustrated by Paul Lehman

Wherein a valiant officer invades the desperadoes' stronghold in the lava-beds and shoots it out: a stirring tale by a writer of promise.

MEN of the Pronto Basin country called him One-shot Sam. Even those who knew him only by his reputation, and had never set their eyes on the real figure, spoke familiarly of "old One-shot." The name was given in praise and meant far more than his official tag: United States Marshal, Sam Warren.

He had earned it too. He was the best of gun-fanners in a country where fanning was an art to be practiced from the cradle to the grave. The span of life between those two objects was apt to be short, and the fact that Sam Warren had already passed the half-century mark, shows his ability.

But what had given him his name was that, in fights with desperadoes he set out to capture, when the result was doubtful and life or death hinged on one last shot, that shot somehow always came from Sam's gun. If anybody was to be caught short of ammunition, it was the other fellow.

Yet there was once, down on the Malapai Flats. . . . . Well, a man isn't exactly a piece of machinery after all.

Malapai lay more than one hundred miles to the south of Pronto Basin, where Sam had his headquarters, and was just that much closer to a mysterious country filled with a large assortment of sudden ways to die. In fact, Malapai was just at the beginning of that strip of land north of the border, where "wanted" men from both sides gravitated into the volcanic flats, saw the advantage of lava-beds which left no hoofprints when they passed, found the maze of cones and craters that rimmed the high mesa to be an excellent place to lose pursuers, and so remained.

A stranger entering among them could meet sudden death in a dozen ways: the

thrust of a knife, the long-range flight of a rifle-bullet, the shorter leap of a six-shooter, poison in his drink, stripped naked and baked upon a rock in the sun. Or if he escaped these and fled further south, which was the only way he could go, he would find a double death in the desert and the border line.

IN all his years of office, Sam had never gone to Malapai. He had ignored it. Let them fight it out down there and dog eat dog.

But lately there had been an attempt by law-abiding settlers to take up land in the district. The ever-restless push of civilization had filled the more peaceful valleys to the north, forcing the newcomers to make their homes further toward this pit of outlawry. From the beginning of the movement, Sam had known in time he would have to go down and protect them.

He was not wrong. Shortly after noon one day a lone horseman rode into Pronto Basin, covered with the gray dust of his long ride. He came straight to the marshal's shanty, halted just long enough to deliver a sealed envelope, then dropped asleep under the nearest mesquite.

Sam looked at the message and scowled. It was from Sheriff Hall at Malapai. His scowl deepened as he reached the end.

"There are five in this gang," the message concluded. "You had better bring half a dozen deputies."

For a moment Sam continued to scan the paper, though he had finished reading. Presently he nodded. Next he proceeded about his bookkeeping in the usual way: he burned the note.

After that his preparations were simple. From its wall peg, he took down a belt with a single holster, saw that his gun held six shots, and slipped it into place. A knife with a seven-inch blade went into his right boot-top, just behind the calf of his leg. A little coil of whang leather filled his pants pocket. Then he was ready.

"Better bring half a dozen deputies," the sheriff's note had advised. But in less than fifteen minutes after receiving it, One-shot Sam, alone, rode into the hills and south to Malapai.

SHERIFF HALL was one of those who had never seen Sam Warren. If he expected a raw-boned giant with a mean look and a gun in each iron fist, he was to be disappointed.

About nine o'clock of the next morning after he had sent out his call for help, a man paused in the doorway of his office and asked jovially, "You the peace officer here?"

Hall looked up into a weathered, but unhardened face. Genial blue eyes smiled back at him. Gray hair alone showed age, for in figure his visitor was spare-bodied and straight.

"I'm the sheriff," he answered. "Don't know so much about the peace part of it!"

The man advanced into the room. He lowered his voice. "I'm Sam Warren. Got your letter and came right along. Now tell me all of what's up."

Sheriff Hall glanced out of his door, surveyed the lone mount standing at the tie rack, then looked back at Warren.

"You didn't bring a posse?"

"Hell, no! Six men would just make six targets and a lot of trouble. I figured to get a fresh horse here in Malapai and one man who knows the country south. That's all I ever want."

The sheriff's mouth drew into a wry smile. "You can get the horse all right," he agreed. "You're welcome to mine. But I don't think there's a man in town who'd go south with you."

"Too scairt?" asked Sam.

"Too wise! Them Malapai Peaks off yonder are just so many tombstones. A man's a fool to go in there without a posse. That's why I sent for you, and I'll tell you right off that I'm glad it's out of my county. Of course you can make me a deputy—"

"I'll not force anyone," Sam cut in. "Don't blame you neither for not wanting to go—maybe you've got a family. I'm single and don't give a dang if my name is carved on one of those peaks—which isn't so likely. But I've got to have some man who knows how the land lies."

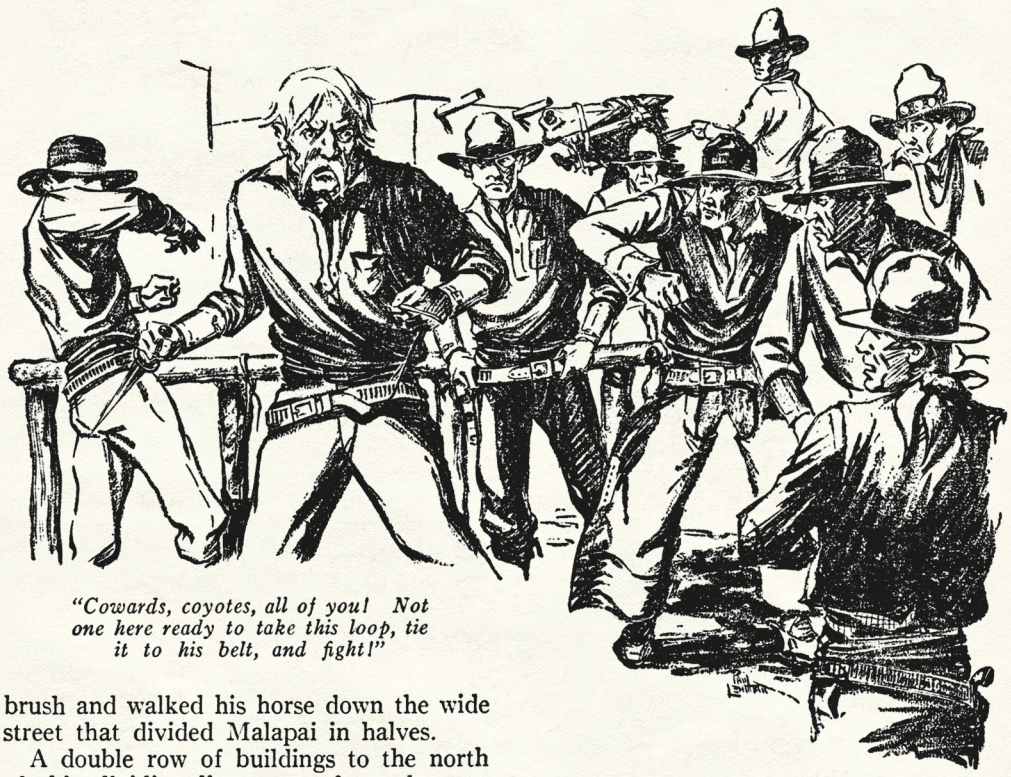
"Well," Hall repeated, "I don't know where to get one. You see, this gang has been in here three times now. They ride in from the Peaks, shoot up the place and take what they want, then fade off south. And they've just about got every settler backed against the wall. Their leader is called Señor Jo, but he's not Mexican." The sheriff paused, adding reproachfully, "You should have brought your own men."

"Haven't led a posse in ten years!" Sam retorted. "And I'm sure disappointed if a town like Malapai hasn't got one *hombre*

with nerve." He stood up. "It aint possible, sheriff! He's here, and I'm going to find him!"

The town of Malapai was never alive until night. Then the hands from outlying ranches loped in for entertainment, relieving themselves of the weight of their month's pay before they loped out again at dawn. They came in two by two, or in bunches, very seldom alone.

Yet on this particular evening about dusk, a solitary figure rode in from the brush and walked his horse down the wide street that divided Malapai in halves.



"Cowards, coyotes, all of you! Not one here ready to take this loop, tie it to his belt, and fight!"

A double row of buildings to the north of this dividing line were of wood, some of them painted green or red, and a few two-storied. That was the new part, where the more recently arrived citizens had their businesses and lived in hopes of seeing Malapai grow into a prosperous community.

South of this wide street no one gave a dang what happened to the dump; it could grow or sit still, just as it liked. Here was only a scattering of flat-roofed adobes with wooden awnings over board sidewalks and scarcely no windows. The furthermost faced upon a crooked alley, while their rear doors opened directly onto the broad expanse of the Malapai Flats and looked across the blue-hazel bowl of a sink to the rank upon rank of exploded craters which formed the Malapai Peaks. This was the "old town."

Business here was mostly in saloons and gambling-houses. Men who passed in the alley-street wore two holsters with ends tied down to make easier the drawing of their revolvers. They rode steel-limbed mounts and sat their saddles with an easy slouch that was not to be mistaken for heedlessness. Their half-closed eyes from under broad *sombreros* saw much, though in themselves they told nothing. According to their dress they were all cow-hands, this watchful attitude having been cultivated from long contact with another breed of men who might at any time swoop down from the Flats.

As the lone rider came midway along the main street, he turned his horse abruptly and entered the section of adobes. He was a young man of middle height and wiry build. Like many of those about him, he wore two guns with holsters tied down, yet he made no show of being indifferent to his surroundings.

He sat erect in his saddle as he passed slowly toward the center of "old town" and his eyes swept to right and left in open, half-amused curiosity. They were gray

eyes with points of steel in them, and for all their humor, seemed to carry a fighter's challenge.

He had come in front of a casino doorway and had dismounted, when his glance fell upon a knot of men gathered in the middle of the street further on. For an instant he studied the scene, then led his horse toward it. Something had happened, or was about to happen; he couldn't tell which.

By this time the commotion had attracted others from near-by saloons and gambling-houses. A mob rapidly formed in the center of the street. The young man pushed his way further into it. But he was too short to see over the heads of those in front of him, and so, putting one foot in his stirrup, he lifted himself until he could look down within that ring.

He saw a spare, wild-eyed fellow raging back and forth with a mean-looking knife in one hand. He was bareheaded, his gray hair falling in strings about both ears. From his belt hung a loop of whang leather not more than a foot in length, which he held out with his free hand as he swept a contemptuous glance at his audience.

The young man turned to his nearest neighbor. "Plumb loco, aint he? What's he want?"

Just then the one in the ring snarled: "You call this a man's town? Cowards, coyotes, all of you! Not one here ready to take this loop, tie it to his belt, and fight!"

"What's eatin' him?" the stranger persisted.

His neighbor grinned. "Too much *tequila.*"

Down on the ground, the warrior's language turned from challenging to rank insult. He voiced his opinion of Malapai, of its inhabitants, of all men west or south of it.

"Gettin' pretty tough," the horseman observed. "Do you let 'em talk that way here? Aint none of you goin' to take 'im up?"

"Not me," his neighbor answered. "I seen that game before, up North in the lumber-camps. It's the way them Swedes fight. Tie themselves together, then start carvin'. Nope, it aint civilized; I'll go it with six-shooters—but not that."

The young man watched for a moment longer. "Hell!" he scoffed; "that *hombre's* bluffin'!"

He swung down from his horse. "Here, friend, hold this cayuse. You-all make me plumb sick!"

"Better not go in," came the warning. "He's clean mad and drunk."

But the other was already pushing his way through the crowd.

When the onlookers saw that the challenge was being accepted, they parted willingly. The young man reached the little circle of cleared space. Without a pause he strode to the one standing there, grasped the leather loop and started to buckle it in his own belt.

"Mister," he said, "I'll just try yore little game."

Instantly the loop was jerked from his hand.

"Young feller," said Sam Warren, "I want to talk with you!"

ALL the wild raging vanished; the voice was calmly jovial, and Sam grinned through the dusk. But the crowd about him was worked up to see a fight. They had been blocked, and now feeling their shame, surged upon this one who had held them all back. The young man too, stood with both hands hovering close to his guns.

"No call for that," Sam said to him. "This is a business deal." Then whirling to the others he roared, "One at a time! If you think I'm bluffing, come on! Here's the leather."

He held out the loop, but no one came forward to accept it.

"Well, then," he said, turning back to the lone figure, "suppose you and me go where we can talk."

He rolled up his loop of whang leather and stuffed it into one pocket, thrust the knife into his boot-top, then shouldered a path through the ring of men. The young man tied his horse and followed warily.

Sam entered the nearest saloon, saw a partitioned box with a table and led the way to it. He came directly to his point.

"Know the country south of here?"

"I work in it."

Sam nodded. He liked at once the fearless look in this young fellow's eyes. His curious, half-amused smile was infectious.

"Well, here's the cards," he continued. "I want a man to take me down there on the trail of some outlaws. I've got straight dope on them and they may be close to the border by now. But I aim to follow clear to the fence if I have to."

"You're after Señor Jo's gang?"

Red fell at a double report that rocked the cave.

"Yes. I'm Sam Warren, United States Marshal. The man who goes with me must have nerve. You've got it. What do you say?"

The gray eyes narrowed in thought until only the steel points gleamed under the dark lids. Then the young man spoke with low earnestness:

"That's a bad country, mister! You'd better stay out."

There was a time of silence while the two men gazed eye to eye across the table.

"If it's pay you're thinking about," Sam said at last, "why, it'll be worth the risk —a thousand dollars a head and you needn't bring 'em in on the hoof."

Abruptly the other rose. "I'll go you."

That was the agreement. They mounted their horses at once and rode south until after midnight. Through the silver haze of a full moon they passed over the hard surface of the lava flats. At times the rock underfoot glittered like metal and rang against their animals' hoofs.

They ascended the gentle sides of the sink at last, then made their first camp with the Malapai Peaks rising over their heads.

Through the next day they threaded a trail further within the jagged cones; during all this time not more than a dozen words passed between them.

It was not Sam who maintained their silence. He made an attempt at first to draw his guide into conversation, but received only short answers. The young man rode in the lead and often his only method of direction was a wave of one hand. Yet there was companionship even in his taciturn silence. That can be true. Sam felt it. The somber, changeless peaks that encompassed them, brooded silence. Beneath their spell, too many words would have been unwanted.

He began to study the youth ahead of him. Sometimes the shoulders were held square and firm, the head erect, then for long intervals there would be a drooping, pondering look. At times like this, with the young back rounded, arms hanging limp, the figure seemed almost dejected.

They made camp early that second night, to give their horses a long rest and a hat of grain each. Their own ration was cold meat and crackers, for they could not trust a blaze.

Then after eating, propping himself comfortably against his saddle, the young man grew talkative for a time. He avoided his own personal history, as men there in the Malapai were apt to do, and turned the conversation along the general lines of Sam's work.

"I've heard of you," he said presently.

"Got a name for bein' a killer. That's the law's business, aint it—killin'?"

He was talking quietly, with long pauses when he drew deep clouds from his cigarette. Sam waited, knowing these questions were not given for him to answer. His guide seemed almost to be musing.

"Killin' men," he repeated; "just like any other business! Do you always kill 'em, mister? You know sometimes I've thought the law might be better served by lettin' one go, now and then. One, say, who's learned his lesson.

"I figure some men have just got to learn it first-hand, and I'd trust one that's had his head bumped good and plenty a heap further than one who's never come through the mill."

Sam scowled into the dark. "That sounds like you're kind of soft on skunks and such."

"The hell I am! If they're skunks, they'll show it, and my argument aint for them."

There came another long pause, then the young man stood up. "Anyhow, this talk is just my way of passin' time and I guess we've passed enough. It's me for the blankets."

On a trail like this, old Sam Warren had the habits of an owl. He spent the night sitting against a rock, with only a short time when he dozed. About four o'clock he woke up his guide. They moved on at the first light of dawn.

They were passing now through a land of red mystery. The sun came red above the ancient craters, was caught in the red streams of lava rock and sprayed back in red mist between glittering perpendicular walls. The fires of those volcanoes were dead, yet as the sun rose and beat down hotly, they seemed to kindle again and beat hotly back.

As Sam rode through the breathless hours, he saw the peaks visibly change form, rising, distorted upon heat waves, or shrinking into grotesque tooth-like shapes. Illusions sprang up before his eyes, horsemen riding at a lope, yet appearing later as twisted lava chunks when he drew near. Other figures lifted their heads from sunken cones and stared at him—stray cattle, gaunt-bellied and almost blind.

About midmorning he halted to squint hard at four objects that appeared more distinctly than these illusions. Yet, like all the others they too vanished at once. He was not convinced. They looked like riders and might be cowboys driving the gaunt cattle. Again, they might be something else.

For the past half-hour he had been aware that their course was more west than south. Now he turned to his guide, who had ridden back when he stopped and was sitting his horse a few paces in advance.

"Just how does she lie from here?" he asked. "Can't we strike due south?"

The other shook his head. "There's no pass that way."

"But we must be dang near through these craters," Sam insisted. "Looks like over yonder is a pass, and our men sure wouldn't go around it."

With sudden impulse he wheeled his horse directly south. "Come on. Let me lead awhile."

The young man made no move to follow. He was still slouching carelessly in his saddle. But two guns had flashed into his hands.

"You'll go where I say, mister!"

A LITTLE after noon, four horsemen had scarcely raced up the bottom of a wide, steep-walled cañon and reached the mouth of a cave at one side, when from the opposite direction two figures came more slowly, one ahead of the other.

It was Sam Warren riding in front, his gun and knife removed, but otherwise allowed all freedom. Behind him, the young man turned his gray eyes to the four figures entering the cave, and scowled.

Presently he too dismounted at the mouth, and ordering Sam down from his horse, followed into the cool depths.

Sam Warren had spent the past two hours cursing himself for being several kinds of a damned fool. Yet even as he cursed, he knew his judgment was not wholly to blame. He had taken a chance on the stranger, of course, but he had taken bigger ones before. Even now he was not convinced that a youngster with such courage and level eyes could be altogether a skunk.

Still, all the facts were against this argument. He was a prisoner. He stood halfway in the cave facing four men that he knew must be friends of Señor Jo's, if not the gang itself.

Suddenly he became aware that they had entered into a dead silence, and that the silence had continued for over a minute. Glancing back, he saw the young man had halted, hands on his hips, and was

glaring at the four who sat against the opposite wall.

"Where you-all been?" he demanded.

One with matted red hair and greasy beard hitched himself into a half-standing position. "Look here, Jo, we're through—"

"Shut up, Red! I told the bunch of you to stay under cover while I scouted our back trail. You've been out pulling something—thought you'd sneak it for yourselves when I wasn't looking, eh? Your horses are wet; you've been gone all night! Where you been?"

"We're through with you!" Red suddenly blurted.

"Through, hell! You aint half as through with me as I am with you! Ought to have knowed that before I started. I've got more sense now. When we make the border, this gang splits, see? I'm done."

The leader paused and waved a hand toward Sam. "Know who this is?" he demanded. "It's a United States Marshal!"

Four faces turned suddenly tense. Sam met their gaze with his own hard stare. He knew now this was Señor Jo, standing before him.

Jo's curious smile had returned as the four other men became silent. "This marshal," he went on, "has got a bad name and he's offered me one thousand dollars for each of your damned heads. But I don't figure to collect. We're movin' out of here. Get ready!"

Only Red stood up. The others remained motionless behind him. "What'll you do with this?" He indicated Sam.

"Leave him," Jo answered. "Leave him without a horse, and by the time he can walk back to Malapai, we'll be where he wont find us."

"Not much! We don't leave nothin' here—alive."

Señor Jo dropped his smile. Steel points came into his eyes.

"We changed leaders while you were gone," Red continued; "I'm boss now! So just give me this—" One hand reached toward Sam. The other stayed near his gun, yet neither moved quick enough. He fell at a double report that rocked the cave.

Almost deafened, Sam felt himself whirled about, and heard a curt yell in his ear: "Run for your horse!"

He leaped into the daylight, aware that Señor Jo, back of him, was holding the other three men under the cover of his guns. They gained their mounts together and were astride, racing down the cañon before those behind could send a shot after them.

But their escape was short-lived. The cañon turned in a sharp S, and as they reached the second bend, Sam caught sight of three men running across the intervening mesa top. Two kept on, one held back, then soon all scrambled down to the cañon floor. The horsemen were pocketed between them.

On either side rose walls too steep for an animal to climb. The cañon bottom itself was of lava, unobserved save for little channels cut crosswise. Only a lone chunk of rock offered protection.

Señor Jo halted near this. "It's the best we can do," he said. "Anchor your horse and we'll dig in. They mean to kill you sure, now—so I'm giving you back your gun."

Sam dismounted and took the belt from Señor Jo's hand.

"We'll sit against this rock," Jo advised, "and cover the cañon both ways. Now don't you make no false moves with that six-shooter, because I'll be watchin'. Understand?"

Sam nodded. So, sitting back to back against a waist-high boulder, they faced the figures that approached from above and below. These came on slowly, worming themselves along in the cross-cut channels.

Sam was confronted by the two on the down-cañon side. Occasionally a back showed above the grooves in which they crawled and he raised his gun. But the range was still too great, and he saw now that his belt contained no more than two or three rounds of shells.

HE let the two men creep nearer. Then a shot from the other side of the rock told that Señor Jo had opened up.

In a moment he too, took a long, steady aim at the crown of a head just showing above a ripple in the cañon floor, and fired. The head vanished, but appeared again further on.

His miss seemed to give courage to those others, for they risked a leap into a larger cut that would bring them on a slant within a few yards of the lava rock. Though the range was still great, Sam knew his best way was to fire at every chance, discouraging their approach.

Except for a few shots at first, the two men were holding their own fire, ap-

parently unwilling to expose themselves enough to take good aim. Overhead the sun dropped close to the cañon rim. Its shadow filled the bottom. Soon dusk had come.

There came a lull in the slow advance and Sam knew his enemies were only waiting for dark. They would rush in then, three against two. He reached to his belt for a fresh round of shells. It was empty. He whirled the chamber of his gun, frowning, then leaned around the rock.

"I'm out," he whispered. "Have you any more shells?"

A hand reached toward him. Gray eyes stared into his. "There's just two men," said Señor Jo. "Here's two shells."

Sam took them, shoved them in his gun and waited. He had not long. The figures out on the cañon floor moved more openly as dusk deepened. Then, with just enough light left to aim by, they leaped from the ditch and poured their lead at the lava chunk.

Unhurried, drawing a bead when the outlaws' guns made it easier by their red flare, Sam fired. Two shots—two men. It was all over in half a minute. Then he stood up.

Behind him, Señor Jo too, had won against this last rush and now the two men rose facing each other over the waist-high rock.

"Well, mister," said Señor Jo, smiling through the dusk. "They're all yours. Collect your own reward. Me, I'm driftin' out of this business. *Adios!*"

He walked away one step, turned, halted. The round black bore of a forty-five yawned across at him. Behind it, Sam Warren's eyes showed in narrowed slits.

"I saved one shot," said he, "for you! Come back here."

"You're bluffin'! You haven't anything."

"Try it and see!"

Again there was a tense, silent moment. Blackness of night had come. Through it gleamed once more Señor Jo's half-amused, half-curious smile. He began to move; a short step backward, then another—then whirling, he sprang to his horse and the silence was shattered by the ring of hoofs on the cañon floor.

