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MONTH-END EDITION

VOLUME XXVII NUMBER 1

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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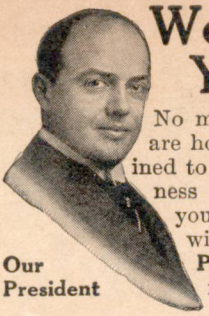

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXVII. JANUARY 15, 1913. No. 1.

Free Rein

By Frederick R. Bechdolt

Author of "The 'Old Man' of Eagle Pass," "The Pot of Gold," Etc.

Time came when Jack Moore needed a free rein before he could find his pace. He was a thoroughbred, and son of a Western railroad king. A young animal, if he's thoroughbred, always starts from the stable the same way. He goes into the air. Try to check him too closely and what does he do? Breaks a trace, or maybe smashes everything before he's done. Ease up on the reins; give him a free head; he takes his first plunges, and then it's out of him. He's down and ready for the day's work. How true this is of men as well as of horses is the moral of this fine story. Jack indulges in a mad plunge in a region of gold and greed, finds his feet after the perilous leap, and settles into a steady stride.

(*A Complete Novel*)

GIVE him his head; he'll steady down to his stride the quicker for it."

The room had that remote quiet which only top-floor offices, guarded by long suites and signs of "Private" may possess. Street noises came faint here from depths remote. Somewhere beyond the door of leaded glass a battery of typewriters was clacking. But these things penetrated as suggestions merely; they did not intrude. The two men had the place undisturbed. They belonged to a common type—close-cut hair of iron-gray, and close-clipped mustaches over firm lips. About the eyes of both were many fine, radiating lines gathered through long years. On the features of him who had spoken were amusement and something like solicitude. The other, here with his old friend, had allowed some worry to betray itself through what was usually an iron mask.

"You're talking of horses now," he said, with a little irritation.

"Horses," said the first speaker, "and men. Listen. A young animal, if he's thoroughbred, always starts from the stable the same way. He goes into the air. Try to check him too closely, and what does he do? Breaks a trace, or maybe smashes everything before he's done. Ease up on the reins; give him a free head; he takes his first plunges, and then it's out of him. He's down and ready for the day's work. Now, take that boy of yours. You can make him do as you want, I dare say. All right. Say that you do, and that you hold him tight, and he drops into the

rut of business. I've seen fellows like that, and they got it out of them later on with ugly consequences. Jack's grandfather came overland in a wagon train, and started gold hunting with a pick and shovel, didn't he? And you broke away from *his* railroad interests when you were in your twenties to come down here and build your own system. The boy's clean strain; you can see it in his pedigree. I always liked a thoroughbred to drive, but I never saw one that I didn't have to give those first few plunges to. Jack will go and take his chances. And he'll go up in the air a good bit, too. Maybe he'll fall in with crooks——"

"Lord!" said the other. "That's it. I don't want to see him——"

"Easy now! He'll meet crooks, and they'll swindle him; and he'll get into bad company, and they'll bleed him. And he'll wake up some fine morning, and see what's happened. Then the good things in him will make him sick of the bad company; the hard sense that he's inherited will make him understand why he was bunkoed. He'll find his feet, and then he'll take life at a steady stride. Better all this now than when he's in his thirties."

There was a silence. At length the other nodded. "Right!" said he. "The time's come when he needs free rein."

Down in the street whose noises rose faintly toward the top floor, a strange excitement was in the air. Through the crash of traffic and the muffled roar of sidewalk travel, it spread silently like a contagion. It seized many; men and women from all the walks of life. In the day of war you see such an epidemic, but only war can grip men as universally as a gold rush.

The desert, silent, wanton in its alternate grimness and allurement, had shown a fragment of its yellow horde. From a far, sun-baked hill of malapi whose dark, gaunt summit reached toward a blazing sky, a prospector had called in a voice which thirst had reduced to something like a croak the one word *"Gold!"* And for a radius of two thousand miles the multitudes had echoed this cry until the roar reverberated over half the world.

This afternoon while the two keen-eyed men of finance were talking in the sequestered office, the city below their feet was tense. The shrill, ear-piercing music of the newsboys was set to that one-word libretto—*"Gold!"* Lean-faced clerks, shabby in their neatness, whispered it to one another over their figure columns; fleshy men, hard-eyed from long experience in fleecing their fellows, became florid with the excitement which the desert's bait had given them; youths with their hopes ahead of them, and old, broken timeservers whom the years had robbed of their last opportunity read the black headlines on the evening papers with eyes that flamed.

For this was no rumored strike to be to-day's excitement and to-morrow's joke. Gold was a fact. A large fact. There was much of it. Big ore bodies, rich values. Millions lying in those sun-baked hills.

One camp had come into existence; now its mines were shipping. Incredulity on the part of the public had given way to belief. The new-made millionaires, who yesterday had been wage earners, reserved parlor suites in the city's most luxurious hotels, and bade their chauffeurs break the city's speed ordinances on the boulevards. All that was old—a year old.

But recently, farther out in the desert, where the wilderness was more savage, where it had been hitherto untrodden, where men had died of thirst seeking its secrets, a prospector, foolhardy in his daring, had lingered, until one day he struck his pick into rock so rich that the world gasped on reading the assay reports.

Then had come posting of location notices, driving of stakes, pitching of tents, and creaking freight wagons had hauled into those sun-stricken wastes the material from which men made a town. A roaring camp. Gallows frames sprang up on the naked hillsides. Autos—as gray and swift as desert lizards—roared through the sagebrush. A rich camp. Ore that yielded ten thou-

sand dollars to the ton; ore that yielded fifteen thousand dollars; ore that yielded twenty thousand dollars. Ten dollars for a one-pound pebble!

The city was clamoring this afternoon—clamoring with the lust to go forth and seize hot auriferous fragments, to tear them from the desert. Hundreds were laying their plans to set forth on the morrow.

Jack Moore, whom his father's friend had likened to a young, blooded horse chafing in the harness at the beginning of the day's journey, sat in one of the downtown hotels. It was a place where mining engineers sojourned. Nowadays they were in a majority among the guests.

Jack Moore sat in one of the big leather-upholstered chairs. His face showed that he was his father's son. But he lacked the close-clipped gray mustache and the many fine, radiating lines about the corners of the eyes. Also he lacked that firmness of the lips. His mouth curved easily; his eyes were straight looking; they were wide with the believing eagerness of youth—eyes that had not yet learned to narrow in examination of what lay beneath the skin of others. A slim young fellow in his early twenties.

About him moved the ever-passing throng. In that throng the sons of the desert, whose profession was to seek out its riches and to appraise them. Brown-skinned men, with lips all cracked by sun and wind. Their faces looked like the faces of Apaches save that their light eyes often gave a startling contrast to their cheeks of copper hue. They were talking of many things—of new strikes, of startling ore values, of water holes gone dry, of wooden headboards where no headboards had been the year before. With equal terseness they discussed wealth and striving and death. They had seen all of them.

Pasadena nor club nor polo had known Jack Moore for a week. He had spent his days sitting here listening to such fragments as fell to him from the lips of these bronzed, lean, resolute men, looking eagerly at their faces, whereon the experience of deeds was written. He was in the grip of a deep, huge longing. For he was beholding adventurers. And he would be one of their company.

This afternoon, sitting in the deep leather-cushioned chair, in the midst of this throng of desert men, Jack Moore showed by lighted eye and flushed cheek and curving lip that he was happy. In that happiness was all the eagerness of youth—an eagerness mingled with a diffidence. For close by him sat a bronzed mining engineer with whom he had managed to scrape acquaintance.

In the attitude of a petitioner, Jack procured speech from this other. Like a beggar receiving alms, he gathered in the words—stories of lost mines found again; stories of men who had outfaced death alone in a waterless land; stories of the desert's treasure-trove.

A noisy group came through the lobby. "Sam Powers," said the engineer; and in the midst of the group Jack saw a man with big-boned and honest face which had been flayed by the sun until it had peeled raw in spots. A wide-shouldered man, meant for khakis or overalls, but wearing now such atrocities in suit and tie and shirt as city clothiers had yielded to his taste. On the ready-made cravat six diamonds glared at one another over a chunk of gold.

"Sam Powers!" Jack repeated.

"He made his strike last month—an accident. They were looking for a place to build their camp fire, and kicked some rubble off of the outcropping."

Mutely Jack watched the freshly hatched Crœsus, who paused now near by, and drew from out a canvas sack a bit of dark rock. Holding this before him so that those about him could see—"That's the stuff!" he cried. "Don't look much, does it? Well, it goes ten thousand to the ton. It does! Come on, boys, I'm buying! *Wine!*" He shouted the last word, and passed on to the barroom. As the swinging doors flapped behind the group, Jack heard the voice of Sam Powers shouting his

order to the white-aproned servitors: "Wine!"

And though wine to him was something which went properly at its proper occasion, being otherwise a vulgarity, Jack felt something like a thrill. He had heard the adventurer come home, and it made him envious.

Late that afternoon Jack left the hotel. He hurried home, for he had spoken his longings to his father that same morning. And his father had as yet given neither assent nor disapproval, but had hidden whatever feelings he might own beneath that iron mask of repression which he always carried with him.

At dinner nothing was said upon the topic of adventuring. But later the two faced each other in the library. Apropos of the first excuse which he could find, Jack gave enthusiastic description of Sam Powers.

His father smiled. "That fellow," said he, "risked his life to get about one-tenth of what you have waiting for you, Jack. You don't need to go gold seeking."

"I know," said Jack. "Don't you see —it's not the money. But it's the other thing. Those fellows—the way they get it—it's the getting it, that's it."

"Since you spoke to me this morning," said Moore quietly, "I've thought the matter over. And I've come to this conclusion." He was speaking slowly. Jack was tense, listening. "You—use —your—own—judgment."

After Jack had thanked him, the pair did not come back to the subject again. Nor for two days did Moore say anything in the way of advice. But on the evening of the second day, when they stood together in the middle of the crowd that filled the lobby of the station, he gripped his son's hand, and looked him in the eyes.

"I've put ten thousand dollars to your credit, Jack," he said quietly, "and you'll use your own judgment. It's your money—part of what is coming to you later. Stand on your own feet. And when you're done with it, why, come back home. And now you'll have to run to make that train. Good-by."

Their grip tightened. Jack sped to catch his Pullman. From the steps he looked back, and saw his father's face. It was looking after him, but it was to him inscrutable.

CHAPTER II.

The railroad yards extend a mile from the union station; where their network ends there is another depot. Mean streets surround it; the small frame structure contains a single waiting room and a ticket office. In this waiting room while Jack Moore and his father were clasping hands a mile away, two men stood talking in a peculiarly expressionless undertone, an undertone accompanied by infinitesimal movements of the lips. The raiment of one was punctilious after a somewhat flashy fashion down to the gleaming shoes. That of the other was equally punctilious—in its dusty carelessness. In Stetson hat and flannel shirt and heavy tan shoes it said harmoniously that its wearer was one accustomed to the open places. The flashy man was speaking:

"Let me know if there's anything good out at that end. I wouldn't take your chances, though, Charlie, unless it was something big. If you fall there you fall hard."

The full face and hard jaw of the other remained expressionless. His lips moved just enough to speak.

"Don't worry," he said comfortably. "I know that end, and I like it. And now——" He smiled a little.

The man with the shining raiment looked a trifle disconsolate.

"All right," said he. "But come outside."

They walked together around a corner of the building. The last speaker reached into his trousers pocket, and pulled out a thick roll of bills. He handed them to his companion, who carefully stripped them and counted them. That process showed first a one-hundred-dollar note; below that came a twenty-dollar note and a ten; then followed a five, and then numerous ones and twos. At the end of these came a core composed of Confederate cur-

rency. This core comprised the bulk of the roll. The full-faced man counted, moving his lips.

"Two hundred," he announced. He turned his cold eyes to the other. "Now," said he, "good-by and good luck."

He picked up a single prosperous-looking Gladstone bag, and went forth to catch the train which was thundering into the station.

Jack Moore had already put aside the memory of his father's face as he had last seen it at the union depot. He was in the thrall of a large exaltation. Although he had traveled much, he felt as one feels who is setting forth alone on his first journey. He had managed to secure a section by himself. He was sitting there, his mind busy with visions—dreams of the desert which pursued one another in swift succession.

From his reverie he awakened at the stopping of the train at the river station. A moment later he saw the porter coming down the aisle with a heavy Gladstone bag. Behind the porter came a man of middle age. This one wore the traditional Stetson and the flannel shirt that goes with it. His full face and firm jaw, combined with a certain quiet assertion in his bearing, suggested to Jack's mind both experience and means. The porter set down the Gladstone in the section directly across the aisle from Jack. The stranger dropped into his seat, and immediately unfolded an evening paper. The train was already moving.

Jack turned his face to the window and watched the suburbs slip by. His visions of the desert and his dreams of the desert's adventure had been disturbed. A dissatisfaction was within him. It was born of what he had seen in this newcomer—or, rather, in the latter's clothing. It made him critical of his own clothing.

Jack had already dressed for the desert. He wore khakis, soft shirt, Stetson, and laced miner's boots, an outfit which he had carefully selected, whose selection had made him thrill with anticipation, for clothes have always suggestions of their own surroundings. Now the thrills were gone.

This traveler across the aisle bore on his Stetson and flannel shirt the unmistakable earmarks of the mining man. But the raiment was unobtrusive; the light-gray suit would pass unnoticed on a city street. As for his own get-up, Jack felt that it had in it something of the theatrical. It made him sense the incongruity of the khakis and his untanned, unlined face. He was dissatisfied.

The train roared on that evening through a land of orange groves and olives. In his section, Jack watched his fellow passengers; he began to pick from their number those who, like himself, were bound for the land of high-grade ores—a pair of full-girthed, diamond-wearing fellows of that breed who term themselves "sporting men"; a bronzed and lean old-timer in much-worn khakis, who looked as if the alkali dust of Southwestern deserts had settled into his wrinkles beyond erasure; two loud-voiced young women, who laughed shrilly and had rouge upon their cheeks.

In the buffet car, Jack found others, for the most part men still in their thirties—men of business, gamblers, mining engineers, and a gentle-speaking, square-jawed prize fighter. Here, and at the tables in the diner, the air was full of talk on the one subject—the desert's gold. On all lips was the name of the new camp whither these passengers were rushing, the mecca of their golden hopes, the town of Malapi. In the smoking room of his Pullman, Jack heard men striving to outvie each other's stories of bizarre adventure and suddenly discovered riches. He remained silent, listening. And he noticed how his neighbor across the aisle was always silent, taking no part in the discussions, carrying himself with impassive mien, inscrutable.

After one of those troublous nights which all men experience on sleeping cars, Jack awoke the next morning with the odor of sagebrush in his nostrils. The train had stopped. He rose and went to the dressing room. As he hur-

ried through his toilet, that keen, wild smell came in through the cinder screen. It thrilled him. The stop was of long duration. Jack was done with his shaving in time to go outside and walk up and down the depot platform. Near by a single row of one-story buildings showed the first signs of morning awakening; behind them the gray-brown hills rose into a cloudless sky. In the air was a suggestion of great, wide spaces. Jack breathed it, and became exalted. This was the desert, the land of gold and adventure! Its newly risen sun smote him upon the cheek like a hot hand.

All day the train rushed through an arid land, whose stark rocks gave forth heat waves against a brassy sky. The passengers about him spoke unendingly of gold. Jack listened to them, and watched the hard, relentless landscape slip by. Its very inhospitality appealed to him. For he had come with youth's spirit of conquest.

The next morning he found himself —still dazed with sleep, and with the unpleasant memory of a hastily swallowed breakfast, which he had wrestled for in a restaurant half tent and half pine boards—sitting in the tonneau of a long gray automobile. The machine bore deep dents upon its sides; its engines were hoodless. A gaunt monster, unlovely, stripped of all useless adornment. Even as he settled down into his place, with his grips somewhere at his feet, and crowded by fellow passengers, the engines gave forth a throbbing roar; the machine swooped in a dizzy half circle, and the little railroad town dwindled in their wake. Jack watched a dried lake floor, shimmering in the morning sun, as it came toward them. A hill followed whereon twisted yuccas sprawled.

"Excuse me," a voice said beside him through the droning of the engines and the rushing wind, "you're on my foot."

Jack apologized, withdrawing his booted leg from where the last lurch of the machine had entangled it with the legs of his neighbor. It was the man who had occupied the section across the aisle from him. The apology paved the way for conversation. In such intervals as came that day, between choking alkali dust and the weariness of enduring blazing heat, Jack found himself asking questions, which the other answered tersely, enwrapped in what seemed like a decided reserve. But when they swung down a crooked gulch, all lined with hideous gallows frames upon the flanking hilltops, and came in sight of the blazing lights of Malapi below them, the stranger, of his own accord, offered a word.

"If you're new to the camp," said he, "better stop at the Grand Central. It's a decent hotel."

Jack thanked him, and followed his advice. He found the hotel as the other had said, decent. Here he washed away the dust of the desert and dined in a crowded room amid the most heterogeneous throng in all his experience. Then he set forth to see the camp whose populace of fortune hunters he had joined.

As he passed the office desk, Jack saw his traveling companion, who looked over his shoulder and nodded briefly, then went on talking with the clerk.

"I want you to put this in the safe for me," said the full-faced man. "Name, Charles Brown, Room 116." He handed a thin, lank roll of bills across the desk. On the outside of this roll was a one-hundred-dollar treasury note; it inclosed just two twenty-dollar greenbacks. The clerk nodded, took the money, and locked it in the safe. Meantime Charles Brown, his fingers gripping a thick bundle of currency, comprising for the most part the fiat money of a lost cause, walked out through the door, to see what he could of the camp of Malapi, of whose fortune hunters he, too, had become one.

CHAPTER III.

The narrow main street of Malapi wound down a gulch; it followed the first burro trail whereon the daring prospectors, with sun-flayed cheeks and eyes aflame, had brought their chattels to the golden ledges. In its dust still

lingered the scent of trampled sage-brush. The flanking buildings were for the most part made of yellow pine boards; occasionally a more pretentious structure was covered with shingles; quite frequently tent roofs topped wooden walls.

In this street, although it was now evening, traffic passed like a swift mill stream flowing down a sluice. Four-mule teams drew heavy freight wagons. The drivers, gray with desert dust, sat on lofty seats plying whip and curses with equal freedom. A burro train, laden with ore sacks; a lurching auto, filled with khaki-clad mine owners; a squad of foot passengers who wore canteens slung over their shoulders; and several burly drill runners returning from their day's work in the mines —these elements of Malapi's population paraded by the hotel as Charles Brown came forth. He looked upon them with unwidened eyes. Only the burros with their canvas sacks of high-grade ore got any shade of expression from his face. As they went by, his eyes narrowed a trifle; and for a moment he seemed to be in thought. Then he took his place in the passing throng and walked among the others down the street.

Jack Moore saw him pass. Jack was still standing near the hotel door. He watched the procession of desert dwellers, miners, and burden-bearing animals with eager curiosity. It was the first fulfillment of a promise; the picturesque and the bizzarre were facts! There had been times when he had almost feared lest the desert would prove commonplace; lest all the storied things of the old West would have vanished. But now he beheld them, facts before his eager, widened eyes.

A new land this, and raw. It waited still for its conquerors. And of those conquerors he would be one. He had come to do his share in the work of development. Opportunity waited here for him. He thought of the ten thousand dollars lying to his credit. With that amount of money a man could do much. Tramways, freighting, mining; his mind went from one to another. What it was to be he did not know. Time would bring him his chance, and he would pick it wisely. Of one thing he was sure: he would go forth somewhere into these dark, gaunt hills, whose rocks emanated jigging heat waves all the long day, and he would taste their hardships, encountering their risks; and when he had done with them, those hills would be yielding something more than they had given before.

Now he would see this camp of Malapi, and watch its much-storied life. He took his place in the stream of traffic and walked slowly down the winding street.

Behind him, a trio of young fellows, copper-tanned and wearing the inevitable khaki, swung along; he could hear them talking busily of apexes, dips, and outcroppings; one of them bore on his shoulder a surveyor's transit. In front of him, two gray-haired men, with cheeks as brown as those of the mining engineers, were discussing some question of ore values.

"And inside of a week we'll strike the main body," one was saying. A burst of music from an automatic player-piano came forth from a tent saloon and drowned the rest of his words. Then: "Three thousand on the average; that's safe." It was the voice of the other now.

Listening to these, Jack noted a board building whose plate-glass windows gave it unusual elegance on this makeshift street. He looked closer; beneath the glow of incandescent lamps he read the sign upon the window: "Brown & Co., Brokers." Beneath that, "Mining Stocks and Bonds." Within the plate-glass windows was a large office with many desks, ornate screens of gilded wire, and wickets like a bank. Evidently finance was here already. Among its neighbors, the building bore an air of substantial backing. It suggested money, from the plate-glass windows back to the huge vault door.

Before that same building, Charles Brown had paused a few minutes ago; the sign had attracted his attention, "Brown & Co." After brief contemplation of the interior, he had passed on.

Something like a gleam was in his impassive eyes.

An assay office farther down the street stopped Jack once more. He watched the man within, bent over a flaming Bunsen burner, whose blue glow lighted his face with weird reflections. Next door, a saloon occupied a huge tent with boarded walls. Curiosity rather than the desire to drink turned Jack's footsteps into the place. He was startled by the sight of an ornate bar and furnishings, backed by a mirror worthy of any city drinking place.

While he sipped a high ball he took appraisement. Two broad-faced men in miners' garb, still dusty from their work, their garments all black with oil, were shaking dice for champagne. The loser tossed a ten-dollar gold piece to pay for the bottle. In the rear of the room a seedy-looking individual was laying bets upon a faro table. A listless man, who was in his shirt sleeves and wore a green eyeshade, turned the cards with an air of huge weariness; once, twice, then, after the third time, raked in the seedy man's money. As apathetically as the dealer, the player placed a second bet. Jack saw that it was a twenty-dollar gold piece. He began to wonder if there were such a thing as silver in the town of Malapi.

The bartender, immaculate in stiffly starched linen, glanced keenly at Jack's face.

"Just come," he made it as an assertion.

Jack nodded. "How did you know?" he asked.

"The sun hasn't got at you yet," said the other.

Jack indicated the seedy man at the gambling table. "A mining man?" he asked.

The barman allowed a faint disgust to show as he shook his head. "A booster," said he.

"You mean to say," said Jack, "they let their touts use gold here!"

"Sure. No one plays with silver in Malapi—not yet," he grinned. "Wait five years and you'll see them putting two-bit pieces on the layouts, and the games glad to get it. But not now. Taking a look at the town?" Jack nodded. "Go down to the Great Western Club. You'll see games there that *are* games. Twenty of them. And big play."

The pair of miners had gulped down their wine and departed.

"They must get big wages," said Jack.

"Big enough," said the bartender carelessly. "But chances are they ain't playing *their* gold. Ever hear of high grading?"

Somewhere in Jack's memory the expression lingered; he strove to place it. "Ore stealing," said the bartender. "More than half those fellows are carrying out high-grade rock every night in their clothes. Good for business, but bad for the owners. There'll be trouble some day. Shootin'. You watch and see if I ain't right."

With these new bits of wisdom, Jack left the place, and resumed his walk down Malapi's crooked main street. A camp where the decoys had to use gold pieces at the gambling tables; where thieving miners shook dice for champagne at double prices; where already violence was foreseen. Truly it was the West, the West of old, the wild West.

Out beyond the glare of the electric lamps and beyond the velvet black mysteries the moon was peering over a ragged hilltop. In its silver glow Jack beheld the rock escarpments of that summit outlined against the faintly illumined night sky. Beetling pinnacles upthrown by some fiery convulsion, they stood above the seething camp, silent, grim, implacable: the desert unchanged and weird in its grandeur. From off those steeps the night breeze swept, whispering some secret to the rocks. Into the jammed street through its hundred smells came the keen, wild odor of the sage. Tasting this breath of the wilderness, Jack paused, and for the moment the knowledge of the hectic crowd and the flaring lamps went from him before the mystic presence of the desert. It was as if some one had laid an alluring hand on him, bid-

ding him come. He felt the grip of a mighty longing. Out there lay the unknown, the struggle and the adventure. For these things he had come.

When he had gulped down his young emotion and resumed his walk it was with the determination that he would on the morrow begin to look about him; he would lay plans for an expedition; he would do as others had done; he would go out and seek his gold among those ragged summits.

For an hour Jack wandered among the sights of Malapi. In the memory of that evening various things remained for a long time, silhouetted: a long canvas-roofed interior upon whose pine floor booted men—mule drivers, prospectors, and miners—waltzed to the music of a cornet and an automatic piano, their partners listless women with rouged cheeks; a pair of brawlers on the sidewalk struggling in each other's arms; a cabin made from empty liquor bottles laid one on the other like bricks and cemented with adobe; two Englishmen, pink-cheeked, in visored caps and tweeds, their trousers uprolled above their tan shoes; the only things which Jack had seen in Malapi unaltered by the desert.

Evening was growing late when Jack made his way into the portals of the Great Western Club. In Monte Carlo he had once seen gaming halls where hundreds staked their gold; but that spectacle faded into tame insignificance beside this.

In Monte Carlo, men in conventional black and white, and women in low-necked evening dress had smiled politely while croupiers gleaned their money from them with the rakes; the very marbles had rolled decorously, to drop daintily from their grooves. Liveried attendants and onyx columns had given the impression of a proper function, to be gone through with if one wanted to do the regular thing.

In Malapi two flannel-shirted burlies with long-barreled forty-five single-action revolvers conspicuous at their thighs, sat beside the door, scrutinizing every comer through imperturbable and narrowed eyes. The long room roared with interminable noises: the drone of croupiers, the shouts of dicers calling to the cubes to bring good fortune, the charlatanlike invitations of Klondike dealers who summoned the crowd to try their luck, the babel of two hundred tongues, invoking, cursing, laughing, all together at the grim goddess Chance. Only at the faro layouts, where the dealers slipped the cards in careful silence from the boxes and the lookouts scanned every bet, mute on their high perches, was there decorum. And here, in the faces of those before the tables, was that mighty tenseness that means real gambling of the iron-nerved kind.

Gold was on the tables; winners held it in their hands, and those who slaked their thirst slammed it noisily upon the bar. Through the air laden with its many noises came a constant undertone whose burden was the one word, *gold*.

The bar occupied one side of the great room, extending from wall to wall. Half a dozen white-aproned men ran to and fro behind it attending on the wants of those in front. Jack had seen all these things, when his eyes fell on a somewhat bulky form in gray suit and flannel shirt. He nodded to his traveling companion. Brown, talking to one of the bartenders with what seemed like the careless intimacy of long acquaintance, returned the bow. His lips relaxed a little; he, too, was seeing what there was to see, and learning what there was to learn. At the moment it had occurred to him that Jack might be worth at least passing study.

The loneliness of a crowd had just begun to oppress Jack Moore. He had also that alluring invitation from the wilderness, delivered by the night wind a short time before. Brown's appearance and bearing had impressed him during their journey. Perhaps this older man might be willing to tell him something of the country. A diffidence showed in Jack's smile as he walked over to this chance acquaintance, the only man he knew in Malapi.

"Well, son, seeing the sights?" Jack thought there was a heartiness in the

voice; it warmed him. In five minutes he was telling Brown his experiences of the evening; five minutes later they were drinking wine together at the bar. It seemed to be the custom of the camp; and Jack had a boy's fear of doing what others did not. Finding in these crowds of strangers some one to whom he had talked before, was to young Moore like the discovery of a water hole in an arid land. And there was about Brown a solidity which made Jack certain that he had picked well.

"The Great Western," said Brown, "is our biggest place. Of course, we're sort of proud of it." His manner was proprietary. "If you care to, I'll show you about."

They finished the bottle of champagne; in this high altitude the wine ran through Jack's veins like fire.

And had that wine been only water he could not have noticed—so skillful was Brown's method—how the older man was leading him on. Until, when he had told all about himself and who he was, he felt Brown's hand on his arm.

"My boy," there was a warmth in the voice now, "I got my start in your grandfather's mines." He laughed. "That was years ago, before the days of Tonopah. But it was the money I made up North there that staked me to buy the Montezuma when they all thought the proposition was worthless. I knew your father well when he wasn't any older than you." He reached into his pocket and brought forth the bulky roll of bills. "Another bottle, Bill," said he. "I've loaded myself with paper money on that Eastern trip, you see."

The bartender, whose name by the way was Jacob, and who knew nothing of Brown or of that Eastern trip, preserved the inscrutable smile of his kind as he uncorked the champagne.

Jack's training included champagne at dinner; his experience included too few escapades to teach him the value of a steady head. He saw Brown drinking, and he drank. And before the end of that bottle he was telling Brown of his hopes.

After that, Jack was ready for friendship; and his critical faculties had failed to work. He never saw the swiftness with which the older man slipped into the rôle of mentor and confidant. He remembered the last portion of that evening as a sort of vague blur, wherein were mingled a third bottle of wine, a terrific ordeal of trying to follow the course of a roulette marble every time it spun about its groove, and some time, when he was on his way back to the hotel, leaning heavily on Brown's arm, a tramp of many feet together, with a hurly-burly of loud voices. Among these voices he remembered that several kept shouting something about a rope.

That last episode occurred an hour or so after midnight. Brown, bearing a considerable portion of Jack's weight on one elbow, paused by the street's edge to watch a surging crowd go by. In the van of that crowd were two men whose faces Brown scrutinized with cold attention. Terror-whitened faces, and blood was upon them.

"What is on?" Brown asked one who was not so swift in passing as the others.

"They caught 'em up at the Lucky Boy," was the answer, "holdin' up the watchman to get the high-grade ore. They're runnin' them out of camp. Next week we're going to have a marshal, and stop this high grading."

Brown went on in the wake of the mob, with Jack upon his arm. At the hotel, he told the clerk Jack's name and room number. Also he told the name and standing of Jack's father.

"You see," he said, as he gave orders for attentions, "I've got the boy to look out for. He's come here to invest, and I promised his daddy I'd keep an eye on him."

The memory of Brown's single Gladstone bag faded from the mind of the clerk before that information. And certain intentions as to exacting advance rent made at the nonarrival of any Brown trunks with the evening baggage, went promptly glimmering. As to Jack, he went to bed under the ministrations of two bell boys.

CHAPTER IV.

The next morning, Charles Brown arose early. If the champagne of the previous evening had bothered him in the slightest, that fact failed to show on his countenance. His cheeks were fresh, his eye was as keen and as hard as a hawk's; nor had his jaw lost any of its firmness. He ate his breakfast with good appetite, and read the camp's two-sheet paper with interest, particularly the story which related to the attempted holdup of the night before. At the end of the meal he sat for some moments, thinking. Then he arose and went out of the hotel like a man who has on hand important business demanding immediate attention.

First he walked straight down the street to the large plate-glass window which had attracted his attention—and later that of Jack—on the evening before. At a wicket marked "Manager" he asked for Mr. Brown.

"No one of that name here," said the man.

"The sign," said Brown quietly.

"I know," said the other, "but we're just the Malapi branch."

"Well," Brown demanded, "I want the head of the firm here."

"That," said the other, "is me. What is it?"

"I want to rent desk room."

"Space," said the manager, "is all full. Sorry we can't accommodate you, but we need all the room for ourselves. We've had a dozen applications like yours."

Brown nodded toward a corner outside of the counter and near the window. "How about that?" he asked.

"Oh, that," said the other; "if you can use it; it's too public to suit, I'd think."

"It suits me. How much?" said Brown.

"Twenty-five a week," the other announced. Brown had recourse to his plethoric roll of bills, and paid the money.

After that, he spent an hour purchasing the lease of a roll-top desk and getting a carpenter to build a railing about his office space. This latter was a hurry-up job, and Brown had to pay double for it. When he sought the hotel again his roll of bills was dwindling. At the hotel, he indited a telegram of some length to George, in Los Angeles. Then he went back to his desk, now all prepared for him. He was sitting there when Jack Moore went by an hour later.