Motionless, Sam Warren listened. Presently he broke down his gun and let the shells fall into one hand. Two empty ones he dropped to the ground; another, unused, he slipped back into its place.

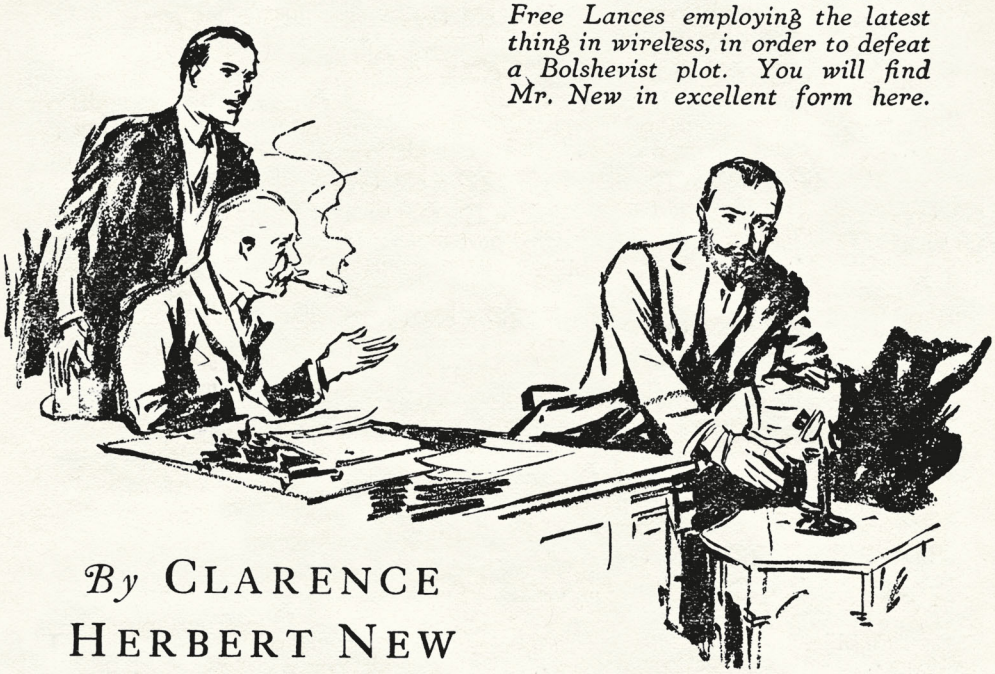
Free Lances in Diplomacy

Illustrated by
William Molt

ACCORDING to the gazettes, Earl Trevor of Dyvnaint, Earl Lammerford of St. Ives, Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan and the Honorable Raymond Carter were cruising in American waters upon the famous Trevor yacht *Ranee Sylvia,* while the Countess was entertaining a house-party in the Avenue de Neuilly, Paris. The earls and their two inseparable companions had been reported by the press-syndicates as dining with old friends in Boston, New York and Washington, and as cruising along the east side of Chesapeake Bay, where it was rumored that they had purchased an interest in the great Chincoteague Radio Station, and as spending some time in the Jamaica highlands not far from Newcastle.

These items had been appearing in the cable reports during the previous two months—and there was no mention made of their expected return to London. As a matter of fact, however,—the *Ranee Sylvia* being a thirty-knot craft in smooth water and better than twenty-five when it was much less smooth, usually crossing in about four days,—the four gentlemen had been for nearly a week upon the large estate in South Devon known as Trevor Hall. There the Earl's laboratory, machine-shops and experimental works were hidden in the heart of a forest covering an area of over two square miles, the whole estate enclosed on three sides by a high concrete wall electrically protected against intrusion—the fourth side guarded by the sheer drop of the Scabbacombe Cliffs. The yacht had stolen into her home berth up one of the inner reaches of Salcombe Harbor behind Bolt Head in

"A Radio Double-Cross" shows the Free Lances employing the latest thing in wireless, in order to defeat a Bolshevist plot. You will find Mr. New in excellent form here.



By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

the middle of a foggy night—and those who lived in the neighborhood were under far too many obligations to her owner and his friends to gossip about their comings and goings.

Three of the four men were first-class engineers and mechanics; two were among the world's foremost aviators; one was an inventive genius with over a hundred valuable patents to his credit; and Raymond Carter, formerly Chargé d'Affaires at the American Embassy in Paris, was a phenomenal amateur chemist and lab-experimenter on the side, though he was supposed to have retired on a fortune made in lucky speculation. The real purpose of their visit to the west coast of the Atlantic had been to complete the purchase of the Chincoteague Radio Station which they had been using for radio-communication during the previous six years—first for code-messages, and then for radio-telephony when they found they could switch in and out with a high-powered receiving set to get the other end of the conversation. Also, to purchase ground in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica and start the building of the most powerful "beam-station" in the western hemisphere.

During Trevor's absence from England, his engineers and his mechanics had been

"The data are precisely what I hoped you might get—I'll see what I can do, at once!"

supplementing the powerful station they'd previously had on the Trevor Hall estate with an eighty-kilowatt "beam" equipment capable of clearly projecting the human voice to the antipodes—considerably more powerful, in fact, than the new Marconi stations at Grimsby and Skegness recently turned over to the Post Office Department, and embodying three of the Earl's patents in construction and power-discharging. Aside from the Earl and his friends, every man on the estate was intensely interested in the practical success of this great station—knowing, as they did, that it never would be used by anyone outside of the family and would give his Lordship communicating facilities with every major division of the globe.

Upon the morning after their arrival, Trevor's chief engineer and his master mechanic breakfasted with the party at the Hall, and gave them an account of everything that had been done, even to minute details of construction—finally stating that they saw no reason why a working test should not be made that morning. Harry

Archer, invariably the Earl's *mécanicien* on his longest and most dangerous air-flights, challenged His Lordship to mention a single detail which they had overlooked. Both earls and Sir Abdool grinned at this, as Trevor casually asked about the symphony orchestra which had been in his mind to make the initial test of the beam station.

"Of course it wouldn't be fair to count that against you, Harry, d'ye see, because it's not in line with engineering or mechanics."

"But you mentioned it just before leaving for the States, sir—did you not? An' outlined in a general way about how you fancied the studio should be fitted up for 'em? Aye? An' of course I'm not supposed to know much about music an' musicians? Very good! Well, d'ye see, there are sixty of 'em quartered at this moment in the visitin'-servants' dormitories an' club down at the lower end of the cliff, where they've a fine view of the Channel, all the desirable conveniences, an' have no way of pryin' into what goes on above the Hall upon the upper three-quarters of the estate. As for their auditorium—you remarked, sir, that it should be much smaller than the average concert-hall, but I ran up to London for a day an' looked at the music-studio connected with WLO—saw where your suggestion would vastly improve it, an' decided that the little concrete music-hall you built for chamber-music near those dormitories some twenty years ago would answer the purpose, temporarily at least. Since you put up the larger Tudor building near the old Hall, for balls and cinema-shows, that smaller building has been used only occasionally by servants coming down with the house-parties—not at all when only the family are in residence, here."

"Sounds pretty good, Harry! We'll have a look-see after breakfast if you fancy it's ready for use at once—an' I must compliment you upon attending to that detail, which is really out of your line entirely. I suppose your sixty-piece orchestra can really play well enough for a radio test? What?"

"Oh, I *say!* Your Lordship is havin' me on, I fear! Fancy! An' it's costin' us over a hundred quid a day for them!"

THE breakfast-room at Trevor Hall is a cheerful place, getting the morning sunshine on its carved oak paneling through Elizabethan diamond panes; and so they took considerably over an hour for their meal. Then they sauntered down along the cliff-brow to the little concrete hall, consisting of a vestibule, a space forty feet square for the audience, a square proscenium-arch and curtain, with a stage back of it twenty feet in depth. The rear wall had been curved to a shallow hemispherical shape and smoothly surfaced with strips of teak, sandpapered and finished with rottenstone. Over this, around the sides and ceiling of the hall, had been fastened thick olive-colored velour to absorb sound and give off no reflective vibration. The stage floor-level had been carried out twenty feet into the auditorium, so that there was ample seating and playing-room for the sixty musicians, and both floor-levels had been covered with thick-pile carpet.

It seemed to Earl Trevor and his friends one of the most utterly silent places they ever were in—the thick concrete walls having no vibration whatever, even when a stiff Channel wind was blowing over the top of the cliffs. At the side of each music-rack was a microphone connected under the carpets with a radio-console a few feet behind the leader's rostrum. Without any explanation from Archer, they instantly saw that a master-electrician, watching the leader's baton, could switch his rheostats on the microphone-circuits higher or lower as the wood-winds, the strings, the brasses or the percussion-instruments were accentuated according to the leader's reading of the selection being played—with a group-rheostat controlling each section. As all the wires had been laid underground before the musicians arrived, they had no idea where the connections led to or how far away—but in order to test the effect at a distance, there was a ten-tube receiving-set alongside the electrician's console, with a four-foot cone.

After thoroughly approving of Archer's work at the little hall, they got into a car and were driven up through the woods to the new beam station. Though the other three had seen the concrete tower, rising but a few feet above the tree-tops, before they left for the States, they had never seen anything like what was now on top of it even though they understood the theory of "beam-transmission."

Upon the six-foot-thick rim of the concrete tower—fifty feet in outside diameter at the top—a manganese-bronze truss, exactly across the center, rested upon four-

wheel trucks which ran on a four-foot track entirely around the rim. This truss projected at one end sixty feet beyond the rim and carried at its farther end a pole supporting a "cage-grid" of three-eighths-inch copper antennæ which led to another pole directly opposite the center of a concave reflector twenty-five feet in diameter, made of molded glass prisms cemented to ridges in the hard-rubber shell—the inch-space behind them being filled with white plaster. In front of the antennæ-pole at the outer end of the truss was another reflector of similar construction but of much smaller size, and mounted upon a universal bearing which enabled it to catch the sun or a battery of arc-lights from any direction and reflect them into the big shell at the other end, which could be adjusted laterally or vertically. In the solid eight-foot top of the concrete tower was a bearing and shaft of manganese-bronze upon which the trunnion of the bronze truss revolved as the big reflector was moved to bear upon any point of the compass—the truss being swung around by means of a hemp cable attached to its outer end and hauled by a motor running on a circular track sixty feet outside of the tower's base.

Five hundred feet from the tower, in the woods, was the concrete building which housed the power-generation—there being five stages, all of which could be thrown together or used separately, in three gangs of twenty-five one-kwt. tubes and two of five five-hundred-watt tubes—all water-cooled. The wiring and the stages of generation, of course, were too complicated to be described in a narrative of this sort, but most radio-amateurs will understand in a general way about what they must have been to get an initial input of eighty-kwts. And it should be obvious that output from an installation of this sort is almost entirely directional in a unilateral way, there being merely negligible radiation from either side or behind the big reflector.

FROM Archer's answers to their questions, apparently, he and his men had covered every detail—even to arranging with the powerful station owned by the two earls on one of the hills south of Paris for reception from Chincoteague and relaying from South Devon—also the fitting up of duplicate operating-rooms, one in Trevor's private suite at the Hall, and the other near the beam-tower in the woods. Finally his Lordship said:

"The sooner we make a preliminary test, the sooner we'll spot anything which may have been overlooked. How long will it take your orchestra to get ready for a prompt start when I give the word from the Hall?"

"Ten minutes getting into the little broadcasting hall, sir—ten more to get seated, music distributed, ready to play. I drilled 'em a few times—said this was a scientific experiment, an' we'd no time to waste upon the conventions or musical temperam'nt."

"Very good! Phone the leader now, from here, to be ready in twenty minutes—with six quarter-hour selections—two of soft music like Debussy's 'Après Midi' or the 'Liebestraum' of Liszt—two from the loudest parts of 'Götterdämmerung' and 'Tannhäuser'—one good waltz, and one syncopated jazz—supper-music. Have your electrician at the console with ear-phones adjusted and the cone cut-out—so the leader can't hear anything at all of what is relayed back from Paris. We can drive back to the Hall in less than ten minutes and call up Chincoteague in the other ten. Now start things—and then join us!"

AS the big switch-panel and three sets of receiving-instruments in the radio-room of his private suite had been worked out by Earl Trevor himself in collaboration with Earl Lammerford and Archer, he was familiar with every knob and switch—knowing exactly what it was supposed to do—but his chief engineer, Bruce Dalton, had done the actual installing, so he was asked to handle the panel for this preliminary test.

"First we'll project the beam squarely on Chincoteague, Bruce—getting them to report just how strong the reception is—and a report from Paris saying how much, if any, side radiation they get. Abdool—call the broadcasting hall and tell the leader to start the 'Liebestraum' at once! That should be a good transatlantic test."

In a moment the exquisite notes filled the radio-room from the smallest receiving-set, then Dalton amplified it with the tickler-coil until the roar of sound nearly split their ear-drums. Shutting that set off and switching in a larger one of fourteen tubes, the Chincoteague operator's voice boomed out quite powerfully:

"Getting just about everything—perfectly. The highest violin notes, and the lowest double-bass. Loud enough to be

heard from the stage of any theater. Are you using full power?" Those in the radio-room glanced at each other and grinned. Then Trevor said—into the microphone, after the orchestra had been momentarily switched off from the beam:

"Stuff cotton into your ears, Phil—and stand by!"

Giving him a couple of minutes somewhat doubtingly to comply with this suggestion, three thousand miles away, they switched on the full eight-kwt. power for another two minutes—afterward cutting it off.

"Great cats! I believe that would carry ten miles in the open air—from a four-foot cone! Try it on Sydney—and ask 'em to report in code. They've an operator on duty all night."

The Paris station reported that their most powerful receiving-set had picked up fragments of the music with very sharp tuning—but so faintly that they thought few sets of lesser power would get any of it at all, thus demonstrating that the beam theory appeared to be working perfectly in this instance. They'd heard, of course, what Chincoteague had said. While those in the radio-room were discussing the advisability of making a test at the other side of the world with Sydney, Australia, Dalton had been idly shifting his vernier.

The voice of a man apparently broadcasting a "talk" boomed suddenly into the room, every syllable clearly enunciated except for an occasional catch of the breath which sounded like a slight habitual impediment. As he cut this off, Lammerford, attracted by the little peculiarity of speech, asked him to swing back on it and sharpen the tone a bit. As he did so, the general trend of the remarks became more apparent—until all of them were closely following every word:

"What I wish to impress upon you is the fundamental fact that any government controlled by the moneyed or aristocratic classes must prove exceedingly dangerous to the great mass of people—an outrage against their individual liberties! If it were possible to change such conditions by parliamentary government within a reasonable time, I would say: 'Do it that way, and avoid bloodshed.' But when every news-sheet is bought, when every branch of government is in the hands of the capitalist-aristocracy, the hands of the people are tied. No course is left them but to burst their bonds and themselves seize the power to regulate the nation's affairs upon a mass-basis. If blood is spilled in the course of such an upheaval, it cannot be helped—the majority must rule!

"It may be said that I myself belong to the moneyed class. In a sense this is true—as I accumulate funds for this cause, and still larger amounts pass through my hands, contributed from outside sources. But for myself—I have little more than sufficient to live in moderate respectability. I wish to impress upon you—"

JUST before the last few sentences His Lordship had suddenly adjusted the radio-compass, then snatched up one of the telephones and ordered the orchestra to start up the loudest movement of the "Götterdämmerung"—at once! Then he rapidly threw over switches on the big panel which swung the great transmitting beam squarely in the direction the compass indicated and gave it full power. In just five seconds by the tall "regulator" in his living-room, an avalanche of sound engulfed the words coming from the receiving-set, completely submerging them—blotting them out as though the man had suddenly lost his voice. Snapping off the A-switch of the receiving-set so that the room was quiet enough to hear their own voices, he said:

"That bounder appears to be broadcasting from a super-station with which I'm not familiar. Presumably he wont have a receiving-set in the studio with him—that would distract his attention too much. So he will go right on to the end of his talk entirely unconscious of what is being done to him. Bruce, cut off our beam for a second, every little while, to see if he's still talking—then slam into him again until he's through! I fancy what we heard was just about the beginning of his talk, an' may not have been fully grasped by the amateurs who did pick it up. Unless they were given the tip beforehand, most of those he's trying to reach would be at work, this time of day. Even if a number went home to listen, they may have missed the first three minutes, as most of us do with any broadcasting program. While the rest of us are considering ways an' means to deal with that bird, suppose you an' Cunningham take the responsibility of listening for him every hour—an' then drowning him out. Eh? If you haven't the orchestra available, let your couplers slop over and squeal him out—or manage some

Each bowed, the man in an embarrassed way. "This is Mr. Rasoczy?"

way with D. C. on the beam. I'll order that leader to keep right on playing—any medley his men can follow without their notes—until we know this bounder has signed off for the day. Now come into the living-room, you chaps, an' let Bruce lock himself in with his noise while we consider this unexpected development.

"I fancy we may consider our beam station a complete success as far as we've gone—we'll try Sydney about eleven tonight. That'll be morning out there, an' they'll be sufficiently awake to take a lot of interest in the experiment. Farmer an' Comp'ny are usin' ten kilowatts on eleven thousand meters—it's quite possible they may relay a three-cornered talk with us. Now, let's get down to this bolshevik bird! That sounded to me—from the strength an' direction—like an English station not far from London, though it might have been Belgian in the same direction if there is one there of any such strength—"

LAMMERFORD quietly interrupted:

"Fancy I can give you a good bit of information, as it happens. Sometime ago I noticed a new station building on the highest ground in Bucks—didn't pay much attention at first, then heard it was owned by a private syndicate who had the idea of leasing advertising privileges to any commercial house who wished to broadcast general talks upon their line of trade or, in fact, anybody who cared to pay their rentals for broadcasting. Just how their prospectus was worded, I don't know, but it must have been approved by the Post Office Department, because no objections were raised about anything connected with it, the only stipulation being that it must use at least double the wave-length of WLO—which would make it somewhere around seven hundred meters, using about five kilowatts. One of the syndicate, I remember, was Rasoczy—the Hungarian steamship-agent and immigrant-banker in Queen Victoria Street; and Rasoczy happens to have just that little hesitating impediment in his voice that we noticed so plainly in that talk. I fancy I could swear to that voice almost anywhere—though he affects much more broken English in his business dealings—and I heard that he was one of the largest shareholders in that syndicate.

"A chap in that line of trade naturally would be handling funds for all sorts of

foreigners from eastern Europe—might easily be receiving large sums from bolshevists 'for investment in British enterprises'—all in his perfectly legitimate line of trade. Well, d'ye see—that puts him in the best possible position to furnish liberal backing for every demnition red in the United Kingdom without bein' caught at it. All he's to say is that foreign drafts were presented to him, as banker, payable to whatever beggar writes the proper signature an' is properly identified. You can't touch him on any legal ground. If, however, it's all a blind to cover him as a secret agent an' dangerous propagandist—that'll be something else again. The F. O. can smash or at least deport him—with any sort of evidence.

"You'll recall that gang headed by Igor Gratz? Schmidt—Rourke—Lipowski—Anna Soper—McSorrell? Two of 'em actually procured berths in Windsor Castle. Anna Soper an' Maria Schmidt were in position to shoot every member of the royal riding-party one morning in Windsor Forest—when we side-tracked the lot of 'em an' sent four to Dartmoor for life. Gratz an' Lipowski were kept under observation in London, but so far, we have no direct evidence connectin' 'em with any criminal act. Now, if those men planted Rasoczy here a few years ago with his bankin' and shipping agency, as the channel through which their funds were passed on to reds all over the place, this would be just about the time when he might be expected to start that sort of work if it could be done without bringin' him into the limelight. I'd wager that he's known to all the reds by a name entirely diff'rent from Rasoczy—an' that if the word an' the hour were passed around as we suspect, he was broadcastin' under that other and better known name. Prob'ly slipped into some room in London which has been fitted up as the broadcastin'-studio for that Buckingh'mshire station when not a soul could swear to seein' him goin' in or out of the place. It's very doubtful if anyone in the Post Office Departm'nt heard the beginning of his talk and our drowning him out—but even if they did, it would be a nice question as to just what action the Departm'nt could take in the matter. What?"

"I was considerin' that point myself, Lammy. Let's go into it a bit. Suppose he got up an' made any such speech on the floor of the House? The Honorable Speaker might call him to order on a point of sedition, but I doubt if he would—it being so generally understood that condemnatory silence upon the part of other members, or a few blistering remarks from one of them, would amount to all the snub that was necess'ry. If he made that speech to an audience of radicals in one of the East End halls or cellars, it would be merely a matter for the police—to interfere or not, accordin' to their judgment. An' it's on record that the bobbies, as a rule, let 'em go about as far as they please—in talk—on the ground that it works off a lot of bile an' does no great harm.

"But when a man with a perfectly understandable speaking voice broadcasts anything of that sort literally to possible millions, it'll be another matter altogether. There's no Parliamentary disapproval to nullify what he says in the public mind, no bobbies to stop him when he lets himself go entirely too far, as he did just now—almost no way of getting at him to stop his mouth before he finishes all he means to say, unless by some such lucky accident as our bein' able to do it instantly. An' he's literally pouring corrosive poison into illiterate, unthinking minds not in the least able to digest it without going crazy and running amok—walking about in a cellarful of powder-casks with the heads knocked out, lighting cigarette after cigarette. Those are the cold facts of it! An' whether we do it through legal channels or in some high-handed way of our own not strictly legal, we avert a very serious danger from every decent person in this country an' from the Governm'nt which they support because it's the best obtainable—if we succeed in stopping this bounder right where he is.

"FIRST place," deduced Trevor, "the man's wealthy—so wealthy he actually tried to explain it in that speech. That is a suspicious point which the reds find it diffic'lt altogether to forget—in spite of any explanation. Lipowski an' Gratz would trust him, of course, because he's undoubtedly a superior, in position to give them orders an' see they're carried out. It's quite sufficient if he tells 'em that plans for next month's activities are not quite matured—they'd have to be satisfied with the statemn't as long as they got word from Hungary an' Moscow that he's one of the men higher up. They see him disbursin' formidable sums to various bolshevist sub-

agents, get some of the cash themselves, know they must go to him for it, tell all this to the lower strata, who also see it and, generally, are convinced by it. Very good! But if we convince Gratz, Lipowski an' some man lower down that he's been really double-crossing 'em ever since he came to London—getting away with the bulk of the funds for himself—well, he wont last long as an influential bolshevist agent. If you ask me, I'd say he prob'ly wont last at all—and it'll be his own crowd that do the eliminating—not us."

"Some order, that George!" observed Lammerford. "An' yet—we have carried through worse ones. Any idea as to how we might go about it?"

"A somewhat vague one, as yet—partly suggested by our experiments of this morning. But first we'll need a good bit more information than we have to go upon at present. I'd like to remain here a week and continue these experiments, because they're deuced important for all of us. But if Lammy can dig up certain facts in one direction, if Abdool and his cousin Achmet can get at some other ones in a diff'rent stratum of society, I'll have the general scheme pretty nearly worked out by the end of the week, if you're back here then."

"That goes, old chap—of course! We're all of us bloomin' nobs today, largely thanks to you; but you've the best head of the lot, an' we cheerfully admit it. Just what would you wish us to get for you?"