Jack had eaten a scanty breakfast; he was wan and shaky. He had confused memories of the night's happenings. And the gist of these memories was that he had been a fool. Walking down Malapi's crooked street, he passed the plate-glass window with its legend, "Brown & Co., Brokers." He glanced within.

At a desk, prominent in its situation next the window, he saw his only acquaintance in Malapi, the man in whose company he had played the prodigal for the first time in his young life. Charles Brown was sitting, hatless, coatless, busy over some papers. At this very moment he turned in his swivel chair and apparently called some order to one of the men inside the gilded railing. The call was accompanied with a brisk jerk of the head.

A thickness of plate glass and two seconds of time can make a big barrier to knowledge. These two had shut Jack away from two salient facts. The first fact concerned the behavior of Charles Brown, who, prior to those two seconds, had been sitting with his back to the rolltop desk scanning the street with keen eyes. On seeing Jack, he had turned abruptly to the desk. The second fact concerned the words which Brown addressed to the man in the wicket. These words were a request for a key to the office.

Not knowing these facts, Jack drew his own conclusions, and these came naturally enough.

"Brown," he said. "By Jove! I might have known it. Why couldn't I pick some one beside one of the biggest mining men in Malapi to make an ass of myself in front of?"

The dejection which comes after youth's first escapade is accompanied

by many misgivings; and these misgivings concern themselves largely with appearances. A spirit of emulation had been largely responsible for Jack's drinking. He wanted to live the mining-camp life and to carry himself well—just as others did. And now he felt that he had failed dismally. He spent a gloomy morning walking about the place. At lunch he saw Brown in the hotel dining room.

Jack approached the table with an apologetic smile. "I'm afraid," he said, "I made a nuisance of myself last night."

Brown stopped picking at the contents of one of the canary bird's bathtubs before him; he smiled quietly and shook his head. "You handled yourself first rate," said he, "considering your cargo. This altitude gets even the old hands at first, you know."

"Did I, honestly?" Jack began to feel easier. "I was afraid——"

The other gave a brief glance under drooping lids. "You wanted to plunge at faro," he said lightly, "but I dragged you away." He busied himself once more at the side dishes.

"Awfully good of you," said Jack. The waiter came for his order, and after that there was silence.

Jack's misgivings began to vanish; he had carried himself with credit, then; and Brown said that old heads couldn't stand that change in altitude. After all, mining-camp life wasn't half bad; not when one was gifted with the ability to take his wine like a man.

Over his dishes, Brown cast a dash of cold water on Jack's budding self-confidence. "You know," said he paternally, "you're going to drop some of your money—more than you want to—if you go after the faro the way you started last night."

Jack thanked him again, and became properly impressed with the knowledge that Brown had safeguarded his interests. Lucky for himself, he thought, that he had fallen into this man's company.

"I'm busy this afternoon; there's a deal on at the office," Brown told him over his dessert. "If you care to drop down during the evening, I'll have a talk with you over things."

"I'd be awfully glad," Jack told him heartily.

"The mines, you know," Brown went on, "are up the gulch behind the town. You might like to take a look around." He smiled carefully. "No danger of you're running amuck up there, and after supper I'll look out that you see the camp right."

He rose and left the table, saying that he had an engagement at the office. "And now," said he to himself, as he walked down the street, "that keeps him out of sight until I've had a chance to get in right."

To that process of "getting in right" Brown devoted the fore part of the afternoon. It consisted of further ingratiating himself with the men who attended the wickets nearest to his desk. By three o'clock, Brown was on "hail-fellow-well-met" terms with all of them, and knew every one by name.

"Now," said he, "let him come any time."

He slammed down the top of his desk and left the place. His steps took him straight to the Great Western Club. Like all mining-camp gambling places, this was getting a modicum of quiet afternoon play. The faro tables were busiest, and the noise of the night before was lacking. Among the devotees was a goodly sprinkling of miners off shift. In the long room were several groups of quiet-talking, hard-eyed men. These loafed before the bar or watched the players idly. It was the hour when those who lived by night had just breakfasted, and were enjoying leisure before resuming their varied vocations.

Gambler, swindler, thief, and thug, they gathered here in the Great Western Club. They talked in that expressionless undertone common to those who thrive through the credulity, the weakness, or the follies of their fellow men. They talked of percentage games, of games where the cards were marked, of loot waiting for long fingers, and of gold to be gotten by force. The freemasonry of those who pass their days outside of the pale of the

law extended over all of them. Only one requisite was needed to make a man a member of their fraternity.; that requisite was what they themselves termed "class."

Charles Brown came among them; and as he passed the different groups, men looked up to nod at him. Their leaden faces remained expressionless, devoid of any warmth; but in those brief salutations there was withal a measure of respect. One, newer than his fellows to the West, asked a neighbor who the newcomer was.

"Denver Charlie," said the other; "short-card man, phony mining stocks, and in the old days he used to do rough work. He's ready for anything, he is. Made a half a million out of Thunder Mountain." The speaker waved his hand at Brown, who passed on, with a nod, toward one who stood alone by the bar's end.

The solitary man at the end of the bar had a dark, sallow face and long, black hair. He wore a soft shirt, black string tie, and frock coat. His lips had a cruel thinness.

To Charles Brown he extended a cold, limp hand. "Just in?" he asked.

Brown nodded.

"How's the coast?" The sallow face turned enough to allow the hard, black eyes one look of swift appraisement.

In the wolf pack, when the hunt is on, he who weakens or shows a wound is promptly rended by his fellows. Charles Brown knew his own kind well. He looked the other fairly between the beady eyes. "Fine," said he. "I've half a mind to go back. It looks to me as if this camp was overplayed."

The sallow man smiled incredulously. "I got it straight," he drawled, "that you had to shake George and blow without coffee money."

Brown's hand slipped up from his trousers pocket revealing one end of his bulky roll of bills. "Let me strip it," said the other, "and if it ain't a flash, I'll buy wine." His tone, however, had altered a little.

"Drop in at my office," Brown smiled, "up near the Grand Central. Name's on the window. You'll find my desk out in front, where the head of the firm ought to be."

"You!" The sallow man showed admiration now. "Brown & Co.—is that your stall?"

Brown nodded.

"Who's that come-along you had last night?" The sallow man was showing decided interest by this time. "You nursed him careful enough."

"Look on the hotel register," said Brown; "you won't believe me. I'll tell you, to save you the trouble, though. He's Jack Moore; father owns the railroads, you know."

"Now, see here, Denver"—the sallow man had become a frank petitioner—"you can't turn anything all alone, you know. Let me in."

"I'm doin' nicely," Brown asserted, "and I've got George. He's coming. Tell me what you know about the camp."

The sallow man told everything that a week in Malapi had given him to impart. His information extended deeply into the high grading which was then going on.

"Rough work," Brown said disdainfully. "Keep away from it."

"I can see two hundred thousand in six months," said the other, and his eyes shot sparks. "It's right; I got a chance to handle every pound of crooked ore in this camp. I'll let you in, Denver."

"You mean you need money?" said Brown.

"I do, and a lot. No use stallin' with you." The sallow man talked swiftly in a sort of tense whisper. "I tell you it's big. And I've got the prettiest lay you ever heard of. No assayers to snitch. I got a mill of my own. But it takes money for burros and grub and those things. Say, Denver, if you could turn that rich come-along for a stake. It needs five thousand to start this thing big."

Brown's face suddenly became like stone. He dropped the lids over his eyes lest this other see a sudden enthusiasm which had come to him. In that moment he was dreaming dreams and seeing visions.

"Come outside," the sallow man was saying, "where none of these crooks will run a chance of piping us off. I'll give it to you straight. See what you think of it."

Brown nodded. His face still remained as expressionless as wood as they walked to the outer air. Together the pair left the street and went out into the sagebrush, where they sat and talked at great length.

The sallow man argued, explained, and set forth facts. The hope of riches made him sincere for the time.

"I'll go you, Johnson," said Brown at last. "I handle the kid. You and George will 'tend to this end."

"That puts you with the swag, and no one to watch you," the other objected.

"If you can turn it alone, go ahead," Brown bade him. "If I'm in, I don't see myself letting you or George be the main guy. Do I, now?"

There was some more remonstrance on the part of the sallow man. Brown let him talk. Then he said quietly:

"Who stakes us? My come-along. I got ten thousand in sight. I can get it if I want it to-night. I can blow with it. It's good, easy money. Now I say I'll use part of it for bank roll in your proposition. And you know your game is nothing but rough work. Then you want me to separate myself from the money and to let you glom onto it." He chuckled.

"Oh, go ahead," said Johnson. "I'll keep cases on you, all right. You won't hand me the double cross."

Brown nodded. "Now, listen. Here's your lay. To-night this kid is coming to my office. You'll blow in at ten o'clock. You're a desert mining man, see? Get your front for that. You're just in. We'll turn this with the sick-Indian game. Give him the steer for that. I'll pick him up on it. George is due at the railroad day after to-morrow. I'll meet him there, and I'll get him planted out near this camp. He'll be inside man. When he springs his talk, the kid will flash; we'll get the roll. That starts us on the rough work. You can tell those miners to begin right off and get their ore ready."

They arranged some more details, and then they parted. Brown hurried back to the hotel, where the clerk handed him a telegram. It read:

Start this afternoon. GEORGE.

He read the message, and tore it to bits. He dined early and in some haste, and so managed to leave the hotel before Jack came back from his walk.

CHAPTER V.

Jack returned to the hotel that evening dusty and somewhat weary from his walk. The afternoon had been hot, and his miner's boots were heavy to his unaccustomed feet. But up there on those Malapi hills, behind the town which had been named from them, he had seen alluring things. The summits of dark rock were hideous with a forest of gallows frames; the sheave wheels upon these creaked endlessly to rising cages. And cars ran thick upon the dumps whose rubble was already beginning to fill portions of the gorge. Gasoline engines coughed in endless staccato chorus. Miners, dusty from their toil and plastered with black oil, went to and fro.

These sights and sounds of throbbing industry awakened Jack's interest. Walking among them, watching everything with eager eyes, he beheld what thrilled his whole being: Processions of cars bound for the mill, which lay farther up the gulch; upon these cars, sitting on the ore which they were guarding, men with Winchesters. By the feet of these armed watchmen, segregated from the rock of lesser value, canvas sacks wherein was contained the high-grade ore—the precious stuff which ran as high in some cases as fifteen thousand dollars to the ton; and even in rare instances reached twenty thousand dollars.

Kindled by the sight of these sacks, Jack became emboldened, until, finding a friendly foreman, he managed to visit one of the mines. Down in the dark, earth-smelling passages, in the yellow

glow of the lamps, where the air shook with the roar of the burley drills, he watched the miners drive the holes to shoot the precious stuff from its resting place in the bosom of the hill. And, peering where the foreman's finger pointed for him, he saw there in the breast of the drift, outlined dark against the gray surrounding rock, a two-inch strip of black, the high-grade ore itself.

When he found himself again in the white daylight by the shaft mouth, his heart was beating fast; his cheeks bore a deeper flush, as if he had a fever in his bones. The lust had seized him; he was determined now; he would not waste his time in looking for other investments. Men had found these golden ledges; he would do as they had done; go forth and look. The last vestiges of uncertainty went from him; certain vague ideas of tramway projects, which had been with him in the beginning, departed. He was on fire.

It was inevitable. Older men, in high-grade camps, go forth with the same madness born of beholding the gold in its native form. Jack had caught a fever by going where its germs lay. And, remembering who had advised him to take this walk, he felt gratitude toward Brown.

At the hotel, Jack ate his dinner hastily. To his inquiry at the desk after Brown, the clerk had replied with a message:

"He says you'll find him down at the office."

Hurrying through his meal, Jack was centering his mind on a purpose. He would have a talk with Brown to-night; get his advice as to where it was best to go; and then he would organize an expedition to set forth immediately. He had noticed that morning in the registration office a crowd of men; and some one had told him how they were back from a recent stampede. At this rate, Jack told himself, there would not be a claim left in the district within three months.

With the heat of this first prospecting fever—than which there is no more gripping madness in the experience of man—Jack sought out the office of Brown & Co., brokers. A single light was burning. Brown was bending over his desk near the window; he whirled in his swivel chair as Jack entered.

"Oh," said he, "it's you. Have a good walk?" He opened a drawer and brought forth a box of ornately labeled cigars which he proferred carelessly.

Jack shook his head. "No, thanks. I'd rather smoke a cigarette." He produced his silver case and selected one, while Brown, locking within his secret soul the regret over a precious ten dollars wasted, picked one of the cigars and lighted it carelessly.

"I was up at the Lucky Boy," said Jack. "The foreman took me down, and I saw them at work. He showed me some of the high-grade ore."

Brown, having looked for some such experience, knew the cause of the light in Jack's eyes. He yawned and nodded. "Some good rock up on that hill," he agreed.

"Good rock!" cried Jack. "Well, rather! See here." He pulled a small dark fragment from his pocket. "The foreman gave it to me. He says that bit will go at least four thousand to the ton. And they don't call that high grade, either."

"Well, they oughtn't to." Brown scanned the bit of rock closely. "Humph! Yes; it ought to run four thousand, maybe five. That's nothing in Malapi. Let me see if I've got any here." He bent to one of the desk drawers, which he had laden with carefully assorted specimens of country rock gleaned from the edge of Malapi's single street. He looked them over and chose a chunk of porphyry. "That," said he, "weighs five or six pounds. It ought to be worth fifty or sixty dollars."

"Twenty thousand dollars to the ton!" Jack whistled. "I heard men talking of ore like that when I was on the train. I didn't believe it."

"Didn't come from Malapi, either." Brown smiled mysteriously. "That's something new. Wait until we let that news go out. You'll see a stampede then that *will* be a stampede."

"I say now"—Jack bent forward eagerly—"Honestly? And they don't know? Where is it?"

Brown shook his head. "Can't tell," said he tersely, and lapsed into inscrutable silence. "You see," he explained, after a moment, as if relenting his incivility, "I constantly get tips; and I've got men out prospecting all the time. Now, this proposition is a sample. We've uncovered a rich showing. It may blow up, and it may be big permanent values. But, anyhow, I've looked out to see that we get the ground pretty well covered before anything in the way of a stampede starts."

Jack's eagerness showed in his eyes and his flushed cheeks. A boy, and stricken with the great fever! Some men might have taken pity then. But Denver Charlie Brown was successful in a business where pity is the least known of the forgotten virtues. He leaned back in his chair and allowed the bait to go well down.

"You know," said Jack, with the abruptness of diffidence, "I told you last night I'd come to invest. I've made up my mind to let other things alone and go in for mining. Of course I'm ignorant. I know that. But lots of fellows just as ignorant as I have made it rich out in this country from what I hear. Isn't that true?"

Brown nodded. "Yes," said he slowly, "that's right."

"Well," Jack went on, more swiftly now, "I'm going to look about here in the desert. And what I wanted to ask you is this: You know the country. If you don't mind advising me—where to strike out, you know. I don't want you to give me any secrets you shouldn't; but if you could tip me to a good promising section, then I'd go and take my chances. What do you think?"

"My boy"—Brown laid his hand on Jack's arm—"there are lots of big chances in the desert. I've followed this business for years. And a few thousand dollars give a man a good start. It's easy to make a lot from such a stake. It's easy, too, to drop it. I don't want to see you go out on a wild-goose proposition; and I don't want to see you stay here in camp and maybe get the worst of it on some wildcat deal. Now, let me tell you a bit of my own experience, and you can judge for yourself the chances a man runs."

Jack leaned forward, and Brown began his story. If Brown had been a mining man and had tasted the hardships of the desert for three times the thirty years that he claimed, he could not have gotten the atmosphere any truer than he did now; he could not have painted his pictures more convincingly. One of the things that had made him a king among his breed was that faculty he had of believing for the moment what he told—and putting it so that others believed it. He pictured desert water holes, and he told of lost ledges, fabulously rich; of prospectors dying of thirst at the brink of discoveries; of ore bodies where the white quartz was all flecked with yellow specks. He described himself wandering in these arid wildernesses, losing, fighting on, winning. Always in that story, even in its periods when all seemed darkest, he carefully retained the central thread: the gold in the rocks, rich gold. He never let that idea leave. Always the gold was somewhere near by, to be discovered. And had Jack analyzed the tale, stripping it down to plot, he would have found this idea: *gold.*

"You see," said Brown, puffing at his cigar until the fragrant clouds drifted around him, "you never can tell. Some say luck. I say it's sticking at it and keeping your eyes open."

"Just so," said Jack. "Of course. And when a chance comes, not being afraid to take it."

"You're still set on going?" asked Brown. "Remember I had some tough experiences myself, and I was old on the desert."

"I'm going to go," Jack declared. "Why, that's what makes it worth while. I can run my chances, I guess. I wish you'd advise me where, though."

Brown pulled out his watch. It was nearly time for Johnson's arrival, and he talked more quickly.

"Malapi," said he, "is played out when it comes to prospecting. The whole district is staked. A man ought to go to the south still farther. A big country there—south and west of here, where the desert breaks up to the mountains. That's the section where the old lost mines of the padres lay, you know. No one has found them yet. One or two big propositions started over there; but they petered out. They've never located those ore bodies. I've had my eye on that country. Fact is, I've had men out there lately. One of them is liable to be in any day. He's overdue now."

"The country to the south and west," Jack repeated.

"You never can tell," said Brown. "But wait, we'll see what there is to hear. Meantime, supposing we"—his eye was on the street door, where a form had revealed itself to him in the shadow—"go downtown." He nodded sharply, a movement which Jack did not understand. "We'll take a turn—— Hello!"

The street door opened. Johnson stood there looking about him. It was not the Johnson with whom Brown had talked that afternoon. The frock coat had gone and the string tie had vanished. A much-worn flannel shirt and a pair of dust-stained overalls tucked into miner's boots comprised the more prominent portions of Johnson's raiment now. Beneath a wide-rimmed hat his sallow face and lank, black hair gave him an appearance in harmony with the heavy revolver which he wore strapped to his side. In the doorway he stood, as if hesitating.

"Bill!" cried Brown. "I was just talking of you. Come in, can't you?"

"I thought mebbe yo' was busy." The Southwestern drawl of Johnson was one of his most prized accomplishments. He called it a money-getter.

"Bill," said Brown, "come over here. I want you to shake hands with Mr. Moore, Bill. Jack Moore. He's a friend of mine because his father was a friend, and I worked for his grandfather. So. Back, eh? I looked for you a day or two ago, Bill."

The pseudo Bill came forward and gripped Jack's hand in a grasp for which he summoned all his energies. "I'm pleased," said he, "for to meet yo'."

Over Jack's shoulder the cold eye of Charles Brown signaled caution. Bill's dialect became at once a bare shade less prominent.

"Yo're new in Malapi," Bill went on. Jack acknowledged his freshness. He was getting used to that accusation. Brown produced his cigar box.

"Oh, take two or three of them," said he, as Bill's long fingers swooped forward with undisguised eagerness. In that tone some people might have detected sarcasm, but Bill accepted the invitation at its literal terms. He took three. Placing two of these in the pocket of his flannel shirt, he lighted the third.

"Well"—Brown waved toward a chair which was at a safe distance from the cigar box—"what's doing? Find anything?"

Bill's eyes went slowly to Brown; they remained there while he sat in silence; then they wandered to Jack; then back again.

"Oh," Brown laughed, "go ahead. It's all right." He turned to Jack. "Bill has been scouting around for me," said he, "and he's just in from the same country we were speaking of." To Bill: "Go on. What is it?"

"Well, I've got a proposition looks mighty good. I brought some rock." Bill groped in his overalls and finally brought forth a chunk of lava. "There," said he.

Brown bent over it, scanning it; and, after a long time, he looked up with a peculiar expression. "Looks familiar, too."

"Remember the Elephant Mine?" Bill asked.

"That's it!" exclaimed Brown. "Why, it's a specimen from the old ledge."

"Yo're wrong there, Brown," Bill said. "And, again, yo' ain't wrong, neither. That there was took from the Elephant Mine less than ten days ago."

"What!" Brown rose in his chair.

"It sure was," said Bill. "Less than ten days ago. They've picked up the ore body again—after twenty years. The real thing now."

"If that's the case," said Brown feverishly, "somebody's got a million. I never heard of their working it."

"Listen," said Bill slowly, "nobody's got that million only one man, and him dyin'. I got this offn him. And no one knows of it. Yo' remember Schwartz, the Dutchman, that made five hundred thousand and then dropped it when the vein pinched out? It's him. He went sort of half crazy, he did; and he has been up there in them there hills for twenty years a-minin' all by himself. A-minin' all by himself, and this month he found the ore body again. He found it, bigger than it was before. And then he took sick. He's down with a fever out in the desert. Twenty mile from here. I left him there. I couldn't pack him no farther. I run onto him a-tryin' to make Malapi and get help. And he's there where I left him, and dyin'. He owns the whole thing, and the mill is standin' just as they shut down, ready to turn on the water and go to work. Old Schwartz is a-goin' to pass in his checks. Rich now, too."

Brown was showing excitement, Jack leaned forward in his chair. This was like some of the stories which he had read of the desert; one of the strange tales wherein gold was the burden.

"And now," said Bill, "this is the idee: He knows he's goin' to die, does old Schwartz. And he took a shine to me for helpin' him and packin' him on my burro. And he says all he wants is ten thousand dollars to send home to his sister in Germany. Ef I can raise that, I can have the mine. And that there is what I come back with."

Brown sat in silence, now that the tale was ended. He drummed on the desk with his fingers. Finally he looked up. "Nope," said he; "it don't look right to me."

"Yo' mean to say——" Bill cried.

"Oh, it's honest enough, as far as you go, Bill; and as far as old Schwartz goes; but I don't care to go after it." Brown shook his head again.

"Why not?" demanded Bill fiercely.

"Well," Brown said, "it's too darned easy! I don't like those old mines. Too many risks. Maybe the vein will pinch out again."

"I'm tellin' yo'," said Bill, "I heard Schwartz tell it. He's got the real thing. Anyhow, it won't cost ye anything to go and hear him for yerself, will it?"

"I've got other things to keep me busy," said Brown.

Jack broke in, then, for all his diffidence. "Why couldn't I try it?" he asked Brown; "if you don't want it, you know."

Brown sat studying him. "It's a risk," said he.

Bill was more decided. "He'd never listen to no tenderfoot, Schwartz wouldn't," he asserted. "And, besides, if yo' don't want it, Brown, I know others that would jump at it."

Jack was on fire. "Couldn't I arrange it some way," he asked Brown, "to buy in through you, if it's a good thing?"

Bill remained obdurate, and reiterated the statement that he had other men of money on his string. This brought him into a somewhat acrimonious argument with Brown, at the end of which the latter said to Jack:

"See here, I'll tell you what I'll do. I don't say this *is* good. But if it is, you can get it. I'll look out for you. You, Bill, you keep your mouth shut. The deal is mine. Understand? I'm looking it up. And don't you tip it off." He turned to Jack again. "I've got some business that will take me out of town for a day. When I come back, I'll take you out with me, and we'll hear what this sick Dutchman has to say. If it sounds right, we'll look farther."

Jack thanked him with all the warmth of youth. Brown shook his head. "We're not done yet," said he; "but if it does show well, I'll look out for you. And Bill, you stick around Malapi and stay sober. Don't talk."

"I'd like," said Bill, "a bit of cash, Brown. I'm needin' some."

The rage that surged within Brown's soul never got as far as his face, but the effort of hiding it was herculean. He depleted his store of bills by ten dollars. "That," said he easily, "ought to keep you till to-morrow morning. Then, if I'm not here, get the cashier to give you some more." He scribbled an order which he handed to Bill, who, in his turn, made a magnificent struggle to hide his own chagrin, and then departed.

Soon after that, Brown saw Jack go to bed, and left him, with many cautions as to looking out for himself. These cautions were sufficiently sweeping to preclude any danger of Jack parting with large sums of money. Later, Brown sought out Johnson in the Great Western Club. The erstwhile Bill was back into his frock coat once more.

"Now," Brown told him, "you just sit tight, and keep away from that come-along. Understand! He's not going to loosen up on any of his roll while I'm gone. I've looked out for it. So don't get any ideas of the double cross."

Brown left his confederate, with this warning, and sought his bed. The next morning he took the auto stage for the railroad. And the day following he met George at the station. The two remained in conference for some time.

"I always get some rotten stall like that," George complained. "Out there in the jungle, and chances are I'll get sick."

"All the better," said Brown. "It'll make the stall stronger. And don't go overplaying."

"I don't like Johnson," George complained; "he'll hand us one yet before we're done."

"I don't like him, either," Brown said cheerfully; "but he'll not hand anything to me. You know it. And the deal's too big to miss. Two hundred thousand in these tight times."

"Rough work," George commented. "I'd about as soon take a rod and go out to stickin' people up. It's dangerous; that's what it is. You might as well be a regular downright crook, while you're about it."

"Dangerous?" Brown laughed. "Listen, you fool: Don't I know my business? What's dangerous when you've got papa's boy along with you, and papa owns half the railroads in the country? Don't you see? Why, he's backing the proposition, that's what he is. And," his voice became lower, "when I've done with that kid, I'll have him tangled up, all right. He'll be as crooked as I want him; crooked enough to be in this thing up to his neck. No, no. There won't be any prosecution even if there should come a tumble."

CHAPTER VI.

The arrival of Charles Brown on the auto stage in Malapi on the evening following his talk with George, found that resourceful man closer than he liked to the Confederate bills which formed the core of his plethoric roll. The time had come for haste in his dealings with Jack. Brown therefore immediately showed a disposition toward delay when Jack met him. Watching, under his drooping eyelids, the fever of anticipation in the boy's demeanor, he manifested tendencies toward caution, and spoke vaguely of some business matters which really ought to get his attention. He had the satisfaction of seeing these seeming obstacles fan the fire of Jack's desires to a white heat.

Jack had spent the time chafing. Following Brown's advice, he had kept to himself, imbued with fears of being caught in some wildcat scheme, or dragged willy-nilly into investing some of his ten thousand dollars. For those forebodings the older man had carefully laid the foundation before his departure.

As a consequence, Jack had seen no one to whom he might confide his plans; those plans kept seething within him. He walked about Malapi and loafed around the mines. He saw the high-grade ore, he heard the talk of gold, and his brain leaped from vision to vision and from daydream to daydream. Always with him there was a dread.

What if this man, Schwartz, should die? What if others should find him? What if, in some manner, through some little accident, the big deal should slip from under his fingers? There were moments when he was tempted to go and seek the long-haired Bill and start out without Brown. Only his mentor's many warnings kept Jack in hand during that time of waiting. And when the auto chugged into Malapi that evening, Jack was in front of the hotel to meet it.

Now, sitting at dinner with Brown, he became as importunate as he dared. Although Brown tried to change the subject more than once, Jack hung doggedly to the topic of Schwartz and the mysterious high-grade mine.

"All right," said Brown at length, with a good-natured laugh, and threw both hands in the air, "we'll get out in the morning. I'll lay hold of Bill tonight. I oughtn't to do it. I tell you, it is only because I promised you."

They set forth together from the hotel, and they found Bill in the Great Western. Jack stared at the frock coat and black string tie. Bill was more picturesque now than he had been that other night. A regular Texan, Jack thought, watching him as he talked with Brown.

The eagerness of youth owned Jack this night, controlled him absolutely. It made him both blind and deaf. It did more; had any one come to him and told him who were these two men with whom he was about to embark on a desert expedition, he would have called that man a liar. He would have shut his eyes against proof. And this, because he did not want proof. He was on fire for this adventure. And—even had he begun to know the realities—he would have been anxious to live out the lie. He had lured himself into it. He had set his own bait. That was Brown's business—to make men pull themselves along. He had done it with men far wiser than this boy.

So Jack stood willingly while Brown and Johnson conferred under his very nose.

"To-morrow," Brown was saying. "George ought to be there now. In the early morning's the best time."

"Can't make it too soon to suit me," said Johnson. "I've got things lined up. My bunch is waiting to start in business. Any night is good now for them."

Brown gave him a keen look. There was no doubt of the eagerness of Johnson, who thrust a bit of dark-colored ore under his leader's nose, saying: "That's the stuff they're carrying out now. It goes ten thousand and more to the ton. And the mill's all ready, I tell you. All you got to do is turn on the head of water. This gang can put through all that their burros will carry out in one night."

"Come on." Brown's cold voice hid his eagerness. "Better go down the line with us."

The pair came over to Jack. "Bill says we can make a start before daylight," Brown explained. "We'll go out in an auto. It's better to go, then; there'll be nobody to see us. If I was to start during business hours, I'd have half the camp trailing along after me on the chance of a stampede."

Jack's eyes kindled. At the long bar, miners were buying wine. He turned to Brown: "Say we celebrate with a bottle!"

They drank together, and Jack felt his enthusiasm growing. He belonged here! He was one of the mining men! He would do as they did. A fortune seeker among a company of adventurers, he would bear himself like the rest. The idea which gets many a wiser and older head than Jack's—the idea of one code of conventions in a mining camp and another in town—tempted him now. He was in half a mind to make a night of it. But, when he felt his head begin to swim, he remembered the night before and the morning's shame. He checked himself. Although Brown and Bill even pressed him, he drank sparingly. But at that he traveled beside his two companions with flushed face and overbright eyes.

And had he kept his senses cooled with ice, it would not have availed before the carefully steered conversation

of these two with whom he walked. Gold yellowed the atmosphere about them; all things were tinged with it.

In the early hours of the morning, while the night was still heavy over the camp of Malapi, while the lights were blazing down the crooked street, and the strains of music were thumping staccato on a dozen pianos, loading the desert breeze with ragtime, the trio sought out one of the lean, ugly autos whose business was to carry expeditions into that land. Brown gave directions to the chauffeur. A moment later they were off.

They roared up the gulch behind the town. The crooked road wound among the dumps from the mines; and far above them they could see the twinkling lights at the shaft mouths where the precious ore lay. They climbed on past this region of gallows frames and out upon the naked desert.

They sped on over mysterious wastes of sage-covered hills that loomed vague about them. The road dived down into one of those salt sinks which are frequent in the arid regions east of the Sierra Nevadas. Through the night, the expanse of crystal white gleamed ghostly. They skirted it and ascended another hill. The machine lurched over a summit where dark masses of malapi stood sharply outlined against the whitening eastern horizon.

The sun climbed closer to the sky's edge. Its first rays painted the heavens before it. The heavens poured those colors down upon the sage-covered hills. Jack watched the splendors of that dawn. He watched the rioting tints speeding across the heavens. He gulped in the keen air of the desert; he felt his senses clearing.

They traveled five miles farther, and the sun was still beneath the horizon when they reached their destination.

A low range of sand hills, over whose shifting sides a forest of mesquite bushes sprawled. Under a huge clump of this brush a well, which had been planked over by some prospecting party years before. Beside the well, a small khaki-colored dog tent. The machine stopped before this. Jack climbed out and looked about him. Brown said a word to the chauffeur, who nodded, and leaned down to a lever. The auto coughed, swooped forward, and departed.

"He'll come back in three hours," Brown explained. "Now, Bill, let's see your sick Dutchman."

"Let me go ahead," said Bill. "He won't know you fellows."

He left them and vanished in the interior of the tent. He was in there for some time. Jack looked about him. A range of lofty malapi summits were catching the rays of the rising sun. They gleamed as red as blood behind the sand hills where the mesquite sprawled. A dreary, dead land; the solitary tent was the only sign of life besides himself and Brown. For an instant a chill came over Jack. The weirdness of the place seemed to warn him. He struggled with his forebodings. The chill of the air crept into his bones. What was he doing here, anyway? Why had he not stayed home? He glanced at Brown. In the cold, square-jawed face of this older man was something he did not like.