"Assurance that Rasoczy *was* the fellow broadcasting—that he actually *is* the chief bolshevist agent here now. Information as to exactly how much he knows about radio an' electric currents—particularly the valve-action in radio-sets an' the giant valves, or 'tubes' used in power broadcastin'—whether he has a set in his own London house an' how much he uses it—who it was purchased from—with what sort of a guarantee for maintenance. Then, whether Igor Gratz, Lipowski or any of the other reds come to confer with him in his house, frequently enough for the servants to know them, what room he usually sees them in, where his radio outfit is. Whether he has any standing or influence among communists and socialists outside of his own extreme radicals. In a general way, just about how much dangerous influence he's exerting here among the Labor Party and those affiliated with it. You catch the idea, of course—but the other details are equally important. It will be easy enough for all three of you to get inside his house and study it. Find out if there are houses for sale or to rent upon the next street—backing up against his house, or near it. A week isn't very long for this, but we have freq'ntly got more in less time than that. The more I recall exactly what the bounder said, the more I fancy we can't nip his activities any too quickly!"

AS the three started directly after tiffin in one of Trevor's high-powered cars, they were in London in time for dinner—disguised, in the East End, about nine. From that time until one in the morning,—knowing about where to go and who were likely to answer casual questions without thinking about the matter afterward,—they picked up considerably more than the police or even the Foreign Office knew about the banker and steamship-broker in Queen Victoria Street. During the next two days they got at still more. Upon the third day Lammerford—as an Italian banker from New York—had a pleasant enough interview with Rasoczy at his town-house near Portman Square, while Achmet was making himself agreeable to the servants, below, as a telephone lineman in the employ of the General Post Office. Sir Abdool, meanwhile, was looking into the matter of real-estate—finding a small house which seemed to please him on the next street, exactly in the rear of the Hungarian's. Rasoczy's house was a detached one with a narrow strip of ground at either side and a larger garden in the rear, terminating in a brick wall upon the other side of which was the little rear garden of the dwelling Sir Abdool had purchased after an hour's examination—partly as a speculation, he told the agent, but also with the chance that he might decide to live there through the "season," at least. On Friday they all motored back to Trevor Hall and discussed their information with the Earl over their dinner.

"First place, old chap—there's not a question but that Rasoczy has much more actual influence among the Labor Party than even we suspected. A good many of the foreign element have come here from their own countries consigned to him. He's handled their remittances, told 'em where to find the best lodgings for their money, gotten employment for scores of the beggars. That sort of thing tells—they look upon him as a big man, one of importance an' influence in this country. And just

at present he's the acting chief agent for the reds in London—as we supposed."

LAMMERFORD went on to describe his house, inside and out—also Sir Abdool's recent purchase. "He has an expensive five-valve radio-set—five-tube, as they call 'em in the States—of which he knows absolutely nothing beyond the dials he turns to make it work. No knowledge whatever of radio or electricity beyond punching a button to ring a bell or talking into a microphone to produce the result he hears in his own set. Gratz, Lipowski an' two lesser men confer with him freq'ntly—but usually come after dark when their character isn't quite so obvious as by daylight, although they'd come at high noon in any emergency. Widower—no children. Housekeeper—who is likely enough another bolshevist agent. Four house-servants and a chauffeur from Moscow. Rasoczy is no mechanic—helpless in any situation requiring such knowledge. White hands—be-a-utifully manicured—flower in his lapel. He purchased his radio-set of Simmons an' Block in Cannon Street—with a small monthly payment for their keeping it in order. He listens to all the political stuff and all the good music. Has a good set, but very far from up-to-date. Storage A battery—ninety-volt B battery—and a small C for a tickler-circuit. They lend him secondhand batteries while his are being recharged. Set thrown in or out with a single A switch. Simmons and Block are said to have started in the radio-business on a shoestring—have been doing fairly well, but still have several notes out which they get renewed at maturity—held by Icklestein an' Meyer, bankers. Block is Meyer's brother-in-law—very likely they're int'rested in other things together—that would account for the note-renewals."

"My word! You chaps certainly were thorough while you were about it—what? I'll buy that house at a profit, Abdool—if you want to sell at any time. The data on Simmons an' Block are precisely what I hoped you might get—but didn't expect so much. I'll see what I can do with it, at once!"

Reaching for one of the phones which stood on a low taboret near his chair, under the table, he called his Park Lane mansion in London on his own private wire and asked his secretary, there, to get Solomon Meyer on the wire—put in as an emergency-call. In this way Meyer was reached in his own house within ten minutes, where a long-distance call from South Devon would have taken several hours.

"Are you there, Mr. Meyer? Trevor of Dyvnaint, speaking. I'm wondering if you would care to accommodate me in a little matter?

"Now, that's very decent of you, Meyer! Your voice sounds as if you were feeling quite fit—what? Mrs. Meyer and the daughter are well, I trust? . . . . Well, d'ye see, it's this way. I've a friend who wishes to set up his brother in the radio-trade. Chap has seen that shop of Simmons an' Block in Cannon Street—Block's a relative of yours, I understand?—an' fancies he might do well in that location if he took the business over. I'm of the impression that my friend will pay any reasonable price for it on the understanding that the firm wouldn't start up another place in competition within a half-mile of him. Seemed to me like a good opportunity for Simmons an' Block to make a quick turnover an' start up again farther west. But—between ourselves—I'd like to be in a position to assure my friend an' his brother that the business can be purchased. I'm told in bankin' circles that you hold some of their paper an' have been obliged to renew several times? Would you—er—consider turning over that paper to me? What?"

The pause was a very slight one, then:

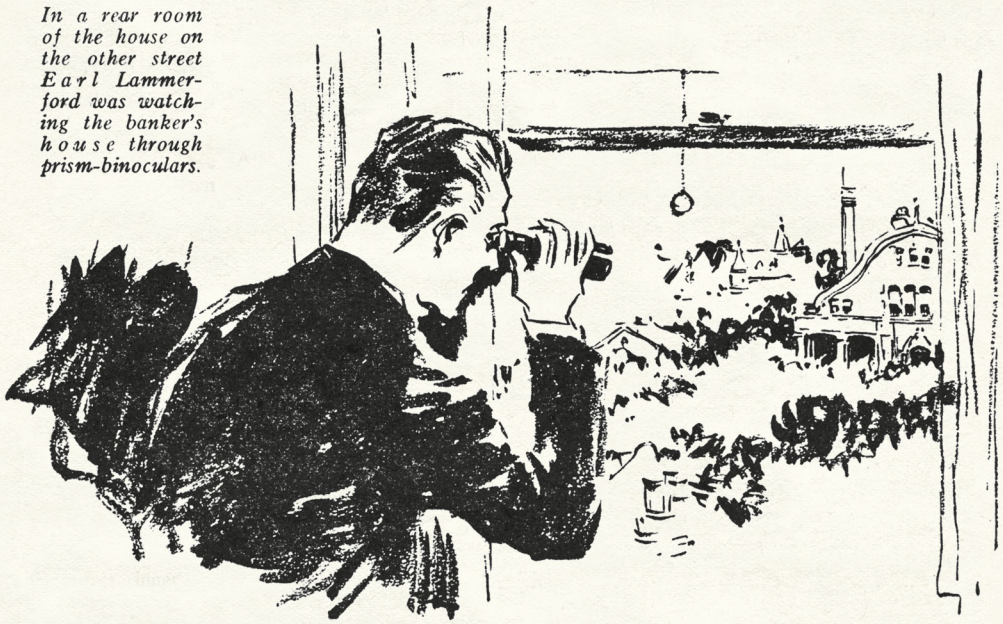
"That's fine! I'm really much pleased, that you're willing to accommodate me in this little matter. It's a small one—but I'd like to please my friend an' his brother. Suppose my secretary calls at your office with a check signed in blank an' fills it out when you tell him the proper amount? That satisfactory?"

This detail being attended to, the Earl outlined to his friends what he had in mind—and as they grasped it, there was a broad grin on each face. They were puzzled, however, over the purchase of the radio-shop—it seemed at first glance a rather needless detail.

"I'll be callin' upon Rasoczy, d'ye see, as the electrician from Simmons an' Block—makin' the usual monthly examination of his set—suggestin' one or two points which occur to me. Couldn't do that while they owned the place without arousin' suspicion an' probably upsettin' the whole scheme. The work of that electrician in Rasoczy's house will be my own little touch, d'ye see—while you chaps are down in the East

End hobnobbin' with Gratz an' Lipowski as you've done several times before. Faith—they should trust you by this time, I fancy. What? Lammy's description of the room lay-out on that parlor floor was the key to the whole plan. The arrangement of those rooms simply couldn't have been better."

mentioned the notes as their only reason for accepting such a ridiculous amount. He merely smiled knowingly—said he was also purchasing the right to use their firm name for another year—and asked if they could vacate in forty-eight hours. They took his check without argument—and fetched away every employee they'd had to a new shop.



In a rear room of the house on the other street Earl Lammerford was watching the banker's house through prism-binoculars.

Ordinarily it is a matter of weeks, at least, to sell out a business—take stock and turn over the shop with the books and various accounts. But Simmons and Block were making a supposititious eight per cent on their investment, which was very far from their ideas of what they cared to work for. They had had some discussion with Meyer over getting rid of it—but any purchaser would insist upon seeing their books, and the trade didn't look like a bargain from any point of view. When they heard of a purchaser who wanted the shop and good-will in a hurry, it struck them that he might not examine the conditions too closely—and they were chucklingly considering a price that would just about get by when Meyer remarked that being pressed for ready money, he'd been obliged to sell their notes, which, of course, would be a lien on the business which they would have to show in selling. So when a gentleman from the West End offered them a lump price which amounted to a profit of twenty per cent for them, they

Upon the following day the Simmons & Block motor truck drove up to the curb in front of Rasoczy's house, loaded with various electric and radio appliances. A tall, well-built man got down and walked around to the servants' entrance in the rear with a battery in either hand. Five minutes later Rasoczy came along in his own car, saw the motor-truck, remembered the name—and was told by his butler that the man who came with it was waiting to see him about his radio-set.

RASOCZY'S private study was in a rear corner of the house on the parlor floor, overlooking the garden. From one end of it a door opened into a small square space in which a circular iron stairway led up to a similar landing outside the door of his bedroom. On that floor another door gave upon the main upper hall of the house, but below, there was no exit save through the study. A larger door in the front wall of the study opened into a good-sized dining-room with a large open fireplace on the

opposite side—and at the right of this fireplace was an archway screened by heavy velour portières from the front drawing-room. At the rear of the main entrance hall, on the other side, were a door leading into the butler's pantry and another into the dining-room—the kitchen being underneath the pantry. Except when meals were being served in the dining-room, the door from it into the hall was always locked so that nobody could approach the study through it unless he first passed through the front drawing-room and big archway. When Gratz, Lipowski and other radicals conferred with the banker, drinks and tobacco were usually placed upon the dining-table and folding-doors drawn across the archway behind the heavy portières. Across the front of the big fireplace, a tall Spanish screen of carved leather was drawn to stop the draft when there was no fire burning.

Rasoczy had been seated at his desk but a few moments when the butler appeared with the repair man in tow—and the banker examined him with some inward surprise. The fellow was well-built, tall, as clean as a mechanic ever is in the middle of the afternoon, though his working clothes bore some evidence of his occupation. Each bowed, the man in an embarrassed way.

"This is Mr. Rasoczy?"

"Yes."

"Then I can explain a bit about our business, sir. I'm a Varsity of London man, myself, d'ye see, an' I've a brother-in-law who's done quite well in the linen-draping trade—looking to invest a bit, here an' there. Well, d'ye see, I'm by way of being an electrical an' radio engineer—have taken out a few patents in that line—heard that Simmons an' Block might consider parting with an interest in their business, as they think of opening a larger shop in some other place. So my brother-in-law an' I pooled a little of our savings an' bought in. Eventually, I fancy we'll take over the entire business. Lookin' over the maintenance accounts, I came upon the contract for your radio set an' a description of it. Saturday would be the time they usually came around to renew your batteries, but today and tomorrow I could do a bit of work on your set if you wish. I'll give it a thorough overhaul, at all events; but knowing your type of set as well as I do, it struck me that with another antenna rigged from your roof an' a couple of small regeneration units, I could give your set more volume, better reception an' better selectivity. If I don't succeed in gettin' that with the changes I make, it'll cost you nothing, sir. If you're satisfied that the set is noticeably improved, it would cost you not over three pounds—possibly not over two. In fact—well, d'ye see, my brother-in-law an' I wish to please an' hold all the old customers while we're makin' new ones. In this one case, I'd be willin' to put in my work, gratis, an' call it all a part of your maintenance contract. Of course, if you consider your set improved an' are more pleased with it, we'd appreciate any word you might care to pass about concernin' our work."

"H-m-m—I don't t'ink I catch your name? Eh?"

"Roberts, sir—William Roberts."

"Well, Roberts, your proposition seems a leetle more as fair to me—yess? You may broceed wit' the set as you blease—undt if ett worrk better, as you say—well, I sendt ot'er beople by your shop. Yess."

"If you have time to watch me, sir, I'll be pleased to explain the changes as I make them—and the reasons why they should be improvements. Aye."

"Humph! I could watch you, my friendt, until t'e cows wass milked, undt I wouldn't know w'y all t'ose wires undt t'ings wass not not'ing but junk."

"Roberts" grinned to himself, inwardly, at the vast difference in the man's pronunciation and accent from that of the mysterious person who had made the bolshevist speech in such excellent English over the radio. The little impediment was there, clearly recognizable, but not one person in ten thousand, hearing the two voices, would have admitted that they could have come from the same individual. Rasoczy asked him where he expected to fasten the other end of the new antenna—but was assured that nowadays people were quite decent in permitting a wire to run from a hook in one of their chimneys and that there would be no difficulty in his obtaining such permission from one of the neighbors.

AFTER changing the batteries, Roberts went out to his truck with the depleted ones and fetched back a couple of bakelite boxes, with coils of wire and a three-cable-grid antenna. As Rasoczy appeared to be occupied at his desk with his own affairs, Roberts didn't venture to interrupt him with attempts at conversation, but worked—quickly and expertly—at his "few minor alterations." First he connected a

couple of heavily insulated wires to the A battery switch on the inside of the panel and led them through a porcelain tube in the window casing. From the antenna connection, he then led a core-wire, heavily insulated with rubber, through a small hole bored in the same casing. After asking the Hungarian's permission, he attached a ground-wire to a cold-water pipe at the opposite end of the study from the set and connected it, apparently, with one of the bakelite boxes which he placed behind a paper-towel basket under the skeleton porcelain wash-basin—but that ground wire merely ended in one of three connections upon the outside of the box, and went no farther.

From the other two connections he led a double stranded wire cord, heavily insulated, to the opposite side of the window-casing—and through a small hole to the outside. Then after connecting a C battery where he thought it would do the most good, he carried all five wires on glass insulators—the double cord to the A battery, the rubber-insulated antenna wire, and the double cord from the box under the wash-basin—up the rear outside of the house to the antenna-pole on the roof.

Next morning, he fetched a three-foot cone to replace the old loud-speaker horn, a power-tube for the second stage of audio-frequency (the B battery he had brought the previous day was one hundred thirty-five volts instead of ninety) and went up to make his roof-connections. To the two-cable-grid of stranded wire he quickly attached both of the double cords. To a third wire, which he rigged between the other two, he attached the antenna-wire from the study window—each of the three being thoroughly insulated from the others and everything else. Any radio-man or electrician not examining the connections very closely would have said at a glance that it was a three-wire antenna-grid. But at the other end, where it ended in a large glass-insulator ninety feet away, over the rear yard of a house on the other street, the heavy wire which appeared to be merely a "holding guy" attached to the chimney of that house was actually a triple-wire insulated cord, carrying all the connections into a room of that house to switches alongside of the telephone, which had been taken over from the previous owner when the house was purchased. The telephone-connection could be switched to a private wire that ran to Sir Abdool's house in Park Street at the rear of the Trevor grounds on Park Lane. The box under the wash-basin was a dictaphone with its battery in the other house, where there was a similar one. And the two wires from the A battery switch ended in a switch in the other house. As every radio-user invariably cuts off his A battery when the set is not in use, by throwing open the switch, the other connection enabled a person in that house on the next street to throw it into circuit again at any moment he wished, and the two dictaphones instantly conveyed to him any sound coming from the set in the study. They also clearly reproduced the voices of any persons speaking in the study or dining-room—the sound of footsteps on the floor—even the rustle or crackle of papers as they were unfolded.

ROBERTS waited until Rasoczy came home that afternoon, and demonstrated so much increased volume and clearness in the set that the banker was as pleased with it as a child. Then, after carefully adjusting the coupler-pitch with the tickler-coil, he asked him to avoid tuning with anything but the vario-condenser vernier for the next couple of weeks, at least. It never entered Rasoczy's head that the kilocycles from some broadcasting stations can be varied in resonance with any particular coupler or condenser as easily as one tunes in that set with its own vernier.

That afternoon Rasoczy went down to Southampton, and his servants all went to a party across the street. While the house was empty, Sir Abdool and Earl Trevor had the through connection made with the operating-room of the beam station in South Devon—speaking to Archer and Dalton through phones which stood at their elbows as they sat before the big switch-panel. When Archer announced that he was ready, they threw the switch opening the A circuits in the banker's study and told him to shade down on his kilocycles until they shouted—the orchestra, meanwhile, playing a selection in the little broadcasting hall. In a moment or two, the sound came to them through the dictaphone with such volume that they knew it could be heard all through the banker's house, and shouted over the phone for Archer to modulate it considerably—which he gradually did until they judged the sound must approximate that of human voices in the study, talking in tones slightly above conversational pitch. Then, having demon-

strated the perfect working of their scheme, they locked up the house.

The next detail was carried out in an old warehouse overhanging the river at Wapping, where Igor Gratz and Lipowski, like many of their radical predecessors, made their headquarters and conferred with their subordinates. Earl Lammerford and Sir Abdool had assumed certain workingmen's characters over a year before—and from the necessity for gaining information of red activities from time to time, had reappeared in the same characterizations again and again until they had become quite familiar to most of the radicals and socialists who frequented that neighborhood. Knowing the value of thoroughness in anything of the sort, they both worked with other employees from time to time for a firm of building constructors, owned by Lammerford, which had gangs of men working upon different construction-jobs in several cities —therefore, with their regular union cards, they were in excellent standing among the laboring classes everywhere. As they were quite evidently products of the board schools with a far better education than the average workingman, they found themselves with considerable influence in a short time and had been conferred with by the radical leaders upon details which would not have been discussed with the majority.

DURING the few days before Trevor had completed his arrangements, they had been expressing considerable doubt concerning Rasoczy in various East End quarters until Gratz called for a show-down upon what they were hinting. Then they quietly and convincingly stated that they had seen the Hungarian upon four different occasions dining in a swell West End restaurant, and hobnobbing in other places, with two Conservative Members of Parliament who were known to be unqualifiedly against everything whatsoever in the way of socialism or radicalism; that he had appeared to be upon most excellent terms with them, when it was known that they picked their associates with a very decided taboo against anybody of sufficiently opposite views to compromise them; that both of these men had been observed through the windows of his study in obvious private conference with him—and had left the house next morning after evidently having remained over night in Rasoczy's house; that he had seemed to be receiving from them a large sum of money in the study, the evening before. These various facts were casually given in a manner which didn't admit of any doubt concerning them—and when the red leaders were more than half convinced, Sir Abdool told them he'd thought of a way by which they might test the man out for themselves.

He admitted that he and his pal had watched the banker pretty closely, gone out of their way to do it—struck up acquaintance with his servants. Through them they had learned that Rasoczy was going down to Liverpool upon the second afternoon following—expecting to be home in time for dinner the next evening. They said they had learned enough of his habits to have noticed that he invariably returned from several hours to a whole day in advance of the time he had stated to his servants, and that they were positive that he was to have a conference with those two Conservative Members during the afternoon when he was supposed to be on the train returning from Liverpool. So if Gratz, Lipowski and one other man called at the house, telling the servants they had an appointment for that afternoon with their master, there was no question but that they would be admitted and permitted to wait for him in the dining-room, with the folding-doors drawn. Once in there, if they closed the door into his study, he wouldn't catch any glimpse of them if he came down into it from his room above, as he might do with the two Members—but to make sure, they would better take some of the smaller chairs and conceal themselves behind the big leather screen in front of the fireplace, just in case he happened to open the study door and glance into the dining-room. Once they heard voices talking in his study, it would be safe enough to come around the screen and place their ears against the door.

The more Gratz and Lipowski thought over this scheme, the more it appealed to them. They really didn't give a damn what Rasoczy might think of them if they were discovered in his dining-room, because he wasn't in position to do anything against them. The main point was what they could learn concerning *him*—what he was up to beneath the surface. If he were actually double-crossing them—well, they had their own ways of dealing with that sort of thing. And the matter had now reached a point in their thinking where they had to know. Either the man was one of them, out and out, or he was a menace to be eliminated.

In due course Rasoczy left for Liverpool. Actually, he didn't return to his own house for three days. But when he afterward attempted to convince Gratz and Lipowski of that fact, offered to prove it by the testimony of six or eight persons in Liverpool, they laughed at him in a sinister way that made his blood run cold. For as they had waited in his dining-room, they distinctly heard slight jarring, scraping sounds undoubtedly caused by shoes upon human feet descending the little circular iron stairway, then the slight creaking of that private door into the study, footsteps sauntering across the floor-rugs—the creaking of leather as two or three men seated themselves in the big comfortable chairs by the banker's desk—and then—laughing remarks:

"You do yourself very well here, Rasoczy. In fact, I should fancy this sort of thing would arouse suspicion among the reds you're so cleverly bamboozling. Presumably you offset that to some extent by the absolutely seditious speeches you broadcast from that station in Bucks from time to time—but seems to us, d'ye see, that you go a bit too far with that sort of thing! What? Is it really necess'ry?"

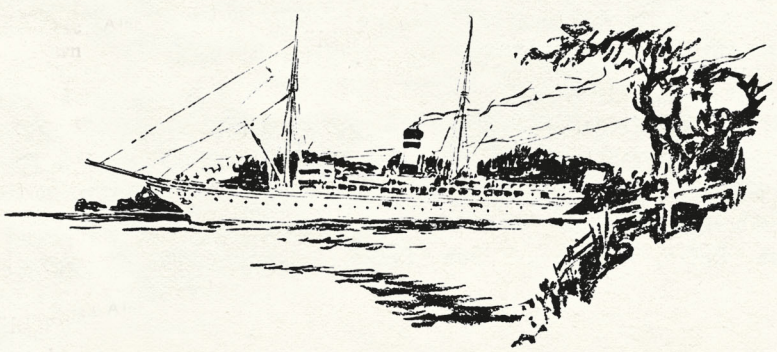
"Othairwise, my friendts, t'ere pe suspicions! I mus' have t'e plausible explanation w'y I haf so mooch money to inwest in t'e firs'-class security. Yess. An' I mus' assure you t'at large sums—w'ich seem large to t'em, you unnerstand, pecause t'ey do nodt t'ink in larch noombers—iss distributed t'roo t'eir undergroundt channels. Mooch of it find t'e way back to t'e savinks banks in t'e provinces kep' by my friendts. But what goes t'at way iss nodt ten per cent of what gomes from t'e outside sources. You get more as t'at in contribution' for your own party—w'ich leave' somet'ing for me—yess—some leetle accumulation for inwestment in goodt Britsh Industries. W'ich, of course is my own affair—I am nodt in business for t'e healt'!"

There was more of this. The banker appeared to be mutually interested with both Members in public utilities controlled by private interests—and therefore paying good interest upon the capital invested instead of running up a deficit under Government management.