Then there came to him the memory of his errand; the story of the Elephant Mine recurred to his mind. Golden visions swam before his eyes. He felt his blood moving warmer inside him. His confidence came back; his eagerness gripped him. He was on fire again.

Brown was smiling at him. "You went a hot pace last night."

Jack grinned. He had lived the life, had gone the pace; he was a mining man, in a mining camp. Self-satisfaction made him see Brown with the old blinded eyes. Bill was coming out of the tent now. He waved a beckoning hand. Jack's heart leaped.

As the two of them drew near—"He's mighty sick," said Bill; "ready to pass in his checks, is Schwartz. Good thing we come when we did. We ort to get him to town to-day, Brown."

They followed him to the tent opening, which Bill spread wide, for there was no room for all of them inside. They stood there peering in. And now

the sun shot up abruptly over a hilltop and a shaft of light fell over them, warming them, illuminating the tent's dusky interior.

There, within the shadow, covered by his blankets, lay a man. His eyes gleamed out at them.

"Schwartz," said Bill, "they've come to buy yo'r mine."

"The mine!" The voice came from the shadows, weak, high-pitched, shaking as though death had already begun to drag it away from the body forever.

"Talk quick, boys," said Bill, "he's peterin' out, he is."

"Gold," the voice called from the tent, "gold! Twenty years I worked. I got my gold. All alone—I found it at last."

Jack felt a throb of sympathy for this dying man, whose toil meant so little to him now.

"I say," he turned to Brown, "can't we do something for him? He's in a bad way, poor devil."

Brown nodded. "We'll get him to camp as soon as the auto comes back," he agreed. "Better talk now with him. He might get worse."

"Do for me," the voice called. *"Ja!* One thing I want. I have the gold. Hundreds of thousands, I have got it now. Mine sister in Germany. Come; here I have it, the paper mit her name und the address."

"Go on"—Brown touched Jack on the shoulder—"it's your deal."

Jack went inside and bent down close to the white face. In the dimness here he could see but little save the blanched skin and the burning eyes; a thin hand, trembling as with great weakness, stretched toward him. "Here," said the voice. "Bromise me. You will send the money to her. You giff it to Bill. He is mine friend. Ten thousand dollars. He said he would get it."

"I wonder," Jack retreated and spoke in a low tone to Brown. "What do you think? The fellow's dying, I guess. It's a shame, that's what it is. He ought to get more, if the proposition's good. And if it isn't—I don't see what we're going to do, do you?"

"Easy, son." Brown stepped into the tent door. Brown's voice was crisp: "You know me, Schwartz. Charlie Brown. You knew me in Tonopah."

"Ja," the voice cried shrilly. "I know you, Charlie Brown."

"Now, Schwartz, you tell me about the Elephant."

"Come close to me"—the voice seemed to be weakening—"where nobody can hear me talk. I know you, Charlie Brown."

Brown vanished within the tent. The flap dropped in front of him. He was there for several minutes, while Jack, pity and eagerness racking him, waited outside. Finally Brown emerged again.

"I think," said he to Jack, "you can risk it. It's a chance, of course. But this fellow's honest about it. He knows me from the old days, you see. I tell you what: I'll go halves with you on the deal, and we'll develop it together. It's better than I looked for."

"Will you?" Jack cried.

"Ten dousand dollars for mine sister," came the cry from the tent. "I want to see dot money, Brown."

"Here." Jack pulled out his wallet and found his certificate of deposit. "There's the money, Brown. You can give me your check when we get back to town."

Brown vanished with it inside the tent again.

"Now," said he, as he emerged, "where's that chauffeur? The man's in a bad way."

"He said I was to get the money," Bill reminded them.

"So he did," said Jack.

"He's got it now," Brown said quietly. "Don't bother him, Bill. He's sort of set on holding it. I'll go talk with him while you fellows see if you can't keep a lookout for that machine."

The day was glaring out there in the mesquite by the water hole. Already the sun was getting hot. The demeanor of Bill had suddenly become apathetic. Had Jack been less engrossed in the miseries of his own condition and the pity he was feeling for the man within the tent, he might have

suspected that Bill was sulking over something. For two hours the pair sat there, and Bill said not a word. At the end of that time, the auto appeared lurching along the rough wagon track.

Bill and Brown carried the sick man between them to the machine. They bore him to the tonneau, and at Brown's suggestion Jack climbed in to support Schwartz on one side while Bill took the front seat by the chauffeur. All this was done with few words; but there was a sort of tenseness in the air. They started back to Malapi. And during that ride there was little said by any one.

At the hotel it was Brown who made the arrangement for the sick man's room; and Bill, after loafing about in the lobby for a short time, left the place. His beady black eyes were shooting little sparks.

That evening Brown met Jack in the lobby. His face was grave. "The poor devil," said he, "has died. I've taken that certificate of yours and sent a check to his sister, as he told me. I was with him when he passed in."

Into Jack's enthusiasm and golden dreams came something like a cold hand; it seemed to reach and grip his heart. A depression seized him. Brown saw it.

"Come on down to the office," said he. "I'll make you out a check. Then we'll get ready to start for the mine. We can't let it lie there. If anybody gets next to this, they'll jump it and take a chance on a lawsuit."

CHAPTER VII.

Late that evening, Brown met his two confederates in the Great Western Club. Players at the busy tables and visitors, looking at the members of this trio as the latter stood talking quietly by the bar, would have believed them three prosperous mining men. There was a sureness in the faces and a placidity not in accord with the words uttered through the expressionless lips. But any eavesdropper would have had to come within a yard to catch those words themselves.

"When you deliver the goods, Johnson," Brown was saying, "you'll see some of this roll. I don't even know there's any such a mill."

Johnson, alias Bill, had voiced his complaint as to unfair dealing at the water hole. Now he vigorously disclaimed intent to swindle.

"Good," Brown told him, "as far as it goes. Now, when I've seen that mill, and some of this ore, *you'll* get your cut. You don't think I'm picking up suckers for *you to* trim? This kid belongs to me. You get in on the other deal—the rough work."

George broke in with a petition of his own.

"Now that you're dead," said Brown, "you've got to keep pretty close, George. I'll look out for you." He beckoned the others closer to him. "Fact is, there isn't much time to lose now. I've got the kid to bed; and any time he gets up, trouble's liable to come. He's the limit, that's what he is. He made a proposition to me that we look out for your funeral, George, and plant you right. Why, if he gets to going, there's no telling what minute he'll ask some fool question from the clerk and bring a tumble."

"I never saw a sucker like him." George spoke in a reflective tone. "He's a new kind, he is. You know? He hasn't the regular idea at all: to get something for nothing. The trouble with him is he's honest. I don't like handling such people. It's dangerous. They ain't got anything to be afraid of when it comes to a show-down."

"Just leave that part of it to me," Brown ordered. "When I get him started, where is he? Backing a bunch of high graders. Eh? How about it then?"

"I know," George argued; "but he doesn't know he's backing them."

"When I get him going," said Brown quietly, "I'll let him know. And I'll see to it that he stands for it. I can handle that kid, all right. He'll be crooked enough before he gets out of this. And we'll have him to stand behind, won't we? I never saw a man as easy to throw a scare into as you are,

George. Now," he turned to Johnson, "the idea is, we've got to get to work. Right now. See? Let this kid get up and around in the morning and he's going to fall over something. Besides, he's got a phony check of mine, and I don't want him to get to the bank. Between that and George's funeral, coming off to-morrow, we've got to get him out of town. I guess we'd better all of us blow. We can start out for that mine of yours before daylight, Johnson. The kid is crazy to go. George can stay behind to look out for things here. He's got some stock, and he can take my desk room and open an office."

Johnson fidgeted. "You don't figure on my going out to that mine?" he asked.

"You don't think I'm going without you?" said Brown.

"I've got a map, you know——" Johnson began.

"Forget it," the leader bade him. "You get somebody to take us out there and you come along. And when your high graders bring the stuff out, and we get things started, then you can go back and 'tend to them at this end. But until I see some of that stuff, I want you. Why, I might get lost; and where would you be?"

Johnson's sallow face turned a sickly green. "Why, I was never out in the desert in my life, only a trip like to-day!"

"Neither was I," said Brown easily. "So get some fellow that knows the way. I understand there's all sorts of dangers: rattlesnakes as long as a man, water holes gone dry, poisonous lizards, and Lord knows what. We need a good guide. You didn't think I was going to give you your cut and then go out there leaving you to come through with the goods, did you?"

Johnson, who had cherished some secret hopes of that very nature, remained silent. "If we don't get out before daylight with the kid along," Brown reminded him, "it's off. And *I* won't run chances. I'll blow with my roll. Ten thousand's good enough for me. Do we get away?"

"I'll get one of the roughnecks now," said Johnson.

"Better get the main guy. After this thing is started, we're all right. Until then, I like to see who we're doing business with."

When Brown went to the hotel, to awaken Jack early that morning, he was thinking hard. The game had reached that point where much may come from any small accident; the house of cards would tumble over before a bare breath of truth; on the other hand, should it survive the next twenty-four hours, with Jack safely out of Malapi, and operations started, hundreds of thousands would start coming from the mines to this deserted mill. It all depended on one thing: The maintenance of Jack's credulity.

George had hit the nail on the head when he had voiced his trepidations in the Great Western Club. The danger lay in the fact that they had played this ancient and time-worn bunko game without the usual accompaniment: Criminal intent on the part of the victim. Jack's intentions were fair and aboveboard. Jack had nothing to fear should he discover the truth. He could rush to the authorities with a clear conscience, and therein he was unlike the purchaser of a gold brick. The corruption of this victim meant much to Brown. It meant the safe pursuit of a game far more dangerous than the swindling had been. With the belief firm in his heart that all men were vicious at the bottom—an axiom among his kind—Brown started now on the second chapter of his plans.

He went to Jack's room and awakened him. "Get up!" he said, in a tense whisper, after he had shaken Jack to consciousness. "Get up, and hurry about it, son."

"What's the matter?" Jack asked sleepily.

"Matter enough." Brown spoke in a tone of brisk command. "We've got to be moving if you want to hang onto that mine."

"You mean?" Jack cried.

"S-s-s-h!" Brown placed a finger

on his lips. "There's been a rumor that I've a rich thing on, and I had to dodge spies to get here. Bill has things ready for the start. He's waiting outside of the camp. We'll join him, and we'll clear out before any one knows where we're going, or that we've gone. But we've got to hurry. There isn't ten minutes' time for you and me to leave the hotel. That chauffeur told some one, and they told somebody else, and that was enough to start the hatching of a stampede. So hurry up."

Before Brown was done speaking, Jack was out of bed and drawing on his clothes. In silence he completed his dressing. He made a hasty toilet, and the pair went downstairs together.

"Never mind," said Brown, when Jack spoke of soap and other supplies. "We've got a mule packed with all that we need. The thing is to get out now."

The night clerk, drowsing at his desk, saw the pair go forth thus unladen, and his idea was that they were on their way downtown to some late revels. Brown had an auto waiting. They got into the car, and it sped away with them. Outside of the camp, well up the gulch behind the town, the machine stopped. They climbed out, and Brown paid the chauffeur. The auto chugged away.

"Now," Brown said, in a low voice. "All right, there?"

Out of the velvet black shadows beside the road a figure loomed. It was the long-haired Bill. "All right," said he. "They're right ahead."

Jack followed the pair up the road until in the darkness he got the vague loom of a group of animals. As he came up, he saw that there were four saddle mules and two more who bore heavy packs. A man stood there holding them.

"All right, Butch." It was Bill's voice. "We're ready for you."

It seemed to Jack as if Bill had begun to lose his Arizona accent. He had little time, however, to think of that, for he was given one of the saddle animals, and he mounted at once. As he was ahead of his two companions, he failed to see the terrible struggle which Bill made to clamber into his seat, or to witness the discomfiture of Brown. These two pseudo desert men continued to ride in the rear, behind the two pack animals. Jack rode ahead with their guide, who thus far had not said a single word. Accustomed to horses as he was, Jack rather liked the idea of a trip made in this manner. The thrill of anticipated adventure made his pulses leap. He rode through the darkness, striving now and again to catch some glimpse of his companion's face; at times he tried to engage this other in conversation, but got only monosyllables for his pains.

The road led uphill for some distance; at length it turned abruptly, and Jack saw that they were riding over a mere pack trail which went away along the side of a steep malapi bluff. The footing was bad; the mules, accustomed as they were to this business, stumbled frequently; and it seemed to Jack that once or twice he heard groans from behind, as if some one there were suffering deep anguish of spirit.

Brown, doing his best to hold a steady seat, enduring the tortures of rough riding, which only the heavy man really knows, kept his own feelings behind his clenched teeth. Only occasionally did he utter a word. And then the word was directed to Johnson.

The pseudo Bill was one of those hapless individuals who have in their being nothing of the horseman. His movements combated those of his long-eared mount. In the black night, he found himself now clasping the neck of the mule in fervent embrace, now all but over the cantle of his saddle. At such moments of dire peril and extremity, he voiced his terror in ejaculations. And at these times Brown spoke quietly to him.

Thus they journeyed until the coming of the dawn. And in the first light of the approaching day, Jack got the first glimpse of his companion here at the head of the procession. The faint rays revealed to Jack's gaze a large-muscled man, wide-shouldered, riding with easy grace, and roughly clothed. And then he saw a face big-jawed,

coarse-mouthed, marked with the furrows which come only from years of reckless living—a face so wanton in its lack of repression, so full of quick-flaming passions, so replete with fierce willingness to kill that the first sight made him shudder. The man gave him one quick look of scrutiny, and then rode on, looking straight ahead.

Fortunately for the feelings of the harassed Bill, they stopped soon after this at a water hole. And Jack, swinging from the saddle, was too late to see Bill dismount. He did, however, get a look at Brown. He marveled at his friend's clumsiness. However, the square-jawed Butch was already busy getting things ready for the preparation of a breakfast, and Jack flew to help him. In Jack's soul was a huge desire to show that he was no tenderfoot, to do his part among these men of the desert, that they should not look on him with scorn. This willingness enabled Brown and Bill to throw themselves upon the ground and rest their aching limbs without Jack's noticing the fact that they were doing nothing.

For all the hard case that he was in, Brown was doing some pointed thinking. As a result of this, he called the guide over to him, and talked for some moments in low tones. Later, at breakfast, he told Jack that they would rest here during the day. "We're off the track," said he, "and no one will run across us here. To-night we'll go on again, and run no chance of being seen. It's the only sure way to make the mine without being followed."

Jack agreed readily. To him this gave the whole adventure more zest. He was glad for all this mystery, this eluding followers who might attempt to wrest his mine from him. That sort of thing was what he had come for. He found a shady spot under a thicket of mesquite, and slept during the most of that day. He was weary from sleeplessness and from this ride—a healthy, hearty weariness of body and muscles.

A short distance away from where Jack slumbered during the heat and the dryness of the sun-flayed afternoon, Brown and Johnson lay. There was no sleep for either of them. Ache of bones and ache of muscles combined to torture them to wakefulness. Between times they cursed each other and the desert with full and fervent hearts. Butch, the guide, busied himself with the mules, seeing that they got their feed and water; then, after listening with a grim, peculiar smile to the pair of swindlers, rolled up in his blankets, and joined Jack in the land of dreams.

When evening came, the saturnine Butch rose and shook himself much like an awakened dog. He went over to the tethered mules, watered them again, and fed them; then he kindled a little fire. As he was beginning his preparations, Jack came from under his mesquite. Jack had still that eager desire to do his part, to show that he was not a tenderfoot. He helped Butch get the meal ready; he carried water from the desert well, chopped wood, and carried food from the packs. Butch watched him, grunting an occasional monosyllabic reply when Jack asked him some question. At times, when Jack was away on some little errand, the big, sin-marked face turned to glance at the spot where the two swindlers still lay. And once, being by himself, Butch muttered what he thought.

"Damn hogs!" was all he said.

Jack, returning with a coffeepot, grinned cheerfully at him. The outlaw—for other camps had put a price on the head of Butch in other years—returned the grin.

"Anyway," he said to himself, "this one's able to ride a mule, he is." His eyes went over to the bunko men. "Hey!" he roared. "Get outa that. Grub pile. Yo' can move fer that, can't ye?"

An hour later, when they were embarked and on their way, Brown called the guide back to him, and started instructing him as to his demeanor.

The other regarded him with a leer. "See here," said he, "cut that out. I'm runnin' my end o' this here pasear. And I'm jest sick enough of yo' two to bust a gun over yer heads and take my chances on pullin' out alone. So cut it. See?"

Brown regarded him for a long moment under lowered lids.

"Oh, I know yo'," Butch went on, "and I kin take care of myself. So jest mind what I told yo'." He rode on forward and rejoined Jack.

"Nice guy that," said Brown.

Bill only grunted. His own troubles were keeping him busy. Darkness came, and he was able to ride in whatever peculiar manner he fancied might ease his hurts, without fear of Jack's beholding him, or Brown's chiding him. They traveled all that night, stopping once to lunch beside a borax flat which glimmered evilly through the darkness. The last hour found them winding up a deep gorge behind which high mountains loomed through the dark. A smell of water was somewhere in the air. Here, just as dawn was beginning to reveal objects, they stopped and made their camp. At breakfast, looking about him, Jack saw the cañon walls on either side, steep, towering toward flanking summits whereon snow clung at a dizzy height.

"The mine," said Bill, "is half a mile ahead."

CHAPTER VIII.

They ate the breakfast which Butch, with Jack's assistance, cooked. Brown and Johnson stretched out and eased their weary limbs. But there was no rest for Jack. The mine lay half a mile ahead. He was chafing to go on, to finish the last lap of this journey, to see the gold which he was about to delve from the earth—the gold for which Schwartz had toiled all these years. That thought of Schwartz gave him something like pain. It was the first time he had remembered the dead man. He had embarked without even taking the trouble to inquire concerning Schwartz's funeral.

He was walking up and down the floor of the ravine near the camp fire. Butch was crouching over the dying embers, getting a light for his pipe; the other two were stretched out upon their backs near by. Jack suppressed a sigh at the thought of his own hard-hearted greed, which had made him thus thoughtless. He looked at Brown and Bill. Lying there, they were talking in low tones. He drew nearer to them. The talking stopped. It came to Jack that these two had been keeping close together ever since they had left Malapi; and Brown's old companionship had vanished. Somehow, the thought made him uneasy.

He glanced about him; his eyes instinctively went up the gorge toward the mine—his mine. It was a deep, narrow ravine; on Jack's left a barren, stony hill rose toward more lofty summits, on which, far up, the snow hung. On his right the side of the ravine was covered with timber. Down the bed of the gulch a small creek ran, whimpering, through undergrowth and grass. At this hour, while the sun was low, the desert, but a mile behind them, gleamed under the first rays. Ahead of them the ravine rose and grew narrower.

Brown, weary as he was, and sore, was keeping one eye on Jack. He saw the boy stand for a moment gazing up the cañon, then suddenly start walking up the gorge. He struggled to a sitting posture, and called after him:

"Where you going?"

Jack turned. "Up to the mine," he answered, and started on again. There was a rebellion in his heart then; it was born of some vague, instinctive dislike which had begun to arise within him toward Brown. He could not have placed either feeling or cause had he tried. But they were there; they had grown on this desert trip.

Brown began getting to his feet.

"Let him go." Johnson hardly tried to keep his voice so that Jack would not hear. "You've got him out here now. Why are you nursing him?"

The ache of his bones made Brown ugly, and here was a chance to vent his spleen. He snarled at the other, uttering an oath.

"Fools like you fill the pens," he said. "This kid is our big bet now. What did you think I'd taken him for?"

"Search me." Johnson grinned at him evilly. "It's a good place to keep him—or get him out of the way."

Brown bent over him as he lay there. "That," he said through closed teeth, "is your style. It ain't mine. We need him. And I'm looking out for him. If anything should happen to him out here"—he bent closer over his companion—"I'd be liable to cut your throat or turn you up where you're wanted, Johnson. Just remember that." He scrambled to his feet, and limped after Jack.

Butch, puffing at his pipe beside the fire, heard them, and scowled. In his varied experiences through the Southwest, he had been a man of direct methods. Taking his own desperate chances had always been a part of the game with him. His sinful soul revolted against these two, so careful of their own precious bodies. Watching Brown's painful movements as the latter passed him in pursuit of Jack, Butch allowed his features to relax in an expansive and sardonic grin.

Two hundred yards up the gorge Brown overtook Jack. The latter, now half ashamed of his own rebellious feelings, greeted the older man with an ingenuous smile.

"I'm not calloused to gold like you fellows," said he. "I had to go and get a look."

Brown returned the smile with the most conciliating look that he could muster. "I know," he said easily. "I was that way myself at the beginning. Fact is, I'm done up. It's been twenty years since I rode a mule."

"I thought——" Jack began.

"Autos or on foot," Brown went on easily. "I've let the others take the hard going. I'm only doing this for you, you know."

The reproof which his words implied had its effect on Jack. He came back at once to where Brown had had him before. As they walked up the trail, which now departed from the floor of the cañon and clung to the hillside, Brown seized the advantage which he had regained, and clinched it more tightly by telling how he had left two or three big deals with their ends untied back in Malapi. Jack became contrite.

"It's all right," said Brown. "We'll have a bunch of miners up in a day or two now. I arranged for that, you know, before we left." Jack had not known that. It was one of the details which he had ignored. He was thankful. "And after we've gotten things started, I can go back and leave you in charge. Butch there is a good foreman. We'll get some of the best ore out right away, and mill it. That'll bring us enough gold to start putting things in order right. I'll take it back with me after a month or so. There ought to be a couple of hundred thousand dollars. I'll use that to get in supplies and men to start genuine development. Once we get the property to really producing, we ought to be able to take out a million or a million and a half inside of the next year."

He glanced at Jack, whose eyes were wide now with eagerness. Watching his young companion beneath his own drooping lids, Brown tried his first experiment toward the corruption which was his fond hope. He spoke slowly:

"You see, that way we can follow out the best leads. These high-grade propositions are apt to blow out. We can get what is in sight. It will raise excitement. Understand? There'll be a good market for us then. We can gut her, and then sell out for another million, if we handle it right."

Jack stopped abruptly. They were on a narrow pathway on the sidehill. He faced Brown. "I don't quite understand you," he said quietly.

There was no avoiding his gaze. Brown returned it, smiling. But under that smile there was a cold, deadly rage gripping his heart. It looked to him as if Johnson might have been right.

"My boy," he said, "don't balk at a deal like that. That's mining. You get the ore that's in sight, then sell, and let the other fellow see if he can find any more. He's got even chances. It's his lookout. I'm worth three or four million if I sell out what I've got to-day. And that's the way I got it."

"It's not my way of mining," Jack said hotly.

Brown continued, smiling: "Your

grandfather wasn't finicky over those little things——"

"Don't you go any further!" Jack's eyes were blazing. He faced Brown with clenched fists. "You say one word more about my grandfather, or any of my family, and I'll——"

"Easy, boy!" Brown laughed aloud. "What a hothead you are! I'm only talking mining as we do it here in the desert. See here—you came into this to make money, didn't you?"

"I came to make it by mining," said Jack, "not salting mines."

"Go ahead," said Brown, with another laugh; "do it your own way, then. It won't make or break me. I'll do as I promised—I'll set you on your feet in this deal. Then you can buy me out for my half of the money."

"I'll give you back your check now!" Jack's anger was boiling within him. He groped in his pocket, brought out his wallet, and held the check under Brown's nose.

For an instant the other hesitated. Then—"All right," he said, and took the check. "The mine's yours."

"Just so." Jack breathed deep.

"And you can go ahead and work it," Brown went on quietly. "I've put in a bit of money on pack animals and this, that, and the other thing. You can give me your check for the amount, and Bill and I will go back. Butch I need elsewhere, so we'll take him along."

Jack felt his heart sink. He realized his own helplessness out here. He did not know good ore from the country rock. He caught his breath in a dry gulp.

Brown let him see his predicament, and then—"I'll tell you," he said; "I don't pretend to be a saint in mining deals. I'm not." His tone was open and frank. "I told you *my* way. You don't do business in that fashion, you say. Well and good. I don't blame you. I was like you when I was your age. I admire you for it. I don't want to be the man to disillusion you. You keep the mine. That's all right." He pocketed the check. "Now I've lost time on this, and that's all right, too. I went into it out of friendliness for your father and grandfather. I'll not see you go wrong, even if you have chosen to insult me here." Brown's manner was a combination of magnificence and magnanimity now. "I'll stay with you, as I said I would. I'll get the proposition started. Then you go ahead after your own fashion."

Jack felt his rage vanish before that offer. He was crushed before the free-heartedness of this older man. "See here," he said, "you're awfully good about that. You know I can't stand for that other proposition, though. I won't do any wildcatting."

"That's all right." Brown spoke assuringly. "I'm not asking you to. The mine's yours. And if you don't want my services—out of friendship—why, just say so."

"Indeed, I do! But I want to see that you get some share then. Can't we fix it somehow? Some sort of shares while we're together—until you've gone back and sent in supplies and machinery?"

"Easy enough," said Brown. "I'll agree to that."

Jack offered him his hand. "I'm sorry I said what I did. But I honestly don't see my way to that sort of business, you know."

"Forget it," Brown cried. And they started on up the gulch again.

The trail was badly overgrown with brush, and Jack wondered at the lack of signs of man. At the end of a half mile they came to a point where the gorge widened. Facing this, they were looking into an amphitheater whose steep sides rose to the snow-topped Sierra behind. In the bottom flowed the little brook. Upon the hill at the left stood an old mill. It was windowless, and in one place the roof had fallen in. A gaunt, dreary building, silent as if it were the tomb of long-buried hopes. Below it by the stream Jack saw the dismantled cabins where the miners and millmen had lived. And far up the mountainside a gray dump extended from a tunnel mouth.

The whole place had that huge and indescribable stillness which comes

where mankind has flocked and toiled noisily and then departed, leaving only the marks of his despoiling hand upon the wilderness. A landscape to suggest tragedy. The two men stood beside each other in the narrow trail; they stared at it for a long time.

At length Brown spoke. "Well," said he, "there we are. Now, the best thing we can do is move camp up here somewhere. Then in the afternoon you and I will take a look at the workings. I'll go back and see to the packing up."

Jack offered to accompany him. Brown waved him aside. "It's your mine," said he. "Take a look about while I go back." At that he started down the trail.

Jack stood there for some moments; then he walked slowly forward toward the old mill. Here was his kingdom, the place where he would make his first conquest of the wilderness, whence he would wrest some of its gold. Yet his heart was heavy. He felt, for the first time since he had come into the desert, that he was very young, very raw, and very dependent upon his own poor resources. And why he felt that way he did not know.

Down the trail half a mile, Brown was shaking Johnson to wakefulness. "Come on!" he said wrathfully. "Get up and move. We've got to make camp up the gulch."

"What's on?" Johnson demanded.

"Only this much." Brown was speaking more quickly than usual. "We've got to get this kid and keep him above the mill. Understand? We can't let him see that pack train when it comes up. And we may as well start in about it now. He's liable to get wise if we don't look out."

Johnson's beady eyes scanned Brown. "Humph!" The thin, cruel lips curled in an ugly smile. "You wait. You'll have to do some rough work with that kid before you're done."

"Get up!" Brown commanded. "You talk too much."

Johnson rose slowly and painfully. He was still smiling, however, in spite of an occasional ejaculation which his movements wrung from him. "Brown," said he at length, "You'll not make that kid crooked. You may as well save the time. It ain't in him."

"Well," Brown snarled, "if I don't, I'll see to it he stays with us; and he's in it to his neck, anyhow, ain't he? We can't fall unless he does. And I guess I'll be able to get him to where his old man will have to take care of us if he don't want sonny to go to jail."

CHAPTER IX.

They moved the camp up the gulch to a spot nearly a quarter of a mile above the abandoned mill. Here the saturnine Butch turned loose the mules and cached the supplies. Jack, aroused from reflections by the arrival of the cavalcade, had eagerly joined the outlaw in the work. The little brook ran clear and cold from the distant snows; the grass was green beside it; the brush surrounded this miniature meadow in a circle. The verdure and the morning sunlight which was now streaming down into the cañon made Jack's unpleasant memories of the talk with Brown vanish as though they were unhealthy miasmas. Bending his back to carry laden sacks and to chop boughs for beds, imbued now with the spirit of the out of doors, on fire once more with youth's huge, blind hopefulness, he took no notice of Brown or Johnson.

These two promptly vanished. They climbed the hill, and paid one brief visit to the deserted mill, where Johnson said: "Butch knows all about how to work it; he says it's ready to turn the water on." After which they went on up a zigzag trail to the gray dump by the tunnel mouth. On this trail Brown did his first manual labor during the trip. He bore an ax, and with this implement, at cost of much bodily discomfort, and to the accompaniment of a great deal of heavy wit on the part of Johnson, he cut away some of the brush which had grown over the path. At the mouth of the tunnel the pair of swindlers halted. They peered into the mouth of the aperture.

Brown took a stub of candle from

his pocket, and lighted it. "Come on," said he.

Johnson shook his head. They argued for some time, and finally Brown went on in alone. He was gone for ten or fifteen minutes. The noise of heavy hammering came faintly from inside of the tunnel. Johnson waited, smiling the wrong way of the mouth.

At last Brown appeared. "I made showing enough to keep him easy, but I'd never do this much work again for any sucker that walked." His face was streaming perspiration; his breath came thick; dust was over his garments.

"Too much trouble for any stall," Johnson growled. "You can't keep up this front."

"He'll see the broken rock, and it'll satisfy him. He'll stay easy until we've run through the first bunch of ore. After I show him the gold he'll be all right, anyhow. I'll bait him along with that then. And it beats a roar, which would queer the whole plant now."

A few moments later the pair slowly descended the hill to the camp. Jack and Butch had gotten things in shape for sleeping and eating. Also, this queerly assorted pair were now on terms approaching companionship. At the bottom of his nature each had something in common with the other. Years before, when he had not yet begun to carve his steps toward a fame extending through three Western States, Butch had been an adventure-loving cowboy. And during the subsequent period of misdeeds he had at least robbed by straightforward methods. His breed—a common one while it lasted throughout the Southwest—was similar to the old border raiders; it had no traffic with, nor sympathy for, those who stole by stealth. And now the scarred, grim man—black as his soul was—found himself drawn to the boy, even as the boy began to discover beneath the robber's coarse skin some elements which he liked. They were sitting beside the stream, smoking and talking, when the two bunko men joined them.

Jack looked over his shoulder at Brown. "Where were you?" he asked.

"Looking over the mill. A lot depends on whether it will work now, you know."

Jack flushed at Brown's answer. "I suppose," said he, "I might have done better to be looking out for those things than making camp." A moment before he had concluded that Brown was lazy.

Brown smiled indulgently. "I'm in a hurry to get the first ore milled, and to have gold enough on hand to start your project. Then I can let you go it alone."

And now Jack was back in Brown's hands once more. He was kept there during the rest of the day. He visited the mill, and saw the tunnel. By the light of Brown's candle, he examined a mass of freshly broken rock, to which the older man pointed, saying: "Schwartz pulled that at his last shot. When the men come we'll have it taken down and put through the mill. It runs high, that ore does, unless I'm wrong."

Dreams of toiling men and roaring stamps and a teeming camp began to fill Jack's mind. He saw the yellow gold coming forth in bricks— how it was to come, or by what processes, he had but a vague idea. He would learn the details, and he would supervise them himself. It would not take long. Brown had told him so. Being anxious to believe, he shut his eyes to any practical objections which interposed

They spent the most of the day down in the camp. The mountains loomed close by on either side; the summits seemed to reach up into the heavens; the cool, white snow patches gleamed upon the peaks. And down here the stream filled the air with a pleasant, lilting music; the smell of the grass was good; the air was like a potent liquor. Jack enjoyed these things to their fullest, stretched upon the turf. Brown and Johnson sat talking quietly at a little distance.