NOW, the three men whose ears were glued against that door heard every tone of those voices inside—every chuckle and laugh. They could have distinctly heard every word a foot away from the door, and many of them across the big dining-room. When the discussion seemed drawing to a close, they softly tiptoed out through the drawing-room and the front door, leaving the premises without being seen. Naturally, they had not even thought of opening that study-door.

In a rear room of the house on the other street Earl Lammerford was watching the banker's house through prism-binoculars while Sir Abdool kept posting Archer, in far-away South Devon, as to the proper modulation of the voices coming to him from that study through the dictaphones. By Archer's side Earl Trevor was giving an almost perfect reproduction of Rasoczy's accent and little impediment, having concentrated upon them during their talk while he was making his few "minor rearrangements" of the radio-set—the Honorable Raymond Carter and Bruce Dalton doing very well indeed as the two Conservative Members, a microphone in front of each.

What happened to Rasoczy? Oh, well—let's not go into that. Such details are apt to be rather shocking if one has the gift of colorful description. I believe that everybody was satisfied except Rasoczy—who wasn't where anything made the slightest difference to him one way or the other.



JADE

This absorbing drama of China and America is offered by the gifted author of the well-liked Hiram Inkweller stories. You will find it interesting indeed.

By JOSEPH BLETHEN

"WELL, perhaps I am part Chinese. Anyway, I love the people, love their ways, love their gorgeous clothing—love *everything* Chinese. How am I to know what I am? The only man in America who can tell me is the venerable Ah Ping—and the Venerable One will not tell me."

Bob Farnsworth had said: "Jade, I believe you are part Oriental. There's more Chinese about you than just your name." She had laughed pleasantly, as usual, and that dull dreamy glow had come into her eyes again. Then he asked. a bit troubled:

"But suppose you discover that you *are,* Jade? How would you feel about it?"

"I would rejoice," replied the girl promptly. "I came out of the Orient, and I seem to be marked with a love of its charm. Ever since Uncle Ping brought me, a two-year-old baby, to Aunt Mary—"

"Does Mrs. Collins think—"

Farnsworth asked it for the hundredth time, and for the hundredth time Jade Collins answered: "Aunt Mary does not know. I do not know. I'm a mystery."

"But your parents?"

"You know as well as I," answered the girl patiently. "Mother died at my birth—in Canton. Father was killed in a *tong* war there. Some big man—mandarin, rich, powerful, some one with whom he had business relations—sent the baby home. The baby, Ah Ping, the jade ring, and a fortune in money, all unexpectedly dumped in Aunt Mary's lap. Ah Ping wont talk. He just is Ah Ping, the serene scholar. Some day I'm going to China and look myself up. Ah Ping says I certainly must do so. When I marry, he is to take me and my foreign-devil husband, and show me to his people and to the people who knew my parents. Uncle Ping is my Chinese father. And I, being a good child,"—and now she smiled pleasantly,—"shall do just as he says."

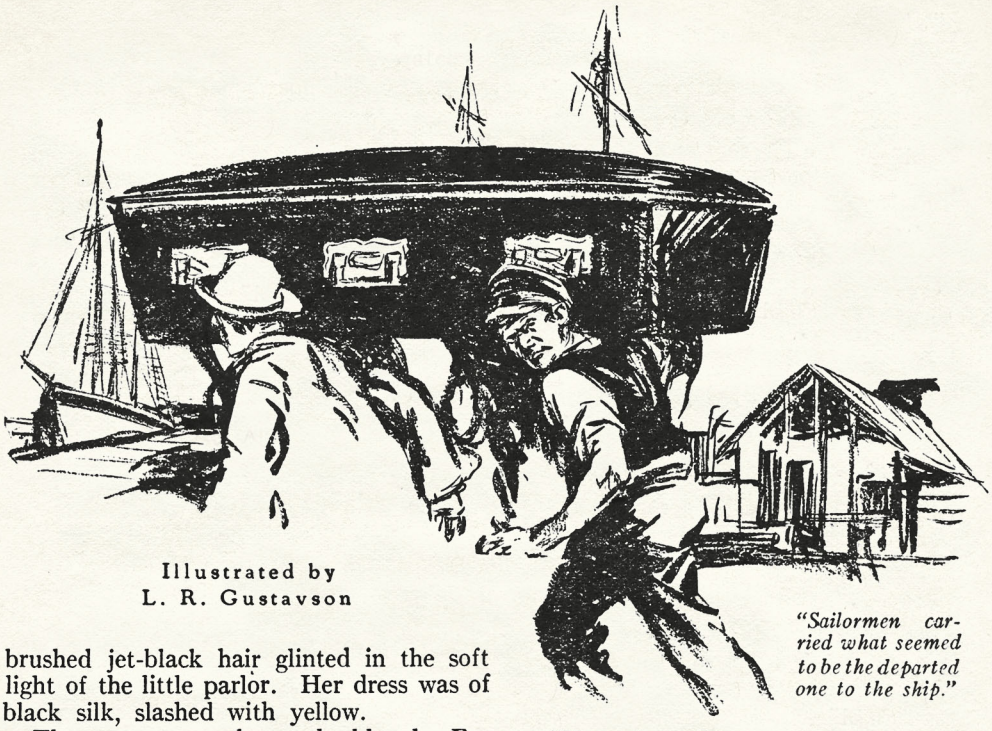
"And I," answered the man dejectedly, "who am to be that same foreign-devil husband, have nothing to say about it."

"Just one thing," Jade answered brightly. "You will say it's a fascinating plan. Then you are to be properly interested. A visit to the Orient with a mystery behind it! You arrive to learn that your Yankee bride is a Chinese princess, or if you've been thinking I'm part Oriental, you learn that your Chinese princess is just a Yankee skipper's daughter. Either way, a thrill."

"But a honeymoon with a dignified Chinese scholar as chaperon. Heavens!"

The girl moved closer to him. "Don't worry," said she. "We needn't even see him till we reach Hongkong. Then we'll probably be very glad to have him for our guide and protector. That's a wild, wild place. And he will be necessary. He will lead us to the Honorable Unknown One."

AS she spoke, she fingered the jade ring hanging pendant from its golden chain about her graceful neck. And as she smiled, her dark eyes seemed to narrow, and the outer corners to widen. Her smoothly



Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

"Sailormen carried what seemed to be the departed one to the ship."

brushed jet-black hair glinted in the soft light of the little parlor. Her dress was of black silk, slashed with yellow.

The young man almost shuddered. For the moment her dark beauty, though exquisite, seemed truly Oriental. But earlier that day, on the tennis-court, when she had defeated him in a hard game, she had seemed all American. He pulled himself together. He told himself it was only that doggoned way she had of plastering her hair down, and of using a little eye-penciling, just to please old Ah Ping. And that jade ring!

Always that jade ring made him nervous. It kept the mystery alive. The glint from the dragon-green cubes could snap like fire, or soften to the texture of rich velvet. Hypnotic—that's what it was. And in spite of his hints that a safety deposit vault was the place to wear it, she clung to it, asleep or awake—the jade ring. And her name was Jade.

"I think," observed Bob Farnsworth, "that I shall visit the Honorable Ah Ping's study officially—officially and ceremoniously. Now that we are engaged—"

"It would be well," she interrupted facetiously. "I shall not feel myself completely betrothed to you, Bob, till my Chinese father consents, and writes the announcement, and posts it on the front door, Chinese fashion, so that the world may see it. You know, it is clearly set out in 'The Twenty-four Patterns of Filial Piety,' that—"

"Your Aunt Mary consented," he interrupted. "And as she is a widow, and you an orphan, who else is to be considered?"

"Ah Ping."

"Why Ah Ping?"

"Because he has been truly a father to me—the only father I've ever known."

"Your Uncle John would turn in his grave to hear that."

"I think not. Uncle John was a dear uncle. It was he who named Ah Ping 'Uncle' Ping. And while he roamed the seas, Ah Ping remained right here and watched over me—watched and guided my every step. He was worth a dozen governesses. Ask Aunt Mary."

"Yes, 'guided'! Filled you up with all that moss-grown Oriental nonsense."

She smiled patiently. "The precepts of the ancients have become very dear to me, Bobby dear. And as they are very strict, I do not think they will corrupt your American wife."

"Lordy!" he exploded. "If only I could be sure you *were* American."

Her smile became playful again. "With such a doubt in your mind, you certainly should consult the Serene Scholar."

"I will. And right now."

"Then may your walk be pleasant, my Betrothed One."

As Mr. Robert Farnsworth, graduate engineer of an American university, walked

toward the secluded sanctum of the Oriental scholar, he felt that shudder again. What if Ah Ping should disclose that Jade Collins *was* part Chinese? He had loved her, wooed her and won her, convinced that she was all white. And she seemed all American, with just a few Chinese mannerisms, affections and pretended languor. Surely it was only a trick of the hairbrush and the eye-pencil. Just make-believe and make-up. But if—

AUNT MARY COLLINS, now the widow of a highly respected deep-sea skipper who had served long on the Oriental run, had learned to accept the unexpected long before Ah Ping had come out of romantic China, bringing her departed sister's two-year-old baby to her door. Captain John Collins and his younger brother, Captain Rollo, had married sisters, so both the Captain and his wife Mary could claim the infant as blood niece. And Ah Ping, with a retinue of servants, had boarded Captain John's ship at Hongkong, and had said that the tiny mite was a Collins—that he was its Chinese "father," appointed by an Honorable Unknown One to guide the baby steps through childhood and youth, and on to the full bloom of womanhood.

Captain John Collins had stared in surprise at the richly gowned ambassador, the retinue of servants, and the child in the serene nurse's arms. And all he could do was bow respectfully, kiss his baby niece and cable his wife to expect them. From Ah Ping they learned all they knew about the death of the parents, Captain Rollo Collins and his wife Norma. They had his word, and that was all—except that as the baby grew, little Jade began to look like her mother.

And there was mystery about Ah Ping too. A man of middle age, of keen eye, soft voice and gentle bearing, he came to San Francisco royally attended—and remained alone, the retinue dispatched back to China on Captain John's return voyage. He became without invitation, a member of the household, ever hovering about the mysterious baby. He had brought a fortune for the child—a love gift from a mysterious lord of the Empire. And his own treasure-chest seemed to be modest or extravagant, as the occasion might demand. A student, steeped in books, and given to much meditation, he was accepted by Aunt Mary as just another mystery of the sea. And he remained to foster in Jade Collins, mysterious waif of the Orient, that love of the Far East that had been born in her.

"Maybe he *is* her father," Aunt Mary had said to Captain John.

"Then she's lucky," answered the old sea-dog. "Ah Ping is *somebody*. Or there's some other somebody who sent him. You can't guess answers out of China. Just wait and see. Maybe she's a princess. And if she is—well, those top-side old chaps are not so bad. And don't forget that ring."

The jade ring was another mystery. And why had the baby been named Jade? Who named her?

The ring, hanging by its flimsy golden chain about the baby's neck, had roused Aunt Mary's curiosity. "Where did it come from, Mr. Ping?" she demanded. "Was it her father's ring?"

"Not her father's, Worshipful One, but given to her by one who loved him. The Honorable Unknown One bestowed it, and it will guard her through life. It is a talisman. And I am Mr. Ah, if you please. Our last names come first, you know."

"Pardon me, Mr. *Ah*. But why give a *green* ring to a baby? It looks—well, barbaric!"

And then old Captain John Collins had grunted. "Barbaric? I'll say! Worth its weight in angel's eyelashes. Dammit, Mary, that's royal jade!"

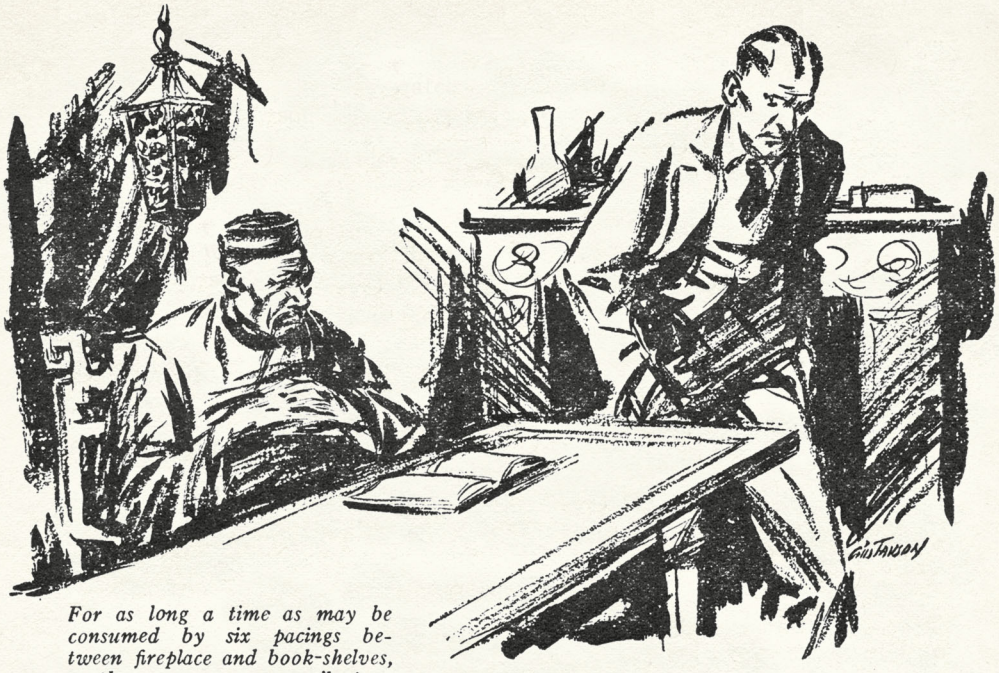
"More than that, Honorable Skipper, if my humble word may be accepted," breathed Ah Ping. "The Honorable Unknown One sent a message. If misfortune ever descends upon her, and I be removed from her guardianship, she has but to go to a jeweler of my country, remove a cube of the jade, and he will point out her rescue. The Honorable Unknown One has not sent gold only, and assigned my humble self to her service, but his lasting protection follows her as well—as lasting as the traditions of my country."

"Very good," answered Captain John. "But I hope, Wise Ambassador, that my niece may never have to holler for help. She's going to be an American kid."

"An American," admitted Ah Ping, bowing profoundly. "But always with a love for the nation that first sheltered her."

Aunt Mary wondered if that statement was to be taken literally. And if so, would *that* be enough to make an American kid partly Chinese? But she did not press the point. "You intend to remain with us awhile then, Mr. Ah?" she asked.

"I remain," replied Ah Ping, "till she is



For as long a time as may be consumed by six pacings between fireplace and book-shelves, the younger man was silent.

grown—and marries. Then I return to the Honorable Unknown One for further commands."

"Then you're here till further orders," laughed Captain John. "Better send home for your other clothes. We don't marry *our* kids from the cradle."

"My life is *here*," answered the unperturbed Ah Ping. "I rejoice that it may be a long one."

Apparently, Ah Ping had brought his "other clothes." At any rate the many boxes which came ashore testified to anything but haste. And so this ambassador of a great love, himself a graduate of a university where many languages are taught, set up his cozy den in the gruff skipper's modest home, smoothed out his many silken garments, arranged his books of many tongues, and, behind a screen, deposited the traditional lacquered coffin that might be his passport back to his native soil. Further, he insisted on sharing the household expense, and on recruiting from Chinatown, with great care, a modest retinue of padded-slippered servants. Aunt Mary Collins found herself very comfortable, and entirely free to be a mother to her niece. Captain John smiled contentedly. "And now I have China at both ends of my run," said he.

For years Captain John Collins, deep-sea skipper, continued to tread the Oriental run, and his modest home in San Francisco became known as the shrine of a scholarly recluse. Baby Jade brought sunshine to a house that had been childless, and the scholar brought an atmosphere of peace and serenity that was beyond price. Unobtrusive, yet ever present, he held the Orient before the childish eyes, and as the years went on, and Captain John Collins was called to the Last Long Cruise, became in love as well as in name Jade's Chinese father. From him she learned the tongue of his ancestors, the scholarly French of the diplomatic corps, and the formal English of commercial Hongkong. Yet she romped as an American child, grew as an American girl, and was all American—except when she dressed her black hair as an Oriental, penciled the corners of her eyes, drew on the silks that were Ah Ping's gifts, and with Ah Ping, played at formality. Then she was so much the Chinese princess that the scholar's eyes would glow in pride, and the ever-wondering Aunt Mary would revert to her primary doubt—was Jade all gold, or partly jade?

And always, when the girl played at Oriental dreams, the jade ring left its chain and adorned her slender white finger.

As she grew older, Ah Ping progressed from Oriental fairy tales to "The Rules of Behavior for Children," led her through "The Classic for Girls," and invited her attention to "The Twenty-four Patterns of Filial Piety." During those quiet hours, she seemed wholly of the Far East.

One day, when she was but eight, and was perched on her Uncle John's lap fingering his gold buttons, and listening to a romping tale of pearl-diving, she asked a poser. "Uncle John," said she, "why does Uncle Ping keep a coffin in his study? He isn't sick."

"It's a custom," explained the old sea-dog. "Lots of Chinamen who come to this country keep their coffins ready. Poor men as well as rich men. Coolies, laundrymen, merchants, as well as scholars, have them tucked around somewhere. They believe that they must be taken back to China and buried with their ancestors, and so they keep their coffins ready."

"Do you ever carry any of them, Uncle John? On your ship?"

"Every trip, Jadie. Always Chinamen going home. Some alive, some in those big, beautiful coffins. Why, I remember the last time your daddy went across with me—he and your mother. Before you were born. They had a very beautiful one right in their stateroom. They watched it constantly."

"My daddy? And was there anything in it, Uncle John?"

"There must have been. Something very precious, too—else they wouldn't have—"

He did not finish. An old suspicion had revived suddenly. He had wondered at the time why that coffin was so carefully guarded. Why his own brother had remained secluded with it throughout the voyage. Why guards from the royal palace had met the ship and whisked away coffin, brother and the brother's young wife? And then the brother and his wife had been swept away, and there was only Ah Ping, with the baby, to tell about it. Now Captain John Collins found himself wondering again about the precious burden of that huge coffin. What was its secret?

But little Jade persisted. "But why was my daddy on your ship, Uncle John? He was a captain. Didn't he have a ship?"

"Not just then, little one. He was attached to a Chinese company that had many ships. He was on this side on business for them. That's when he married your mother. And then one day, all of a sudden, they came on my ship and hid away in their room."

"With the coffin?"

"Yes. They brought along the coffin."

"Well, but why would my daddy want a Chinese coffin? He was a Yankee skipper. Just like *you*."

"I think," said the puzzled sailor, "I shall ask Uncle Ping about it, again. Maybe your daddy told him, after he reached China."

"And will you tell me, Uncle John?"

"Surely. I'll tell you all I ever knew about your daddy, Captain Rollo Collins of Hongkong and San Francisco."

WHEN Captain Collins asked Ah Ping, the scholar lapsed into a long meditation. "Honorable Lone Kinsman," he answered finally, "that I may not answer now. After my little Jade shall marry and I return to China, then, possibly, the Honorable Unknown One may command me to inform *her*. Meantime, walk slowly, Honorable Captain. Your brother's act was one of love and loyalty."

"And I'm damned," said Captain John to Aunt Mary afterward, "if I can get the suspicion out of my head that there was something *alive* in that big black box. Rollo was worried as heck all the way across. And then—*poof!* He and Norma disappear. Swallowed up in silence. How do we know what happened to them after they landed? Your sister was a darn pretty girl, you know."

"What do you mean by that, John Collins? Are you insinuating anything?"

"Not insinuating—just worrying. Suppose Rollo was knocked on the bean and your pretty sister abducted. Ah Ping says it was a *tong* war. Well, just suppose a *tong* man sold your sister to a higher-up?"

"Well, suppose it. What then?"

"Why *then*, little Jade might be the Emperor's nineteenth cousin's granddaughter. *Then* anything could happen."

"But why, *then*," demanded Aunt Mary, flaring up, "let the baby grow up an American? A foreign devil, in their eyes."

"Why keep her in China?" parried the Captain. "Girls are cheap over there. Besides, she looks like your sister."

"Is that a crime?"

"No. Certainly not. But under certain circumstances—if, and whereas, and all that, you know—very awkward to have around the house, and being part American, too, dangerous to drop in the lake. I'm crazy, of course, but if our mysterious niece would just show a little of Rollo in her, I'd—"

"That will do!" decreed Aunt Mary. "Ah Ping says he thinks she is *all* Collins."

"And Ah Ping is a Chinese sphinx. If

he wasn't so damn dignified, I'd shake it out of him."

"Well," answered Aunt Mary, calming down, "she is a blessing—even if I never know the answer." But that night she went to sleep, dreaming again of a tiny, helpless white baby, sheltered at the breast of another race. And, as always, the picture was of a silken-clad, gentle-faced, matronly saint. . . . .

Captain John Collins had inquired in the Orient. Others had inquired. But the trail of Jade's father and mother had been smothered in silence. "You know," said the exasperated sea-captain to his wife, "these Chinese can be so still, when they want to be, that even a mind-reader would go dead on the job. And for all we know, Ah Ping isn't this Celestial's real name at all."

And when he passed away, leaving Jade, a beauty at sixteen, to Aunt Mary and Uncle Ping, Captain John Collins had heard nothing but the silence. He carried his own unanswered question to the Court of Courts.

AND the jade ring? The pledge-gift from the Unknown One? The Aladdin's Lamp to light her feet should dark misfortune ever shadow her path?

A heavy circle of gold, manlike in its strength, and bearing three cubes of priceless jade on its upper face, the center block larger than its flanking comrades. A ring that came out of a dim past, that testified to royal wealth, and that breathed softly of Oriental mysteries. And with the ring had come Ah Ping, his life surrendered to a gentle guardianship, and a serene reminder of far-off love. A life for a life, and a promise of more. Who was this winsome, charming Jade Collins, now just turned twenty and betrothed to Robert Farnsworth? And who was this demure, black-haired maid of the Orient who sat in silks at Ah Ping's chair and listened to "The Analects of Kung Fu Tsze?" That was just what Bob Farnsworth wanted to know as he softly approached the secluded sanctum of the venerable scholar Ah Ping.

The silken-clad figure rose and bowed ceremoniously. "Welcome, my son," breathed Ah Ping softly. "I have been expecting you. Please sit down and I will ring for tea."

The young American engineer was no stranger to the quiet richness of this secluded library. He knew its rich hangings, knew the books of many tongues on its shelves, and had fingered the journals from many lands which weighted the long study table. And he had listened as the scholar had pictured that far-off life, and with careful words had subtly tempted the young American to seek fortune there. But tonight Robert Farnsworth came to ask important questions—to be very personal. Scholar or no scholar, Ah Ping must listen to family matters. But he knew his place in that sanctum, and he waited till the ceremonial tea had been dispatched before he spoke.

"I came, Ah Ping," said he finally, "to talk about Jade. I have asked her to marry me. She has accepted me—partially. She says that your consent, venerable scholar, in addition to that of her Aunt Mary, already given, is necessary to her happiness."

"To her happiness—only?"

The young man smiled in surrender. "To her happiness, and to her complete acceptance of me as her husband," he answered.

"That," replied Ah Ping, "I am glad to hear. I have no authority, but I had hoped bravely for that much from her love for her elders."

"A wonderful love," answered the young man. "I have learned to respect it, although sometimes I'm inclined to be jealous. You know, venerable sir, sometimes she seems to belong to you more truly than to us."