Butch kept to himself, smoking countless cigarettes, and casting alternate glances at the pair who sat together and the dreaming boy. At intervals he looked away at the lofty peaks,

and then his bleared eyes seemed to take on a keen wildness, like the white eyes of a coyote penned in some rancher's yard, and looking away toward its own open country—an expression that held nothing of kindness, but was pathetic because of its dumb longing. Of that whole company, Butch, whose sins had been most wanton in their violence, was the only one to think that afternoon concerning morality. He was battling over a complicated ethical question, which question, rendered in simple language, went thus: "If I thwart these two knaves, I jeopardize my friends. If I continue to act for my own and my friends' interests, I will allow a pair of skunks to injure a boy for whom I have conceived a strong liking. Now, what shall I do?"

Because his liking for Jack was really genuine, and because his faith toward his confederates down in Malapi was inviolate, the only answer which Butch could find to the question was one which he put in two words. Said he, after a long debate: "Aw, hell!" And then he let it go at that.

This was the condition of affairs when night came and all four men rolled up in their blankets. Jack very promptly went to sleep.

Jack's dreams followed one another in a long procession that night. He saw the chalk-white face of Schwartz as he had dimly seen it in the tent; he heard Schwartz babbling on and on of gold. He saw the tunnel up there on the mountainside; by the light of a flickering candle, he beheld a mass of broken fragments on the floor of the passageway—his ore, rich with gold; he smelled the earthy odor of the mine; he was in the old mill, through whose broken roof he could catch a glimpse of the blue sky; the mill was running now; the stamps were shaking the air with their roaring. And on the tables he could distinguish tiny flecks of gold.

Once or twice he woke up, and, waking, he smelled the cool night air, and saw the embers of the dying fire. Then he sank back in his blankets, and the dreams began again. They shifted from the desert to the mine, and from the mine they went to the mill. Now they remained there in the old, ramshackle building; the thunder of the stamps became real; it dominated all the other things in the vision; it obliterated them. It was all that there was in the entire universe, a deep, trembling diapason. Then Jack awoke.

For a few moments he struggled to shake off the dream, which seemed to cling stubbornly to his mind. Then, sitting up in his blankets, he realized that this deep roaring was not a figment of his imagination; it was a reality. He heard it now, awake; he could hear nothing else. It drowned the gentle sounds of the night. It came pealing down through the darkness, and it sat upon the place—a great, leaden mantle of noise which spread over the whole gorge.

Jack rose to his feet, throwing his blankets from him. He stood there in the darkness, half clad, and the air about him shivered to the peal of the stamps.

Yes, that was it. He knew now. The mill was running. Why? He leaned forward, peering upward through the night in the direction of the abandoned structure which he had visited the afternoon before. He uttered a low, startled ejaculation. For streaming from every windowless aperture he beheld a path of yellow light. The building up there was ablaze with lamps. Its batteries of stamps were growling like heavy artillery.

Jack stood as if he had been stricken with paralysis. The fearsomeness of the unknown in the nighttime gripped him. He felt a chill. Then it came to his mind that some one might be up there stealing his ore, running it through the mill. He thought of his companions. He shouted aloud to Brown. In the noise of the stamps, his voice dwindled sadly.

He dropped to his knees, groped for a match, found it, and struck a light. He held the flaming match aloft and peered toward Brown's bed; the blankets were empty. Near by where Bill had slept were tumbled quilts.

Shaking with excitement, Jack

dropped the burned-out match. His mind leaped from one conjecture to another. None seemed plausible. He got a candle, and lighted it; he pulled on his clothes; then he looked about the camp. All three men had gone away. It occurred to him that they might have been awakened as he had been, and that they had gone to see what was happening. He hurried up the winding trail, lighting his way with the candle.

Above him the mill roared through the night; the light streamed down toward him, and now, as he drew nearer, he could see the forms of men moving to and fro. Hurrying on, he stumbled over a bowlder. The candle went out, and left him in blackness. He lighted it with trembling fingers, and climbed farther. Ahead of him there was something moving, several vague bodies crackling in the bushes. He came nearer; a snort and a scurry of hoofs startled him; then he laughed. These were burros. Even as he was wondering what they were doing here, he saw in the patch of light by the door of the mill the figure of a man. A stranger, roughly dressed, booted, flannel-shirted, holding a rifle in his two hands. The attitude of the man was tense; leaning forward, the rifle was gripped as if the bearer were waiting to throw it to his shoulder.

As Jack took the next step the firearm seemed to leap to that position. It remained there, pointing toward himself. He saw the man's lips move. Under the menace of the weapon, Jack halted. He remembered, with a feeling of futility, that he was unarmed. The other came toward him, still holding the rifle pointed toward him. Jack saw the face, coarse, ugly, the eyes half closed, malevolent.

"Who are you?" he cried.

The other did not answer, but came close and peered at him; then, with an abrupt gesture, signed for him to stand fast, and backed away. In the mill door Jack saw the figure stop; another form appeared from somewhere within. It was Brown.

Jack's candle had gone out again. He was in the darkness; these two were in the light, and he could plainly see their every feature. The guard with the rifle put his lips close to Brown's ear, and evidently shouted his information. Jack saw Brown's expression suddenly change. The placidity left the heavy face; the eyes flew briefly open; for the instant they were startled; then the lids lowered again, and the lips became crafty. And as swiftly as these movements had taken place, the whole thing altered once more. Fright and craft disappeared, and were replaced by a calm smile. Brown came down the path toward him.

As soon as the older man came close Jack shouted the question which was in his mind—and rage was in his voice: "What does this mean?"

Brown bent his head. "The men came soon after you went to sleep. I put them to work. We got that ore down. We're milling it. No time to lose. I'll tell you why later on. Come."

Jack hung back; the sight of Brown's face there in the doorway had kindled distrust in him again—a distrust born of things which he did not yet recognize Now his memory flew to a tangible fact. "That fellow with the gun?" he demanded.

"Got to look out for ore thieves. News is out in Malapi. Stampede is coming any time. It's a bad place for trouble. We're all alone."

It was so eminently reasonable on the face of it that Jack felt ashamed of his distrust. He followed Brown up the path, and they passed the rifle-bearing sentinel by the door. The fellow was looking down the hill into the night again. He paid no heed to them.

The interior of the old mill was one vast twinkle of lanterns and candles, set up along the walls. Half a dozen men were working feverishy to the roaring of ten stamps. At first this din and its cause held all Jack's attention. The big steel weights rose and fell, each in alternation with its neighbor, the result a series of blows, each one thunderous in itself, the entirety a heaven-shaking salvo which crushed all of Jack's senses. In this appalling noise Jack's eyes remained centered on the

cause. The stamps held him as if he were hypnotized. He stood near the door, gazing down the row of them, watching them drop their crushing weight, then rise, then drop again. Thus engrossed, he did not see several of the roughly dressed men in the place look curiously at him; nor did he see Brown shake his head at these.

Jack's attention went from the stamps to the broken ore. Heavy, dark in color, it was coming down steadily to the monstrous hammers. Crushed by their blows, it gathered in a trough which extended beside them. Jack saw a film of water running over everything; he saw the finely crushed dust passing out from the trough through a screen, and on over the amalgamated plates; from these plates it went on farther to a set of concentrating tables. He watched these tables jigging; saw the pulverized stuff passing by a strange freak of gravity and motion upward until the heavier particles went on over the upper edge and were caught there, while the finer stuff worked down and off into the tailings.

All these things Jack watched; in their entirety they bewildered him. The terrifying volume of sound helped to make his brain reel. Brown touched him on the elbow; he looked up; Brown made an abrupt motion with his head, and Jack followed him down the room.

Walking along the row of stamps, they passed one of the toiling men. The fellow's eyes were on the screen through which the pulverized dust was passing; in those eyes was greed. And, looking about him, Jack saw how the others of this strange company were constantly keeping their gaze bent on screen, or plates, or jigging tables; and how always in the faces of the men was the same hard, eager greed. As if it were their gold.

Butch was standing at the far end of the room. Jack saw how the evil-featured guide kept his bleared eyes not upon the workings of the mill, as did the other men, but on these men themselves. And those eyes were sinister. Also, he saw how Butch wore his heavy-caliber revolver by his side.

It came to him that this mining in the wilderness, where the ores ran high values, and where men were far from the law's reach, had some phases as perilous as they were picturesque.

Occasionally now Brown stooped close to Jack to shout into his ear some explanation regarding the machinery; and at length Brown showed to him upon the amalgamated plates a thin crust. "Gold!" yelled Brown.

There it was. Gold! His gold! They were getting it now. The strangeness of the whole business became of less importance to Jack. Brown's ready explanation down the path became sufficient; all things became dwarfed beside that one big thing—the gold. And yet Jack had no need at all for that yellow stuff.

He stood there watching it gather on the plates. He saw it coming up over the top edges of the tables in black concentrates. He wondered how much it would be. Brown left him now. He wandered about the place. The men—his men—bent their attention to their work. They paid no heed to him. As if he had no part in their calculations. In their eyes was flaming that greed, and often in their movements Jack perceived something which looked to him like the signs of haste. Among them there was no appearance of fellowship. And always Butch, revolver handy at his side, watched the entire company.

Brown came back and beckoned Jack to follow him. They went outside, and there it seemed as if the night were silent, so diminished was the noise. Brown did not have the difficulty now in making himself heard that he had when they first met. He smiled as he spoke:

"Well, how do you like it?"

Jack shook his head. He was quite dazed with it all.

"Pretty good clean-up," Brown went on. "It shows good. I got to get the men right back. My partners need them. Got a new crew coming in a few days. Bill goes back with them. He'll send out our supplies. The next bunch will get things to moving. I'll leave you in charge."

It suddenly occurred to Jack that this was his mine, and he said as much. For he had a piqued feeling at Brown's proprietary manner.

"I told you I'd start it for you," Brown retorted. "I'll gladly go back with them in the morning if you don't want me. Get your own men, and go to it, my boy."

Jack came back to earth. He was impotent as a child. He knew it. And, like a child, he was showing resentment toward this one who helped him.

"I'm crusty," he acknowledged. "It was because you left me there asleep and didn't let me know when the men came."

"All right." Brown frowned. "Only don't get too crusty."

They went back inside. In an hour Jack found himself watching the processes of the clean-up, the removal of the amalgam from the plates, the gathering of the concentrates. He saw Butch retorting the quicksilver away from the gold. It seemed to him as though in the haste which was now evident on all sides, and in the feverish anxiety of the men to get done, there must be an awful waste. He only guessed at a fact whose mathematical dimensions would have appalled him had he known them.

Dawn was beginning to appear at the sky's rim when suddenly the men departed from the mill. Jack followed with Brown. Butch was walking near to them. Brown staggered under the weight of the clean-up which he bore. The mill was silent, as dark as ever. Below them, the rest of the company trooped. Some of the men were talking in low tones, and now and then there came to Jack's ear a laugh in whose lilt there was no suggestion of kindly mirth—as if some one were exulting.

In the shadows of the gorge they kindled a fire, and several began preparations for a meal. Butch drew nearer to Brown. "Time to make the cut," said he; "they got to blow."

Brown turned to Jack. "I'm going to pay them off and give Bill what he needs to get those supplies, if you're willing to leave it to my hands. If not——"

"By all means," Jack told him. And when Brown suggested that he might as well go and sleep, it was his own uneasy sense of something wrong that helped to make him comply. For he could not bring himself to show any further distrust of Brown. That would provoke a crisis. And to Jack there was no cause for a breach between him and Brown. He could not understand his own suspicions. Shame for them and for himself made him leave the camp fire and seek his blankets with a feeling like humiliation.

CHAPTER X.

A flare of hot sunshine in his face awoke Jack that afternoon. He had slept like a log. He opened his eyes with senses keen and a mind that became at once alert.

Brown was sitting under a clump of brush a short distance away. Jack's eyes went to him. Brown was frowning as though he were in deep thought. As he lay there looking, Jack beheld upon that square-jawed face the same crafty expression that had been there the night before.

For a few moments the boy lay as still as though he were hiding and the other were searching for him. He thought of the night's strange events. For some reason, these happenings did not stand the light of day. They seemed unreal, as if they had been played on a stage. All save one thing; that thing was fearsome in its reality; the ugly thing written on Brown's face —the same thing which Jack had seen on the faces of the roughly dressed men toiling in the mill. Crafty greed.

Something was wrong. The knowledge was absolute. It was stamped on Jack's brain beyond erasure, beyond forgetting, beyond the power of smooth words.

The place was silent save for the whimpering of the little stream. Far up the mountainside an eagle screamed to its mate. Butch was gone. All the

rest of the men had vanished. Jack was alone with Brown.

And now Brown turned his head. The lids dropped swiftly before the hard, crafty eyes. The corners of the mouth curled up as if by some mechanical process.

"Hello! Awake?" Brown's voice was hearty.

Instinct handled Jack in that moment. It made a liar of him. He yawned mightily. He rubbed his eyes. He muttered something.

"Hello!" he answered. "Yes, awake."

"Want a bite to eat?" Brown arose and went over to the ashes of the camp fire. He started whittling some kindling. A new departure this.

Jack started dressing in silence. He was wondering. He went down to the brook, and splashed the ice-cold water over his face. He felt unusually fit this afternoon. Somehow, he felt unusually cool.

When Jack came back to the fire Brown had the coffee hot. Brown delivered a rapid fire of talk while the other ate and answered in monosyllables. Jack found it hard to keep his mind on what the older man was saying; he was thinking busily of the night before. Strange business! Something was wrong. What? He knew he had to find out. With a jerk, he realized that he was going about that in a poor manner.

"You seem down in the mouth," Brown was saying.

Jack was no liar by nature. But he did his best to smile. "The sun made my head ache a bit." He pushed his tin plate from him.

"Done?" Brown got to his feet. "Come over here, and I'll show you what ought to make you perk up." He went up the stream a little distance, and into the thick bushes. Jack followed him. Brown came back from the brush. He bore a brick of gold. He handed it to Jack. A small thing, yet its weight was astonishing. Under this substantial evidence, Jack's former glamour began to come back to him. He stood still, holding the metal in both hands, gazing at it. Yes, the mine was a reality.

Brown smiled. He was doing a good deal of smiling this afternoon. He threw himself down on the grass, and Jack sat down beside him, still fingering the brick fondly, as all men finger naked gold. His eyes hung on it. Under his own lowered lids, Brown watched.

"Five thousand dollars there," Brown said quietly. "I sent back as much with Bill."

"Bill went?" Jack's eyes strayed from the brick; then they reverted to its dull, roughened surface.

"With the men. He'll look out for some of the supplies. They'll be back in two or three days."

Jack frowned. "Say," he looked Brown fairly in the face, "it's awful queer—those fellows coming up and then going back. And that rifle, and working at night. I don't——"

"You don't understand." Brown nodded. "Well, I'll tell you all about it, Jack." In spite of himself, Jack winced when the other called him by his given name for the first time. Brown did not see that; his eyes were on the gold. "Five thousand dollars," he went on caressingly. "Next time there'll be a bigger clean-up. You'll be getting the yellow bricks thick and fast this summer. Nice stuff, isn't it?"

Jack nodded. "Yes," he agreed, "it's nice to have—to get for yourself."

"Just so." Brown's voice was silken. "Nice to get. And there's lots of it. You can make more money than your father inside of two or three years. It's a fact. I'm not joking. Millions!" He uttered each word slowly, giving emphasis to all. "You stick to my advice, and you'll pack burro loads of bricks like this out of Nevada."

Rather than look into Brown's face —for to hold his composure when he did that was to lie, and he was a poor liar—Jack continued to stare at the brick. Brown smiled craftily to himself. After all, the sight of that gold was doing more than he had hoped. He told himself that. Then he went on:

"All a man has to do is to know how to get it."

Jack looked up at him, and battled to keep suspicion down so that it would not show. Yes, something was wrong. He was able to smile as he asked: "How?"

"That's it." Brown touched him on the arm. "How? In this country, my boy, we get down to cases. Things look rough. We don't finesse, you know. Now, you saw the mill working last night. You want to know about it. I'll tell you. That ore wasn't your ore."

"What!" It burst from Jack's lips in the surprise of the moment.

Brown retreated into his shell with speed. "No, not yours." He did some quick thinking during a moment's pause. He took an easier and a slower route. "Schwartz," said he, "didn't really own the mine. He was working a property that belonged to others."

"You mean to say——" Jack paused as Brown waved his hand.

"I didn't find it out until the night we left. But that's the case. Now, there's a chance, of course, in court. But we don't do things that way. I made up my mind to get you out in good shape. And, anyhow, the people that do own the mine would never work it; they never knew of its worth. You found it out through me, and I found it out through Bill." Jack remained silent as Brown went on. He had a feeling that this, too, was a lie. "And so we're working it carefully. In a hurry. By night. Gutting it, you see." Brown picked up the brick. "Of course, you can stop it if you want." He eyed Jack keenly. "Or you can go on and get more of these." In all his experience with gold bricks, Brown had found the sight of the yellow metal to be the potent factor in the deal. He held this where Jack must look at it. "And there are millions here if we stick to it and keep quiet. Now, what do you say? I'm fair with you."

Jack felt as though everything inside of him were ice. A weakness was over his limbs. For the moment he could not have moved had he wanted to do so. And he was dumb. At last he spoke, and as he talked he was morally certain that Brown had told him only a part of the truth. He wanted to think, to see it all. Time was what he needed. He talked for time:

"I paid my money for stolen property." He mustered more feeling into his voice, which was strangely listless. "Bought a mine from a man that didn't own it? And I've got to steal the ore, to mill it in the night?"

"That," said Brown, "is the thing in plain language. But you don't need to lose out. You can make millions."

Jack picked up the brick. It was in his mind to heave the heavy thing into Brown's face. He subdued that inclination by a heroic effort. He gazed at the gold. He pondered. How would he gain time?

"Good stuff to have," Brown said smoothly.

"Fine!" Jack grinned. There was something here that made him want to laugh at himself. He had been stealing gold, when he had plenty of it waiting for him at home. "Well"—he looked at Brown—"you see there's more, then? And we got to get it, eh?"

"You want to?"

"Sure! And the sooner the better. If I'm in it, I'm in it. Might as well go good and strong. If I'm a thief, I'm going to be a big one, you know. How much can we make this summer?"

"Matter of millions." Brown knew the virtue of that magic word.

"All right." Jack got up in order that he might not have to look too long at Brown's face. "Go to it. I suppose I've got to divide up with you and—er—the others—Bill, you know. Is that right?"

"Right." Brown was as expressionless as a stone. "And now the idea is to keep quiet, and take it easy, and don't go talking your head off. You see where you are? It's one thing or the other: Prison for stealing ore, or millions."

"Oh, yes," Jack laughed mirthlessly, "I see. Better make as much as possible, and as soon as possible." He wanted to get by himself. He felt sick.

Brown gave him a swift, keen look,

and then relieved him mightily by rising. "I think," said he, "I'll go down where the boys camped last night. I lost my jackknife. If you want a bit of fishing, there are some flies in the pack, and I saw some big fellows in the creek this morning."

"That's a good idea." Jack went over to the pack, and rummaged for the flies. "Humph!" muttered Jack, as Brown walked down. "Trout here ought to average a good three inches. That's one time you overreached, Mr. Brown."

He continued groping in the sack, and when he found the flies he merely sat there staring at them. His mind and imagination were beginning to work fast. Stolen ore! What was the truth? This thing began to look big. And a thousand little facts began crowding his memory—facts which he had previously ignored. He realized that he was up here, miles from men, with two thieves. He had begun to like Butch, too!

"Time to go fishing," he said aloud, and cut a willow pole. He walked briskly up the creek. When he had gone two hundred yards or so and was well out of sight of camp, he climbed the hill, and found a spot in the brush from which he got a view of the entire gulch. He stood there peering in the direction which Brown had taken. He saw the ashes of the fire which the men had used, and that spot was deserted. He looked up the trail which led to the mill. Brown was climbing slowly up that zigzag pathway, occasionally pausing to look behind. Jack's teeth clicked together; his chin shoved forward. He bent low, and walked downhill through the brush, seeking cover as he traveled, and thus gained the other side of the ravine. Then, crawling sometimes on hands and knees, again running with head and shoulders low, he climbed toward the abandoned mill.

It was a race. Brown had all the advantage of a big handicap; Jack had the advantage of youth and hard limbs. Jack won. He gained the brush-clad slope close by the red-brown dump. He crept up this until he reached a point directly opposite one of the apertures, where a window had once been. He lay there in the bushes, peering into the dusky interior of the building. As his eyes became accustomed to the dimmer light, he saw a man; and gradually he was able to distinguish every feature. It was Butch; he was stooping down beside the space behind the concentrating tables, shoveling a dark powder into a rusty gold pan. Ignorant as Jack was of milling, he realized that Butch was here to steal what the others had in some manner missed. Truly he was in a nest of thieves!

The door space of the mill darkened; Jack saw Brown standing there. And simultaneously the right hand of Butch suddenly dropped all else, and flew to his big-caliber revolver. The coarse face became fierce, malevolent. Brown walked into the mill. Suddenly he saw Butch. He paused, his face bereft of all emotion.

Jack lay prone in his hiding place, with ears strained.

Butch, hand on his weapon, looked up at Brown, snarling. Brown looked down at Butch steadily.

"Well?" Brown's voice was even and cold. "Trying to steal a few hundred dollars, hey?"

"That's jest it." Butch smiled now, and a leer was in his eyes. "Yo' hit it, pardner. And I'll tell yo' somethin' more: I'm here ready to spatter them brains o' yourn all over these here concentratin' tables if yo' bat an eye! I don't like yo', anyhow."

Brown made no answer for a moment, but stood there looking at the other. Then he shrugged his shoulders. "Take it," he said; "as much as you can get. I don't give a damn. A few hundred ain't worrying me."

"Mebbe not." Butch remained with his hand resting on the pistol butt. "It don't bother me none, neither. Because I'm a-goin' to get it. What I said about shootin' I mean. Yo' see, I don't like this whole business, and I'm jest about ready to dig out any old time. And if I *should* do thetaway, I'd be very liable to leave yo' behind. There's that about yo' that makes me jest plumb uneasy

to turn loose this forty-five. Yo' need beatin' up, anyhow, at the very least."

"Speaking of digging out," said Brown, "I just came up to tell you that you're liable to have to blow any second or get pinched."

"What!" Butch was on his feet. His eyes were gleaming slits; his body was tense.

"This kid," Brown went on coolly, "is wise."

"Oh, the kid! Shucks!" Butch's voice showed relief.

"I had a talk with him," Brown said slowly, "and I put it up to him—not the way things are, you know, but strong enough to feel him out. I did it once before. He balked then. This time he didn't balk. He lied to me."

"So? How was that?" Butch asked the question carelessly.

"I'll tell you." Brown was showing some asperity now. "And when I get done you'll understand, perhaps, just how near you are to the big stir. See? It was this way: He tried to make me think he'd stand for any sort of raw work, and that he was ready to go into this whole thing to his neck. If he hadn't gone too strong I'd have believed him. I did at first. Now I know he's stalling. And if you can't see where that puts you, as well as me, your head is thicker than I thought."

"Don't you worry about my head, pardner." Butch toyed with his gun once more. "It's got me out of more tight holes than yo' ever seen. I took my chances, I did, always until this time. Jest tell me what there is to tell."

"He's wise, I tell you, to the crooked work. He won't stand for it, because, after I showed him a bit of gold, he tried this stall. It means this: He's going to try and blow and get back to Malapi. And, of course, if he does, or if he sees a prospector up here, or anybody at all, it's all off. Hundreds of thousands if we can keep on. We can mill all the ore that all the high graders in Nevada can make away with."

Out in the brush Jack lay as if he were frozen. And now he saw the truth in its entirety. Brown kept on; his voice showed rage:

"Hundreds of thousands! We're all rich in a few months. Do you see what you stand to lose? Day after to-morrow the gang gets to work again at the ore train from the Lucky Boy. It's the big thing then. And the only chance for it. They've stalled along for days, getting ready for that rock throwing, and now it's to come off."

"Well, what of it? Don't I know?" Butch scowled.

"And let this kid get away from here and we lose that. We got to make that clean-up, anyhow, if we don't make another. Thousands of dollars; all the burros can pack. And we got to stand guard over a picayune, thin-skinned, lily-fingered sucker like two nurses if we want to get it. And if we want to stay out of jail. Ever been in jail? You like the smell, hey?"

"Forget it!" the other growled. "What are yo' goin' to do?"

"That's up to you." Brown took a step closer. "You know how to do some things that I don't understand as well. Of course, if you want to stand guard every night, and keep that kid close all summer, all right. But you can't do it."

"You want me to kill him?" Butch looked Brown in the eyes.

"Do you want to do the other?" Brown snarled.

Butch bent his head and thrust his jaw forward. "I always did itch to bat yo' over the head with this gun. Now, listen to me. I kind o' like that kid. But it ain't that is botherin' me so much. It's you and that long-haired pardner o' yo'rs. Kill a kid for you two? If yo' bat an eye in that kid's direction, I'll turn loose this gun on yo' that second! If he does not show up some night in camp, or anything happens to him, I'll do the same."

"You want to go to jail, then?" Brown was white, but he mustered a pretty good sneer, for all of his trembling.

"Yo' can hog tie him, or do what yo' please with him so yo' don't hurt him," Butch replied doggedly. "And I don't

know what I'll do when the time comes. It's a bad deal, and I'm plumb sick of it. But I can't see my way through with it now. And I won't murder no fool kid. I don't do that sort o' thing. Why in glory didn't yo' hook up with a bunch o' greasers when yo' was about it?"

"Tie him up?" Brown was speaking as much to himself as to the other.

"Jest so," said Butch.

"If he makes a roar?"

"What of that? The place is big." Butch grinned and spat.

"Somebody might come along."

"Keep strangers out. We got to do that anyhow." Butch pointed a finger under Brown's nose. "No killin'. Yo' understand?"

"We'll get him to-night, then," said Brown coldly. "He thinks he's safe now. And we'll keep him tight."

"I'll figger what I'm goin' to do with him," said Butch decisively, "and until I do, yo' let him be."

"He's fishing down there. I'll get down and see that he stays close." Brown started for the door.

"If yo'd not picked the wrong kind of a man," Butch called out after him, "this would have come through all right. Yo' got mixed up with honest people, pardner. And better keep away from him this afternoon. He's wise now, and he'll be lookin' out for yo'."

In the brush Jack lay silent, immovable. He had grown hard and old in that half hour.

CHAPTER XI.

And now the glasses of illusion had fallen from before Jack's eyes. The fact that he was in deadly peril dwindled into insignificance before the fact that he had been a fool. His cheeks were hot with shame; he was suffering the tortures of humiliation; he lay prone, thinking over the events which had taken place since he started to Malapi. Brown's arrival on the train (he wondered whether Brown had then picked him out); their acquaintance, which he himself had sought (that hurt him keenly); the office with its sign (for a brief moment Jack wondered over this, and then he recalled the situation of Brown's desk, the utter lack of investigation on his own part, and he winced); the lank Bill, evidently a confederate; Schwartz and the "death scene" in the little tent—a hundred small incongruities flashed before Jack's mind, and he called himself a simpleton.

He knew now why Brown had been willing to sell out to him; that check which Brown had given him was probably false. One after another these things occurred to Jack, and he saw how he had always been trying to make himself see golden visions; how he had done the necessary part of the swindling; Brown and his gang had simply steered him into the proper paths, and he had gone ahead only too eagerly along these routes of belief. His wine drinking in the Great Western Club came back to him now, and he recalled the faces of several men about them that evening, laughing at some one—himself! His lack of discernment, his failure to examine under the surface, his enthusiasm, his optimistic acceptance of statements made to him by strangers—all these things, in themselves a part of a generous nature, loomed up before Jack Moore now as cardinal sins. He had put his neck in a noose. And now he had to——

What? What had he to do? What could he do? His situation flashed before him. He was in danger of his life. Even Butch, who had refused to murder him, was willing to bind him and keep him a prisoner. He was in the hands of a gang of high graders, criminals who were robbing those very mining men whom Jack had wanted to emulate. He had financed these thugs. His money had undoubtedly outfitted them. That was it. That was his part of the business. Brown had swindled him for that purpose, and now Brown had him fast and hard, unless——

Yes, he must do something. Escape. But how? There was Butch. The outlaw liked him, and did not want to harm him. For a few moments Jack pondered in the grip of that tempta-

tion. He might take a chance, and talk with Butch. But it came to him that there was more to do than to save himself. He had to protect others whose property he had jeopardized, whom he had already helped to rob of thousands. He owed his duty to the law. Temptation went away, and the struggle was brief, indeed. He must get back to Malapi and bring word to the camp before either Brown or Butch could get there. He had his life to risk, and thereby he might make some restitution to his self-respect.

In these minutes while he lay there, thinking, there was nothing of the boy in Jack. He was hard; cynicism had entered his soul; he was facing facts, and he was planning his conduct toward those facts along the lines of principle. He had one thing to do. When he had done that he could afford to face other men.

Inside the mill, Butch was working with his gold pan at the concentrates, which had gone over the tailings. Jack watched him. And, watching, he thought of the mules. Butch could ride, but Brown could not. Another wave of shame came over Jack at the memory of Brown's horsemanship and his own failure to see then that Brown was an impostor. He wasted some minutes on that. Then he went back to his plans. Butch would be able to follow him. It would then be a race, and that race would depend upon his own start. The mules were down the gulch near the spot where they had first camped. Three of them, grazing by the little stream. Perhaps he had best try it now. He weighed the chances. No; better wait until night, when Butch was asleep, when Brown would be snoring. He might get many hours' start.

He lay there trying to decide with some intelligence; he was putting one fact against another. In this last half hour many things had changed in Jack. A former disposition to do a thing as soon as he thought of it, to go after a thing as soon as he saw it, to imagine all lovely because he hoped for lovely things—that tendency was being tempered by the fire of a huge experience. Just now everything in him had swung straight to the opposite extreme. He had been too quick; now he was overcautious.

He realized this with a jerk. A shadow loomed in the doorway of the mill. Butch looked up from his gold pan. Brown walked swiftly across the creaking floor. "The kid has blowed!" he cried as he came.

Butch leaped to his feet. "The mules!" he growled. "I bet yo' never looked for them."

"He went up the creek," said Brown. "But he's not there now. I figured that——"

"Come on!" Butch had dropped his pan and was running to the door. "If he gets one o' them critters, he's gone. Come on! Run some o' that fat off'n yo'!"

The pair vanished down the trail. And Jack saw how he had waited to give them their biggest chance. He was a prisoner now. Down the gorge lay the road to Malapi. On either side lofty mountains rose, impassable walls of rock; at the head of the cañon a pass led somewhere over into California. And now his one route to safety and to those whom he would warn was being blocked. For Jack knew that Butch would look out for that. What was more, they were likely to search the place for him. He couldn't remain here. His mind worked quickly, clearly. The mill, where Butch and Brown had talked, would be the one place above all others in which the pair would be sure he was not concealed. He rose and ran into the place.

Jack stood inside, examining the barren room. The stamps and tables loomed dusky in its shadows; up where the roof had fallen in he picked a spot which afforded shelter. He clambered along a broken beam; he tore his clothes; he cut his hands; but when he had gained the hiding place he found himself where no one could see him from inside the mill, and whence in his turn he could look down over much of the ravine. He lay there behind some twisted boards and timbers, watching, listening.

After some time he saw, far down in the depths of the cañon, the pygmy forms of Brown and Butch; the former was leading one of the mules, and the latter strode the one which Jack had ridden, with the third animal following, tethered. He watched them ride up to the camp, where Butch dismounted and tied all three animals to trees at a little distance from the blankets. After this was done, the pair stood talking; Jack saw Butch gesture up the cañon, then down. Evidently the outlaw was showing Brown the futility of escape from the place. Shortly afterward both of them vanished in the brush.

"They're combing it down for me now," Jack thought.

He lay still, and endured the heat of the late-afternoon sun. It seemed as if he had been there for hours, although it was really no more than fifteen minutes, when a crash of footsteps in the brush made him press his body close to the timbers. It was Butch. He was alone. He passed by the building, and went up the hill toward the deserted mine. Silence followed. The sun was low when the noise of breaking brush told Jack that Butch was coming back. This time the ore thief passed by quickly. A smell of wood smoke make Jack look down the cañon bed. Brown had kindled a fire there. Butch walked on down the trail, and in the gathering twilight Jack beheld the pair eating their supper.

Darkness followed dusk with the swiftness which it has in cañons. The flame of the camp fire flared yellow down in the bed of the ravine. Now and then Jack could hear one of the mules stamping. At times he got a glimpse of Butch walking about the place. The coolness of evening began to make Jack shiver. He started to climb down; a cracking board froze his blood; it seemed to him as if the noise must reach for miles. He sank back into his place, and peered down toward the camp fire; in its light he could see the two men sitting; evidently they had not heard. He began moving once more, with caution now. At last he was down in the mill.

Here Jack planned carefully and at length. He made up his mind to steal one of the mules; the moral certainty that one of his enemies was sure to be on guard became a factor in his plans. He stole on tiptoe out of the mill, and began creeping down the hillside toward the camp. Foot by foot he went, and as he gained more distance his progress became slower and more stealthy, until when he was less than one hundred feet above the fire he stopped and waited. He could see Butch and Brown. One of them was talking. He could barely hear the voice. He was not yet close enough. He started on again. This time he crawled by infinitesimal movements. The dragging forward of one leg was a task which sometimes took a full sixty seconds; he felt every object before he trusted his weight on it, and even then he made so much noise about it that his heart stood still for what seemed like minutes at a time. At last he found himself behind a thick clump of greasewood where he could hear every word from the camp fire and distinguish every movement of facial expression in the light of the flames. The pair were talking of him.

"Yo' see, he can't get up over the range; it would take that kid a month, and he'd starve. He's got to go down the cañon." It was Butch; and Jack realized that in the voice of the ore thief there was now in evidence a closer companionship between the two men than there had been before. This did not surprise him; he was ready for revelations of the unpleasant sort after what had come and gone.

"If he tries to steal one of those mules," Brown snarled, "I'll get him, anyhow."

"A rotten shot like you be," Butch said calmly, "couldn't do him nor nobody else no harm. Yo' keep yo'r gun quiet unless it comes to a case of have to."

Brown swore briefly. Then the pair lapsed silent. At length Butch rose and stretched himself. "I'm behind on sleep," he announced. "I'm goin' to go out there and keep an eye on them

mules until midnight. I'll call you then." Without any more words, he strode away out of the firelight.

Brown rose and watched him go. In the firelight, Jack saw the cold, square-jawed face, and he marveled how he had been able to miss the wickedness in those lineaments before. When Butch had gone out of sight, Brown sought his blankets, and rolled up in them.

Behind his clump of brush Jack waited, and the dew that rose from the little stream seemed to be eating into his very bones, so cold it was. He dared not move now; he knew that Butch expected him to be near at hand, and he was morally certain that Butch would not let one of those animals be stolen while he was on guard. He must wait for Brown. Each minute dragged slowly; each hour loitered for what seemed like a day, and the ache in his limbs became almost unendurable. But Jack did not move. He was grim with a purpose. He was as iron-souled then at Butch himself. He had that warning to give; he had his self-respect to regain. And he was going to do it if he lost his life.

In the grimness of that purpose, Jack was even able to forget the excruciating pain in his limbs as he planned each little detail. Brown would come on guard at midnight. He would wait until the hours before the dawn brought their deadly chill and gripping weariness. Then while Brown dozed—as Jack felt morally sure he would—it would be time to execute his plan. How would he go about it?

There would be the gun. Brown would probably take one of the rifles which had been a picturesque portion of their equipment. He must get that weapon first; he might be able to do it if Brown should doze. If not—Jack set his jaw—he would get that rifle, anyway, and if there were a struggle then he would have to shoot it out with Butch. But if Brown dozed—then he could steal the firearm, and afterward—he might be able to steal one of the tie ropes from the mules, and bind Brown while he slept. He went on mapping it all out, trying his level best to conjure up every complication which might arise. And now as he planned, the time began to slip by without his noticing it. Midnight had passed for something like an hour when he heard the footsteps of Butch coming down past him. A few moments after that he listened to the instructions which Butch was delivering to Brown:

"Mind yo', if yo' go to sleep one holy second yo' run a chance of ten years in the pen. I hope yo' get it some time. But not this time. There's others besides yo' that I've got to look out for. Now, watch them mules, and if I should get up and find yo' nappin' I'll bust yo'r head wide open with the barrel of this here forty-five."

Brown growled an oath in answer, and then Jack heard him pass. And now began another vigil, longer, more wearisome, and more heartbreaking in the pain which the cold was bringing, than the last had been. At last, when he could stand stillness no longer, Jack began to crawl toward the spot where Brown was watching. His legs were paralyzed; he had the utmost difficulty in moving either of them at all. He labored a good half hour, wriggling his toes and making small, cautious movements until at last he began to feel the blood stirring in both limbs again. He crept on, an inch at a time, feeling his way with his hands, keeping head and body close to the ground.

The temptation to arise and shout and thus relieve himself of the terrific tenseness was strong before him. He remembered what he had to do. He fought the temptation down. He crept a rod; another rod; and now he could see a faint silver sheen stealing through the brush where the low moon was letting her light filter into the depths of the cañon. Fairly in the middle of that little area of light, Jack saw the form of Brown. His heart gave a great leap. The head was sunken low against the chest. The arms were relaxed. And the rifle lay a good three feet away.

Into Jack's mind there came a picture—he had seen it when he was a

small boy—the picture of an Indian stealing up on a sleeping enemy. The savage in that picture was prone on his belly; he was in the unmistakable attitude of one who wriggles like a snake. Jack sank down, and started emulating that example. His mouth was half open; his eyes were wide, staring at Brown. And his ears, attuned to the slightest sound, now caught the slow, deep, regular breathing of the sleeper. Jack was at the end of the shelter; the brush stopped here. Bare grass lay between the two of them.

Jack paused and listened for a long time. He strove to hear whether there might be any movement in the direction of Butch's blankets. Save for Brown's breathing, there was no sound. He rose to his hands and knees, and crept across the grass. He reached out his arm, but it lacked an inch. He moved forward. Brown stirred. Jack's fingers gripped the barrel of the rifle and dragged it toward him in a flash. He hugged the weapon, and he lay still, waiting. Brown's head tilted to one side, and he snored gently. Jack's jaw ached, he was holding it so tightly clenched against its fellow. Then he crept away.

The mules were standing tethered to three little trees. He crawled toward the nearest of them. The animal saw him and snorted. He felt his breath stop; he lay still. The mule looked down at him, ears forward, then went on munching its feed once more. Jack rose slowly, and came toward it. He seized the tie rope and loosed the knots. Then he walked over to the next animal, and took its tie rope away, and did the same with the third. The first mule had moved away from the tree. Jack gulped down a big lump in his throat. He had counted on the brute staying at its feed until he could lay hold of it again; now it was seeking green grass. Then, with a sigh of relief, he saw that it was moving down the creek. He bent down and crept toward Brown.

In one hand Jack carried the three tie ropes; in the other he gripped the rifle. In the moonlight his young face gleamed, white, tense, ugly with determination. He crept slowly, as silent as a snake, toward Brown's back. Within two feet of that fat, bent back he paused, and, rising to his knees, placed the rifle beside him on the grass. He dropped the ropes. He reached into his pocket, and pulled out his linen handkerchief, then unknotted from around his neck the bandanna which had been a part of his garb. Placing the latter by his knees, he leaned forward. The handkerchief was in his left hand, his right arm was crooked at the elbow. He slid the forearm in front of Brown's face, dropped it to the level of the chin, then sharply pulled that rigid forearm toward himself.

His wrist thudded against Brown's soft throat. His right knee shot upward between Brown's shoulders; Brown's head flew back, and there was a strangled sigh. That was all. Brown fell back limp, senseless, against Jack's body. In an instant the handkerchief entered the half-open mouth, and Jack tied the bandanna firmly before the double chin. He seized the tie ropes, selected the longest, and bound the ankles; he took another, and wound it round wrists and body. Then he picked up his rifle, and stole, bent-backed, down the cañon after the mules.

Even as he sped through the moonlight on the soft grass, his sweating fingers gripping the barrel of the weapon, Jack felt a surge of exultation. He had done one thing, and done it well. It did not matter what the outcome was—he had done this much. And he had planned it himself; he had figured out every detail, and every detail had come as he had meant it to come. His confidence began to return. He passed the ashes of the camp fire, and the thought came to him that here was Butch sleeping away the weariness of two days and a sleepless night. But Jack knew better, on second thoughts, than to try with Butch what he had done with Brown. The ore thief was made of different stuff.

The mules had wandered for a hundred feet now; they began walking briskly away as Jack approached. He

slowed up; they were still within too easy earshot of Butch. The animals checked their pace, and began feeding once more, but at every second bite one of them would move on for several steps. In this way they proceeded for one hundred yards. Then Jack slipped the rifle into his left hand and took the tie rope in his right. He walked quickly toward the mule which he had ridden. The brute raised its head, retreated a few steps, then stopped, regarding Jack with ears forward.

Jack held out his hand. The mule remained still. A moment later he had the tie rope around its neck. With all his soul he wished there were a bridle, but he contented himself with knotting the rope into a hackamore as he had seen stablemen do many times. He gripped the mane, and scrambled up. As he gained the back of his mount, he heard a sudden cracking in the brush behind him. A man was running there. He dug his heels into the flanks of the mule, and gave a loud whoop. The other two animals ran before him down the gorge.

CHAPTER XII.

Jack felt his mule heave under him in a mighty leap; he slipped back toward the sloping flanks, and nearly lost his seat. Clinging to the roached mane with desperation, he gripped the belly with his legs; he was holding his own now, barely maintaining his seat. If only he could use the other hand! The weight of the rifle impeded him, too. There was a moment when he wrestled with a desire to throw the weapon from him. He dug his nails into the stiff, wiry mane; he felt the rifle barrel banging against his thigh. The mule, terrified by that pounding, increased its speed. It turned with a bend of the trail, and now it ran downhill. Jack slid forward, and seized the mane farther up, holding himself to his new seat. He managed to shift the rifle in his right hand. The tie rope looped slack from the fingers clinging to the mane. The mule, ears back, ran like a frightened hare, its body low, its head outstretched. Before them the hoofs of the other two animals struck fire from the stones in the pathway.

A resonant bang from the rear made Jack bend his body closer to the outstretched neck. Butch was resorting to his forty-five. The hammer of the iron-shod hoofs echoed the pistol's report. And even as Jack thanked his luck that he had not cast aside his rifle, he heard a snarling whine close to his ear; simultaneously the forty-five bellowed once more. Things had simmered down to grim finality between himself and Butch.

In the silence of the night, the three mules now seemed to roar down the trail. The rattle of spurned bowlders, the crash of hoofs upon the living rock, the whip of branches upon his face, the rush of great winds taking his very breath away, and, above all, the wild, huge motion, gave Jack a strange and stern exaltation. He was riding for life and for his self-respect.

For life and for his self-respect. Behind him one enemy ran, his smoking revolver in his hand; another enemy lay bound. Back there were ignominy and shame; ahead—across miles of desert, by an unknown trail—was the law. And he would gain that goal or die. He knew that. The resolution which makes a weakling more than a man, which gives strength to women and shrewdness to the fool owned Jack in this extremity. He was a man, as hard, as tireless, as implacable as him who stumbled behind.

On down the cañon, heels digging into the rounded barrel of his long-eared mount, head low, body bent and lithe, Jack rode like an Indian. His polo days stood him in good stead now, and he had in his soul that recklessness that made him one with the leaping body under him.

Ahead of him the driven mules sped still. If only he could have the luck to keep them there! For he knew that it was beyond his power to turn his own bridleless animal, at this terrific gait, for their herding. If he could drive them out to the open stretches, where the desert met the cañon's mouth! Half a mile to go. The gorge was narrow

yet, and they ran on before. The distance went by so swiftly that his wish had no time to vanish from his mind before it was attained. Out of the cañon's shadows they ran into the bare, rounded slopes, all shimmering in the moonlight. And now suddenly he saw the two riderless mules wheel abruptly, scurry up a little hillside, and vanish behind some rocks.

His own animal slackened its pace; it slowed to a steady, swinging gallop. The imminence of peril now past, Jack rode no longer by instinct; he began to feel the jolt and constant sliding which makes bareback riding a constant torturing wrestle for the novice. Again he battled against desire to throw away his rifle; he rode on, eyes blazing and lips pressed to a thin, tight line. His hat was gone; his garments were torn; his face was bleeding from the whipping of the boughs. He did not know these things. He only knew that he must ride on and on, and keep up that hard, grinding pace.

He had no idea whether he was on the trail. He had traveled this route, paying no heed to landmarks, and for the most of the distance he had come during the hours of darkness. He trusted to the instinct of the mule; he had a pretty fair certainty that it would keep on toward Malapi. And now all depended on that one thing.

Thus he rode for five miles, and at the end of that distance he let the mule drop into a slow, easy trot. He was feeling sorely the punishment of this unaccustomed manner of riding; he bore the pain with gritting teeth. He bent his head, hung to the stubble of mane, and whenever the pace began to slacken toward a walk he beat a tattoo with his heels against the round sides.

The great hills widened and became less abrupt; the sage and greasewood seemed in the magic moonlight like the undulating surface of a heaving sea. The calm, grateful presence of the night wind came upon his cheek like a soothing caress; it eased the fever of the blood within him; it seemed to promise hope.

He rode on. The pain and weariness were, after all, but little things beside that other thing; he was on the road to make his restitution, to give to decent men what would repay them for the evil to which he had been a party. A dupe no longer. If he could but get to Malapi, he would be able to face himself.

The dawn was beginning to whiten the eastern horizon, and now it came on swiftly; he watched the glories spread over the sky; he saw the chain of gaunt, dark rock hills off to his right assume tints of glory; they shone like celestial walls. Across the wide, bare reaches in front of him the colorings swept, clean as a breath from heaven, beautiful beyond belief. In this hour of transformation, Jack rode, bareheaded, ragged, bleeding, his jaw set, his eyes all blurred with his huge weariness. In his right hand the rifle, with its big stock and short barrel, ugly, venomous, banging the mule's flank; in his left hand the lead rope and a tuft of mane. A haggard, thin-lipped rider, black from sun and wind and earth; a deadly vision. And but two weeks ago he had been a fresh-cheeked, eager boy. Now death had become a minor thing in his reckoning; he had a purpose; he was as implacable as fate.

The sun shot up; the desert gleamed; light glared back from a wide borax flat to meet the flare that came streaming down from a yellow sky. Dust rose from the mule's hoofs in little clouds; they spread; they formed a foglike mantle, enwrapping animal and rider. Jack bent his head before the hot rays; they descended upon him like blows.

An hour passed; another hour followed; the mule lagged in spite of ever-urging heels; Jack felt the gnawing of an empty stomach; his mouth was dry. The heat increased; the glare pained his eyes. He closed them, and rode on blindly.

Water! He remembered that he had not drunk since the afternoon before; the emptiness of his stomach had made him faint. Now to that faintness was added the intolerable ordeal of thirst. He forgot the pain in his body; he felt his head reeling; all his senses

swam. His fingers relaxed; he closed them suddenly, bringing back his will to that task; he dared not drop that rifle. He urged on the mule.

The sun climbed high; the morning wore on to noon. Jack knew that he was riding; then he forgot that and everything; again there came to him—a flash of thought—his goal. Purpose made him mighty. Once he stopped his animal while he tore strips from his garments and made a rude bandeau; he slung the rifle over his shoulder. It was safe. Then he started on again.

Suddenly he felt the mule quicken its pace of its own accord, and the trot became faster at every step. In the midst of the discovery his senses all blurred again; he rode as one in a swoon.

The halting of the mule awakened him after a long time; he was slipping off; he tried to regain his seat; he fell; he lay upon the dry earth. In his widening nostrils was the smell of water; he heard a sucking noise; the mule was drinking beside him. They had gained the spring at which the party had made camp.

Jack crawled to the little pool; he bent his head, and drank, his face pressing the nose of the animal. Thought came back to him; he dared not kill himself now, and water was deadly in such a condition as his. By a mighty effort, he drew his lips away. He lay there gasping; his blood began to run more cool through his veins. He stared up at the sky. Wonder seized him; it was late afternoon. For many hours he had not sensed the flight of time.

The mule withdrew from the spring. Jack moved to seize the dangling lead rope; he found his limbs like lead; he strove to increase his speed; the animal was out of his reach. Then, to his inexpressible relief, he saw the brute settle down on its knees, lie prone, and roll luxuriously. He laughed aloud. The crackling of his laughter was weird to his ears. And now he might drink once more; he crept back to the spring, and sucked up a long draft. The mule was cropping bits of bunch grass. Jack dozed off.

For three hours they rested, and then Jack mounted once more. He had soaked his shirt until it dripped, and his parched skin drank in the little rivulets as they ran over his body. His aching limbs cried out as the mule took the first few strides; he shut his teeth, and kicked the patient animal. The sun was near the earth; the heat was less intense. Ever the mule kept to the slow, jogging trot; and now the sun sank from sight. Jack battled with his weariness.

Evening went on to night, and night toward midnight; he knew that they were on the trail, and the knowledge made him stronger of will than he had been before. He spared himself no pain; he only tried to gauge the strength of his mount. On and on, and the lofty malapi hills rose about them, mysterious, black in the moonlight, ragged of outline, hills of an inferno rather than of this earth. The road was stony now; at times the mule stumbled, and Jack reeled, holding to the mane with desperation. His senses were dulled; his mind was numb.

Then abruptly every sense awoke to keenness; his mind flew to wakefulness; he became at once alert. Back of him, far on the night wind, he heard a faint sound. He straightened, turned his head, and listened. It came again—the rat-tat-tat of hoofs. A horse was galloping there. No need to wonder who that was. He knew. He stopped one brief moment, and he tore away the cloth bandeau in which his rifle was suspended. He gripped the weapon in his right hand, seized the mane with tighter fingers, and leaned forward. With a shout, he urged the mule into a run.

And now he knew that there would be no slackening of that pace until the animal should drop from under him; he became merciless. He beat the mule upon the flanks with the rifle barrel; he cursed it in a voice as hoarse as the croak of a frog.

The road lay downhill; on either side the malapi bluffs loomed, closer every mile. The footing was dangerous at best; Jack paid no heed to missteps, nor

did he slacken the pace at any time to save himself, but clung with leg and foot and hand, and dared every fate.

In this manner he kept it up for a half hour; then he drew rein. He listened; behind him, nearer than they had been before, the beating hoofs called out to him—rat-tat-tat, rat-tat-tat. He bent forward once more, and raced on. The gorge narrowed, widened again; it joined another gulch; the mule turned into this, and, rounding the corner, fell to its knees. Jack lurched forward on the long neck; he saved himself by a hair's breadth from falling. The mule was up; he beat it with the rifle barrel; it galloped on.

Now as he raced Jack saw coming toward him a path of white light; it blinded his eyes; it grew. Even as his mind, intent on his own danger, came to this reality, Jack heard the soul-curdling shriek of an auto siren. He drew in his mule; as he halted, the machine swept up; he yelled and waved his arms; he fell to the earth. The auto had stopped close by.

"What in the name——" some one was calling.

Jack staggered to his feet, and he gestured with his rifle toward the trail behind; he shouted in a voice all cracked and broken by thirst and alkali dust.

"Stop him when he comes!" he cried. And as he uttered that warning the rattle of hoofs sounded up the gulch; in the light path a form showed; a man mounted as he had been.

"Stop him, I tell you!" Jack leveled his own rifle.

The rider had stopped his mule; in the same instant the animal wheeled, and before Jack had time to utter another word it was gone into the night.

"Well"—a hand fell on Jack's shoulder—"now, what is it?" A burly form was standing beside him. He saw that the man had left the machine, that other men were leaning toward him from the tonneau. He strove to shape the words to tell them everything in a breath; his knees weakened under him; he was falling. The hand slipped from his shoulder and under his arm.

"Whisky, some of you fellows." The burly man reached forth and took a flask, which he pressed to Jack's lips. Senses and strength began to return.

"You see, he's an ore thief"—Jack's voice sounded to himself vague and like nothing that he had ever heard before, and to the men in the auto it sounded strangely listless, as the voice of one who has undergone mighty things—"an ore thief. He can't get to camp. He'll warn them."

"Warn who?" It was the burly man beside him.

Jack shook his head weakly; his brain persisted in reeling round and round. If only he could keep it still until he told them. He summoned all his will.

"The Lucky Boy. It's the one. I heard them say. I came to tell. They're high graders. I was with them." He stopped again, and from somewhere a long way away he heard a voice saying:

"For the love of Heaven, get him into the machine! He's all in." And then he did not hear anything more, nor did he know anything save that he was lifted up and up and on up.

Some time later—how long he did not know—he woke up. He was in a room. A man was sitting beside his bed. In his mouth was the smart of whisky.

"Well, sir"—the face was big and wide and sunburned; an honest face, and smiling—"take it easy. Can you talk now?"

Jack smiled back; he felt his cracked lips ache at the movement. He remembered that they had picked him up back there. A thought came to him.

"The mule," said he; "they ought to get him. Poor devil!"

"They got him, all right." The man was big-shouldered and burly.

"You picked me up?" Jack said listlessly.

"Listen," said the other. "There's a party out after the man that was following you. Now, can you tell me more?"

That was it! He had come for that. And strength was flashing back once more as he realized the fact. Jack told

the story from the beginning. And when he had done——

"Lord!" said the other. "The Lucky Boy!"

"Where am I?" Jack asked.

"In the hotel," said the other. "And I'm one of the owners of the Lucky Boy."

"Did I tell you what they said about —what was it?—yes, making some sort of stall they said for a long time?"

"You did." The burly man nodded. "I'll leave you a minute or two and you take it easy until I get back."

"Wait!" Jack called. "There's one in Brown & Co.'s office, you know, and another named Bill——"

"You told me," the other said. "Don't worry any more. Take it easy. I got to go for a minute or two."

Jack sank back, wondering whether he had not missed telling them many things. He could not remember a word now. His mind was tired—tired. Suddenly he dropped off to sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was late afternoon when Jack awoke; a hand was shaking him. He opened his eyes, dazed with slumber, and for an instant he wondered at the walls inclosing him. Then he saw the large, bronzed face of his burly friend. He remembered all.

"If you'll get up," the burly man was saying; "that is, if you're fit now——"

"I'm ready for most anything"—Jack stretched his lame limbs luxuriously, and there came to him knowledge of an important fact—"especially a fine, large breakfast."

"Sure!" The other laughed. "You'll need that. And afterward I'd like to have you help us some more. I'll see you downstairs, then?"

"In a mighty short time." Jack regarded him earnestly. "You won't forget to see about that breakfast, will you?"

The burly man departed, and Jack dressed as fast as lameness would allow him. Amid the confused memories which raced through his mind, he kept thinking of the mule which had carried him so well. "I hope," he muttered, "they gave him a good feed, anyhow." His torn clothing appalled him as he got first sight of it. "By Jove," he told himself, "I did have one time of it!" But when he looked into the mirror he stood silent. The face in the glass was burned by the sun to a deep red; the lips were cracked; the grime and blood upon his cheeks were startling. And there, where there had been none before, were several fine lines—the scars of weariness and long endurance, of grim resolve. That face looked strange to him.

When he came downstairs into the lobby, the burly man met him. "My name," the latter said, "is McIntosh." Jack remembered; it was the name of one of the desert's mining kings.

"I'm afraid, Mr. McIntosh," he said, "I've helped to make a lot of trouble for your people."

"You've helped us to weed out a bunch that would have robbed us right and left. I don't know where this would have ended if you hadn't happened along. Feel better now than you did last night, don't you?"

"I'm all right now, but lame." Jack looked toward the dining room. They went together, and while Jack devoured an appalling meal, McIntosh answered his questions.

"We've got those fellows you told us about—the one in the broker's office and the long-haired bunko man—where we can watch them."

"The others?" Jack looked over the table anxiously.

"A party went out to the old Elephant Mine. I've an idea they'll find this fellow Brown there. As to that man Butch, the one that was after you, the chances are that he's got away. But he won't come back to Malapi; his face is too well known here for him to run a chance on that."

"And that robbery—that was what bothered me. Did you——"

"That," said McIntosh, "is what I came to get you for. It took some time to figure out what they were up to—how they were going to do it. But you gave us the tip that put us on the

right track. If you're through now, we'll start out. The boys are waiting up at the mine."

An auto was throbbing at the curb; the pair climbed in; it started off at once; they roared up the gulch among the gallows frames and the dumps; the car climbed a winding hill, and stopped before a frame building. "Better hustle right in," said McIntosh. "You can't tell who might be hanging around, and some of these fellows may know you, you see."

They passed swiftly into the door, and Jack saw that the room was full of men. A small room, fitted for an office, littered with blue prints, whereon were traced in white lines the boundaries of different claims. It now held a dozen khaki-clad, brown-skinned mine owners. And Jack saw, under a counter desk, the butts of several rifles. Every one was smoking, and the air was blue with the fumes of expensive cigars. Jack noted that the faces were those of men still under fifty, all possessing a firmness and decision which would make any one of them marked in a crowd. McIntosh introduced him, and he was the recipient of a general handshaking. If any of this company were thinking of the dupe that Jack had been, they were ignoring that fact in the light of the part that he had just played. In terse words they let him know that they recognized within him a quality which they termed "sand."

And yet these enconiums were bringing to Jack no exultation. He was obsessed by a huge anxiety; he wanted to see the completion of his task. He had an uneasy feeling that he was getting praise as yet unearned. He made some awkward answers; he lapsed silent, and more than once he looked half diffidently, half inquiringly at McIntosh, who had locked the door and drawn the shades before the windows.

McIntosh caught one of those glances. "You see," he said, "we were out last night, on our way to the railroad, when you came along. We'd have been gone to-day—all four of us who own this property. Well, there's been a lot of trouble lately among the men; two gangs fighting the way miners sometimes do. It was becoming serious; there had been a bit of a free-for-all on one of the dumps, and some rock throwing. When we came to figuring over what you'd told us, we got down to that. And now, unless some warning has come to them, that gang of high graders ought to start in again when the ore train goes."

"I'm afraid," Jack said, "I don't get it yet."

McIntosh smiled. "Come to the window and you'll see in a few minutes. Just pull the shade aside a little; look down there at the track. See? There comes the train now. Watch it as it goes. When it gets up the gulch a ways, the fun will begun."

Jack stood as he was directed; his eyes followed the progress of the train. On the ore cars he saw a number of miners; near the sacks of high-grade stuff sat the guards, with their Winchesters. The other passengers—some twenty in all—were scattered here and there upon the loose rock of lesser value. The train rattled along, and as it came near a turn of the gulch men began appearing on the hillside, springing from behind rocks and bits of shelter. To all appearances, it was an ambuscade. For now these men started a fusillade of stones which rained about the passing ore train. At once the passengers began returning the fire. The air was full of rock fragments; the miners, battling valiantly, seemed unable to repulse the attack of the opposite gang; the fight continued, a running warfare. And all the time the rain of rocks kept up. Thus, to the accompaniment of loud shouts and hurtling missiles, the train rounded the curve, and passed out of sight.

"I should say," McIntosh spoke slowly, "they got away with half a ton that trip."

"Hardly that much," came from one of the others watching from the next window, "but more than five hundred pounds. And this is the fourth trip this afternoon."

Jack began to understand.

"Still," said he, "how is that? Don't

they keep the high-grade stuff in the sacks?"

"We used to think so," said McIntosh, "until we began to work on your information early this morning. It seems the sorters have been bought up, and about one sack out of five gets filled with low-grade stuff, while the ten-thousand ore is dumped from it. See? Those fellows can pick it out quickly enough—it's easy to tell from the other, you know. All they have to do is throw it away. And then——"

"All some one else has to do is to come along and pick it up, I suppose?" Jack asked.

"Right!" McIntosh nodded. "And we're waiting for them to come along. You see, this is only a part of it. They've been busy several days, getting ready for us to ship the high-grade stuff. There is a cache. We'll camp here, and keep our eyes open."

The vigil passed pleasantly; the production of a cold lunch from a hamper made it still more pleasant for Jack, whose hunger had already recurred. As he ate, he listened to the mine owners jesting over this series of felonies, which had already milked them of many thousand dollars. High grading had been going on ever since the camp began; stories passed of various methods, and the victims of these different ingenuities were made the subject of laughter on the part of the others.

But the owners of the Lucky Boy were suffering heaviest here in the office at the hands of their friends. For in this pseudo warfare between gangs of miners, their ore trains had been stopped two days before, and since that time the owners had encouraged the stone throwing by the passengers, in the idea that they were losing a few hundred pounds of comparatively low-grade rock. The fact that they had been encouraging an organized gang of high graders was being thrust at McIntosh and his associates now by all the other men in the room. And, listening to that, Jack got some crumbs of comfort. He was not the only victim of misplaced confidence!

Evening came, and they waited still. Some time after dark two of the company left the place, each carrying a Winchester. A short time later another pair departed in the same manner; and after that two more. In this way, at short intervals, the room was being emptied. At last McIntosh and Jack were left alone. McIntosh picked up the two remaining rifles; he handed one to Jack. "The chances are," said he, "you won't get to use it, but it may be handy, you know." They passed out into the night.

Lights twinkled along the narrow-gauge tracks and in the windows of shaft houses; otherwise the gulch was shrouded in dense darkness. McIntosh bade Jack follow at his heels and keep as silent as possible. They walked swiftly, avoiding the yellow patches under the lamps; they climbed along the hillside, over stones, and through rubble; and at last Jack saw the vague form of his leader sink down seemingly into the earth. He dropped to his knees close by.

"All we got to do is wait. The thing is, make yourself as comfortable as you can," McIntosh whispered into his ear.

Jack complied, and now he began to feel the thrill of real adventure. Premonitions were not with him, nor vague doubts; he was on the right side.

An hour went by, and another, and at the end of the next one the sound of footsteps came from down the gulch. The track with its lights was some distance below their hiding place. Jack strained his eyes, trying to see into the darkness that lay between. The gleam of a lantern approaching on the hillside startled him. He lay there shaking with excitement; it seemed to him that breathing had become a mighty task. The lantern was coming along the hill between them and the track. Another light was following some distance behind, and a few moments later a third came into sight.

The first lantern had gained a point directly beneath Jack's hiding place. In its rays he saw two men; each carried a canvas sack, and each was stooping low; in such an attitude Jack had seen rag-

pickers at their work. The pair were searching the hillside inch by inch; at intervals one would pick up something and drop it into his sack; then he would resume his search. Down the gulch other lights twinkled, and Jack could see the forms of other men engrossed in the same task.

This lasted for something like a half hour; then the two men who had been working nearest to him departed, and Jack saw how they carried laden sacks on their shoulders—sacks beneath whose weight they bent as they walked.

"Ten-thousand-dollar ore," McIntosh whispered, "and some runs twice as high."

And this was Jack's mine! He flushed there in the darkness, remembering his own great hopes of a few days ago.

"They'll be back again," McIntosh told him. Jack shifted his position, and made himself as easy as possible. Then followed another wait. After some time the lanterns reappeared. Jack watched the searchers picking up the rock. When they had departed he whispered a question to his companion:

"Where are they taking it?"