BOTH men, the eager youth and the venerable scholar, sat silent. Bob Farnsworth was but knocking at the door of his desire; Ah Ping was meditating on how far he could go, should go, would go, in answering that inquiry. "My son," said the elder in due time, "I am honored to give my consent to Jade's marrying whom she will. I am ready to write the scroll of betrothal. But my intuition tells me that you wish to ask something further. You desire to know if I approve of you as a husband for my little one—if, in fact, I approve of *any* American for her husband."

The young man felt that shudder again. Here it was—mystery! He groped for words. "You are correct, sir," he replied. "This mystery of Jade's ancestry—I confess, it sometimes makes me worry."

"But it should not," said Ah Ping quiet-

ly. "If you truly love my little one, this quaint touch of mystery should heighten your romance."

"But her ancestors, Ah Ping! My God, sir, suppose she is part—"

He checked himself. It was hard to say the word in the presence of the serenely intelligent one sitting opposite, calmly poised and arrayed in gorgeous silks.

Ah Ping spread his hands in a gesture of invitation. "Proceed, troubled one," he said quietly. "Do not fear to use plain words. My race is called yellow; yours is named white. Let us talk frankly as men, and calmly as gentlemen. You fear that my little one has a taint of my racial blood. If you knew that to be true, you would not marry her. Am I right?"

"You move too fast for me, sir," replied the younger man. "I wanted to ask the former question. I find it hard to answer the latter. Frankly, such knowledge would disturb me. Yet, equally frank, I feel that nothing could make me give up my Jade."

"But you, unsatisfied, would marry her with an unfinished worry in your heart."

"This, I fear, is true, sir."

AH PING lapsed into meditation. For as long as it would require to remember a worthy quotation, he sat silent. In his mind there was passing the words: "Thought for far-off things may dissipate troubles near at hand." And then that comforting thought was dispelled by another classic utterance: "Sing before the morning rice, for the day is long and may bring its own trouble." Between the two unanswerable utterances, he felt a bit helpless to comfort his visitor. He knew well that love had claimed the two children, and he longed to see them united. But it was whether or not this young man, and not the little one, was yellow that mattered.

When he spoke, Ah Ping had formed a plan.

"To my mind," said he, "my little one is a rare flower of the rarest garden, and she is worthy of her place in the sun. That we may have a point from which to take our walk in that garden, let me say this: I believe that my little one is *all* of your race. That was the impression that the Honorable Unknown One gave me when he commissioned me as ambassador to the now sainted Captain John and to our own worshipful Aunt Mary. But there was more which the Honorable Unknown One did not divulge to me. Possibly even *he* does not know positively her parentage. Possibly he has held open the door that she might return to his protection in case the white race did not want her."

"You *think* she is all white," repeated Bob Farnsworth eagerly. "Well, honored sir, that is more than you have ever said to me before."

"There is a time and place for telling, my impatient one. But suppose the truth, when we learn it, shall contradict my belief? How would you, married to my little one, accept it?"

"I do not know, Uncle Ping," replied the young man, dropping formality in his perplexity. "Our walk seems to take us along a puzzling path."

"Well spoken," replied the scholar. "But when is the path of matrimony other than a puzzle?"

"A venture, yes. Happy or troubled as the case may be, sir."

"But love, my puzzled youth, can walk safely through trouble and come to fields of daisies. Suppose, for a moment, we take thought of possible far-off troubles?"

Bob Farnsworth shuddered again. Now Ah Ping would picture the possibility of Jade Collins being part Oriental! He braced himself. "That would be wise, I agree, sir," he said.

"Suppose, then, my inquiring one, that you marry my little Jade, and that we find her to be all of your race. What of her ancestors in that case?"

"I—I do not understand, sir. You mean the Collins family? And her mother's people?"

"Certainly. Should you go back and read the scroll of the past,—as you Americans seldom do,—what might you find?"

"Search me, sir. Captain John was a square-shooter and Captain Rollo bore a good reputation. They came from a long line of New England skippers. And Aunt Mary and Mother Norma were Kellys. Straight Irish descent. That's all I know."

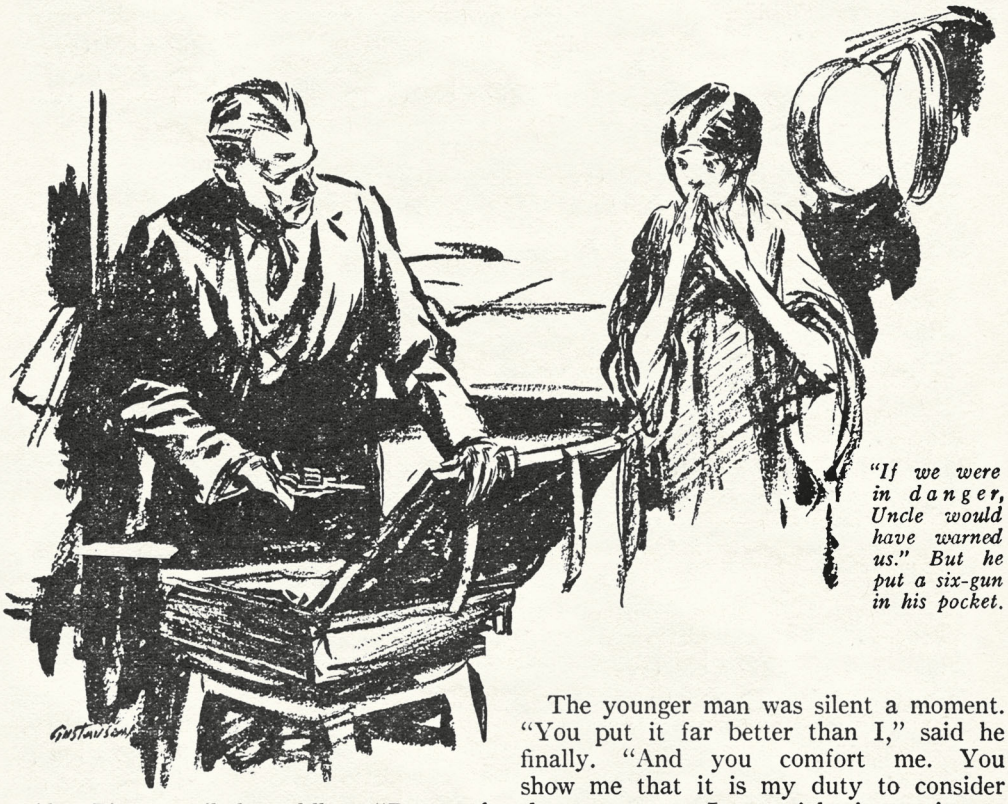
"Skippers," repeated Ah Ping quietly. "For generations roaming the romantic corners of the farthest seas. What blood may be mingled in their descendants? Ireland, swept by many conquests, and sending her sons on unending adventure. What blood may be mingled there? Who, my son, from the shades of the past, may look into your eyes when your own son comes to play at your knee?"

"Well," answered the young man, laughing nervously, "what I don't know wont hurt me. If he would look like his beautiful mother, I would be satisfied."

"And if he looked like his capable father, the mother's heart would be happy."

"I suppose so, sir. Yet I happen to know that way back somewhere I had a British ancestor who was hanged for smuggling."

ture. We were born out of the shades, and facing forward, we pass ourselves and all of our past on to our children. And as we cannot know all of the past, and as we cannot see the children yet unborn, we can only consider that bit of the path allotted for our life's walk. It is, therefore, but prudence that we consider what possible shades of the past may live again in our children's faces."



"If we were in danger, Uncle would have warned us." But he put a six-gun in his pocket.

Ah Ping smiled coldly. "But, of course," said the scholar, "*he* was white. But my little one, even if sired by an Oriental prince, would be yellow."

Farnsworth was silent.

"Let us come back to our walk, my son," continued Ah Ping, speaking without malice. "The path of matrimony may seem a transient thing to be followed for the few days of our mortal span. But to the thoughtful, the path of matrimony has no beginning and no ending. It flares back into the shadows of the beginnings of life, and has been trod by all of those from whom we have our being. All our ancestors hover on its borders back in those shadows. And on before us the path stretches to eternity. We, who tread it today, do but link the past to the fu-

The younger man was silent a moment. "You put it far better than I," said he finally. "And you comfort me. You show me that it is my duty to consider these matters. I was right in coming to you."

"Your duty, surely. To yourself and to my little one."

"Yes, learned scholar. But what's the answer? What, in my case, should I do?"

"Just one thing," replied the thinker. "Look deeply into your love. If it be strong, it will meet fearlessly all turns of your path, and ease your feet over the troubled places. Unless your love be that strong, you should not marry Jade. And if it be that strong, she will be safe in your keeping, no matter what ancestors look out of the shadows on your serene home."

"Which means, Uncle Ping, that it's entirely up to me."

"You," answered the wise one, a quiet

smile on his bronzed face, "will be the father of your own children."

An answer flashed through Robert Farnsworth's mind, but he smothered it. He would have said: "And there might be a yellow chick in the brood." Instead, he said, rather stiffly: "Our walk, venerable scholar, has taken us through some weighty considerations, but has brought us to no conclusion."

"It has brought me so," contradicted the elder.

"It has? And what, may I ask, sir, is your conclusion?"

"It is, my son, that either you love my little one well enough to take her from her Aunt Mary and her Uncle Ping, or you do not so love her. The decision is for your own determination."

"A *nice* fix!" exclaimed the youth, rising to take his leave.

"The parting cup, my son," said the elder chidingly. "And before you decide, do you, I beg, walk a long way around. And, I pray you, walk slowly."

BUT Robert Farnsworth, graduate engineer, did not walk any distance before coming to his decision; neither did he move with cautious meditative steps. Instead he flung himself rather fretfully to a deep chair on the balcony, and impatiently lighted a fresh cigarette. Below him the lights of the city twinkled in a long swoop down to the flats, and then stretched their dazzling march on to the bay, and the bay shimmered restfully under a lazy moon. But no view could calm the restless race of the lover's thoughts. The young man had endured evasive calmness and mellow beauty until he was bursting for action.

"And just why," he raced in thought, "should I walk a long way around? And why hand me this slow-motion stuff? The old fox is jollying me. He *knows* that Jade is an all-American whiz-bang, and he waves this mystery stuff at me just to scare me. To scare me—that's just it! It's a test, and he thinks I can't see through his ponderous gestures and his rounded Oriental quotations. And that ancestor stuff? Shucks! Any couple getting married has to swap ancestors and forget 'em. In this country it's what we *are* that counts. And I sha'n't worry about my kids till I see 'em. Maybe 'The Fifty-seven Varieties of Pickled Pieties' may be the whole thing in China, but over here we look ahead. Grandmother bobs her hair and looks as cute as a regular stepper, and Grandpa trusts his bootlegger's word where he wouldn't believe his pastor under oath. We're progressive, I'll tell you. We're go-getters. And I *know* Jade is all white! And *some* girl! Well, Uncle Ping can have all the long ghostly walks he wants. He's a good old sport, at that. But I'm going to hop, skip and jump into matrimony. Yea, bo!"

And so, in the length of time that it requires to half-smoke two rumpled pills, it was decided; and Bob, the satisfied, returned to the parlor.

"DID you have a profitable interview, my son?" asked Jade Collins, imitating the soft cadences of Ah Ping's level tones, and smiling from the depths of her mischievous serenity.

Bob Farnsworth folded his arms and bowed profoundly. In the security of his own wisdom, he too could play at comedy. "I did, My Flower of the Universe," he replied roundly. "The Oracle of the Library consents to my throwing myself away on you. And after deep thought and long promenading, I am prepared to hasten that sacrifice. I'll trade you my ancestors for yours, and forget the bail money. Only, I don't want this remnant of Confucius mussing up our honeymoon. He can meet us at the first soda-fountain after we land in China. So now, my frail flower of many tennis tournaments, I'll ask you to pardon my worry over your Oriental orgies and furthermore, I'll ask you all over again to marry me."

Jade met him, smile for smile. "But," said she, "suppose I turn out to be—"

"And suppose one of my ancestors was a snake-charmer and I turn out to be a bootlegger?" he interrupted. "We must be prepared for those little things. Mutual forbearance! All the risks of life are not confined to the insurance business, you know. And I know several men who would risk their right eye for a chance to marry you."

With that, the mystery of her ancestry was banished in the smiles of love's preparations. Jade Collins, happy in her romance, and feeling in her own heart that she was in truth all American, ceased her play with the eye-pencil and laid away her silken Oriental jackets. She loved China as before, and looked forward eagerly to her pilgrimage there. But she realized

that her lover's fears, once lulled, were better not roused again.

THE young couple had planned to marry as soon as Bob Farnsworth's present business engagements would permit. The engineering firm with which he was associated was completing a tremendously imposing bridge across a tremendously wide river, and on its completion he was to have leave for his trans-Pacific wedding journey. And the bridge was nearing completion when he received an invitation to sit again in Ah Ping's library.

The ceremonial cup was dispatched with impatient curiosity on the part of the younger man, and with meditative serenity by the elder. Then the venerable ambassador very ceremoniously selected a letter from the various documents on his desk.

"I wish, my son," began Ah Ping, "to ask your consideration of an important matter. Highly pleasant to me, it is, and possibly may become highly profitable to yourself. I have a letter here recently come from my country. It is from an official high up in a very rich Chinese brotherhood. At the head of that brotherhood there presides the Honorable Unknown One."

The venerable scholar paused in his speech, bowed humbly over the letter, and then sat looking at his young visitor. Bob Farnsworth bowed also, as a well-bred young man should, but he wondered at the same moment, as any young American engineer would, what the heck the fuss was all about. Ah Ping, his serious face unrelaxed, continued:

"The enterprise with which this letter is concerned is the creation of a new and important railway in China. The funds for its creation are available. The grants, the charters, the rights-of-way are secured. The problem now is one of construction."

Bob Farnsworth sat up and took notice. "A railroad," he exclaimed. "And all financed! Well, you certainly do things over there when you put your minds to it."

"The new China," agreed Ah Ping, smiling pleasantly. "And naturally," he continued, "in a situation like this, my people turn to the engineering skill of this country. This new railway will sweep plains, span rivers and penetrate mountain ranges. The engineering problems are many, their solution worthy of America's best men. My people ask me to recommend an engineer to their consideration. And they prefer a young man who might, on the completion of this five-year project, remain with them for further conquests in the romance of new—of industrial—China."

Ah Ping stopped, studying his visitor's face, and the younger man sat silent, hope and doubt alternating in his eager eyes. "Most interesting, worthy ambassador," answered Bob Farnsworth finally. "And may I ask if you have decided on your recommendation?"

"I have, my son. For ten days now I have meditated on this. Now my conclusion is reached. It is in my mind that my son is competent to accept this responsibility. It is my judgment that he would walk far and mount high did he join my countrymen in this enterprise. And it is in my heart that he would one day come to love the land of my ancestors, were he to go there and impress his handiwork upon it."

"And Jade?" Bob Farnsworth asked it coolly, but the old mystery had flared in him again. Was this a trick to get him to China, smother him with honors, make him rich, and all to atone for—

"My little one," replied Ah Ping calmly, "loves China, came from China, would become again a part of China, were she to go there. Shall we leave the decision to her?"

FOR as long a space of time as may be consumed by six vibrating pacings between the fireplace and the book-shelves, or for the nervous glowings of half a cigarette, the younger man was silent. Then he faced the venerable ambassador across the table. "Uncle Ping," said he, "I am going to make this a matter of the heart. I respect you and the culture you represent. I respect the people you venerate and the country you love. I know Jade would be happy in that life. But I am an American. I want my wife to be American. I do not know whether I would love your country, or hate it. I will leave the decision to you. Uncle Ping, do *you* want me to accept?"

"Would you, my son, relish the achievement that lies before you there?"

"I would, sir. It's a tremendous opportunity for a young engineer. And I appreciate your offering it to me. But I'm thinking of my home life in a land I

know nothing about: my wife, my family, myself. It's a great hazard."

"A hazard of happiness, I agree, my son. And you will leave the decision with me?"

"Absolutely, Uncle Ping. And right now."

"Then, my loyal one, I shall be honored by forwarding your name. You will present your resignation to your present affiliations at once, to take effect as soon as the big bridge is completed."

"But, Uncle Ping! Suppose your people do not accept me?"

"That decision also, my son, lies entirely with me."

For a moment Bob Farnsworth stood silent. Then his wonder took words. "For heaven's sake, Uncle Ping, *who* are you, anyway?"

Ah Ping, the venerable, rose and bowed profoundly. "An old man," he answered, "who loves his little one, and who will be happy to be just Uncle Ping to her foreign-devil husband. My name in China, I may tell you now, my son, is Ming Mock Ping. And now, worthy engineer, will you accept the parting cup?"

THE days that followed were puzzling days to Robert Farnsworth. When he was with the radiant Jade, dancing, riding, playing at tennis, or planning cozily by the fire, he was superbly proud and happy. A beautiful wife, an extravagant dower from Ah Ping, and an assured professional standing; all these were his. But although Jade seemed more Yankee than ever, there lurked in his mind a haunting fear. The mystery sulked there, and fed on trivial circumstance. His selection by Ah Ping for the new post, Ah Ping's generous gift, that the newly wedded pair might enjoy a lengthy and a liberally supplied honeymoon, the suspiciously flattering congratulations showered on him by his business associates, the friendly confirmatory letter which had come from the brotherhood's headquarters at Canton; all these savored of China, and China savored of mystery. Even when Robert Farnsworth, engineer, stood before the minister, his bride's hand in his own, he knew that the jade ring hung on its delicate golden chain, completely concealed, but jealously guarded, beneath her smart traveling gown.

Their wedding journey wove an enchanting girdle about the globe, the woman's eyes charmed with many scenes of beauty, the man's keen senses stirred by many wonders of engineering skill. In many lands he met men of his calling, and talked deeply of the new China. Congratulations and good wishes met him at every turn of the historic highways, and when they boarded their last ship, and knew that Hongkong lay just ahead, he found that his expected arrival was no longer a family secret. There were others beside Ah Ping who would be at the pier to glimpse the foreign-devil engineer and his bride.

It was put into words by a chance acquaintance made on this last ship: a florid man of middle age, who dropped veiled allusions to business responsibilities in Hongkong, and who appeared to be a Britisher familiar with world affairs, engaged the young American in conversation. Learning Robert Farnsworth's identity with apparent interest, he exclaimed: "So you are Farnsworth, the American engineer chap, eh? Well, you may not know it, Sir Newcomer, but you are the talk of the clubs in Hongkong."

"Just how can that be?" asked Farnsworth, a bit disturbed. "I'm practically an unknown quantity over here. I haven't built that new railroad yet, you know."

"It isn't you, old chap," confided the rotund gossiper. "Nor is it the railway. That will be done, God knows. And some chap must do it. It's simply an eternal rumpus between two ancient and dishonorable Celestial brotherhoods. One set is to do this road, and have picked you to do it. They have untold millions in their strong-boxes. The other set are your set's hereditary enemies. They will scatter your coolies, bribe your assistants, steal your plans, blow up your bridges. In other words, old chap, away out here in the Orient is being enacted one of your picturesque American feuds. In the open it is capital against capital, family fighting family for financial aggrandizement, but behind scenes it is just plain *tong* war. And that's why you're talked about. There's a price on your head—a big price. As they say over here, you must walk a long way around, and walk carefully. And you will do well to have a guard about you as strong as Napoleon lost at Waterloo."

"Plenty of time for that," replied the young American, interested in, but much relieved at the frank outline of dangers, "when I've taken over the job."

"No time at all," replied the informant with apparent sincerity. "I'm surprised that your people let you board this ship unguarded."

"As bad as that?" asked Bob Farnsworth incredulously.

"If you *are* Farnsworth, the American engineer, you should do one thing. Thank God this is a British ship. Go to the captain at once and demand protection."

But Bob Farnsworth did no such thing. Accustomed as he was to walk freely the streets of his bohemian San Francisco, he resented this suggestion of "walking a long way around." It reminded him too much of Ah Ping's unruffled calmness, and his silence concerning Jade's ancestry. And, further, he fretted at the thought of walking behind a guard.

With one blow he shattered the glass behind the footman's head.

What was it all about? Had he, after all, married a half-caste? Had he married into one of the ancient brotherhoods only to find himself a marked target for the deadly blows of another *tong's* padded-slippered hatchet-men? Had the Orient, through the fiction of employing his engineering skill, really enmeshed him in her ancient spider's web? He fretted over it till he became indignant, and being indignant, had hard work not to blame his wife. He told her merely what the stranger had told him, and was a bit surprised to find that the rumored threat of danger really frightened her.

"Oh, my *dear,*" she exclaimed, "it's dreadful! We had better be *very* careful till we meet Ah Ping."

It flared in his mind to say: "So this is what I walked into when I married *you?*" But he smothered the retort. He had sense enough to remember that he had accepted this engineering post of his own free will, and that frontier work in any land carried dangers with it. And even if his marriage should turn out to be a mistake, to blame his wife for it would be the height of foolish self-pity. "Sure," he replied evasively. "We wont jump overboard till we see Ah Ping. And right away I want to see this Honorable Unknown One. There are a lot of things I want to find out."

For the first time in her life there came to Jade a touch of fear to darken the thought that she might prove to be part Chinese. Ah Ping had showed her only the beautiful side of the Orient. Here was another side—and it made her shudder. She groped for words.

"We both know, of course," said she, "that the Chinese are a great mass of unwieldy people. We know that there is a conflict between old traditions and this new commercial progress. Old China resents new China. But I hadn't dreamed that two old, rich families, each helping to build the new China, would support a *tong* war."

"Looks like they're not all as saintly as Uncle Ping," admitted Bob. "But what could happen to us on this ship? That Englishman probably thinks he is spoofing me."

"I do not know, dear. But I wish you would see the captain."

"I will not," he replied finally. "If we were in any danger, your Uncle Ping would have warned us." But he did put a six-gun in his pocket, and he and his bride were careful of the contacts they made among their fellow-passengers.

The florid, rotund informer did not intrude upon them again during the voyage. He kept much to himself, seemed uninterested in his fellow-passengers, and

acknowledged Bob's presence only by an indifferent nod when they chanced to meet. But when the two young people were standing by the ship's rail, scanning the landing-place as the ship approached, he spoke again, and it was to speak again of his real or pretended fear of trouble.

Taking a place beside Bob at the rail, the stranger observed casually: "Looking for your friends, Sir Engineer?"

"Yes," replied the American coldly. "A very dear friend promised to meet us."

"I hope he brought along his guards," continued the stranger.

Bob Farnsworth answered this time rather testily: "If they are needed, he is in a position to know it."

"And so am I," replied the florid one, unruffled. "Were a Britisher landing here this morning to assume this great responsibility, he would have this ship's rail lined with guards. I shall take the liberty of standing close to you till I see you and your wife in the hands of your friends."

There seemed to be no answer to that, and when Robert and his bride were descending the gangplank, waving a joyous greeting to Ah Ping, whom they could see standing at some distance, and apparently accompanied by several other Chinese of imposing bearing and flaming dress, he felt the stranger at his heels.

"Push right through that crowd to your friends," commanded the volunteer guard. "I don't like the looks of those beggars in front."

But the pushing through was not so easy. The crowd seemed sullen and dense.

"This way! Quick!" commanded the guide again, lunging a hole through a mass of coolies. "Come along! I'll help you."