"We've got men watching the other end," the mine owner told him, "and when they come to tell us we'll move."

No lanterns reappeared, but at last a low whistle sounded in the velvet-black night. McIntosh rose to his feet. "Come on!" he ordered in a low tone. Jack followed him. In a dark shadow behind a lofty pinnacle of rock they came upon the dozen who had been in the office that afternoon. Jack heard a rifle butt clatter against a bit of rubble, and the sound made his pulses leap. He gripped his own firearm. Some one was whispering to some one else; the word passed round, and Jack found himself in the midst of a silent file of men, who walked, mute, along the hillside through the night. McIntosh was somewhere ahead of him; behind him he could hear the low crunch of a companion's feet upon the stones.

In a dark interval between two of the incandescent lights, they crossed the track; they came to the wagon road; they walked on up, and no man spoke a word. In this manner they went on for an hour. Then they halted. Again some one was whispering in front. Jack heard two or three departing from their company; the footsteps were moving cautiously off to one side; the sound became less; silence followed. With the remainder of his companions, Jack waited for a good half hour. Then——

"All right, boys." It was McIntosh speaking in a subdued voice. "And let me do any talking when the time comes. If anything starts, you know what to do."

Jack felt his fingers curling round the barrel of his rifle. He knew the meaning of those last words.

They started walking once more. In some way, the road seemed vaguely familiar to Jack; he was sure it was the route over which he had started to his mine. They turned from the road into a trail; they followed this for two hundred yards or more, then halted again. A blur of light came through the darkness ahead. Jack stared at it. Some one had moved away; he wondered who. Suddenly a sharp rattling crackle of brush from that direction made him jump like a startled girl. Then McIntosh's voice:

"Come on, boys! Hands up, you, there! I'll shoot if you move!"

Jack ran forward with the others. He stumbled over something; it was soft, and it gave forth a groan. He peered ahead, and then he brought his rifle to his shoulder as those about him were doing. He saw before him in the light of several lanterns a huddle of men and burros. The men were squatting about canvas sacks; the burros were standing with their heads down, as burros do when waiting for their packs. Now one of the miners made a sudden move, and——

"Up with them, or I'll shoot!" came from close beside Jack.

McIntosh walked before him now into the group of thieves. One or two others followed him. Jack stood with the rest, holding his rifle to his shoulder; his nostrils were widened; his

breath was gasping; he was in the grip of a great desire to shoot.

"And if any of them makes a move, turn loose on him!" McIntosh called.

Save for the three mine owners there among the thieves, bending now with ropes in their hands, now straightening again, there was no movement before the rifle muzzles. The binding done, McIntosh called out, and from the other side of the lanterns footsteps sounded. Now Jack saw the movement in its entirety; one part of the company had come on the gang from behind, and another squad had meantime gone on ahead.

As he came with the rest among the prisoners, Jack saw the faces of those who had worked that night in the mill. And with them was the erstwhile Bill; his sallow face looked poisonous in the lantern light. Beside Bill stood a man whom Jack had seen somewhere before. The face was baffling in its resemblance, which he could not place.

By orders from McIntosh, the ore and burros were left under a guard; the party of mine owners went back to Malapi with their prisoners. At the office where he had watched the rock throwing that afternoon, Jack scrutinized the face of that ore thief once more. He remembered then; he turned to McIntosh.

"That," said Jack, "is Schwartz, the fellow who pretended to be sick and to own the mine."

It was well after daylight when the ore had been brought back. And then Jack went to the hotel and sought his bed. He was getting used to sleeping during the hours of sunlight; it began to seem the regular thing. He awakened in the afternoon. McIntosh was waiting for him in the hotel lobby.

"The men I sent out to the old Elephant Mine," said McIntosh, "are back. They brought this fellow Brown with them. He was tied up still when they got there, and mighty sick. But he wasn't too sick to talk when he got here. As soon as I told him that we'd got the whole crowd, he started; he was in a hurry to be the first State's evidence. But he was too late at that. The man that played sick had been ahead of him, and the long-haired fellow was a close second."

"They've all told?" Jack cried.

"Every one of them," McIntosh laughed. "They don't trust one another, those three. The miners are keeping their mouths shut. They're a different sort, you see."

"And Butch?" Jack asked. "The fellow that followed me?"

"He got clean away," McIntosh chuckled. "They tell me he's wanted for a bank robbery up Winnemucca way. Yes, he cleared out."

"Well," Jack sighed, "I did it, then."

The other looked quizzically at him.

Jack colored. "You see," he confessed, "I was afraid I'd not be able to get through and even things up—you know, I'd financed that crowd. I wanted to do the right thing."

"I understand." McIntosh placed a hand on his shoulder. "You did it, all right. And it was a good job."

CHAPTER XIV.

A week after the capture of the ore thieves, two men sat in the seclusion of the inner office far above the roaring city street. The door had just closed behind a stenographer departing for the day. The pair had the place alone.

Moore was speaking; in his firm and careful face there was a mixed expression. Worry was there, and there was pride.

"You were talking of horses, you know," he said slowly. "You remember? A thoroughbred taking his first few jumps, and then settling down?"

The other nodded; he looked up with something like sympathy.

"Well," Moore went on quietly, "he went up in the air, all right." He bit the end from a cigar, and lighted it, then told Jack's story in brief, but all-including, outline.

"Humph!" The other shook his head. "It *was* rough going for him. He showed good nerve, too."

The pride struggled to show itself plainer on Moore's features. He kept

it under his mask of repression. Then:

"Do you know, he's older by ten years than when he went away that first time."

"Naturally. But has he gone again?"

"He put it this way," said Moore. "He said that he liked the idea of starting over in that country better than ever. He said he was set on it. But he told me that he wanted to go at it differently. He didn't want to be an investor; he didn't want any money. He had a job. This man McIntosh, of the Lucky Boy, gave him a position keeping time. And Jack's going to learn something of mining. What ideas he has of getting on later, he didn't say; I don't think he's so sure of himself as he was."

"Probably not. I wouldn't be if I were in his shoes." The other smiled dryly. "Well, he's tamed down a bit."

Moore nodded. "He's not afraid, or anything of that sort, you know. He's confident. But he's lost that—er——"

"That leap before you look," the other suggested.

"Exactly. He's ready to learn. Yes. He needed that free rein. I think he's settled down to steady going. I offered him some backing—just to try him out—and he laughed. He said he wanted to earn some money and to learn how to handle that first."

"He's all right." Moore's old companion spoke with emphasis. "He's got sense. He only needed to see once. Why, there are men that take half a dozen lessons like that before they're convinced. Not so rough, of course, but the same thing."

Arriving in Malapi that evening, Jack looked down the seething main street, where mixed traffic flowed like water down a rapids. Enthusiasm was strong within him; he saw ahead golden visions. But that enthusiasm of youth, undiminished by experience, no longer made him blind. He saw the golden visions, but they were far, far ahead. And between him and them he was able to examine the faces of men, and make some attempt to appraise what qualities those faces betrayed.

In the next issue you will get a complete novel by Herman Whitaker. It is called "The Barranca"—a story of Mexico, romantic and exciting. In the first February POPULAR, on sale January 7th.

A QUICK TOUCH AND A SUDDEN DEATH

JAKE TANNENBAUM, who owns a big theater in Mobile, goes to New York two or three times a year and there meets a lot of his friends. One morning, before he had left his hotel for a stroll on Broadway, a press agent who had met him in Mobile rushed in and engineered a swift touch.

"Mr. Tannenbaum," he said breathlessly, "I've got to have twenty dollars! It's a matter of life and death. Lend me that twenty, will you?"

"That's all very well," replied Tannenbaum, "but when do I get it back?"

"I'll give it back to you at two o'clock this afternoon," the press agent reassured him.

"But will you?"

"Mr. Tannenbaum, I'll give it to you at that time if I'm alive."

The theater owner handed out the money.

At two-thirty that afternoon Jake walked down Broadway, displaying on his coat sleeve a tremendous band of crape. There were tears in his eyes, and if Niobe had been living he would have made her grief look like a fit of laughing hysterics.

"It's a sad thing," he lamented. "I'm all broken up. A young friend of mine, a press agent whom I knew well in Mobile, died some time before two o'clock this afternoon."

The Gems from Modena

By Richard Washburn Child

Author of "The Blue Wall," "Jim Hands," Etc.

In which you will hear how the Spirit of the Season descended upon a widely contrasted trio—an avowed millionaire from Modena, Montana, and a light-fingered artist, and a pathetic little old maid—passengers on the *Montesano*, due to reach New York on Christmas Eve.

SAPPHIRES!" said the third passenger on the *Montesano*. At the word, Paymaster gulped, coughed, dropped back into his swinging chair at the captain's table, as if some stress of curiosity had suddenly been relieved. As he looked at the speaker, a strange little smile twisted one corner of his shaven mouth, and he played with the red plush of the chair arm with young but bony fingers.

If explanations are needed, let it be known at once that, sorry to say, Paymaster's profession is finding personal property in advance of its loss by the owner. Were he to be asked what motto might properly be painted upon other people's property, he would say, with his lean-faced grin, "Yours—Mine." To speak the truth, he knows the idiomatic use of the verb "to pinch"; he is an adventurer in acquisition. His methods are so various that his "work," as they say of artists, has no identity. Connoisseurs may look at a picture to say, "Corot, Ziem, Velasquez," but the police, looking at the result of Paymaster's machinations, have never been able to use their usual method of identifying the criminal by past experience with the peculiar earmarks of the result. Therefore, Paymaster, whose sobriquet had been earned in 1906 by a fortunate bet on a horse of that name, was unknown to the police. Indeed, he has suffered so far an ignoble but comfortable professional obscurity, and is forced to admit that his frequent flashes of artistic inspiration and bold and daring execution are flowers of genius that almost waste their sweetness on the desert air of self-appreciation.

"Sapphires is what I have said," repeated the bulky man with the fancy vest. He emphasized his remark by placing a huge and opulent forefinger on the edge of the bare table.

"Sapphires!" exclaimed the second passenger. She was a little woman, and she clasped her poor, little, thin hands as she gazed at the important creature with her poor, little, pale-gray eyes. She might have been fifty. She wore the air of the never-married, which grows more aromatic with age.

"What a cinch!" exclaimed Paymaster, recovering his nonchalance after the excitement of discovering the proximity of riches. "Just dig 'em on your own land? Why don't you get the case and open it up and let us see 'em?"

The bulky man shook his head, shook his jaws, shook his cheeks, and the fat under his good-natured chin. He meant "No."

"Can't," he said. "My foreman has got 'em all packed just right. Pay him twenty thousand dollars a year. That's me! That's the kind of man I am. I want everything done right. You can't get things done right for nothing. I

found that out when I was in the big smelter syndicate. Used to say so to the board of directors. Get things done in a big, broad-gauged way. Secret of success!"

"Sure," said Paymaster, looking inquiringly at the woman.

The little old maid blushed.

"I feel so funny when I talk with men of affairs," she whispered timidly. "I feel so insignificant. I've always had to watch every penny so carefully. And when you tell about the income from all your orchards in Oregon, and lumber business, and then about the sapphires you're taking to New York in that little black case—dear me!"

The big man fondled imaginary mustaches for a moment. He opened his mouth once or twice, as if he were about to announce with two tears rolling down his meaty cheeks that he would give her a handful of sapphires. Instead, however, he sighed in the manner of one desiring to be modest.

"Well, it's true, I've seen life—big life," he admitted, glancing about at the empty tables. "Here it is two days from Christmas again. We're tossing around now on a wintry sea—the only three passengers on the boat. Of course you, ma'am, took this way because it's cheap travel. I took it because I want to be out of reach of my affairs, and the terrible strain of financial matters. And you, sir——"

"My name is Jefferson Oliver," said Paymaster glibly. "My business is rugs —Atlantic City."

"Funny we haven't swapped names before," the affluent one boomed heartily, extending his paw. "Been on this craft two days out of Savannah. Well, mine is Bowen P. Blowther. I'm from Modena, Montana. They wanted to name the town after me, but I wouldn't have it. I said to Senator Clarkson, 'No,' I said. 'What's the use? Everybody will say it was because of my money.' "

He paused, looked up at the ceiling, rubbed his cushioned palms with real satisfaction.

"Oh, well," said he, indicating that success, after all, was a low-hanging fruit.

The little woman with the little, pale-gray eyes, clasped her little, thin hands again.

"Dear me," she said, as if thinking aloud. "I have to pinch and save so! If my father hadn't left me a little property—a mere trifle—I don't know what I should do. I am so much alone in the world, and a woman has so little sense of business."

"Oh, that's all right," said Paymaster, expressing his sympathy.

"I feel so lonely as this time comes —around Christmas," said the old maid, tightening her thin lips, and patting her little, black hand bag as if it were a child.

"Umph!" grunted Blowther. "Here's what I say. Get into the spirit of the season. That's what I do with all my enterprises. I distribute stock to my employees. That's me. I wrote a paper on profit sharing for the Manufacturers' Association once. My old friend, Bill Potherton, of Chicago, the man who defeated What's-his-name for the Senate by saying just three words. He said, 'He won't do!' And the legislature turned the man down and—— What was I saying? Oh, yes. He asked me to read that paper. Special favor. But I couldn't leave my business. Half a million involved, building spur track and getting enough freight cars to get the crop to market at top price. Eighteen hours a day is what I put in. We fellers at the top don't have it so soft as you think, in spite of eighty thousand in sapphires on the side. That's just luck in my case—those sapphires."

The second passenger blinked her eyes.

"It makes me nervous!" she murmured. "I become so excited even over my own little, foolish affairs. I worry so over a dollar here and a fifty-cent piece there."

"Christmas," mused Paymaster to himself, feeling in his pocket for the three last ten-dollar bills he owned in the world.

"Yep, Christmas," repeated Blow-

ther. "Great Scott, there's Sandy Hook Lightship now. See it through that porthole?"

"What hotel do you use?" asked Paymaster, looking back from the quick glance at the man of wealth.

"The St. Ravenna, my boy," Blowther intoned in his most impressive bass.

Paymaster nodded, thinking of sapphires.

"That's good enough for me," he said.

But Blowther did not seem pleased.

"I shan't be there but just overnight," he objected. "Of course, I'm going to be busy this evening with a big buyer of gems. From Christiania. The kind of man that wants me to spend a hundred dollars for the dinner. Likes to see me give the waiter thirty dollars. Oh, it impresses the foreigners, I tell you. I know it."

"Thirty dollars for a tip!" the little woman almost screamed, with the agony of the thought. "Thirty dollars would buy me two warm dresses."

"Madam," cried the other severely, "I did not intend to speak of clothes. Personally—as a personal matter—for myself—I spend nothing—almost nothing for clothes. See this old, black felt hat I wear. You would laugh. I wear it because I want to wear the thing the ordinary man wears. That's me. But automobiles! Now, there's my hobby. Thirty thousand a year on motor cars. Why, I love 'em!"

A gleam of ecstasy came into the woman's little eyes out of her imagination; she leaned forward across the table of the empty dining saloon.

"What are you thinking about?" asked Paymaster.

"Sapphires," she said. "I could just *revel* in sapphires—handfuls. But I cannot spare a cent toward even one, and they are my birthstone, too."

The words sent Paymaster's thoughts flying back through lapsed years. Garnets were his mother's birthstone; he remembered he had given her a garnet ring when he had won in a tandem-paced bicycle race for junior professionals at the Eighty-fourth Street Armory. Forgetting for a moment Mr. Blowther's little black case with metal corners, which contained wealth for a ten-year holiday, his half-closed eyes saw the pictured panorama of city crowds at Christmas Eve. They moved along shopping thoroughfares in front of frosted windowpanes, with smiles of expectation. The air of restrained joy went with them.

"What in timenation is there about Christmas?" asked Blowther, as if he, too, had seen the same picture.

Paymaster shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. Something. It sounds good to me," he said.

The little woman sighed again. "I wish I weren't so poor," said she.

"Hotel St. Ravenna?" Paymaster inquired, jumping up to avoid any further dents in his hard-shelled sympathy. "Say, Mr. Blowther, you ride up with me. I've got to hire a taxi, anyhow. Well, what's the matter?"

"Nothing," said the man from Montana. "Only——"

Paymaster looked his prospective victim in the eye.

"Why, all right," said Blowther finally. "I guess that's all right. I'm much obliged. I hate to have you bear the whole expense."

"I should never think of riding in a taxicab," said the little woman sadly. "I never could understand how people could afford it."

The adventurer in misplaced confidences was touched again. The appealing eyes of the little, scrimping, saving, poverty-pinched, lonely old maiden was a new kind of assault upon Paymaster's hardened heart. He felt that he would never be able to cast out of his mind's eyes the haunting portrait of this chance acquaintance who clasped and unclasped her little, wrinkled hands whenever dreams of wealth were stimulated in her imagination, and who spoke of the purchase of a warm winter dress with the expression of one without hope longing for the unattainable.

"Mr. Blowther," said he, as she left them with the excuse that she must pack her satchel, in preparation for the

landing. "Mr. Blowther, I say. If I was a man with millions——"

"I understand," said Blowther, a shadow passing over his face. "I know what you mean. It's the spirit of the season."

"Spirit of the season—is right!" exclaimed Paymaster.

"Well, where'd I be if I let my passions for giving money away get the best of me? Why, I'd get rid of a million dollars in twenty-four hours. That's me. And it would go every which way. You take men used to thinking in large sums of money and watching the markets—why, they have no business giving money except on some system. You know that."

The thief's eyes narrowed for a second. They were vicious slits in his vicious, determined, lean face. A new catlike spring had come into his legs, his wiry arms, his whole active body.

"That's all right, you son of a gun," he said under his breath. "Just for that I'll get those gems from you, if I have to knock you on the head."

He bit his lip, and, with one hand in his pocket again, he felt of the three ten-dollar bills, the last he had.

"One of 'em might do a lot of good," thought he. "The spirit of the season——"

"Well, that's the kind of man I am," Blowther broke in loudly and arrogantly.

"Yes, and that's the kind of man I am," replied Paymaster.

The two men meant different things.

The capitalist from Modena, Montana, however, not knowing this, lit a cigar and smoked comfortably until he looked up finally at the porthole which let in the glow of sunset. He pointed silently.

"Well, there she is," the thief said, simulating good nature. "There's the goddess."

"I'd like to buy her and take her out to Modena to put in front of the courthouse," Blowther mused. "Well, where'll I see you? On the dock?"

"Yep—on the dock," answered Paymaster, as Blowther left him.

"On the dock," the thief repeated softly when alone. "What a stroke of luck—them sapphires!"

The truth, spoken by innuendo, of this remark, was that luck for the adventurer had been exceeding bad. A month in Cuba, to be sure, had been very profitable apparently. Paymaster and a partner had taken orders for imaginary house-furnishing merchandise, which amounted to nine thousand dollars in imaginary value. Five hundred dollars had been collected from the gullible in deposits. Then the partner, one Jimmy Harris, of Chicago, and St. Louis, and Kansas City, when, as, and if, take one's choice, had proved that honor is not sufficiently among thieves. He had left Paymaster at one particular moment to buy a package of cigarettes, and incidentally to leave the Pearl of the Antilles on the steamship *Excelsior,* clearing for New Orleans ten minutes later. The five hundred dollars mysteriously adaptable to Jimmy's purposes went with him, and Paymaster knew he would see it no more. The money was gone. The man he hoped to meet some day.

Now, spreading his three last ten-dollar bills on the red tablecloth of the deserted ship's dining saloon, for several minutes he gazed alternately, first out of the porthole at the snow-capped buildings of winter-bound New York, and then at the lovely, lovable, green engravings under his nervous hands.

"Maybe the woman wants to buy presents for some kid in her boarding house," he mused. "Maybe she wishes she could buy somethin' for somebody, and can't. This gives me a pain, all right. I'm a cold slice of chicken halibut. Don't tell me. I know it."

A ferryboat bound for Staten Island passed, with its rumble-grumble-snuffle and bellow of salute. The lights on its passenger decks showed a great mass of people, somber colored, crushed into an indistinct pudding of homegoers.

Like a ruby flashing from a mud pie, a bit of red color attracted his attention. It was some object carried by one in the crowd—a child's express wagon, painted with the conventional sheen of

scarlet. Paymaster had owned one once—secondhand. He remembered how the new ones smelled.

"Spirit of the season," he said sheepishly, thrusting the money back into his pocket. "Let's see. Hers is thirty-one."

He did not go to the little old maid's stateroom, however; instead he took down an envelope from the rack in the "social parlor," and, folding one of his bills between the leaves of a sheet of the *Montesano's* note paper, placed it within. He sealed the flap on the back of the envelope, adjusted a stamp on the corner, then sat staring at the blank space where, unless he changed his mind, a name and place now unknown to him must be written.

Indeed, it was not until he heard the gangplank drop on the deck that he stirred.

He lit a cigarette, yawned, and put on his overcoat.

Blowther was waiting for him.

"Haven't you got any baggage?" the rich man asked, blowing a huge stream of visible breath into the frosty air.

"Where's yours?" asked Paymaster.

The other sniffed. "I buy a new outfit wherever I go," he said. "Costs very little—great convenience. I like to do things in a big, broad-gauged way. Of course, safety demands——"

Paymaster pointed to the coveted case of gems.

"Yep," Blowther whispered. "But don't say anything. I don't want it known, of course. What you waiting for?"

"Want to say good-by to her."

"Oh!"

Paymaster stamped his feet on the planks at the bottom of the gangway. Good, old New York was chilly in contrast with the tropics.

At last she came—a pathetic little figure, bundled up in a coat of the style current during the Centennial at Philadelphia. A worn little hand bag was pendent from one of her woolen mittens; she put one foot down after the other as if, the soles of her shoes having worn thin, she expected each moment to step on something which would pierce the tissue of leather and bring on a calamity in the form of a necessity to purchase a new pair.

"Gee!" said Paymaster, looking around to be sure that Blowther did not hear him. "I guess I'm going to do the right thing once, anyhow."

Awkwardly enough he took off his hat.

"Say, ma'am," he stammered. "I don't know your name."

"My! What a start you gave me!" said the little old maid. "Oh, you don't want to know my name. I'm nobody."

"I wanted to send you something that will interest you. I ain't going to give it to you. I'm going to mail it."

This was a stroke only possible to a great student of human nature in the form of woman.

"Tell me," she said eagerly.

Paymaster looked up at the stars and whistled mischievously. He knew the second passenger would yield, and she did.

"My name is Loretta Smith Clinger," she whispered. "Forty-two Naples Place, Syracuse."

Paymaster wrote it down in pencil, shook the envelope tauntingly in front of the woman's astonished face, and deftly dropped it into the green mail box.

"Good-by, ma'am," he called over his shoulder. "You'll get it Christmas morning. Good-by."

When Paymaster looked about for Blowther, however, all thoughts of Miss Clinger slid out of his mind like dried peas from an overturned measure. Blowther had disappeared.

With an exclamation of rage and disappointment, the adventurer ran spryly among the wagons, the hand trucks, and the stevedores, tripping over rattling sheets of iron, dodging rolling barrels, until he reached the street. There, before his very eyes, Blowther was in the act of boarding a common street car.

"He's on to me!" thought the thief. "I've got a stiff game to play.

"Here, Mr. Blowther," he exclaimed aloud. "I'm sorry about this. But now we've found each other."

"I thought——" began the other, puffing with his exercise.

"That I wasn't going to make good on that taxi ride," cried Paymaster quickly. "Oh, no. That ain't my kind. Not Jefferson Oliver! Between gentlemen my bond is as good as my word."

The rich Westerner did not seem to notice the humor of the remark.

"What hotel?" he asked.

"Why, you said the St. Ravenna," replied Paymaster. "That's all right for me. So here's our vehicle. Jump in."

"Well, all right."

It was not all right. Paymaster could feel the presence of something wholly wrong. Blowther was glum. His case of gems was clasped between his knees. Now and then he went through nervous motions that seemed absurdly like those of a man making calculations on his fingers. Mr. Blowther's fingers were fat; in gloves they might have been likened just then to five trembling sausages. It was cold, but a sweat had broken out on the rich man's prominent forehead. Paymaster was sure Mr. Blowther suffered from an emotion called fright.

Had he had a criminal record the adventurer would have given up his prey at once; however, fearing nothing worse than merely being suspected, at least until after he got his hands on the black case, he determined to stick to Blowther, come what would, and take the first opportunity possible to separate this selfish, arrogant, uncharitable man of success from his jewels.

"Do you feel badly?" he asked, as the cab swung a curve in front of the St. Ravenna.

"I do feel a little weak. I've been under a strain. Had suit brought against me for half a million," said Blowther, getting out. "Is this the place? Well, I like luxury. That's me. When things are right, a man is willing to pay for 'em! You ought to see my own house in Modena. Telephone in every room. Turkish bath and swimming pool in the basement. Music room—thirty-thousand-dollar organ at one end—mural paintings by famous artist, Hyacinth Botts, of Chicago—little Cupids and female companions. Phonograph going all the time, because my valet hasn't got much to do, and he loves it—loves it, I tell you. You can't ever tell where tastes for those things will turn up in servants. Servants are just as good as you and me, anyhow. I'm democratic. That's the kind of a man I am."

He had panted his description of luxury in Modena all the way to the hotel desk, where he and Paymaster registered. Now, having lifted his pen from a final flourish, and watched the clerk swing the book around to read the names, he cast nervous, sidelong glances at Paymaster.

"I'll be here only one night," he announced, yielding his metal-bound case to the bell boy.

"The same," Paymaster said, leaning his supple frame against the marble counter with a long, audible yawn.

The clerk rattled his cuff buttons. He seemed interested in Mr. Blowther. The expression that drove the professional smirk off his face might well have been one of awe for a personage of great wealth. He tossed Paymaster's room key across the counter. Mr. Blowther's he handed to the bell boy gingerly.

Paymaster, however, regardless of the distinction, went up in the elevator, softly whistling. He was not the kind of adventurer who believes in planning far ahead. A treasure of sapphires was in his reach. How to get them would have been a problem for a lesser genius, but Paymaster, sneering at preparations, worshiped the goddess Opportunity. Was it to her shame that she had often caressed him? Could there be doubt that sooner or later in this, his time of need, she would put the small, black, metal-cornered case into his hands, and say to him: "Come, friend. The moment for departure has arrived!"

Faith in Opportunity, indeed, even prevented the rascal from assuming a preoccupied air. He made merry.

"Look here, Blowther," he said,

pointing to a tin box hung in the elevator, and marked "Christmas" as a gentle hint to passengers. "Let's slip a half dollar apiece into this slot. You don't get a package of chewing gum or postage stamps, like you do in most slot machines. But you drop in your money, like this, wait a moment, and then you hold your hand under the box, and get some of the spirit of the season. Come on."

The rich man shook his fat jowls. The very idea of charity seemed to irritate him to the verge of apoplexy. He ran his fingers around his number seventeen-and-a-half collar, and when, leaving the elevator, he stopped in front of his door, he looked up and down the hall, then at Paymaster furtively.

"The son of a gun suspects something," said the adventurer, talking to himself, after he was in his own room. "But I'm glad he didn't put his case into the office safe. I'm down now to eighteen and a half quick assets, and the gems is a necessity in my business. Furthermore——" The opening of his door interrupted him. The face of Blowther peering in almost made him drop the cigarette from his fingers.

"My sapphires!" exclaimed the intruder.

"What of 'em?" cried Paymaster anxiously. "You haven't lost 'em, have you?"

"No. I want you to keep 'em for me," said the Westerner. "I've been called away suddenly. I'll be back tomorrow. You're going to stay here, aren't you? Do me a favor. Keep 'em for me."

"Me!" cried the thief, staring at Blowther's agonized expression.

For answer, the man of opulence dropped his little black case on the floor and closed the door after him. Paymaster could hear his retreating steps, heavy on the thick-piled carpet of the corridor.

"Happy day!" cried he aloud. "Here's a sketch!"

He picked up the case.

"Keep the sapphires! Will I keep 'em?" he sang. "Come out and see the rainbow! Sit down on this table, little case. There's something about you different from the others, and I'll be true to you."

Suddenly a cloud of dismal questioning closed over his features. He sat down. In a hoarse and doleful monotone he began repeating the words of a current popular lyric:

"It can't be true! It can't be true!
Plenty of luck may come to you,
But not to me! No, not to me!
This check to bearer is a forgeree,
This diamond is made of glass,
The theater ticket is a last week's pass,
And when I hold four aces hard,
Some one else holds four and a high odd card.
So when you say, I'm a legatee,
It can't be true, for that ain't me."

He picked up the case, looking at it first on one side, and then on the other. He had noticed when on board the *Montesano* the remnant of a parcel tag, and a bit of string, which bound the two handles together. It was still there—an adequate proof that the case had not been opened. He cut this string; he drew back the catch.

Just then, thinking that he had heard hurrying feet in the corridor, he stopped to listen. The case, however, fell open in spite of his wish to delay it; it seemed determined to disclose its contents. Almost viciously it thrust before his eyes the three objects it contained—a pair of pajamas, robin's-egg blue in color, a toothbrush, and a half-empty bottle of Delorme & Jones' Violet Water.

"This is the second time a bag has opened its jaws to laugh at me," he said, and looked up to find Blowther standing again in the opened doorway.

The Westerner's face now was half red, half white; the apoplectic heat of exercise and the freezing chill of fright had met upon the broad countenance. He had no eyes for his violated black case. He looked across and above the evidences of Paymaster's criminal work, and, casting upon the adventurer a pathetic look of appeal, stretched forth his fat hands and tried to speak so hard that beads of perspiration started out on his forehead to glisten in the rays from the electric chandelier.

At last his heavy tongue moved to utter a torrent of thick and sputtering ejaculations.

"Mr. Oliver," he panted. "It was your fault. I never would—have come—to this hotel at all if it hadn't been for you. Four dollars a day! Do you hear that? Four dollars! It's the last straw—on the goat's back. A lifetime of misfortune, I tell you—ends here. You must do something for me—you must!"

Paymaster blinked his eyes.

"What do you want?" he gasped.

Blowther mopped his forehead and unbuttoned his vest as if to loosen the emotion beneath it.

"It was that hotel in Atlanta, Georgia," he went on incoherently. "I left—what shall I say? I left quietly—in an unpretentious manner, you understand. A little bill—twelve dollars—unpaid. Says I to myself: 'I'll send it later.' And now—and now—look what's happened! They telegraphed my name and description to some confounded hotel association. The clerk downstairs recognized me. I saw it in his face—at once. So thinks I, 'I'll just leave my bag and go quietly—without ostentation, as it were.'"

The thief's mouth screwed itself into its inimitable expression of worldly wisdom.

"And the hotel detective stopped you on your way, eh?"

Blowther's eyes filled with terror at the memory. His deep bass voice of opulence had given way to thin, high squeaks.

"They said *jail* to me, Mr. Oliver," he screamed. "And I'm not a criminal, Mr. Oliver. You'll believe it when you hear me."

Paymaster assumed the manner of the melodrama.

"Sit down, my little man," he said. "Your story strangely interests me."

Blowther fell into a chair. His collar had wilted; the great Blowther had wilted with it.

"The sapphires?" suggested Paymaster dryly.

"There never were any, Oliver," said the woeful man. "They weren't real. My money wasn't real; there isn't any place called Modena, Montana, or bonanza farm, or house, or automobiles, or employees. But I didn't mean any harm, Oliver—not a mite of harm to anybody. I'd sooner cut off my right hand than do anything mean, so help me!"

"Begin at the beginning," commanded the adventurer.

"I'm just a chump."

"That the beginning?"

"Yes. Always dreaming of being rich and bossing people around, and having things like these big fellers. I've kept a little hardware and novelty shop in Cincinnati all my life. Never married, either. Lord! How I've wanted to be rich! The more I see I couldn't, the more I got to boasting—front of strangers. You don't blame me, do you?"

"Oh, no," said Paymaster sarcastically. "Only if you go around doing it, sooner or later, you'll raise false hopes in the mind of some poor fool, and then think what you'd be responsible for!"

Blowther expressed his Heaven forbid in several wheezes.

"I can't bear for strangers to think I don't amount to anything," he went on. "That's why I came to this hotel. I didn't want to. I never knew how I'd pay for it. I only had two dollars. I wanted to find a canvasser's job in New York."

"I thought you said you had a store?"

"I sold it."

"The money?"

"I put it into Florida land."

"Well?"

"The land belonged to a woman and her brother. They've got ten thousand acres of it. They were rich, anyway. I heard about the woman. She owns half the real estate along the Hudson. And they've made another fortune selling farms and orchards in the West to chumps—like me. She was down there, but I didn't see her. I bought a farm before I went down. The pamphlet said a man would be wealthy in three years, growing pineapples. But the land was all swamp!

I took a man who knew to see it. I says: 'What had I better set out here?' and he says: 'If I owned it, I'd set out fish.' "

"I'm sorry I didn't meet you before you got into this fix," remarked Paymaster dryly. "It's a shame they saw you first."

"Thank you, Mr. Oliver," said Blowther gratefully. "Thank you. Only, I want you to understand. After my terrible disappointment, I had to talk big. You'll forgive it? When I talk like that I half believe everything myself—when I talk like that is the only time I'm happy. Tell me—tell me, Oliver, my friend—do you understand?"

Paymaster nodded solemnly.

"There isn't anybody who wouldn't," said he. "Most of us have been there."

The unfortunate Blowther wiped his eyes and sat for several minutes gazing sadly into space, his stiff shirt squeaking with every breath.

"I don't want—to spend—Christmas—in jail," he complained at last. "As you said, the spirit of the season——"

"Would be against it," Paymaster finished.

He drew from his pocket the slender roll of bills.

"Ten—five—that is fifteen—one—that's sixteen," he said. "They'll collect your Atlanta bill, and your room here will be four."

He placed the money on Blowther's fat knee, looked with a smirk at the two-dollar bill that remained in his own hand, thrust it into his pocket, and sang:

> "So when you tell me I'm a legatee,
> It can't be true. For that ain't me."

"Great Scott, Oliver!" cried Blowther, blinking at the money. "What shall I say——"

"Say nothing," replied Paymaster.

"And where are you going?"

The adventurer shrugged his shoulders, as he walked toward the door.

"I'm going to demonstrate the right way to jump a hotel bill," he said. "I wish you a Merry Christmas."

The door closed.

A moment later Paymaster's lean, shrewd face appeared once more in the crack.

"Say, Blowther, what was the name of the people who sold you the land in Florida?" he asked.

"Clinger," replied the fat man. "Clinger. I won't ever forget it. Clinger. Forty-two Naples Place, Syracuse, New York."

When, after carelessly sauntering through the billiard room and café, Paymaster had reached the street, he again inspected his two-dollar bill. Then he looked up at the velvet, wintry sky.

"This," said he, as if addressing the assembly of stars, "is what they call—experience."

RUNNING ON NO PARTICULAR SCHEDULE

JIM, free as air and full of the joy of living, strolled in leisurely manner past the somewhat ugly but entirely impregnable county jail. Looking up, he saw behind the bars of one of the windows the disconsolate face of his friend Joe.

"Hello!" called out Jim.

"Hello!" returned Joe.

After this brief interchange of greetings, Jim was proceeding on his way, but Joe, having no extensive promenade at his command, wished to engage him in conversation, and began with this:

"Whut time is it, Jim?"

"Whut you want to know whut time it is foh, nigger?" retorted the free man. "You ain't gwine nowhar."

In Christmas Cañon

By Francis Lynde

Author of "A Caribbean Clearance," "The Wire Devil," Etc.

Not peace but strife came to Christmas Cañon on Christmas Day; but when the fight ended, the mystery of the little operator in the tiny bungalow office in the wilderness—a mystery that had long puzzled the railroad men—was cleared up for all time.

IT was in flat defiance of his own rules and regulations, and dead against the blunt protest of McDonough, his trainmaster, that Superintendent Maxwell, of the Nevada Short Line, appointed Doris Kent to the vacant wire desk in his office in Brewster.

The appointment, as the entire headquarters force had occasion to mark and remember, was made in the early part of November. There was a strike of the telegraphers on, and it was in its third spiteful week. Operators, as a rule, do not resort to bludgeons and brass knuckles on the rather rare occasions when they close their keys and walk out, but they are not lacking persuasive means for discouraging the strike breaker; and in the case of the Nevada Short Line these means were proving effectual.

At the close of the bleak November day in question, Maxwell found himself with half of his night offices silent on both divisions, with a short-handed quota of day men working grueling shifts of overtime, and with the headquarters stripped to the bone of every clerk who could by any means handle a key and stumble through the wording of a train order.

In the thick of this drawn battle Doris Kent appeared upon the Brewster scene. Maxwell, grinding at his desk in the final fading of the gray daylight, heard an irresolute tap at the door of the private office.

Without looking up, he ripped out an explosive "Come!" and was irritably conscious of the almost noiseless opening and closing of the door.

A full minute later—otherwise, when he was quite good and ready—he jerked his chair around and saw, not the expected figure of a tramp telegrapher, but a young woman, small, clear-eyed, sweet-faced, and attractive enough to have stepped freshly out of a Harrison Fisher canvas.

"Hello!" he exclaimed in the first gust of surprise; and then: "I beg your pardon. Did you want to see me?"

"Yes," said a voice which was so little and soft that it seemed to come from an immense distance. "I heard—at the boarding house—that you were needing telegraph operators, and I came to see——"

"Sit down," snapped the superintendent; and when the girl had groped behind her for a chair, and found one, he turned on the electric lights. It was a rather brutal thing to do, but at the moment Maxwell was not feeling particularly gracious. When the sudden upblaze of the incandescents had revealed nothing new in the pretty face save a natural startlement, a pathetic little twist in the delicately curved lips, and a certain half-desperate, hungry eagerness in the slate-blue eyes, Max-

well went on: "We don't employ women operators. Besides, there's a strike on. Didn't you know that?"

"Yes, I knew it," the applicant admitted. Then she added most illogically: "I—I don't want to be a strike breaker, but I simply have to have work of some kind."

"Humph!" growled Maxwell; and then he repeated his formula: "We don't use women in the wire service. Just now I might be willing to make an exception, perhaps, but if I should, you'd regret it. The men would resent it. What experience have you had? Hotel office, I suppose?"

A tired flush crept up to the slate-blue eyes, and the girl's gloved fingers closed nervously over the handkerchief she had surreptitiously taken from her hand bag.

"N-no; I have never—that is, I don't know anything but railroad work," she replied.

"Where did you learn it?"

"In the East—in Ohio."

"Any credentials; letters, or anything of that kind?"

"N-no."

Maxwell had just written out a message to the chief engineer, Benson, at Red Butte, and his thumb had been upon the push button which summoned the corridor boy when the girl's tap at the door had disturbed him. The chair at his own wire table was empty, Calhoun, his operator, having been sent out to reopen one of the closed night stations.

Penciling the Red Butte call and his own office cipher at the head of the message, he stripped the blank from its pad, passed it to the girl, and waved her to the empty chair.

"Let me hear you send that," he suggested shortly.

The young woman's hesitation or embarrassment, whichever it was, either left her, or was conquered instantly. Slipping a slender right hand out of its glove, she crossed quickly to the table. There were three sets of instruments; one east, one west, and one for the Red Butte branch; and she looked up inquiringly.

"The middle key," said Maxwell; and she slid into the chair, sent the call, and, when the reply came, shot the rather long message through without a break.

The superintendent was frowning thoughtfully when she finished.

"You know your trade, at all events," he admitted rather crabbedly. And then: "I can't give you anything permanent; but if you want to come in here and substitute until I can get my own operator back——"

She had jumped up and was taking off her coat. "I can stay now," she broke in eagerly; and five minutes later she was rattling away on a huge sheaf of telegrams, which Maxwell had been holding because he was unwilling to add them to the burdens of the already overloaded dispatcher's office.

Harvey Calmaine, the superintendent's chief clerk, was the first to look askance at the new edition to the force when he returned from an uptown errand upon which Maxwell had sent him. Being a self-contained young man, however, and withal intensely loyal to his chief, he kept his disapproval to himself. But McDonough, the trainmaster, who came in just as the young woman was going out to supper, was less hampered.

"That'll be a bad business, I'm thinking, Mr. Maxwell," said McDonough baldly, when the door closed behind the retreating figure of the new operator. "With the fireworks scattered around under foot, as they are now, there'll be a flare-up. The men won't stand for it."

"I'm not going out of my way to ask anybody's approval, Mac," said the square-shouldered man at the big desk, with rather brittle emphasis. "I was needing an operator, and Miss Kent seems to be a very capable one. She was willing to come in and bridge the gap, and I hired her. That's all there is to it."

McDonough nodded sourly, and went on with his business. But more than once, in the brisk discussion of the strike situation which followed, he wrinkled his nose at the faint odor of violet perfume which the departing sub-

stitute had left behind her. The Scotch trainmaster was not precisely a woman hater, but he had his own ideas of a woman's place in the temporal scheme, and they were as pronounced as those of the German kaiser.

Afterward various buffetings of disapproval came from a good many sources. Railroad men, no less than other people, are tenacious of traditions; and one of the oldest of the traditions in the Short Line service was that women were barred, even from the stenographers' desks—a tradition basing itself more upon Western chivalry than upon any disposition to shut out the cheaper competition.

So there were growlings and headshakings in plenty when it became known up and down the two divisions that Maxwell had set the tradition and his own rulings at naught, though there was a fine touch of Western good nature in the fact that none of the growls came from the striking operators themselves.

As for the young woman, in her own proper person, there grew up a small figure of mystery to pique the curiosity of the young men who were holding down desks in the various headquarters offices. For one thing, she attended strictly to business, and refused absolutely to be chummy. Harry Matson, chief clerk in the passenger office, had tried thrice to walk uptown with her, and on the third occasion she had told him plainly that she couldn't allow it; couldn't and wouldn't.

At Mrs. Hazelbee's boarding house, where she took her meals, and slept in a seven-by-nine hall bedroom, the mystery was even more provoking. Always the earliest breakfaster in the bleak little dining room, Miss Kent disappeared hurriedly each morning, no matter what the weather might be, and was seen no more until she reported for duty at the headquarters at Maxwell's office hour of half past eight.

Again, she was always out in the evening, hurrying from the supper table as she hurried from the breakfast table. And on the Sundays she was gone all day, from early morning until late in the evening; and Mrs. Hazelbee, looking a little askance at her, as so many others did, shook her head dubiously and mistrusted that there was something hidden which ought to be revealed, as she more than once confided to Mrs. Pat Callahan, the traveling engineer's wife, who occupied the adjoining flat.

In the office, however, Miss Kent was not only the pink of propriety; she was industry itself, joined to a degree of capability which was altogether beyond praise. Maxwell did not spare her; and because the various growlings of disapproval nettled him, he was sometimes gruff and short with her to the edge of harshness.

Though she was pretty well intrenched in the privacy of the superintendent's room, there were petty persecutions to come from some of the other offices in the way of uninvited and apparently unwelcome attentions; and these she bore so meekly that finally Maxwell went the rounds of the headquarters, and read the riot act to half a dozen smart young men.

"Miss Kent is employed in my office, and she is under my protection," was the way the rasping formulary ran. "Drop it, and do it now, or you'll get yourself disliked." And after an explosion of this kind he would go back to his desk and be gruffer than ever to the innocent cause.

It was the first of December when the telegraphers' strike was finally settled by arbitration, and the strikers came back to work. Being on the wires and constantly in touch with what was going on, the pretty young woman in Maxwell's office could not help knowing that the situation, clearing now for others, was rapidly clouding for her; in fact, it was she, herself, who clicked out the message summoning Calhoun to return to headquarters.

When the message had been sent and acknowledged, she turned bravely to face her fate.

"I suppose that means that I'm to go, Mr. Maxwell?" she said, in the low tones out of which nothing on earth seemed to be able to startle her.

The superintendent whirled about with a scowl which was merely a mask for his own irritable reluctance to keep up the fiction of the marble heart.

"I told you at first that the place would be only temporary," he rasped.

"But my work has been satisfactory, hasn't it?" she ventured, adding: "I've tried awfully hard to make it so."

"Your work is all right; I've never had a better operator, Miss Kent. But you're a sensible girl, and I'm sure you see how the thing stands. It's hard, I know; but you're doing a man's work—at least, that is the way it is regarded in this part of the world—and you have to take a man's chances."

"If there were only something else—something that would be considered more—more womanly—that I knew how to do," she murmured. And then, with a lift of the heavy eyelashes: "Isn't there some lonesome little wire office—some place that nobody else wants, or would take—that you could give me, Mr. Maxwell? I wouldn't care where it was, or how hard it might be to live in it."

"Nonsense!" said the superintendent, but this time the gruffness was plainly a stop-gap. "Don't you see how impossible it would be for me to send a woman to such a place as you describe? This is a man's country, Miss Kent, and there are times when it takes a pretty well-seasoned man to live in it."

"I wouldn't mind," she protested quickly. "I'm not afraid; and—and 'this man's country,' as you call it, wouldn't hurt me; it's too big, and free, and gentle to be rude to women. I've learned that much about it in the little time I've been here."

"Still, what you ask is impossible. Perhaps we may be able to find you a clerical job of some sort here in Brewster," said Maxwell; and he would have gone on to enlarge upon the hopeful possibility if she had not shaken her head despairingly.

"I tried everything, you know—a month ago, before I came here," she averred, with the pathetic little twist in the curved lips. "It was no use. I don't know how to do anything but telegraph, and, besides—I can't stay here in Brewster; I couldn't stay if you were not turning me off. I want to go out into the mountains—I *must* go, some way!"

Maxwell turned back to his desk, jabbed the paper knife into the blotter, and otherwise showed his soft-hearted side, which was not at all the side which was usually turned toward the five hundred miles of hard-bitted mountain railroad over which he was the supreme and well-beloved tyrant.

"I tell you, it's impossible, Miss Kent," he repeated. "If I should be willing to give you a line office—which I am not—there isn't any vacancy."

That was where he fell down. As quick as a flash she came back at him.

"There is one place," she put in. "When Mr. McDonough was here yesterday you were talking about reopening the office at Christmas Cañon. I didn't mean to listen, but I couldn't very well help hearing. You said that you couldn't get anybody to stay there, because it was so lonesome. I'm not afraid. Please try me, Mr. Maxwell."

"Christmas Cañon!" he exploded. "Why, that's ten miles from any human being—that is, except the miners at the Molly Bawn. And in the dead of winter it's simply a howling wilderness! You'd freeze and starve, if you didn't go stark, staring crazy with the isolation. Why do you pick out such a place as that?"

The curved lips were trembling now, but she controlled them bravely.

"Any place would do, just so it's out in the—out in the country, and I could earn a little money in it. I *must* earn money, Mr. Maxwell. If you only knew——"

The superintendent did not seek to know. In common with others, he had come to look, not exactly askance, but with a growing regret, upon a friendless young woman in a strange country, who should have even the suspicion of a mystery attaching to her. Like most manly men, Mr. Richard Maxwell was straightforward to the tips of his virile fingers, and he was intolerant of mysteries harmless or otherwise.

"She's trying to run away from somebody or something," he said to himself, as he turned again to his desk and tried to think up some new way of discouraging her.

In the effort the mental picture of Christmas Cañon seemed to be all-sufficient. It had once been a mining camp, but the gold had proved to be merely a "pocket," and when it was exhausted the camp died, leaving only a few empty log shacks and weather-beaten frame cabins as reminders.

With the desertion of the shacks the wire office in the tiny bungalow station had been abandoned. But with the growth of traffic it was now and then necessary to use the old sidings for a meeting or passing point; and since the locomotive-changing station of Grand Point was the next wire office, ten miles beyond, the lack of an operator at the cañon was frequently a drawback.

None the less, Maxwell had no notion of yielding. Still insisting inwardly that the thing was entirely out of the question, he permitted himself to say, "Well, I'll see about it," adding: "You wouldn't hold the job a week."

"Then try me for the week," she pleaded quickly; and thereupon the square-shouldered superintendent closed his desk with a bang and went out, swearing dumbly at his own lack of decision, and, incidentally, at the meek and altogether invincible obstinacy of womankind in general.

It was not at all like Maxwell, the Maxwell the rank and file knew best, to take counsel with anybody in a matter solely concerning the discipline of his own department. But this time he made an exception, falling upon Dan Connolly, the round-faced, round-bodied day dispatcher, who had been sweating loyally through fourteen-hour shifts during the strike period.

"You're in touch with the union crowd, Dan," was the way the superintendent went at the counseling. "How would the men take it if I should make a place for Miss Kent? They'd kick, wouldn't they?"

Connolly stuck his pen in its raw potato and placed the blotting slip accurately along the "live line" on his train sheet.

"I don't believe there's a man of 'em that'd make a kick, Mr. Maxwell," he said promptly. "Darby, the chief of the Brewster local, was in here yesterday, and he spoke of her particularly—said she was one o' the strike breakers that nobody wanted to see fired. She's a mighty good little brass pounder, and everybody on the two divisions knows it by this time."

Getting no comfort here, Maxwell next fell upon McDonough, cornering the trainmaster in his bare little den at the end of the corridor.

"Calhoun's been relieved at Angels, and he's coming back to take his place with me," he began abruptly. "If we decide to reopen Christmas Cañon, Miss Kent wants to take it."

If McDonough were astonished at the sheer unheard-of crassness of such a proposal, he was wily enough not to betray it.

"Think of that, now!" he said mildly. And then: "The union wouldn't be standing for that, I'm thinking?"

"That's what I hoped," said Maxwell sourly. "But Connolly says it's the other way around. Darby gave him a hint that the boys didn't want to see her dropped."

McDonough came back craftily.

"Give it to her," he advised. "It's the short way out of it. One night alone in the cañon'll settle it, and you'll be rid of her. And, having tempted Providence, you may thank the good Lord it's no worse."

The superintendent caught at the suggestion as the lesser of two evils. "It's a dirty trick, Mac; a low-down, dirty trick to play on a woman. But I guess it's the easiest way out of it. I'll let her go up on Three to-morrow, and you have a man ready to take her place when she throws up her hands; which, as you say, will probably be after she's had one night of it." Whereupon he went back to his office.

"You may get ready to go to Christmas Cañon on Three to-morrow," he said briefly to the girl at the telegraph table; and he broke curtly into her

grateful chatterings to dictate a message of Gaffin, roundhouse foreman at Grand Point, directing him to send a man down to Christmas Cañon to put the tiny bungalow station in order for its occupancy.

II.

It was a cold world, shoe-top deep in snow, into which Doris Kent was projected the following morning, and Morris, the conductor who helped her off at the momentary stop of Train Three, was honestly sorry for her.

"The old man might've done something better than this for you," he grumbled, when she slipped on the icy platform and would have fallen if he had not caught her.

"Oh, no," she gasped cheerfully. "Mr. Maxwell was kind, and I wanted to come!"

"It's a d—— dashed graveyard!" growled Morris, with a glance around at the deserted shacks of the abandoned hamlet shut in by steep, fir-clad mountains black-green and dazzling white in the winter sunshine. Then he gave the signal, and the train stormed away, leaving the girl fumbling at the latch of the tiny station.

Contrary to McDonough's prediction, and quite to the discomfiture of the superintendent, the young woman at the lonely cañon station did not ask to be relieved, after her first night in the silent immensities of the Hophras.

The reports that filtered in from Christmas Cañon after its opening as a day-telegraph station came chiefly by word of mouth, and were all hopeful; the good-natured gossip of the crews of passing trains, some few of which had occasion to stop at the little-used siding between Burnt Creek and the Molly Bawn Mine.

By these accounts, the "Little Un," as the men promptly named her, was still on the job, cheerfully wigwagging the passing trains, wading through the ever-deepening snow to light her switch lamps, or, on the odd occasion when the cañon was made an emergency order-giving point, rattling her key swiftly and skilfully on the wire business, while the waiting train crews stacked elbows on the counter railing, and took in the unwonted neatness and spotless cleanliness of the boxlike little wire office.

From the first there was no lack of rough sympathy for the cheerful little exile in the lonely cañon, and it found voice in warm-hearted curses for the man—supposed to be Trainmaster McDonough—who was responsible. But before the young woman had been a week on the job the sympathy found a better expression in a hundred-mile shout of applause.

The occasion was a slip of the off-trick dispatcher, Underwood; one of those unaccountable lapses which are bound to occur now and then so long as men are mere human beings, and not curiously devised and infallible pieces of machinery.

The staging of the small drama was thus: Train Six, the fast passenger eastbound, was late, and Underwood had figured out a meeting point for it and a fast "perishable" special at Burnt Creek, a siding fifteen miles below Christmas Cañon. A heavy snowfall the day before had turned the plows out; and the rotary, which had been boring through a slide at the lower end of the cañon, had contrived to lose itself—at least, out of Underwood's calculations.

When the time came to give the passenger and the fast freight the meet order, Underwood forgot the plow. At the last report Burnt Creek had wired that it was still at work in the cut, which was in sight from his station, but that it was nearly through, and would proceed under its orders, which were still effective, westward to Grand Point.

In Underwood's brain the prediction got itself twisted into an assertion of fact. Assuming that the plow *had* proceeded, he went on to give the meet order, catching the freight at a station fifteen miles below Burnt Creek, and the eastbound passenger just as it was changing engines at Grand Point.

When it was too late, he remembered the exact wording of Burnt

Creek's message about the rotary; remembered that he had no definite assurance that the plow was safely out of the way, and realized that he had laid the kindling for a very pretty fire, which might presently blaze up into a frightful catastrophe.

Though the night was cold and the headquarters office was not overheated, the off-trick man was sweating profusely when he hurriedly called Burnt Creek, and asked about the forgotten plow. The answer was partly reassuring. The plow had finished its work, and gone on westward; had been gone for an hour or more.

Underwood got one good breath and went at it again. It was twenty-five miles from Burnt Creek to Grand Point, uphill miles; but the plow, if it had not been detained by other slides, might have made it, and got in before the passenger left. Grand Point answered the peremptory "GS" call promptly.

"Is rotary in from east?" clicked Underwood; and when the Grand Point operator clicked back "No," the off-trick man saw what he was in for, and the lights in his office went black before his eyes.

This was at 10:42 p. m., and the situation was well defined. Somewhere below Burnt Creek the freight was storming up the snowy grade to its meeting point; but it was safe, since it would take its siding at the creek in any event and wait. But somewhere on the twenty-five-mile stretch between Burnt Creek and Grand Point there were a lost snowplow and an unwarned passenger train rushing together, and for these there was no possible chance of rescue. For in all the blinding shock of his misery Underwood was still clear-headed enough to remember that two hours earlier Miss Kent had turned in her "Good night;" and Christmas Cañon was the only wire office from which help could be given.

On the bare chance that the young woman might be awakened by her own call, Underwood pounced upon his key and rattled "CC," "CC," in endless repetitions.

For a time the effort was fruitless. Then, when his office lights were beginning to go black again, the dispatcher felt rather than heard the break.

In Morse that nobody but an expert could have picked up he poured the story of impending disaster through his key, heard Doris Kent's clipped-out "O. K.," and got up to stagger across the room to the water cooler, motioning Grotter, the relief man, to take his place at the train sheet. All had been done that could be done.

Up at the snowbound station in the silent mountains a badly scared young woman was hurriedly thrusting her feet into a pair of rubber boots and struggling into the man's overcoat that she wore when she had to go out of doors. Awakened out of a sound sleep by the persistent clicking of her station call, she did not know whether either the passenger or the plow had passed her station, and her "O. K." to Underwood was merely to let the dispatcher know that she had heard and understood.

At the closing of the key she had instantly released the weight which caused her station-signal lamp to turn its two red eyes east and west, but that was not enough. The wind was sucking hoarsely through the cañon, and she knew that the light, dry snow of the day before would be filling the air, to the probable blotting out of any signal light smaller than a bonfire. Also, she remembered that the passenger train was behind time, and would be running to make up.

Under the spur of the crisis, she found herself thinking clearly as she struck a match, lighted the two red-globed lanterns kept trimmed and ready, and put some track torpedoes into a pocket of the overcoat. Her first duty was to assume that neither the train nor the plow had passed her station. Of the two, the passenger, running at speed, would be the most likely to miss seeing the station signal, and thus to underrun it; hence the passenger was the one that must be stopped at all hazards.

It was a bit of magazine fiction—a railroad story read months before, and recurring now in every vivid detail—that gave her the saving impulse. Her station had not been as yet supplied with red-light track fusees, though she had twice made requisition for them, and she had to do the best she could with the lanterns and the torpedoes. A hundred yards up the track was a gravity-filled water tank, and a minute later she was out and battling with the snow-laden gale in a mad effort to reach it. A lull helped her, and at the side of the tank the snow was piled high in a drift solid enough to bear her weight.

Luckily for her purpose, the light sheet-iron filling spout was a side-swing arrangement, with the spout held aside by a hooked chain with a weight. Tying one of her lanterns to the nose of the spout, she unhooked the chain and swung the big, snow-covered pipe, with its dot of living red at the end, out across the track. That done, she rolled to the bottom of the helpful drift, clipped the torpedoes to the rail, recovered the other lantern, and started down the track to try to head off the plow.

She was only halfway to the lower switch, battling feebly with the wind, which seemed to blow from all directions at once, when the catastrophe climaxed.

From somewhere in the backward night came the hoarse bull bellow of a locomotive whistle, and a shrill screaming of wheels on the snow-covered rails, and at the same instant a headlight eye flashed up in front of her.

After that, things were badly mixed for her. She knew that she had stopped to wave her lantern wildly in the path of the oncoming plow, and, when the curling snow wave caught her and swept her aside, she remembered the little foolish laughing gasp which had come at the realization that she had not had sense enough to get off the track.

Full consciousness came back presently, however, when the men of the plow crew picked her up out of the drift into which the curling snow wave had tossed her, and she heard one of them say, with a break in his voice, "Oh, God, Jim, cover her up! Don't you see she hain't got nothin' but a nightie on under that man's coat?" And then she heard another voice saying, "Gawd bless her white little soul! If she didn't tumble out o' bed in the plum' middle o' the night to—— Easy, Jim! Is she dead?"

She wriggled out of the rescuing arms, and, where there had been benumbing cold, there was now plenty of warmth. "No, I'm not dead, and if you'll please put me down I can walk," she said, with hastily summoned self-possession. And then: "Did Number Six get the signal?"

"You bet she did," choked Big Murray, the conductor of the plow. "Buck Green he said he thought a cy-kalone had shore got him when he hit that tank spout. You're toler'ble shore you ain't hurt none, Little Un?"

"Not a bit," she denied; and a few minutes later she was back in the bungalow office, working the wire like a veteran in the effort to get the train tangle straightened out.

III.

Naturally, the news of this quick-witted rescue went far and wide on the two divisions as swiftly as the gossiping wires could spread it, and thereupon the hundred-mile shout of approval went up, and the small exile at Christmas Cañon took place as an accepted member of the Short Line family.

Two days after it happened, Maxwell's car, running special over the Hophra division, stopped at the desolate little station in the wintry altitudes, and the superintendent, stamping the snow from his feet, broke in upon the exile. He had a couple of messages to send, and, while she was tapping them through her key, Maxwell drew the only other chair up to the tiny stove and sat down.

From where he was sitting, he could look out through the window in the rear and across to the deserted mining camp, which was scattered in weather-worn

dilapidation along the nearer mountain foot. Somewhat to his surprise, he noticed that a freshly tramped path had been made in the snow, leading from the rear of the station to the nearest of the log shacks in the deserted camp; and, looking sharply, he fancied he could discern a thin wreath of blue wood smoke ascending from the rudely built chimney of the cabin.

For this cause, he did not say, at first, what he had stopped to say, when the girl turned to hand him her signed and "O. K.'d" copies of the messages she had just transmitted for him.

"I see you have neighbors over there, Miss Kent," was what he did say, and it was shot forth abruptly. "Who is living in that cabin across the way?"

For some unknown cause the unexpected question seemed to embarrass her cruelly. Twice she tried to answer, and when, at last, the reply came, her face was flushed and she stammered painfully.

"A—a man and his—his wife, I believe. They c-came—that is, they've been there since yesterday."

The superintendent frowned absently. "Some claim-owning prospector, I suppose, come to work out his assessment. It's no good. There's no more gold in that hill. What sort of people are they?"

Again the question, simple enough in any construction of it, seemed to confuse her.

"They are—I think they are very poor people, Mr. Maxwell; indeed, I am almost sure they are are; and—and harmless. I am sure they are harmless."

"Well, harmless or not, their being here makes it all the more necessary for you to listen to what I'm going to say. Your position here as an unprotected young woman in this lonesome place is anomalous enough, at the best, and you must listen to reason. I had no idea you'd stick it out, or I wouldn't have let you try it. You did a very brave and a very clever thing last Tuesday night, Miss Doris, and we all appreciate it at its face value. Mr. Gannett, our new division passenger agent at Brewster, is having a wire cut into his office, and he will take you on as his telegrapher. It's a promotion, in recognition of what you did Tuesday night."

The effect of this announcement was, to say the least, rather disconcerting. The girl suddenly turned away and hid her face in the crook of an arm on the telegraph table. When she looked up again, the slate-blue eyes were swimming.

"I—I can't take it, Mr. Maxwell," she faltered. "I simply *can't* go back to the city. Won't you please let me stay here? I'm—I'm making good, am I not?"

Maxwell took ten other minutes of his valuable time, while his train crew waited impatiently, and the stuttering pop valve of the special's engine was ripping holes in the frosty mountain silences, trying to convince her of her absolute and utter foolishness in sticking to the man's job when she might have a woman's, and better pay for doing it. But, as once before, her meek obstinacy was invincible.

Lannagan, Maxwell's conductor, came in while the argument was in progress, and he got the gist of it. Hence, the story went out on the line that the "Old Man" had tried to give the Little Un a headquarters job with more pay, and that for some unaccountable reason she had refused the promotion.

It was inevitable that gossip—it was kindly gossip for the better part—should lay hold upon this fresh evidence of a mystery with a renewed grip, and, before long, the crews of the passing trains had another story to tell; a story which was passed along with head-shakings and more of the warm-hearted maledictions. In due time this newest story soaked in to the Brewster headquarters; but McDonough was the only man who had the nerve to broach it to the superintendent.

The broaching chanced upon a bitter December night, when the trainmaster and his chief were keeping in touch with the dispatcher's office, and every train on the Hophra division was fight-

ing for each consecutive mile. Maxwell and McDonough had gone into the trainmaster's room, which was next door to the dispatcher's office, and the superintendent, who had been at the wires off and on for the better part of the previous twenty-four hours, threw himself wearily upon McDonough's lounge.

"I take it ye've been hearing what they're saying now about the little doll-girl at Christmas Cañon?" said the trainmaster bluntly, at the lighting of his blackened corncob.

Maxwell made the sign of assent reluctantly.

"Just what have ye heard?" queried McDonough relentlessly.

"I've heard that she is keeping a man at one of the shacks in the abandoned camp, and doing her best to keep it dark. I'm afraid it's so, Donald. I was up there the other day, and saw the path from the station over to the shack, and saw smoke coming from the cabin chimney. Naturally, I asked questions, and she——"

"She lied to you, of course," put in the trainmaster. "What do ye make of it?"

"I suppose there's only one thing to be made of it. The man is one of those unspeakable vampires you read about, and seldom meet in real life; a wretch who, in addition to the wrong he has done to a woman, is vile enough to pursue her and to live on her earnings."