BUT the help, as it turned out, was dishonest and vain. Suddenly the crowd enveloped them, swayed with them and bore them along toward a waiting limousine. The florid stranger, swearing in apparent anger, threw open the door. "My car," he shouted. "Get in, quick!"

Bob Farnsworth, confused at the physical pressure about him, helped the stranger thrust Jade in the car, and then scrambled in after her. To his surprise, the stranger shut the door from without and melted into the crowd as the car shot ahead.

"Well, what *now?*" demanded Bob Farnsworth, when he could get his breath. "Where the heck are they taking us?"

Jade did not answer. She was honestly frightened. In the front of the limousine sat two Chinese in unobtrusive blue livery. The man at the wheel was guiding the car skillfully and swiftly into the traffic of the Bund. The footman beside him sat grimly silent.

Suddenly, and simultaneously, a mutual realization flashed in the minds of the unwilling passengers. The interested stranger had given the chauffeur and footman *no instructions!*

"It's a trap," exclaimed Jade. "Oh, Bob! Stop them!"

She had put Bob's own thought into words. For an instant he felt helpless. Then another thought flashed through his mind and roused his anger. The obtrusive stranger, apparently so eager for their safety, had been a spy! That hint to see the captain had been a bluff. And by dogging their steps down the gangplank the spy had identified them to his gang!

And how easily they, the newcomers, had fallen into the trap! With a muttered oath, Bob leaned forward and began tugging at the plate-glass window that separated the inner car from the two men in front.

Hearing this, the footman turned toward them, and their fears were confirmed. Tapping on the glass with a revolver, the glowering Oriental motioned them back to their seats.

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed the frightened girl. "What have we done?"

"Calm, dear—be calm!" commanded the young American, and as he said it, he gathered his crumpled overcoat from the floor of the car and drew it across his legs.

His plan was quickly formed—simple and desperate. With one blow from the butt of his six-gun, slipped from his overcoat pocket, he shattered the glass behind the footman's head. Then whirling his gun quickly, he shot through the opening.

The bullet plowed a stinging course between the startled footman's arm and side, and crashed its way through the footboard of the car into the delicate timing gear of the engine. With a yell of fear the scotched kidnaper lurched against the fore-door, tugging to get it open. And the driver, also, was in sudden panic. He had heard the shot, heard the crashing footboard, and felt his engine go dead. As he threw up his hands for mercy, he brought the car to a screeching stop with his foot-brake.

Other kidnaped victims had been their

passengers in that limousine, but no foreign devil had ever before smashed that heavy glass and blazed out with unexpected artillery to cripple that powerful engine. And the footman's ribs had never been burned by the close-up flame of powder. Such paralyzing behavior on the part of supposedly docile victims was unnerving. The two blue-liveried henchmen became yellow-livered fugitives. They leaped to the street and fled.

A towering Sikh, halting the startled traffic with his shrill whistle, lumbered toward the car. Bob Farnsworth was calmly helping Jade to alight. His gun was back in his overcoat pocket.

"Tell him," commanded Bob, "that our car blew up. Tell him it's on fire. Tell him to call help and send the bill to the owner. Then come away, quick. I have a plan."

Jade obeyed blindly, giving the message to the startled policeman in her perfect Cantonese. Then Bob, in nervous haste, hustled her toward the nearest ricksha and called one for himself.

"Tell these birds," commanded Bob, indicating the coolies, "to take us to their biggest jeweler. And tell them to step on it."

Jade's eyes were staring as she gave the order. Then she turned wonderingly to her husband.

"Why—" she began, but he cut her short.

"Your jade ring, young lady," he answered in a wave of inspiration. "I got us into this with my superior intelligence. Now I'll stop thinking and let your famous talisman get us out of it. Right now we move up to that Honorable Unknown One and learn what's what! Let's go!"

THE courteous welcome of the two well-dressed Americans to "The Jewel Shop of Serene Permanency" in Des Vœux Road went far to soothe their ruffled nerves. And when Jade asked in her smooth flowing Cantonese for a private interview with the proprietor for her husband and herself, there appeared a sudden and genuine deference to her request. In a gorgeous inner office, seated across a richly carved table opposite the venerable and obsequious silk-clad proprietor, Bob Farnsworth felt that to be some one in China wasn't going to be so bad after all.

From its hiding place, and still dangling from its delicately wrought golden chain, the woman drew the heavy ring with its three cubes of dully glinting jade. At sight of it, and before she spoke, the old jeweler's slant eyes narrowed, and his hands clenched in the loose folds of his silken robe. No such ring was known in China outside the innermost circles of the Most High. He wondered at the sight of it, and he wondered more at its possession by two foreign devils. The young woman laid the ring, with its sustaining chain, in the middle of the great table, and commenced her story, speaking in her soft-cadenced Cantonese. Bob Farnsworth could only listen and watch the glittering narrowed eyes across the table.

"I was born in this country," she began, "but was sent to America when very young. My father, Captain Rollo Collins, was in the service of the Ming Hu Tsing brotherhood. He lost his life in their service. An Unknown One of that brotherhood took my mother under his protection, and at her death, sent me to my people in San Francisco. With me, a baby, went a scholarly man of this country calling himself Ah Ping. He too was of this brotherhood. With me was this ring, and the Honorable Ah Ping said it was from the Honorable Unknown One who had sent him to convey me to my people. Also, said the Honorable Ah Ping, this ring would summon aid to me if I ever met with misfortune. Well, worthy jeweler, that hour has come. Please remove that center cube of jade, and read for me the riddle of this ring."

The old jeweler, his suspicions gone, but still plainly marveling at the young woman's recital, struck a gong by his side, and spoke a command to the attendant who appeared silently out of nowhere. Taking up the ring, he freed it from its clasp, and sat silently devouring its beauty till the attendant returned with a tray of jeweler's tools. Then the old merchant with his own hands removed the center cube, disclosing a small character delicately chiseled on the hidden gold. Adjusting a heavy glass to his eye, the jeweler bent over the inscription. Instantly he straightened, laid down the ring and his glass, and rising to his feet, bowed profoundly to the young woman before him.

"It is," said he, "the seal of the President of the Ming Hu Tsing. Will the Worshipful Flower of Another Land deign to lay her commands on her humble servant?"

Jade eagerly translated for her husband.

"Ask him," replied Bob Farnsworth quietly, "to notify the nearest Ming Hu What-you-call-it representative that we are here and shall stay here until rescued."

JADE translated, not literally, but with politely phrased insistence. Again the venerable merchant bowed profoundly, and again the gong boomed out its brazen summons. But this time the merchant spoke circumspectly and in rounded phrases, and when the attendant departed, he departed backwards, bowing profoundly as he faded through the curtains.

Turning again to Jade, and still standing respectfully, the venerable merchant spoke. "It will be but the opening and shutting of a jewel-case before the Ming Hu Tsing will know. The telephone of your country is here and will be a speedy messenger. And it will add one thousand years of happiness to me and my descendants if the Worshipful Flower of Another Land and her Worshipful Husband will deign to accept the guest-cup while they wait in peace and safety under my humble roof."

And it was over the steaming, fragrant tea that an anxious Ah Ping, flanked by a guard of twenty serious-faced Ming Hu Tsings, found them.

"When you are older, my children," said the venerable scholar, when their happy greetings were over, "you will not walk so fast. Next time you will wait for us to come aboard and welcome you."

"But, my gosh, Uncle Ping," exclaimed Bob Farnsworth, rebelliously, "I didn't know I was of such deadly importance. Just wait till I meet my new English friend again."

"You will not meet him again," replied Ah Ping, suddenly cold. "Not in the span of your allotted days. He joined his ancestors before your captors had cleared Blake's pier."

"Lord!" exclaimed the young engineer. "You Ming Hu Tsingers certainly do move fast."

"We too had men on that dock," continued Ah Ping. "Several sped to your aid, but were too late. One of them—no one will ever know just who—slipped a knife into that spy. Let the incident be forgotten, my children. A cruising yacht is waiting to take us up the river to Canton."

"Why Canton?" asked Jade eagerly, glad to change the subject.

"Because at Canton the Worshipful President of the Ming Hu Tsing awaits your coming. We may go to him now, clean-handed."

At the mention of the president, Ah Ping bowed profoundly, the old merchant bowed profoundly, and all guards, clerks and attendants stood stiffly at attention.

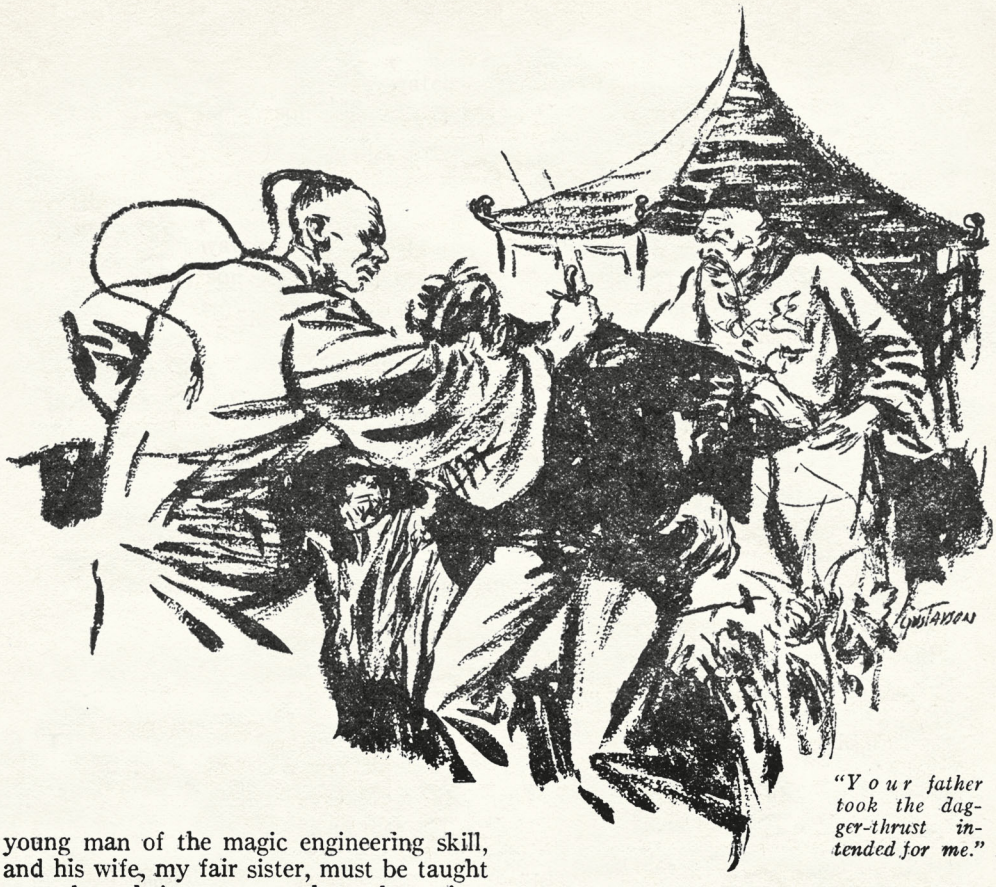
"Heavens," exclaimed the young engineer, making a profound bow to the scene in general, "what a country!"

MING TOY PO, venerable and august head of the house of Ming, and Worshipful President of the Ming Hu Tsing, was at his ease in the palace of his ancestors. Cross-legged, he squatted in a sea of gorgeous cushions that overflowed his ceremonial divan. Near him, on a richly carved chair, sat his son and heir Ming Lee Tu, a slender youth just turned twenty. The great hall blazed with flaming hangings that blushed deeply at their own reflections from the polished floor. Father and son wore the ceremonial robes of their stations, their stiffly embroidered silks marching at the peak of this riot of color. The great hall seemed hushed in its own grandeur, the palace at peace—and waiting.

Between the two formidably erect human statues there rested a low table, carved and polished to match its fellows in that Oriental scene of smoky blacks and flaming scarlets. On this table lay a code telegram, and beside it the elaborately written deciphering laid there by an efficient secretary. Both documents, the telegram and its decoded companion, were written in English; but the elder man, when he commenced speaking, fell naturally into the easy cadence of his native Cantonese.

"It is written, my obedient one," said he, addressing his son after a long period of meditation, "that the young must try their wings. But you, who are deeply cognizant of our great position, must aid me in cautioning this all too arrogant young engineer. Self-reliance without caution is not wisdom. But such is the American spirit—the rampant young of all ages melted into a new and wonderfully potential youth. It is youth plus power, and needs only safe guiding to be tremendous. And he, the potent one, must not destroy himself by beating his head against the stubborn ruins of our older customs."

"My inspired father speaks wisely," replied the younger man, bowing. "This



"Your father took the dagger-thrust intended for me."

young man of the magic engineering skill, and his wife, my fair sister, must be taught to value their true worth and station. Surely, Ah Ping has been lax in his training of the fair one, or this misfortune would have been spared them." The younger man indicated the telegram as he spoke.

"Ah Ping's lips have been sealed on many things, my son. From his letters I know my fair daughter speaks our tongue, that she has read deeply of our classics, and that she bears a deep love for us whom she has never seen. But I have been to her an Unknown One. Neither she nor her husband knew the secret of the ring till this unfortunate thing led them to invoke its unknown power."

"Was it not one of their poets, my all-knowing father, who said all was well that ended well? And was it not one of their philosophers who said, 'A word to the wise is sufficient?' Possibly this capture and escape was a timely, even though an unpleasant, lesson."

"Truly said, observant one. And I too learn much from it. Observe further what becomes patent. The American has initiative, and he is fearless. He breaks windows that bar his way. He shoots with double meaning, putting his captors to flight and silencing their intricate engines. And he is quick to use his resources. Ah Ping's telegram says it was he who first thought to invoke the aid of the ring in their emergency."

"A leader in the making," replied the son, respectfully. "My father's house will prosper by the adoption of this soldier of modern skill. I pray that Ah Ping's reward for his selection may not be light."

"The worthy Ah Ping, my son, has walked a long way around, and many of his days have been passed in loneliness. But he has not walked in vain. He may choose his own path for the future; and that path shall be made pleasant."

"I am grateful, worshipful head. And now may I walk in the gardens? My fair sister and the resourceful engineer will not arrive before the hour for the lighting of the lamps."

"Walk your way, my son. And prepare a happy countenance to welcome your fair sister's return to the humble roof where she first saw the light of day. You may go."

WHEN Jade Collins Farnsworth stood before the mandarin of all the Mings, her heart beat fast in the wonder of the moment. All that Ah Ping had pictured of the Orient, as she should some day see it, was here visualized before her wondering senses. The romantic old palace, its fascinating gardens, its gorgeous interiors, the serious-faced guards, the silent throngs of serving people, the deferential attendants, and now the silken clad, kindly faced, elderly and serene Unknown One, and beside him the smiling prince of the ancient house. She stood as a dreaming child suddenly thrust into fairyland.

The mandarin Ming spoke first to Robert, the husband. "My son," said he, speaking slowly and kindly in Robert's own tongue, "my joy at your arrival is threefold. That you come to me to serve me with your professional skill brings a joy of gratitude. That you escaped a hideous danger at our very door thrills me. That you are the chosen one to husband my fair daughter permits me to extend you a father's greeting. Please make my humble roof your home for so long as life may be spared to you."

Robert, the engineer, bowed, but found himself speechless. These stately greetings seemed to point to but one thing—that Jade was blood daughter of this gorgeous personage. He listened in silence as the venerable head of the Mings turned to Jade.

"My daughter," said the august one, bowing slowly, "welcome again to your father's roof, to the house where you were born and to the arms that protected your first infant days. You have bloomed gorgeously. I have never beheld a fairer flower from the Western Gardens."

The venerable, kindly Oriental stood gazing at the young girl with hungry, tear-filled eyes. Jade seemed lost in a transport of joy. Seeing this, Robert Farnsworth felt his heart sink.

Jade started impulsively to her husband's side, then stopped irresolutely. She had heard the mandarin's softly intoned greetings with sheer wonder. His words "my daughter" had thrilled her. She had become suddenly ready to learn that she was partly of this man's blood. But her husband's shaken nerves roused her. She realized that such a dénouement would be an humiliating blow to the young American engineer. She stood wavering between hope and fear—and then came swiftly to a realization that she too wanted herself pronounced all American. Ah Ping, with keen understanding, stepped forward in the heartrending silence.

"Let what truth is to be told be told quickly, venerable head," he begged, speaking in Cantonese. "We would like to—"

The venerable mandarin raised a silencing hand. To Jade he said in Cantonese: "Ah Ping has written that you would rejoice to learn that you are in part of our blood. Is that true, my daughter?"

"Very true, my august father," replied Jade, speaking in kind. "And my heart would burst with pride to be kin to you. But why, if that be so, was the truth withheld till I became a wife? Now, venerable sire, I am his—and I want to be of his blood. Hear me now, serene Ming Toy Po. It is my prayer that I am *not* your daughter!"

And the American girl turned to her American husband and threw her arms protectingly about him.

THE mandarin of the Mings stood a moment silently observing them. Then a look of great content beamed from his moist eyes. "That," said he, speaking in English, "is as it should be. Blood calls to blood, and clan to clan. You, my little foundling, whom I nestled in the same cradle with this, my son, have proven true to your race. Be comforted, my child. You are all white."

The pride that flashed in Jade's eyes at this announcement was genuine. "White!" she repeated. "All white. Oh, Bob, did you hear?"

For answer Bob Farnsworth took his wife's hand and stroked it gently. He looked up at the mandarin, a bit of defiance in his glance. The venerable head of the Mings smiled pleasantly in return.

"You married her because you loved her, did you not, my son?" he asked kindly. Then, proceeding to answer his own question, he said: "Then cherish her, lest my love prove the stronger."

At this gentle challenge, Robert Farnsworth regained his feet. "You will have to go some, sir," he answered.

"I have gone far, my son," answered the older man proudly. "And I shall go a long way beyond. Let me say now that I did not put this test on your wife to try her. It was inadvertently done. I overstressed my love for my fair one, and the love which I bore for her father. Let us now

be seated, that I may tell you more that you should know."

The son and heir of the house of Ming brought a huge high-backed teak-wood chair for Jade. The venerable head of the family resumed his seat on the great divan.

"This recital," began the elderly Oriental, speaking for Robert's sake in English, "begins in your own San Francisco. There I, then the son and heir of this household, had gone on my way to your great Yale University. But the ancient and deeply accursed enemies of our house reached even across the seas to your land and there, in your San Francisco, emissaries of that accursed brotherhood captured me and sealed me in a coffin to die."

"In a coffin?" exclaimed Jade. "The one my father carried on board Uncle John's ship?"

"The same, my fair one. Your father, the sainted Captain Rollo, had taken service with the Ming Hu Tsing. He was there in your city, and he knew your city better than I, better than my faithful manservant, who was slain at my side. He was watching, and when I was left in that sealed box to die, he broke it open. But our path bristled with our enemies. His life and mine were in danger. So we counseled in whispers.

"To call in the police of your city would have been to make the matter public. Even this would have given joy to our enemies, and would have thrown my august father into a panic of distress. And so I remained apparently dead, but there were holes bored in that great box to give me air. And from the window of my lodging your father summoned sailormen from their holiday in the streets, and they, because they loved him, bore away the box on their shoulders, and even your police guarded them as they carried what seemed to be the harmless departed one to the ship. Even there we maintained secrecy. We knew our enemies would have men on board watching. We feared a quick and deadly attack. And so I abode in my coffin in your father's tiny cabin. There he guarded me; there your mother nourished me. And from the ship even to this palace I was brought in that box."

"My father and mother," replied Jade softly. "Surely they loved you."

"With such a love as I have felt for you, my fair one," replied the venerable mandarin. "The love we bear for that which is dear—and helpless."

The old man of another race paused momentarily, as if dreaming of days long gone.

Then he resumed: "My father heaped thankful rewards on your father, and asked him to remain ever by his side. Nor would he permit me to venture again from his sight. So I remained here, and took to wife the fruitful one who bore me this, my proper son."

At these words, the prince of the house rose, and bowed ceremoniously.

"Born the same day that you were born, my fair orphan," continued the venerable one, addressing Jade; "cradled in the same cradle, and sheltered by the same loving arms. And so I came to call you my tiny fair one, and to love the two babies as my very own."

THERE were tears in Jade's eyes, and Farnsworth found it hard to suppress a catch in his throat.

"But I have wandered," explained the head of the Mings, apologetically. "Our enemies attacked us in these very gardens. We—your father and your expectant mother, I and my expectant wife—were walking apart to view the great blooms. We had not yet seen your faces, my children. Suddenly a secreted hatchet-man sprang upon us. Your father took the dagger-thrust intended for me, and your expectant mother received a grievous wound, shielding with her own person my expectant princess. And all this before my dagger found the assassin's ugly heart. In this house your mother found sanctuary, and lived only to give you to us. We named you *Tai Fu*—Jade, Jewel of Jewels—and would have kept you always. But when you were old enough to be sent home, my august mother decreed that your people should possess you, and that you should know your own land. Only, we sent our cousin, the faithful Ah Ping, to help guard your days, and to commune with you that you might grow to know our love."

"I am glad for that," replied Jade. "And may I love you as I do Uncle Ping?"

"It is written," answered the mandarin Ming Toy Po, "that the love which comes from choice is stronger than the most heartfelt observance of filial piety. I would make you a daughter of this house where you were born. I would make your husband another son. It is a love that has been given, not born. Here are my begging, open arms, my children. Will you come to me?"

There's a lot of real Humor in this plain tale of eager soldier-boys lost in a strange wilderness of war-time rumors.

By

E. A. Gee

The Shovel Fighters

DURING the last war, the average American doughboy was a complicated sort of cuss. You'd tell him something as a straight fact and he wouldn't believe it, even if you proved it. But if you whispered the same thing to him as a rumor—ah! That was different! It was gospel—until the next rumor came along. And I'm not giving any aid or comfort to the enemy when I say that the birth-rate for rumors was so high they had to use algebra to figure it.

When our division landed in France we expected to move directly to the Front to meet the war, for we could do "squads right" with hardly ever a miss. Instead we were sent to British area for training purposes and in the next six weeks we learned how to put just the right inflection at the ends of our sentences, how to swear fluently in Australian and how to dig ditches in French. During this time they moved us gradually toward the Front, on the theory that the closer we got to the big noise, the more vim, vigor and vivisection would we put in our bayonet-work.

One day about noon, when we had finished digging a complete set of practice trenches that any soldier should have been proud to catch cooties in, we got orders to move once more. The rumor factory began going full blast: we were headed everywhere from the British front to the Belgian rear, and one bird who had been a preacher said we were going to Armageddon. But that place wasn't on any maps we had, so we didn't take him seriously. The report that drew the most moans and that most of us were afraid was true, was a musty one that had stubbornly refused to die a natural death. For weeks we'd heard that some American divisions were to be split up into labor battalions for work in the rear. So, when our battalion started marching toward Amiens, we just knew that we were to entrain there for some place where manual labor was the chief occupation.

Scotty Stewart and I were members, in good standing and with dues paid, of the second squad of the third platoon of Company K. We yelped just as loud as anyone during that march. Like everyone else who had never been to the Front, we wanted to see what the war looked like from the front end. We hadn't come to France to dig ditches or learn the grocery business—and we sure told the world about

it! The only trouble was that nobody heard us, for they were all vehemently saying the same thing.

At ten o'clock that night we were still marching—and still growling, only now we were cussing the birds who made us work all day and march all night. Our packs weighed a ton and a half each and our feet were sore clear up to our chins. But, through some error, it was not raining.

ABOUT midnight we were halted somewhere near Amiens and ordered to pitch our pup tents. We had just begun that when Mills, our platoon sergeant, made a speech. He told us the captain wanted a detail of ten men from each platoon for some special duty the next day. He picked out the ten men, getting two from our squad, boys named Miller and Jackman, and ordered them to be ready to go at five o'clock the next morning.

The fact that it did no good to howl didn't keep these boys from blistering everything connected with the war. Scotty and I didn't help 'em, for we were busy heaving sighs of relief. This was the first extra duty detail we'd missed, in months. He and I shared the same room and bath, and we were at work building it when the sergeant made another speech.

"Everybody build a wall a foot high all the way round your tents," he sang out. "That's to protect you from bomb fragments. Captain's orders. And a foot high means twelve inches high!"

The response of the third platoon was wonderful—it was the first time all of us had ever agreed on anything. The theme of our song was that as between being killed by a bomb or by work, we preferred the bomb. Only we didn't yelp loud enough for the captain to hear, or we'd have had two walls to build.

Scotty finally quit kicking long enough to go in search of cigarettes. He came back in a few minutes, all excited.

"Young Phelps up at Company Headquarters says this detail is going to the trenches tomorrow for a few days," he hissed at me. "Let's get in on it!"

We knew of several cases where small detachments from outfits who had never seen front-line service, had been sent up for a day or two for the experience they could get. So this wasn't so hard to believe.

"Maybe we're going to be a labor battalion and maybe not," continued Scotty. "The whole outfit might get into the lines sometime, but if I get a chance to go tomorrow, I'm going. Let's go see Miller and Jackman."

We found these two Crusaders arguing as to which should use the pick and which the shovel in the building of their wall.

"Aint you boys in pretty bad shape for that long hike tomorrow?" Scotty asked sympathetically.

"Bad shape!" growled Miller. "The tread's all wore off me in eight different places. Know where we're going?"

"Back to the camp we just left," lied Scotty. "Somebody raised hell with the captain because we didn't clean it up the way the rule-book says."

We gave them their moment for meditation and then I spoke my piece.

"Scotty and I lost some of our equipment back there," I ventured, "and we have to get it back. If you'll build our wall tonight, we'll take your places tomorrow."

There'd have been simply nothing to it if young Phelps hadn't come past us just then. Before either Scotty or I could kill him, he'd broadcasted his trench rumor and gone on.

"You dirty crook!" yelled Miller.

It took Scotty's silver tongue a half hour to persuade Miller and Jackman that Phelps had been kidding and that in addition of being full of cheese, he didn't know anything. At that, we finally had to play our last trump.

"We gotta get that equipment back!" Scotty cried. "If you'll let us take your places, we'll build your wall."

It was settled that way.

LONG after the other bucks had been tucked in their beds, Scotty and I practiced the manual of the pick and shovel. The ground was hard and our tools were just toys; the cooks had their morning fires built before we'd finished. But the thought of a trip to the trenches kept us from going on sick report.

Phelps' rumor had spread through the company, of course, and before the detachment set out, every man in it had refused a dozen invitations to let some one else take his place. Some of the unlucky ones offered their next month's pay, all their souvenirs and everything they owned or could steal, for a chance to go, but trading wasn't brisk. Miller and Jackman got ugly, but Sergeant Mills

backed us up. He told them that if we were fools enough to work all night for the chance to work all day, he wasn't going to discourage us.

Finally we got started. We had light packs, and of course our rifles, for practically all formations in that area were under arms. Each company in the battalion had forty men in the detachment. It seemed like quite a gang—but then, the Front wasn't crowded.

We had been camped about eight miles behind the first line trenches, and now for three or four miles we marched straight toward them. We put more pep into that march than we'd ever done before—or ever did again. We passed ammunition dumps, camouflaged batteries and a thousand other things that told us we were getting closer to the Big Show. I got twice the guaranteed mileage out of my neck, twisting it every way at once so I wouldn't miss anything.

And then we began veering off to the left. That only bothered us for a moment, for as Scotty said, "You can't expect to march straight into the trenches in broad daylight. You gotta sneak in."

A couple of shells bound for Amiens floated way over our heads. They'd have done the same if we'd stayed back in camp—but this was different!

We got an awful kick out of being ordered to put our gas masks at the "Alert" position. We wouldn't have traded places with anybody, right then! On the other side of every hill we reached we expected to see a long line of Germans, waiting for us to get there, so the war could commence. We might have been a bit scared, but by golly, nobody was going to know it! We reached a big patch of woods lying on the near side of a low ridge. We marched through the woods ready for anything—and that's just what we got!

There was our long line of men, all right. There was nothing wrong with that part of the picture. They were armed with deadly weapons, too, and had a big pile of extras. But the weapons weren't rifles—they were picks and shovels.

British plans for a great offensive called for the burying of many miles of telephone wire in a trench six feet deep, along a line about three miles back of the Front and parallel to it. The men we saw were digging that trench.

And ten minutes later, so were we!

My Toughest Trip

By

Sergeant Reading

FOR a good many years I was a member of the Arctic Patrols of the old Royal Northwest Mounted Police—now called Royal Canadian Mounted Police—and naturally had my share of the duties assigned that force. Since resigning from the force and taking up my abode in a city I have been greatly amused at fiction writers and movie producers' ideas of the work of the Mounties; according to those fellows we spent the most of our time hunting desperate gunmen and rescuing beautiful damsels in distress. On the toughest trip I ever made I rescued a female, young but not beautiful—an Eskimo baby, in fact. I will briefly record how it was brought about.

Most of the trouble which the Mounties have to straighten out in the Arctic is occasioned by clashes between the white men, who go in to trade for the furs which milady of civilization deems necessary, and the natives. But a great deal of our work was straightening up inter-tribal sex tangles among the Eskimos.

In one such case, to decide which of two natives really owned a certain native girl, we brought both the men and the woman to our post at Tree River. Perhaps I had better explain that owing to the fact that the Eskimos destroy girl babies during years when food is scarce, there is a great shortage of marriageable girls among these nomads of the North. Consequently competition for wives is keen, often resulting in killings.

Anyway, after thinking and talking over

An Arctic adventure of a most unusual sort is graphically set forth by an officer of the Canadian Mounted Police.

this particular case for some time, we found out that neither of the two men really owned this girl; they had, in fact, stolen her from her rightful husband, belonging to another tribe. The upshot of it was the males were sentenced to do two years' chores apiece at the post, while I was detailed to return the woman to her lawful husband.

ONE bright June morning, I loaded up our sailboat with grub for a six-weeks' journey, and taking the girl, I set out.

For two weeks I sailed, making slow progress owing to contrary winds. Then a storm overtook us. I did my best, but it wasn't good enough—the storm won and we were washed ashore with the boat.

I am not a writer, so cannot describe an Arctic gale, or the mountainous waves, and all that. But I can state that when the storm abated and the sea calmed down, we were left stranded on an island, neither ourselves, boat nor stores harmed, but fully a quarter of a mile from the water's edge.

Things looked pretty serious for me; alone, I could not possibly drag that heavy boat down to the water. I sat down by the fire and tried to figure out what to do. Far into the night I sat, while the girl tossed restlessly in her furs; but I did not pay much attention to her. Finally I rolled up in my own blankets and slept.

Awakening at dawn, I walked down to the water's edge to collect driftwood for a fire—although it was summertime the ice-filled waters chilled the wind which swept shorewards. Slowly I tramped along, picking up a piece of wood here, a piece there; then I ran into a piece of pure luck, although it told a mute tale of tragedy. Rolling and flopping on the beach I spied an upturned native canoe—a kyak. Caught far from land, its owner had no doubt perished.

Eagerly I dropped my load, and lugged the frail craft from the water. It was undamaged. Again picking up the firewood, I hastened back to tell the girl, Nuttinook, of our good fortune. She smiled rather wanly, I thought, but assented to the plan I outlined as we ate breakfast, that I take the boat, which would carry only one, and go for help.

Eagerly I bolted my food, then set about making a snug camp for the girl. That finished, I packed a two-weeks' supply of food in the kyak and constructed a rough two-bladed paddle. By this time it was almost dark, so I decided to wait until morning before starting. Contentedly I rolled into my blankets; gone were my fears of being marooned and starving to death when our grub had run out. But I had not reckoned with another factor.

Distances in the Arctic are so great that

it takes months to make a patrol, arrests if necessary, and then to return natives to their own people. The trouble which had led up to my escorting this girl home had been no exception; eight or nine months had elapsed since the girl had been stolen from her rightful husband, so perhaps what occurred was only natural after all, especially in the Arctic where life is elemental in the extreme.

AT daybreak I instinctively awoke, feeling somewhat stiff from sleeping on the damp ground, but refreshed. I soon had a fire going, then stepped over to wake the girl. She did not respond to my gentle shaking, but something moved slightly beneath the furs; then a thin wail trembled out in the raw air.

I stood frozen in my tracks! I have mushed hundreds of weary miles, sometimes with "bad men," often half starved and frozen in patches. But never have I experienced the cold chill of dread that wail awakened!

Gently I turned back the robes. It was as I feared—the girl had given birth to a child. Perhaps injured internally during the buffeting we had received in the gale, the effort had proved too much for her; she was dead.

But the youngster— That little beggar was far from dead! It was up to me to do something. Never before or since have I felt so helpless, but somehow I must keep that little atom alive until I struck a native camp. That was the one thought that hammered into my benumbed brain.

Building up the fire, I quickly warmed thoroughly two of the softest blankets. As tenderly as possible I placed the baby in the center of them and covered it up. It still kept up a plaintive wailing. Of course it was hungry.

From my stores I got some evaporated milk. It did not take long to mix a cupful. In my medicine kit I had an eye-dropper. I perforated its rubber cap, then filled the phial with warm milk. The baby soon had it emptied; then she fell asleep.

Gazing at the sleeping infant, I envied her calm, for my own mind was in a turmoil. Then I remembered that perhaps the first duty of a Mountie is to protect life. I determined to save the baby somehow.

Leaving her sleeping, I composed the corpse of her mother; then, with furs and blankets, I made a sort of nest on the kyak behind the seat. Carefully I carried the infant and stowed her away, then I launched the craft.

THE next three days and nights I shall never forget; every two or three hours the youngster became hungry and I had to light a fire and mix warm milk. Years of living in the North with men had made me independent of women, but I would have given a year's pay to have had a woman to aid me then! I was fearful lest I handle the tiny mite too roughly. I wanted to keep it warm, yet I was afraid of suffocating it.

Fortunately, during those three days and nights the sea remained fairly calm and the craft rode well. In between times of pulling ashore to light a fire to warm milk, I paddled hard. On the evening of the third day I reached the tribe to which I had been taking Nuttinook. As eager natives hurried down to the shore to greet me, I almost hugged them.

Rapidly, with signs and speech, I made them understand. One of them led me into a gloomy snow hut. In one corner I espied a native woman with a babe at her breast. When I crawled out again, she had two babes to feed, but she accepted the extra one cheerfully. Outside, to the wonder of the watching natives, I turned a few handsprings in the snow. I have never enjoyed such a sense of relief at duty done!

Then I had to impart the sad news to the husband of Nuttinook: we had saved his squaw only for her to die in childbirth. A few days later he and some of his fellows escorted me back to the island to fetch the young mother's body.

Two weeks later I returned safely to Tree River, none the worse for my patrol. But I shall always regard that as my toughest trip because of the unusual responsibility of looking after a newborn babe.

SEVERAL years later Ayunio, the husband of Nuttinook, made a trip to the post to tell me his little girl was fine and healthy. He also tried to present me with many fine Arctic fox furs. Unfortunately the regulations would not allow me to accept them.

And this describes but one of the duties of men of the Arctic Patrols of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. A trifle different from most of the stuff written about the Mounties, I know—none the less it is true.

The Blow-in

By

A. M. Stuart

Excitement runs high in this break-neck wolf-chase, with a hard battle at the end—a vividly told story of a sport experience unusual nowadays.

"BEN, there's four wolves in the south field and they're headed out!" cried Tony, who had raced full speed from the bunk-house and was quite out of breath as he broke in on me.

"Well, you slip the bridle on Minnie and don't let the dogs out till I get down there. Quick now, and not a sound," I directed.

I took a hasty glance from the second-story window through the fielders, discovering that three of the animals were in reality coyotes. The fourth was much larger. At the price fur was, any common skin would bring twenty dollars; an extra would bring at least thirty-five. Here was what I had been trying to get all season—an extra fine Number One skin.

To the south and west stretched the plains, while on the other sides the valley skirted. It required speed to head off the average gray prowler from the hills and cut him to the open for a straight run.

I wanted to be near my dogs when they overhauled the victim, for one, Brownie, I regarded as a coming killer.

Brownie had come to us as a stray. I learned afterwards that the train crew had stolen him from up the line thinking he would bring them a long price. Instead, he met my old killer in the village and followed us home. I was much taken with him and decided to try my hand at training him to take the place of my own, who was now past his best. Brownie's exact breed I could not determine. From my knowledge of his race I thought him to be a cross between the Russian wolfhound and the English greyhound, which gave him the splendid combination of speed and strength.

My other dogs were an undersized black greyhound, the fleetest thing I have ever seen, and my old Scotch deerhound, who was real dog. He had some fifty coyotes to his credit and if not run too hard was good for a few more.

The moment the door swung open, the old chap saw me on the mare and knew what was on. He gave a low husky bark and pawed the snow to be off.

THE bright March sun was pushing over the rim of the valley as we started.

At the top of the draw above the buildings I saw that the animal I wanted was sauntering straight for the open, but the other three, sensing danger, had fled.

The old dog, General, was the first to sight, and he took out at his topmost speed. The black followed; the new dog seemed running merely as a matter of course. When the black sighted the prey, she shot out from the line and away from General and myself as if we had been walking.

The blow-in ran as if uninterested and

merely to follow. I was a bit disappointed at his gait and tried to urge him on. Suddenly he seemed to see the wolf, and set out in an easy stride that kept him well within reach of the black.

At first our quarry did not regard the situation as being his concern, but after a moment's steady look at us, he evidently changed his mind, and struck into a flight of speed that quite amazed me. I saw at a glance it would be a good mile before we would do any overhauling, if we did any at all.

Soon, however, the black began to gain and the blow-in followed her. Old General kept about even with me, and I could hear his heavy breathing. He would not be in the best of shape after such a run—but he would be there, and that was the main thing for the younger dog's training.

My heart throbbed with wild joy and the excitement of the chase. I could see every step of the way, and had the spot picked out in the distance where we would tear him down. I was surprised he did not veer his course and head for the valley. Perhaps he had never been run before; at any rate he was taking a direct route to the open.

We came steadily nearer. Evidently the animal was tiring, for he was very much slower. I could see that he must be one of the Northern grays, and I reckoned that I would easily realize a fifty-dollar price for him. Though he was a large one and looked as if he might give any two good dogs a real argument, surely the four of us could get him, for with a club I had dispatched many a coyote. I felt for my thirty-eight, but I had left it behind.

On and on we raced, coming ever nearer to the huge animal. Now and then I could catch a low, growling bark from my old dog and knew he was primed for the kill. I knew his method from start to finish, so I kept my eye on Brownie, who was running with perfect ease.

Just then something happened—out bolted a jack-rabbit, almost under the nose of the blow-in, and in spite of all my calls and entreaties he swung into line after it and in a few seconds was gone over a little ridge to one side.

WE were almost on our prey, and I knew without doubt the fight would be far from easy, though I felt no doubt as to the outcome. I cursed the brown cross, however, for deserting at the last minute.

I have had the experience of killing a number of coyotes with hounds; in every case they have run till exhausted, but with the gray it was vastly different. This one had cut through the corner of a shallow pond. His heavy coat was now dripping with slush and he must have felt the extra weight, much to his disadvantage in keeping up his speed. In another half dozen bounds the black would have been on him when he swung about to give battle.

The greyhound weighed but a scant forty pounds, but traveling at the speed she was, he would feel the weight of vastly more than that, should she meet him as she was in the habit of doing with the average coyote, full head on. Not so, however—he made a savage bound towards her and I heard her yelp as she leaped aside, evidently severely torn by his vicious mouth.

We two were not far behind and with an effort we increased our speed. The little black was dancing around him, barking and threatening, but he seemed to disregard her entirely and stolidly awaited the old killer. The two met with terrific force and skirled a dozen feet or so in a mixed mass together. I could not see which was which for a few seconds. Then I saw the General on top with his death-grip, a hold he invariably got beneath the right lower jaw. It was a safety-hold, for his prey was helpless as far as getting a counter was concerned, and with the coyotes it had proved a strangle-hold on the wind as well.

For the next few moments I witnessed the scrap of my life. There was a mad writhing struggling, as if two demons of the jungle had met in a death struggle. I knew my dog would be victorious as long as his wind would last. He had known a day when his wind and teeth were unequaled for fighting ability, but even I had to realize he had but a fraction of his former strength—and he was now pitted against a creature of fighting blood for generations, born to tear down the swift-speeding deer, and give battle even to the lordly moose. I knew my help would be required.

The loudest tones of my voice, and my shrillest whistle did not bring the stray-in back into sight. I vowed vengeance on him, deciding then and there to give Tony a job with the rifle as soon as we returned to the buildings.

For a full ten minutes they wrestled and twisted and tore. The hound, domesticated for ages, was back again into wild instinctive savagery.

The black leaped about whining and barking, but I could not urge her closer than six or eight feet. Now with horror I saw my old favorite failing. I knew he would go fast and, at the mercy of the younger and stronger animal, would last but a short time. His hold was wrenched loose and his foe had him under, with huge jaws clamped over his throat.

I LEAPED to the ground. My mare, thinking she would rather finish her oats than watch the sport, trotted away.

My nearest and only weapon in sight was a water-logged oak post, which at the best was heavy and clumsy. By the time I was ready, the gray was fast doing his work. The General was gasping for breath, his struggles as weak as the struggles of a pup. Again I cursed the renegade deserter I had housed and fed, and had refused to sell for a fair price.

The post proved unwieldy indeed. I brought its weight across the gray's nose, forcing him momentarily to release. He fastened again and I swung for his skull, hoping to crush it in. The blow fell across his shoulders, and only accomplished the misfortune for me of drawing his attention from the exhausted dog, and fixing it on me.

The coyote is a coward and sneak, but this wolf was a battler from the start. With a low muttering growl he rushed me. I could see his great mouth of ivory, dripping bloody froth. It was the most unpleasant sight I had ever faced and I fell back in time to save all but my trouser leg from his fangs. The cloth ripped to the knee as if cut by a knife.

It was well that I had put on my heavy mackinaw, for before I had time to redraw my weapon, he was on me with a savage bound.

Nature had given me a physique a hundred and eighty-five pounds in weight and six feet in length; I required it all for the first time in my life, not for aggression but to defend myself from this monster.

I must protect my face at all costs. I caught him by the shoulders, holding him off. Stretched to full length, his face came even with my own so it was a matter of keeping him at arm's-length.

Time after time I drove my foot into his stomach, and felt him wince with the pain, but each time it seemed but to increase his wrath, and with a vicious lunge he would come so near my face that I could feel the bloody froth from his tongue. He ripped and tore at my arms until I could feel his teeth go through and into the flesh. I realized I was in a death-struggle and the cold sweat of horror broke out on me.

I felt that I must use all the craft of the human, yet become an animal as well, if I were to escape with my life. I was as capable of self-defense as the average man but here I was fighting like a demon and could not see that I was even holding my own.

Blood was running down my left arm into my mitten. I must change the game and get him to the earth, so, swinging my left side and hip to him I turned away, shoving as far under him as possible, for the safety of my face. My right foot tricked his feet and I threw him to his back with my left knee in the middle of his well-furred stomach. Somehow my left elbow had become doubled and was projecting into his mouth. He drew away, attempting to wrench his head free, but I jammed my elbow as far as possible into his throat, feeling this was my one chance.

FOR the next few minutes I know the struggles must have been titanic. It was only the desperation of a human being fighting for life that enabled me to keep my advantageous hold. He was sufficiently gagged to prevent his teeth from doing serious damage, but only by the greatest of skill could I keep myself adjusted to the writhing and twisting of his massive body.

Twice his forepaw came within an inch of tearing my face, so to further protect it I buried it under his shoulder.

My only hope of aid was the recovery of the old killer. If he could, I knew he would again take up the battle; then I would procure a better weapon—and if I got another chance on my feet, I would not be as foolish.

It might have been ten minutes—or more—but it was that long anyway before I felt that what I hoped for had come true. I heard a vicious bark something between a growl and a roar. It did not sound like the General either, but it must be. I felt the wolf wince and draw sidewise, making a stronger effort than ever to withdraw his jaws free of my arm.

Evidently the General had fastened below the ribs and was making his enraged presence felt. There was a vicious rasp-

ing voice with the newcomer's battling. If I could withdraw my arm rapidly enough to save my face from getting slashed, it was my one hope to regain my feet. I felt that the big gray had turned his attention to the new antagonist, who evidently must be giving him more to think about than was I. With a quick spring I took the chance.

My head reeled and for a brief moment I did not know whether I would stand or fall, then my brain cleared and I saw that I was really free.

The old killer was lying in a partly sitting posture, panting heavily. The little black was dancing around in a wild frenzy, while here was my blow-in, locked in the fiercest struggle I have ever witnessed between animals.

He had evidently satisfied his hunger with the big rabbit, and sauntering along on our trail, had decided to lend a hand.

I walked about them at a safe distance, picking up a small stake—which I had missed at first or I would have been spared all that struggle—and waited to see how the battle would go. The old General and I had done our duty and now it was the blow-in's turn.

My heart leaped with joy, for I saw that my highest hopes were not misplaced. This strange brown cross had evidently never been with a real trainer, but he was no coward, and I have often thought since that had he not deserted us at the start, he could have handled the wolf alone.

Over and over and over they rolled, in a mass of flying legs and snapping, tearing jowls, the blood flying from both. The big gray commanded my admiration for the battle he was putting up against this new creature, whose body seemed superior in strength, and whose fighting spirit was on fire. He meant death at any cost. Each time he felt the other's teeth sinking, his fury only increased.

At last the wolf went under and could not rise. Then came the real test of the killer and I yelled encouragingly as he tore into him without the thought of slacking in the slightest.

It was only a matter of moments until the noble gray was gasping and with the stake I administered a finishing blow.

Sometime later I stretched the dead wolf at the bunkhouse door and looked at Tony. "How's that for the blow-in?" I asked him.

"Sufferin' cats!" he answered. "I guess that guy is a blow-in himself, aint he?"

Fish-House Finance

By

Ross Berling

MANY intelligent people will forcefully tell you that they don't believe in ghosts or anything of a supernatural aspect; however, down in their hearts they do believe. I proclaimed with the rest that there were no ghosts, until one time— Well, you may judge!

I was born in Belgium and emigrated to this country in 1914, my mother having died in Belgium in 1912. When the United States declared war I enlisted in a Pennsylvania division and had one year of front trench and fighting experience. When mustered out of the service I was, along with many other unfortunate fellows, a wreck physically as well as financially. I had been gassed very badly and during the following winter this developed into tuberculosis. I was unable to work, and my physician told me I would not live the winter out unless I could go South.

This seemed hopeless, but he wrote the congressman of my district, with the result that I was called to the United States Veterans' Bureau in Washington, D. C.

At the time when my doctor was interceding for me with our congressman I had an opportunity to do a small favor for a good friend of mine. As it happened, I was the only one who could have done him this service, which was really trifling, though he over-valued it. He did not offer me money, which he knew would have insulted me (I had still some Belgian pride left, which now is quite lost), but he assured me that if at any time, he could do any service, he would be ready to do it. I let

This business experience includes some extremely dramatic events. You could perhaps contribute a story that would equal it.

it go at that, glad to have been able to do my friend a favor.

After several physical examinations and a lot of red tape, I was awarded back compensation and a temporary compensation of one hundred dollars monthly. I immediately sent a wire to my wife to join me in Washington.

We decided on the farthest town south on the West Coast of Florida and in due time we arrived and settled down.

I was for a long time very sick but my wife's careful nursing brought me around and after two years I was practically a well man. My ambitions returned also and I looked about for a job to keep myself busy.

It so happened there was a fish-house for sale in this town. This included all equipment, several boats and nets, also the good-will, which last wasn't worth a cuss, as I found out later. We had saved up about five hundred dollars, but the price was one thousand cash. We decided to buy, and offered our five hundred cash, the balance to be paid in twelve months, which arrangement was accepted by the owner.

Now I had a fish-house but no working capital, so my partner-wife and myself decided to incorporate. When we got our incorporation through and the gold-embossed certificates arrived I felt very proud and was sure that I would have to refuse offers from expectant purchasers. I had only incorporated for five thousand dollars and after gazing at the beautiful stock certificates, I bemoaned the fact that I had not incorporated for twenty-five thousand dollars! Then I went out to refuse offers for my stock. I first visited the banks, which gave me volumes of advice but no cash. However my spirits were still high; I tackled one friend after another until I began to realize that stock-selling was not my strong point, even if it was my own stock.

FINALLY I met an old Judge, who was nicknamed the Bachelor-miser. After much persuasion he said he was willing to lend me the sum of one thousand dollars for a term of six months, providing I would put up as collateral for my note all of the stock certificates, properly endorsed by the president, (myself) and the secretary-treasurer (my wife). He also required all the corporation books, and the note was a mortgage note. His interest for those six months was only five hundred dollars. The Judge told me that he generally made more money on such risky investments, but because he felt sorry for all ex-service men he would charge me only the five hundred for six months. I felt myself very fortunate after that, I assure you.

My wife and I now went to work in our fish-business. We had several men fishing for us, and as we paid one quarter of a cent more than the other two fish-houses, we sometimes had more fish than we could dispose of expeditiously. However, we sold them wholesale to Georgia and north Florida Naval and retail stores. We also retailed them in the town and near-by country, which the other fish-houses never had

attempted to do. I bought an old dilapidated truck and a pot of bright paint—thus our delivery truck was provided. We worked from early in the morning until late at night, but we made money hand over fist. I bought an additional power-boat to get the fish from the men while they were still out. We also allowed ourselves a few minor luxuries, such as buying a low-priced car, and moving from our furnished room to a little bungalow. We were doing fine and were headed somewhere at last.

Slowly but surely the time came near that I had to meet my note for fifteen hundred dollars. I felt that I could easily meet the obligation, for we had some two thousand two hundred dollars on the books, and close to seven hundred dollars in the bank.

As none of the large bills had been paid us, a few weeks before the note was due I started to send out letters offering discounts for prompt payment. I had already sent statements, but sent them out again; I even sent wires. However, since it was now the middle of the month, most of my debtors put me off until the first of the month.

The twenty-third of August arrived with only about one thousand dollars in the bank—and on this date my note matured! Frenziedly I visited the banks and different friends, but could not raise the remainder of the amount due. I begged the old Judge for a few weeks' extension, but he would not accord it. He assured me he was obliged to take the business over to protect his interests, unless I could meet the note not later than that day.

LATE that evening, I was sitting disconsolate before the makeshift desk in my office at the fish-house, my wife beside me. We were trying to figure a way out, but had almost given up hope. I remembered my friend up North with whom I had kept in correspondence. I knew I could get all the money I wished from him, for he was quite well-to-do. However, the favor I had done him in the past was of such a delicate nature that I felt almost like a blackmailer in planning to ask him for the loan of money. Anyway it was now too late—I could wire him, but would I have the money that night?

The idea struck me of drawing a check on his bank and signing his name to it. Then I would cash this check at my local bank or give it to the Judge in exchange for my note and papers. I would wire my friend up North the same evening, explain the business of the check, and beg him to honor it, which I knew he would do.

I explained to my wife what I was about to do, but she strenuously objected. She said she would rather lose the business, because she saw jail and disgrace ahead for me if the plan went wrong. But I was determined, and upon reaching home I looked in my trunk for some blank checks of the Northern bank with which my friend did business. I found a whole pad and seating myself at a table near a corner of the room, I was writing out my phony check. My wife was sitting silently behind me in a rocker.

Suddenly I became aware of a third person in the room. I looked toward the door, which was closed, and then around at my wife. Ashen-faced, she was staring towards the window, seemingly about to faint. I looked in the direction of her gaze—there stood my mother, looking at me with warning, sorrowful eyes. The strange vision lasted only a moment, but my wife had seen it also, so it was not merely my imagination. My feelings? I cannot describe them. I felt a premonition of some impending disaster, and decided to leave the check go until the next morning. My wife and I did not sleep much that night.

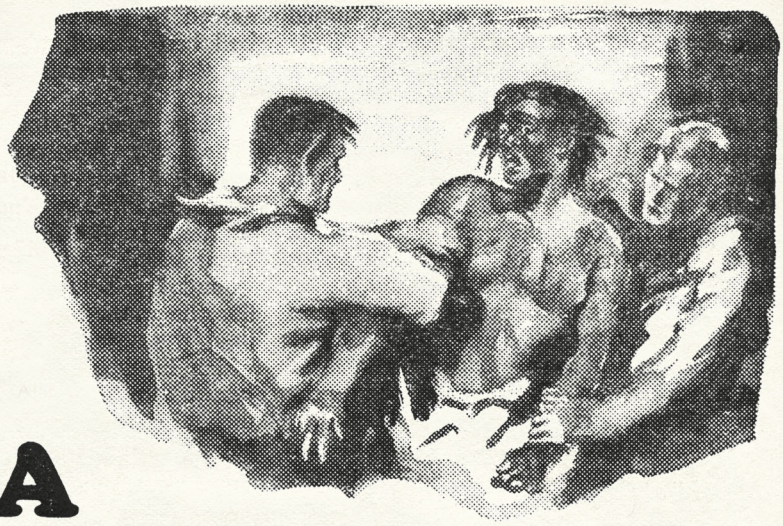
EARLY the next morning I was at the fish-house, attending to all details before turning over the business to the Bachelor-miser. On my return home for breakfast, my wife handed me a telegram, which informed me that my friend had died, due to injuries received in an auto-accident.

I leave the reader to guess what would have happened to me if I had cashed that check!

The Judge took over the fish-house with all its belongings, credits and debits. About a week later I received a small legacy from my mother's people, which had been due me since before the war.

In the meantime the old Judge had been trying to sell the fish-house but nobody seemed to want it. Public sympathy was with me, of course. Finally he offered to turn the business back to me for the fifteen hundred in cash. I could have given it to him; however, I none too anxiously offered one thousand dollars cash—and he accepted. Later I sold the fish-house at a very satisfactory profit.

This curious chronicle of strange events in the Southwest permits the reader to write his own conclusion.



A Border Mystery

By Treasury Agent B—

IT'S always a satisfying thing to start a case, follow out all the clues, the duds as well as the thrillers, get your man,—and frequently a woman,—prove your case in court, and see the guilty put on the train for a Federal prison; but every now and then we encounter one where all the clues and trails end at a blank wall.

Such a case was the Lieutenant Harrigan affair. I was in San Francisco when a code wire from the supervising agent of the Treasury Department sent me hurrying for the first train going south. Government regulations forbid the giving out of certain details, but by changing a few names I can give the gist of this remarkable case without betraying confidences. So I shall say that my destination was Mexizona.

Arriving at the Mexizona customhouse I went at once to the private office of Agent Dan Gray, where I found awaiting me a man of about thirty-five.

While he was apparently a man of education and refinement, he also impressed me at once as quite able to take care of himself anywhere.

"Mr. Blank," said Agent Dan Gray, "this is Lieutenant Patrick Harrigan. Lieutenant, I want you to tell Special Agent Blank what you told me the other day."

Harrigan seemed perfectly willing.

First he opened his short-front, showing me several ugly white scars, which he said were saber cuts. He showed me similar scars on his arms and legs and one on the crown of his head; also five scars he said were old bullet-wounds.

"I am a soldier of fortune," he began, and there was nothing boastful in the way he said it. "I have fought in all parts of the world. Lately I was a lieutenant in the army of Madero.

"Early last May while I was on leave in Nogales, Mexico, I was approached by a man who goes by the name of Pedro Galupas, although I don't believe that is his real name. At that time he was in the Mexican Secret Service. I had had dealings with him and happened to know that he was secretly in partnership with Señor Miguel de Quero, who operates a big ranch not far south of the line.

"Galupas knew that I had been given orders to watch for pack-trains going north into Arizona, as these pack-trains were known to be trying to smuggle arms back to the Mexican revolutionists. He

wanted to know how much I would take to forget that order for a while. I turned him down, and he went away badly miffed.

"A few weeks later I got a tip that a pack-train was going to cross the line away over west toward Yuma. That didn't sound right to me, so while I made preparations to go over that way I sent out a few spies and learned that the pack-train was twenty miles east of my camp. They were ready to make the dash across as soon as I went west on that false tip.

"Late that afternoon we broke camp and rode west toward Yuma. Under cover of darkness we swung back east and at dawn picked up the trail of the pack-train. There were six men, all Mexicans, we thought, but later we found that one was a white man. Seeing us riding up, they scattered and fired on us with rifles, killing one of my men. We fired back and killed two Mexicans and a horse. The others scattered, and I discovered then that we had crossed the border and were in Arizona.

"I found nothing of any value on the two dead men. The saddle-bags on the dead horse were empty, but I discovered that the animal bore the brand of the De Quero ranch. That convinced me that the pack-train had been sent over by De Quero and Galupas. Not caring to get into any trouble in Arizona, we returned to our camp south of the line. Other duties took me down into Sinaloa for several months and I forgot the incident.

"ABOUT a month ago, after I had left the army of Madero, I was in Juarez. One night a Mexican came to my hotel and told me that a white man was at his home, dying, and wanted to see me. I was suspicious, but taking my revolver, I followed the Mexican to his home. There was a white man, dying from two bullet-wounds in the chest. He quickly convinced me that he was the leader of that pack-train.

"He then told me that while it was true that they had been sent by De Quero to get ammunition for the revolutionists, they were not going across empty-handed, but were taking over sixty thousand dollars' worth of opium. He said that after we fired on them, they fled to an old shack near the mouth of San Hermos Pass and buried the opium in the same spot where their confederates coming down from Tucson had buried thirty thousand rounds of rifle cartridges. They then agreed to tell De Quero that everything had been seized, and to return later and get the opium and cartridges for their own profit.

"The week before I had arrived at Juarez, the white man and the two Mexicans had met there and had quarreled over the division of the opium and cartridges. In the fight, both Mexicans had been killed and the white man fatally wounded. Knowing that he could not live, he wanted me to give him two hundred pesos for his family, in return for which he would give me a map showing just where to find the hidden stuff. I took a chance, gave him the money, and got the map.

"At that time, he told me that after his death I would be the only one living who knew how to find the hidden contraband; but just before he died he again sent for me and said that the thing that had started the fight between them was that he had caught one of the Mexicans talking with Pedro Galupas.

"On the very day after this man died, I was attacked by three men and robbed. They took everything, including the map. It may have been a plain case of robbery, but I am afraid those men were acting for Galupas and that he now has the map.

"Now, gentlemen, I know enough about Galupas and De Quero to fear them. Moreover, while I know that San Hermos country, and can lead you right to the spot without the map, I wouldn't dare go in there alone, and I am not financially able to hire men and outfit for the trip. What I suggest is that we go there with five or six armed men, get the opium and the cartridges, and grab Galupas and De Quero if they arrive on the scene. When you have done that, and are satisfied, then you can reward me—at least to the extent of repaying my two hundred pesos."

That was Harrigan's story. Agent Gray and I talked it over between us, conferred with several mounted inspectors who knew the San Hermos country, did everything we could to punch a hole in Harrigan's narrative, and finally decided that while it sounded like an opium-smoker's dream, it might be true and that we dared not ignore it. So Gray called in Mounted Inspectors Paxton and Beers, we outfitted for a week, and one bitterly cold morning in mid-December struck out on the three-day trip to San Hermos Pass.

LATE in the afternoon, in a cold, drizzling rain, we made camp near a Papago Indian village; and early the next morning, leaving Beers to watch camp, Harrigan, Paxton, Gray and I struck out on foot up the mountains toward the pass. We expected to be back that night, but took food and water for two days.

Before we were a mile from camp, Harrigan began to show signs of extreme nervousness. He acted like a man who is desperately afraid of something, but doesn't know just what. Frequently he had us halt while he sneaked to the top of some high rock and surveyed the trail ahead.

While the winter nights along the Arizona border are pretty cold, the midday sun can be uncomfortably hot. By the middle of the afternoon we found our water over half gone. We were then in a rocky cañon, with no sign of water, and had not yet found a single mark that Harrigan could recognize. Paxton had been saying for three hours that we were going away from the pass instead of toward it. Just before dark, Harrigan was forced to admit that he had blundered into the wrong cañon.

We held a hurried consultation and, on Harrigan's insisting that he could lead us to a water-hole as soon as the moon rose, we made camp and rationed out what food was left. Paxton made coffee; then we rolled in our blankets to get what rest we could before moonrise.

I WAS awakened by Paxton. He informed me the moon had been up for two hours. He said that Harrigan had told him he wanted to explore the cañon just ahead, and that he should let Gray and me sleep until he returned. He had said he would not be gone an hour, and Paxton had become suspicious.

I did not know what to think, but we built a fire, made coffee, and got all ready to break camp as soon as Harrigan should return. We were then down to our last canteen. If Harrigan found a water-hole, we would be all right; if not, we were in a tight pinch.

The moonlight made the cañon as light as day, and we kept a sharp watch ahead for the return of Harrigan. It was bitterly cold, but none of us cared to hunt wood to keep the fire going. We were uneasy, and growing more so every minute.

Finally, when Harrigan had been gone almost five hours, we decided that Paxton should take half the water we had, go back to camp and get more water and supplies. On Paxton insisting that the shortest route to San Hermos Pass would be to go back to the mouth of the cañon, we agreed that, no matter what Harrigan said, we would go back there.

Paxton had not been gone long when Gray and I saw a man hurrying down the cañon toward us. Supposing that it was Harrigan, I opened my mouth to shout; but Gray stopped me. He whispered that he could tell even that far that it was an Indian.

Apparently the Indian had also seen us; but as he rapidly drew near us we saw that he was staring straight ahead like a sleepwalker, and muttering some unintelligible gibberish. He let out a frightful yell when we grabbed him, and fought like a madman. We found him unarmed, and bleeding from a dozen cuts on his face and neck, none of them serious. Gray tried English, Spanish, and what little Papago he knew, but the Indian appeared not to hear him and kept up his crazy gibberish. The instant we eased up our hold, he jerked loose and fled down the cañon, yelling at the top of his voice. Thinking that Paxton would capture him and take him on into camp, we did not follow.

By that time Gray and I were very much mystified and not a little worried. For a few moments we considered going on up the cañon in search of Harrigan; but the moon, which had been shining down the cañon from the east, had passed over the south rim and the rough floor of the cañon was now in darkness. Since dawn was near, we decided to wait.

At the first sign of light in the east, we struck out. We had not gone a hundred yards when we heard, somewhere in the cañon ahead of us, two shots. Gray said they were rifle-shots.

We hurried on, watching sharply for a trap. Perhaps half an hour after we heard those shots, we rounded a bend in the cañon and saw a man crawling on hands and knees toward us. This time it was Harrigan.

Harrigan, like the Indian, was bleeding from a dozen knife-cuts about the face. His clothing was smeared with blood, his voice was husky, his muscles twitched violently, and his eyes were the staring, burning eyes of a madman. Recalling those two shots, we looked for bullet-wounds, but there were none. As none of the knife-

wounds were serious, we gave him a drink of water, got him on his feet, and started down the cañon.

THAT trip down the cañon, with no water, and with Harrigan delirious and having to be carried most of the way, was like a nightmare. Fortunately, Paxton had not bothered with the crazy Indian but, suspecting that something was wrong, had hurried to camp and returned with Mounted Inspector Beers, our horses, and supplies. A day in camp put Harrigan in shape to travel back to Mexizona, but he still seemed dazed and unable to talk sense.

With Harrigan sick under guard in Agent Gray's home, we outfitted again, took fresh mounts, and under the guidance of two men who knew the San Hermos country, spent a week searching the hills and cañons. Near the mouth of San Hermos Pass we found unmistakable evidence of a camp where pack-trains from Mexico met pack-trains coming from the direction of Tucson. We found no buried opium nor cartridges; but neither did we find anything to contradict Harrigan's story. As for the crazy Indian, he was never seen again.

Back in Mexizona we found that Harrigan had made a rapid recovery, had eluded his guard one night, and escaped. He had left a note for me. The note said he was going to Tucson on important business and would be back in two days. He never came back.

Within a week we heard that Pedro Galupas, the Mexican Secret Service agent, was mysteriously missing, and that Señor Miguel de Quero had left hurriedly for Mexico City. We have never heard of either man since.

About a month after I left Mexizona, Agent Gray sent me a clipping from a Los Angeles paper giving a brief account of the finding of a white man floating in the bay at Mazatlan. His throat had been cut, but no mention was made of any other injuries, or of any scars. Papers in his pockets indicated that he had been a captain in Madero's army, and that his name was Patrick Hallan. Among these papers was also a letter addressed to "P. Hartley." This letter was from an American firm suspected of smuggling silks and ivories over the Mexican border.

SIX months later came a brief report from one of our men in El Paso. A man caught smuggling opium—obviously not Lieutenant Patrick Harrigan—had told what our agent described as "a weird tale of sixty thousand dollars' worth of opium and a lot of ammunition buried somewhere in the San Hermos country." The prisoner claimed that a "Captain Hallan," formerly with Madero, had told him the story and had showed him a map he had bought for two hundred pesos from a Mexican in Juarez! This, remember, was about five months after "Captain Hallan" had been found floating in the bay at Mazatlan!

There the case rests in our "open file."

We have a number of such cases, but whenever the boys get to swapping experiences it's always of the Harrigan affair they ask first. Has anyone heard again of Lieutenant Patrick Harrigan? Was he actually a soldier of fortune, or just a clever smuggler? Will anyone ever find that buried opium and that thirty thousand rounds of ammunition? What happened to Harrigan that night? What connection did that crazy Indian have with the affair? Who was the white man found floating in the bay at Mazatlan with his throat cut?

"Quién sabe?" one of the border riders will answer. And there it ends. The Harrigan affair is still a border mystery.

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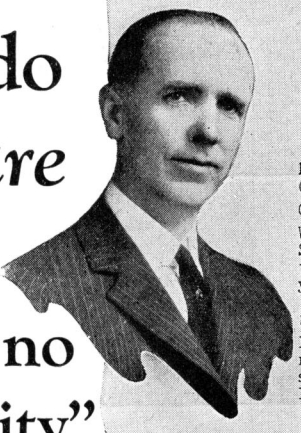

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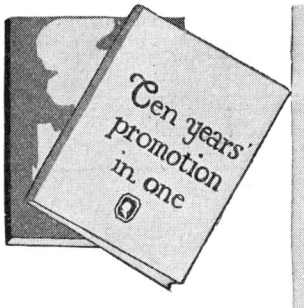

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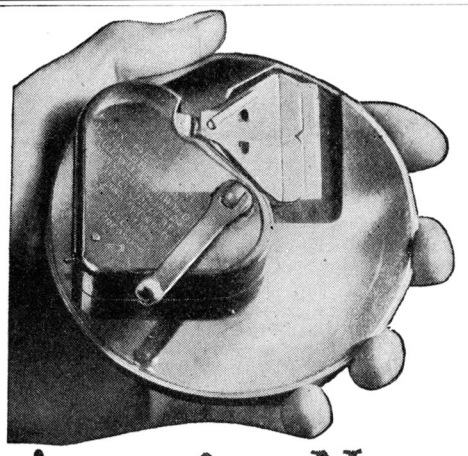

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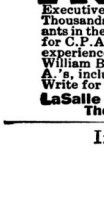

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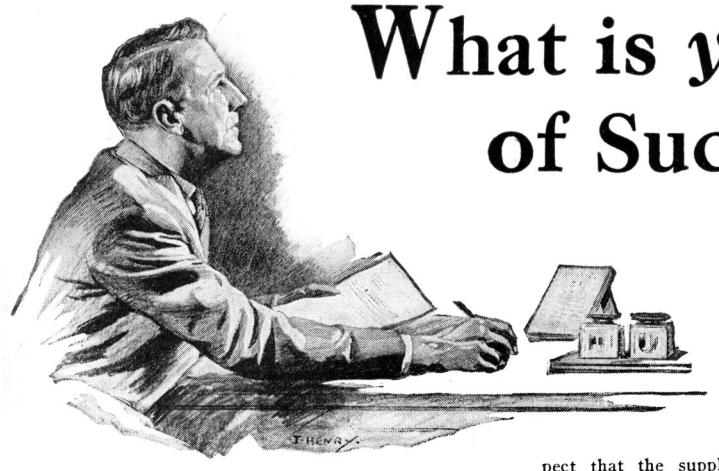

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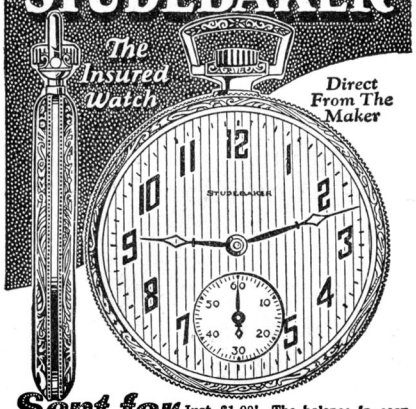

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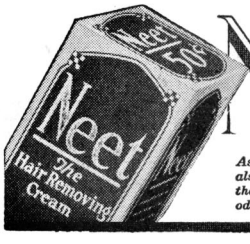

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FOR twenty-two years Leo Crane has been in the Government service, mostly in the Southwest, in charge of various Indian reservations—Navajo, Pueblo, Hopi, Chemehuevi and others. He well knows "The Great American Desert,"—its aboriginal folk and the white miners, prospectors and cattle-men who make up its scanty population. Out of this knowledge came his "The Indians of the Enchanted Desert" and other noted works; and now he has written for our readers a splendid group of stories dealing with this surviving remnant of frontier life. Be sure to read the first of these, which will appear, along with many other good stories by able writers, in—

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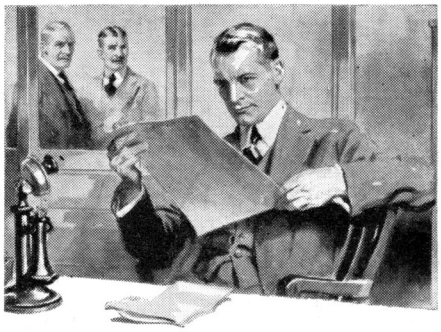

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