McDonough was nodding slowly.

"That's what the men are saying," he volunteered. And then: "Ye can't stand for that, Mr. Maxwell. 'Twas going on whilst she was here in Brewster. She was afraid it would come out on her, and that's why she wanted to hide herself in the hills."

Maxwell locked his hands under his head.

"Do you know anything about it personally, Mac?" he asked.

The trainmaster spat into the box of sawdust at his feet.

"I've seen 'im," he said, his homely face wrinkling itself in a scowl of contempt. "I was at the Molly Bawn Mine settlement two days ago, and he was there, buying groceries in the company store. They're onto him at the Molly Bawn, and the miners' women are cacklin' about the disgrace."

"What sort of a looking man is he?"

"Tall and thin, with a face like chalk. What the Old Harry a girl like her ever saw in him is past me. But they're kittle cattle, these women, anyhow you take 'em."

"I suppose I've got to fire her," said Maxwell. "We can't let a demoralizing thing like that go on, right under the eyes of every passing train crew. And, besides, some of our own men will be getting mixed up in it, next."

"That's the queer part of it," put in the trainmaster reflectively. "I rode down with young Bloodgood yesterday, and dug into him about it. He was grouchy as a dog with a sore head, but I got at the meat of it. He says the man that makes the first break at the Little Un, as they're calling her, will get his, and get it sudden."

"You mean that the men are condoning it?"

"Something of that sort, ye'd say. Bloodgood put it this way: 'It's hell, McDonough, any way you squint at it. But it's her own little particular piece of hell, and if she can stand it, it's nobody else's butt-in. I don't know what she's doing, and I don't care. But every man on the division will tell you that, if she's crooked, the angels are crooked, too.' I'm giving you the sense of it, you understand, without Bloodgood's fireworks."

Maxwell lay still for a time with his eyes closed, and the rattle and spatter of the sounders in the adjoining room filled the silence. After a little he said: "It's a shame, McDonough. I've got womankind of my own. If I thought my little daughter——"

The interruption came from Grotter, who thrust his face in at the door to say that Train Six was stuck at Burnt Creek in a crawling slide, and to report that the mercury was still falling at the summit of the range, with a stiff wind blowing. Whereupon the two bosses sprang up as one man and went back on the weary job.

IV.

This talk between Maxwell and his trainmaster repeated itself in substance many times, and in many places, during the next few days, and, whether in the roundhouse tool room at Grand Point, or in the cabooses of the trundling trains, always with a gruff and commonly profane leaning toward charity. Young Bloodgood's attitude, as McDonough had portrayed it, was accurately typical. No word of disrespect was ever handed across the counter rail in the tiny office at Christmas Cañon; and if the waiting crews now and then glowered across the snow field at the one inhabited cabin in the deserted mining camp, the black looks were for the man who never showed himself; for the man for whom no name in the mother tongue was bitter enough to fill the measure of vindictiveness and contempt. They would have gone over to the cabin and mobbed the man cheerfully, only there was not one of them who did not feel certain that it would be the death of the woman also.

It was on the day before Christmas that the thing climaxed. Maxwell, who had been postponing the inevitable from day to day, finally hardened his heart and tossed a penciled telegram to Calhoun, as he closed his desk and went out to supper. The office operator, a red-headed Irish boy with a temper like smoking tow, and a heart like putty, swore softly to himself when he read the curt dismissal:

To Operator CC.

Your services will not be required after to-morrow, the twenty-fifth. Man will be sent to relieve you on Train Seven. This message, bearing your office stamp, will be conductor's authority to transport yourself *and one* to either terminus of the Nevada Short Line, calling upon this office for regular transportation to cover.

Maxwell, G. S.

Calhoun read the message twice before he snapped his key to send the "CC" call. Then the smoking-tow temper, aided and abetted by the puttylike heart, came between, and Barney Calhoun committed his first and only open act of rebellion.

Opening a drawer in his table, he dropped the dismissal message into it and shut the drawer with a slam.

"You'll stay there, bad cess to you, till wan hour before Seven hits the cañon to-morrow night!" he gritted, apostrophizing the penciled blank. "It's not me that'll be poisonin' that poor little colleen's Christmas for her twinty-four hours beforehand be the clock!"

V.

Christmas Day, that year, dawned for the Timanyoni country in brilliant contrast to the fiercely stormy period which preceded it. On all the ranges the snow lay thickly, and the air was crisp and frostily resonant. But, over all, the sun was blazing brightly in a cloudless sky, and there was no wind to stir the dry and meallike snow in the gulches or on the bare balds.

Up at the head of the cañon in the nearer Hophras the little locomotive-changing hamlet of Grand Point was a mere dingy blot on the white carpeting of its bowllike valley. In the roundhouse the waiting engines were purring in readiness, and on a siding beyond the coal chutes the division rotary rested after its fortnight of steady borings in the cuts and cañons. With good weather and a clean rail, everything was going smoothly, and an atmosphere of Christmas peace and good will—with the job, so to speak, running itself—pervaded the relief station.

Mrs. Costigan, the motherly widow, who ran the lunch counter and the men's boarding house at the station, had served a bounteous dinner for the crews off duty, making it an hour later than usual to mark the day. Since the traffic, impeded as it had been by the weather, was still heavy, there were not over a dozen men to put their legs under Mother Costigan's table; and afterward, after the day passenger trains had come and gone, there were only an even half dozen to sit smoking around the stove in the roundhouse tool room.

It was after five o'clock when Train Nineteen, the last of the day freights, came hammering up the Grand Point lower grade thirty minutes late. At this, the tool-room group lost two of its members to furnish the crew of the relief engine, and gained two, momentarily, at least, when Hardwick and Betts, engineer and fireman of the engine relieved, came in to wash up for their early supper.

"Where you fellows been loafin' along?" asked Gaffin, the big, pirate-bearded roundhouse foreman; and Hardwick took his face out of the washbucket long enough to reply:

"Held out for Sixteen at the Molly Bawn siding. She mashed a drawbar comin' down the slide, and got a pair o' trucks off." Then, as he scrubbed his weather-beaten face with the coarse towel: "Hell's a-poppin' down at the Molly Bawn. Them Cornish miners've got a kag a' Chris'mus bug juice from somewheres, and the whole shootin' match is fightin' drunk, men *and* wimmen. Bunch of 'em came bulgin' down to the sidin' and wanted me to cut loose and run 'em down to Christmas Cañon."

"What's that?" shouted young Bloodgood, who was one of the few left-overs.

"That's right," asserted Hardwick. "I told 'em the walkin' was good, and they wouldn't find any whisky at the cañon; and one of 'em said they didn't want whisky—they was goin' to smoke out a rat's nest; too drunk to know what he was gassin' about, I reckon."

"No, by cripes!" yelled Bloodgood, jumping down from his seat on the bench. "They're goin' after the Little Un, and her—and the——" What he called the one other inhabitant of Christmas Cañon is unprintable. "I know," he went on hotly. "I was laid out at the mine last week, and that one-eyed foreman told me in his danged sanctimonious singsong. He said it was a disgrace to every decent woman in the district, an' I told him to go straight plum' to——"

Where Bloodgood had told the mine foreman to go was not to be known, for at that moment, Jenniper, the station operator, came racing across from the station.

"Trouble!" he gasped, as he burst into the tool room. "The girl at Christmas Cañon—she's wiring—for help! Said a crowd from somewhere was mobbin' the station, and then she broke, and I couldn't get her again!"

It was Gaffin, the big roundhouse boss, who took command.

"Scatter, you fellows, and rout out every fightin' man you can find!" he exploded. "Round 'em up at the coal track, and I'll get the Fourteen on the table. Jenniper, you get orders f'r us if you can; if you can't, we'll go without 'em! Hustle f'r it, boys! You know what it means when that red-eyed mine crowd goes on the rampage!"

It was a tidy, hard-muscled bunch of sixteen men that piled into the cab and on to the tender of the waiting helper engine a few minutes after the alarm had gone out, and Gaffin, himself, took the throttle. At the station a momentary stop was made, and Jenniper came running out, with Mother Costigan at his heels.

"Can't get you any orders; something wrong with the wires!" panted the operator; and then the motherly widow got in her word.

"If any of you boys've got guns, you'll be l'aving them here with me!" she cried. "I ain't going to have any of you hanged, even if it is to stop them rioting Cornishmen!"

"That goes," said Gaffin to his squad, and half a dozen pistols were dropped into Mother Costigan's upheld apron. Then there was a roar from the big "helper's" stack, a fire-grinding grip of the wheels, and the rescue race was begun.

There were seven and a half miles of down grade to the Molly Bawn switch, and Gaffin, nursing the big engine on the brakes, covered them swiftly, and made no halt at the mining settlement, which seemed to be fairly deserted. On top of the tender coal pile the men were turning up their coat collars and setting their backs to the wind of motion. Though the sky was still bright, the sun

had gone behind the western mountains, and the mild Christmas Day was waning to a nipping twilight.

In the gulch above Christmas Cañon those who were able to face the running blast had their first hint of what was going on at the lonesome little station. Above the mountain shoulder a black smoke cloud was rising, and when the 1014 tracked shrieking around the curve of approach, the hint was confirmed. A good half of the deserted shacks and cabins of the abandoned mining camp were ablaze, and a crowd of fighting, struggling men was massed about the little station building. Gaffin twitched at the brake valve and yelled a sharp command. Instantly one of the sixteen dropped from the engine's gangway and ran nimbly ahead to unlock and throw the siding switch. Almost without a halt the big engine slid into the siding, and before the stop was fully made the remaining fifteen were tumbling off into the snow. Again Gaffin showed his gift of leadership.

"'Round to the back!" he shouted; and his railroad squad, roughly formed into a flying wedge, struck the locked back door of the station with an impact that was not to be denied.

What they saw when the bursting door admitted them was pitiful enough. A youngish man, chalk-faced, as McDonough had described him, was lying across the cot in the corner of the office, with the blood slowly trickling from a bruised cut in his forehead, and, standing over him, and holding off the drunken mob by the sheer might of outraged innocence, was the girl.

At the sight of Gaffin, whom she recognized, she flung out her arms and let go, as any woman would.

"Oh, Mr. Gaffin!" she wailed. "They've killed my husband—do you hear?—*my husband!*"

Gaffin had stripped his heavy peajacket, and was spitting on his hands.

"You hear that, boys?" he yelled, with his beard over his shoulder. "Give 'em what's comin' to 'em! *Now then*—out with 'em!"

Then and there began a glorious Christmas battle, the saga of which will be sung so long as there are a dozen of the old-time Short Line men to cluster around the winter stoves in the switch shanties and wikiups between the twin ranges. Back and forth in the cramped little office the conflict raged, double drunken numbers against the sober, hard-hitting few who were mad with the rage of a righteous cause.

Ever and again Gaffin's slogan of *"Out with 'em!"* gave the signal for another rush of the flying wedge; and when the single wooden-barred partition separating the office from the cramped little waiting room gave way with a crash, the battle was swiftly transferred to the frosty outdoors, to surge up and down upon the narrow train platform, leaving a growing number of the vanquished to mark its path.

It was fairly in the thick of things that the bellowing whistle of the evening passenger train from Brewster set the echoes clamoring in the lower cañon reaches. That, together with the sobering effects of frosty air and sturdy buffetings, settled it. When the upcoming train slowed to its stop, the battle was over, with those of the vanquished who could run legging it up the track for home.

Maxwell's car was trailing at the end of the passenger train, and the superintendent was the first man off when the stop was made. There was fire in his eye when he saw the helper engine standing on the siding, and found a round dozen of his Grand Point men cluttering the little platform, and reeking with the carnage of the late battle.

"What in the name of the devil!" he began; but Gaffin came between and explained as well as he could. There had been a riot, and the Little Un had called for help.

"And not a minute too quick," Gaffin went on. "As it is, I don't know but they've killed that poor 'lunger' husband of hers."

"What's that?" ripped out Maxwell. "Her husband?"

"Sure!" said Gaffin promptly, and quite as if there had never been any question about the chalk-faced man's state and standing.

The superintendent headed the little group that pressed into the wrecked interior of the bungalow station. Doris Kent, with fingers that trembled pitifully, was trying to light the table lamp, and Gaffin took the match from her and did it himself. The pallid-faced man, still unconscious, as it seemed, was lying on the cot in the corner, and a handkerchief had been bound about the bruised forehead.

Maxwell, fiery angry a minute before, now issued his orders with no more than his usual snappiness.

"Half a dozen of you go over there and put those shack fires out," he directed. Then: "The rest of you take hold and load these left-over Cornishmen into the baggage car." And, to a young man who had followed him from the train: "Bolton, you climb aboard and see if there isn't a doctor on the train. If there is, bring him here, quick. Now, then," turning to the arch culprit, who had retreated to the cotside and was awaiting her sentence. "Now, then, tell me all about it. Is this man your husband?"

She nodded dumbly, adding the pitiful details which the admission demanded. "Tommie was the railroad operator in our home town, and we went to school together. He taught me Morse, and when he got sick I substituted for him the best I could. Then the doctor said he must come West, and we came to Brewster. Tom was sicker than ever, and he had to go to the sanitarium. We—we had no money, and I had to go to work. Then, when things were beginning to look a little brighter, the sanitarium doctor said Tom must come to the mountains, and live and sleep outdoors. I—I didn't tell you, or anybody. You wouldn't have given the place to a married woman."

Maxwell came nearer and laid a cool hand on the unconscious man's forehead.

"You did this, Mrs. Kent, knowing what everybody would say of you when it leaked out that you were living alone here with this man for your only companion?" he said.

She nodded again. "He is my husband, and—and I love him, Mr. Maxwell. Doesn't that explain—a little bit? And he didn't know; I never told him."

The superintendent turned away with a lump in his throat, and the words that came to his lips were the words of the One for whom the day was named: "Greater love than this hath no man." Then he turned back brusquely, just as Bolton came hurrying in with the doctor, who is, fortunately, seldom missing in any well-filled train. "What do you want, little woman? Anything in reason goes."

"Just to stay here, if I might, and—and nurse Tom back to life and health. Only I know you can't let me do that. You can't put a married woman on your pay rolls, Mr. Maxwell. I knew that very well before I went to work in your office in Brewster."

Maxwell made room for the doctor, and drew her aside.

"No; we can't put you on the pay rolls, after this. But I'll tell you what we can do; we can and will put Thomas Kent in charge of Christmas Cañon, and if his wife is good-natured enough to substitute for him on the off days, when he isn't able to work——"

It was here that the doctor broke in with his verdict, which was that the man on the cot was coming alive again, and was not hurt seriously; was in no danger beyond that attaching to his winning or losing fight with the dread disease which had driven him to the high altitudes.

At this the snappy superintendent disposed of things quickly. Gaffin was directed to detail some of his men to carry the sick man, cot and all, across to the one habitable cabin, which had luckily been spared in the fire-setting of the rioters. Bolton was ordered to take the station wires until he could be relieved, and to get orders at once to have the helper engine follow Train Seven back to Grand Point as second section.

While these orders were getting themselves carried out, Maxwell, himself, gave his arm to the girl-wife, and led her across to the cabin of refuge, with the curious passengers looking on from the train windows, and demanding

one of another to know if it had been a station robbery, or what? At the door she turned quickly and put out her hands.

"Mr. Maxwell," she faltered, "I don't know if you believe in God or—or Christ; but if you do——"

"Of course, I do," he snapped shortly. And then, still more curtly: "I wish you many happy returns of the day, Mrs. Kent. You're one of God's own little fools, but I guess heaven's full of 'em. Good night." And then he went across to the train in obedience to the conductor's impatient cry of "All aboard!"

Two minutes later Train Seven was surging on its way up the cañon again, and the superintendent had passed through the swaying sleepers to let himself into his own car. In the working compartment a young, red-headed Irishman, who sometimes went out with his superior as private secretary and general utility man, bent lower over his desk; but the train was slowing for the Molly Bawn Mine before the dreaded question came:

"Barney, what did you do with that 'CC' message that I gave you yesterday?"

Calhoun looked up and met the stern gaze of the Big Boss fairly.

"That's on me, Mr. Maxwell," he said, in well-feigned contrition. "You did be scribbling it so fast, and with a pencil that bad, that I couldn't read it at all. And I clean forget——"

Maxwell turned back to the ranked files of correspondence which went with him, like a bad conscience, in all of his goings to and fro.

"That's all right, Barney," he said pleasantly. "Just keep on forgetting it. And, while I think of it, make a memorandum for McDonough, telling him that Thomas Kent—Mrs. Kent's husband, you know—has this day been appointed agent and operator at Christmas Cañon. Now we'll go on with that letter to the live-stock people. Let me see—where was I?"

THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE MORNING

THEY were two Southern gentlemen, high strung and high living, and they met at eight o'clock in the morning after having had an unusually hilarious evening.

"Colonel," said the major, "how do you feel, suh?"

"Major," replied the colonel, with great solemnity, "I feel like thunder, suh, as any Southern gentleman should, suh, at this hour of the morning, suh."

THE INVOLUNTARY COMEDIAN

GRAHAM B. NICHOL, who makes many trips between New York and Washington, looks in the mirror every morning and frankly admits that if he had lived in ancient days he would never have been a close rival of Adonis at a beauty show. Furthermore, he tells this story on himself:

Not long ago, when he was on a train pulling out of New York, he went back to the observation platform and found that the only other person there was a very pretty girl. As Nichol took his seat, the girl looked at him and laughed.

"Well," said Nichol, in a burst of inspiration, "you have nothing on me. I regard it in the same light."

"What do you think I was laughing at?" smiled the girl.

"Why," replied Nichol, "you were laughing at this horrible face which I have to push through the world."

"No," she said mercifully, "I wasn't laughing at your face, but when I looked at you I thought of something funny."

The Shoo In

By Charles E. Van Loan

Author of "When Thieves Fall Off," "The Strategy of Battle," Etc.

It could not have been anything but an intervention of Providence when a black boy by name Mose dropped down under the nose of Old Man Curry, lover of Hebrew prophets and race horses. Read how Curry adopted the youngster, rechristened him Moses and set him to ride Nehemiah, the "new prophet in Israel," the latest acquisition to Curry's "Bible Class," as the race fans called his string.

SIDNEY ALBERT JOHNSON, late unknown, but now a steeplechase jockey with one winning bracket against his name and a heavy sense of his own importance, was taking his morning stroll down the line of stables. The work-outs were finished, and the race-track habitués were enjoying a breathing spell before lunch and the strenuous business of the afternoon.

Sidney Albert's black face wore a superior smile; the rest of his body was attired in a startling manner. Let us take Sidney Albert apart, garment by garment, and see what caused him to strike such a strident note upon the pleasant morning air. Item: One plaid suit, decorated with four-inch checks. Item: One very round, mouse-colored derby hat, worn far back upon a shaven cranium. Item: Patent-leather shoes with fawn-colored uppers. Item: One high collar, almost white. Item: One baby-blue scarf skewered with a cut-glass horseshoe pin of noble proportions. Item: One shirt of alarming design, not quite so white as the collar. Item: Two deep purple socks. Item:——

But why pry further into the secrets of Sidney Albert's wardrobe? All that could be seen advertised itself loudly; all which was unseen must remain Sidney Albert's own business. It is not the undershirt which proclaims the man.

In one hand Sidney Albert carried a thin, light cane, with which from time to time he made rhythmic passes in the air. In one pocket of his trousers Sidney Albert carried fourteen dollars and thirty-five cents, a sum sufficient to place him beyond the long reach of want or worry. Is it any wonder that he strutted a trifle on this bright morning?

When Sidney Albert Johnson succeeded in bringing home the good horse Isaiah in front of such steeplechasers as Arabi and Prince Wang, Old Man Curry, the owner, having wagered upon Isaiah at twenty to one, saw fit to reward his rider with two dingy, crumpled fifty-dollar notes. The major portion of this honorarium transferred itself immediately to Sidney Albert's back, chest, and feet; with a part of the remainder he devoted himself to light pastimes of many kinds.

As he walked, smothered ejaculations smote upon his ear. Some of them held a note of entreaty; others the stern tones of command. These sounds seemed to proceed from the open door of a "tack room," a place where horse owners store their tackle and portable goods.

"Crap game goin' on," said Sidney Albert to himself. "I reckon I'll jus' slide in an' fondle them bones a few times."

Several small boys looked up from the floor as Sidney Albert's form darkened the doorway. They were exercise boys, and Sidney Albert saw at a glance that there was not even an apprentice jockey in the lot. Clearly he who had ridden Isaiah to victory at twenty to one could not jeopardize his position and dignity by consorting upon equal terms and all fours with such small fry. Sidney Albert became a languid observer.

A very small, very black, bullet-headed boy in a ragged red sweater was crouched upon his knees, earnestly agitating two amber cubes. Every time they left his hand he squatted lower, as if to follow them in their flight, snapped his fingers, and ejaculated:

"Hooey!"

Four nickels and one dime scattered upon the floor represented the stake at hazard. The other little boys, all of whom were white, and most of whom were chewing tobacco, greeted each cast of the dice with shrill cries of "Come a seven!" "Crap him, bones!" and simliar entreaties; but the black boy, save for his one grunting ejaculation, was silent. His dumbness displeased Sidney Albert to such an extent that he leaned over and touched the little gambler upon the shoulder.

"Little black boy," he said kindly, "what's yo' point?"

The child looked up with a snort of displeasure.

"Six!" he said sullenly. "I'm afteh a six."

"Little black boy," said Sidney Albert pityingly, "how you expec' to git a six 'less yo' talk to them bones? You got to *speak* to 'em—you mus' *plead* with 'em! How they goin' to know what yo' want if yo' don' tell 'em? Call 'em by name, little black boy, by name! Like this." Sidney Albert's voice rose in a hoarse howl: "Come, you, Jimmy Hicks! Come on, you, sixty days! Mus' have a six! *Six!*" Once more Sidney Albert assumed his easy, confidential tone: "That's the way to make yo' point, little black boy. Holler fo' what yo' want when yo' want it."

Then, having furnished this valuable advice, Sidney Albert removed himself from the tack room, and continued his graceful stroll.

Half an hour later, when returning to Old Man Curry's stable quarters, he heard loud yells from the tack room, and inserted his mouse-colored derby into the opening. The small, bullet-headed black boy, sweater cast aside, and sleeves rolled to his shining elbows, was hurling the dice with shouts which taxed his lung power and drowned out all other sounds.

"Bones!" he yelled. "Don't you fool me this time! Don't you do it! Show me all that money!"

Sidney Albert smiled commendingly.

"Little black boy," he asked at length, "what's yo' point now?"

"Four!" answered the child. "Come you, li'l' Jody!"

A look of disappointment crossed Sidney Albert's face. All that noise for one of the hardest points on the dice! Sidney Albert shook his head sorrowfully.

"Little black boy," he said, "yo' askin' too much of the bones. Yo' askin' too much."

Later he came upon his pupil sitting on a bale of hay in the sunshine, dejection written on every line of his small, drooping figure.

"Uh huh!" he said, in answer to an inquiry. "They cleaned me good. Got my last dime. I shot 'em forty cents, come out on a seven, rode it, and 'en passed out two box cars fo' the works."

He lapsed into moody silence, but his lips moved from time to time, and it was plain that he was living over again the incident of the "box cars" and the wreck of his fortune.

"What yo' doin' around this here race track?" demanded Sidney Albert. "Who you workin' faw?"

"Nobody," answered the child dully. "I was gallopin' some hawsses fo' the Okay Stables, but they done sol' out to a man f'um Texas name of Kline.

He had his own boys, so he gimme the gate yestiddy. Now I ain't got no job."

"Little black boy," asked Sidney Albert solicitously, "where does yo' expec' to eat to-night?"

"Nowheres," was the sober reply. "Nowheres. Them box cars, they done rolled off with my po'k-chop money."

Sidney Albert clapped him on the shoulder.

"Come on down to our stable," said he. "Ol' Mist' Curry, he might give yo' a job gallopin' hosses faw him. He was sayin' only las' night he wisht he could get a good lightweight exercise boy faw Nehemiah."

"I ain't carin' where I goes," said the child, as he rose to follow his protector. "If I could 'a' jus' lammed them white boys on the nose with another pass I'd 'a' had somethin' now besides 'sperience."

Old Man Curry, a straw protruding from his thicket of white beard, surveyed the small scrap of human driftwood which Sidney Albert brought to the stable. Old Man Curry had won a great deal of money on Isaiah when that "right nice hoss" came home alone in his first steeplechase; but the fattening of his bank roll had made no difference in the personal appearance of the old gentleman. He still wore the same old slouch hat, the same old greenish-black garments, and the same patched boots, with the tops thrust inside his trousers. A touch of prosperity had left Old Man Curry as it found him, a kindly old dreamer, chewing straws and ruminating upon Old Testament history and the Psalms of David, in his innocence believing all men to be honest, and at heart untouched by the corrupting evils of the trade which he followed—a strange character to meet with upon a race track.

"Well, now," he said at length, after Sidney Albert had stated the case, "I was just a-wondering where I could get a little boy to gallop my horses; Sid here is gettin' too hefty—and here he is! Looks like the hand o' Providence helpin' me out again! Maybe I might make a rider out of you, son. I might. What's your name, boy?"

"Mose," answered the child. "Mose Walker."

"Moses," corrected Old Man Curry gently. "It's a Bible name, son, an' you ought to use it with respect. Moses. Boy, do you know who he was? He was a leader in Israel." Old Man Curry suddenly removed the straw from his mouth, and smote his thigh a resounding whack. "A leader in Israel! It's Providence, sure enough! Boy, you've got a job, and I'll make an apprentice jockey out of you as sure as I'm a foot high!"

"Yo' heard what th' ol' man said?" commented Sidney Albert as he led Mose away. "He's the least mite touched in the haid 'bout Bible people —kind o' partial to 'em—an' he thinks you'll bring him good luck 'cause you're named outen the Bible, too. Boy, you fell in soft—*soft!*"

"Huh!" grunted the small waif. "So long's he gives me a job an' I flops my lips over the eats three times a day, I don' care where he thinks I'm named from!"

"Ho, ho!" chuckled Sidney Albert. "The ol' man says 'a leader of men!' Well, if yo' kin lead King David or Elijah or ol' Nehemiah outen this wilderness an' down to the wire, that other Moses won't have a thing on you, little black boy, I'm tellin' you those!"

"Bad hosses?" queried Mose, professionally interested.

"Worse'n that," answered Sidney Albert. "Come on an' I'll show 'em to you." He opened a door and looked into a stall. "This big black hoss here, he's Isaiah. Don' worry you' haid none 'bout him, because he's a steeplechaser, an' I rides him. Put him over the other day at twenty to one—didn't I, you ol' black scound'el? This one here is Elijah. He quits worse'n a yellow dog in a swamp. Ain't won a race since he was two years ole. This feller here is King David, but he don' look like no king to me. No, suh; he look mo' like a deuce. No 'count, and never will be. This here's Nehemiah. Take a good look at him, boy, because he is

shorely the orneriest hoss that ever et a bran mash!"

"Mean?" asked Mose anxiously.

"Naw, not mean to *folks,*" said Sidney Albert reassuringly; "not mean that way, but mean in a race. The ol' rapscalion kin run, too, and that's what makes him so ornery. He got the ability, but it don' look like he got the *desire.* Leastways, he won't run none when you git him in a bunch of hosses. He's got speed to burn, but seem like the smoke don' agree with him. Not until he's lef' at the post or somethin', and then—*look out!* When he makes right sure they ain't a chance faw him to *win,* he kin run aplenty. That ol' skate shore do despise to associate himse'f with society; when he runs, he's got to run alone. Let him get so far behin' the bunch that you can't see 'em faw smoke, an', lawzee, he'll bus' all track records!"

"Ain't they no way to git him off good an' keep him goin'?" asked Mose.

"No way that Mist' Curry ever found out."

"Say," demanded Mose suddenly, "was he kiddin' me when he say as how he'll make a 'prentice rider outen me?"

"Little black boy," said Sidney Albert, "Mist' Curry, he don' never kid nobody. He don' know *how.* If he say he'll make a jock of you, he'll shorely do it. That man, he wouldn't know how to tell a lie, not even to a bookmaker!"

The winter meeting was drawing to a close. The judges, whose unfavorable attention had been drawn to the Curry Stable by the suspicious circumstances attending upon Isaiah's famous victory, had found nothing further to fatten their distrust of the old gentleman with the white whiskers. Isaiah had been entered in three steeplechases, once finishing second in a bad field. Old Man Curry lost a little money on his black horse. King David and Elijah had started in several "dog races," in each case performing in keeping with their miserable records. Old Man Curry had not bet a cent on them. Neither had any one else. A man must win with bad horses or lose with good ones to hold the attention of a race-track judge, and Old Man Curry had almost faded from official recollection when the name of Nehemiah appeared upon the overnight entries.

The judges noticed it in the stand.

"See here, Ed," said the presiding judge, "we have another prophet of Israel in our midst. Nehemiah this time. He goes in the fifth race to-morrow. Do you reckon that old scoundrel, Curry, is up to something?"

The assistant judge shook his head.

"Not in that company," he said, running his finger down the entries. "And not on anything Nehemiah has ever done in the bushes. I took the trouble to look up all of Curry's horses after that jumping race, and this Nehemiah seems to be as bad as the rest. Runs last all the time. And, then, colonel, look at the class he's up against to-morrow. Exmoor, Lahore, Murillo, and Abdul. No, Nehemiah can't beat horses like those even if he has been under cover all the meeting."

The presiding judge fingered his close-cropped beard.

"Exmoor," he said. "That's Hogan; Lahore, Joe Early; Murillo, Pete Smith; and Abdul, the Sundown Stable—four of the finest burglars that ever got together on a race track. Ed, if I could get anything on that combination, I'd come down on 'em like a hen hawk."

"Sure!" said the assistant judge. "Sure you would—but you've got to get it on 'em first."

Oddly enough, two of the gentlemen mentioned by the presiding judge were at that very moment discussing Nehemiah and Old Man Curry. Frank Hogan and Pete Smith, sitting on the rail outside the paddock, were conversing in low tones.

"How 'bout this Nehemiah bird?" asked Frank Hogan.

"Oh, he won't make no trouble," said Pete Smith. "Forget him. I've got a kid galloping horses for me who comes from the bushes where this Curry used

to hang out. The kid knows all his horses, and he tells me that this Nehemiah lizard can't beat a fat policeman up a hill. And then I looked him up in the dope to make sure. He's a bad horse, Frank, and he won't figure at all. Runs in dog races, and finishes last every time."

"You can't never tell about that," said the cautious Hogan, "particularly when something is due to come off in a race. He ain't going to have the good horses to beat this time, remember. He's only got to beat Laura Jane to get all the money. And, then, this old Curry slipped over a hot one in that steeplechase, and they tell me he unbelted to win a bunch. He may be wiser n he looks, and maybe we'd better go to see him, and office him as to what's on the cards, eh?"

Smith cackled offensively.

"You're a regular rabbit for nerve," he said. "I've got a line on this old guy, and I tell you he wouldn't do any cheating even if the money was put in his mitt. There was certainly something doing on that steeplechase, but you can bet your life *he* wasn't in on it. A cog slipped somewhere, and he won the race, but if you should tell him what was going on he'd tear for the judges' stand and give up his insides. He ain't no horseman! He's a white-whiskered, psalm-singin' old rumdum—that's what he is—and he ain't got no more idea of business than a sheep! He's one of those 'yours truly, always on the level' guys; but the joke of it is that he *means* it. He is on the level."

"They tell me," said Hogan, "that he is going to put up a stableboy to-morrow—some apprentice coon he picked up around here."

"You don't want anything softer than that, do you?" said Smith. "A raw boy and a rotten horse. Why, say, even if this apprentice coon was on a *stake* horse, Shaughnessy and Powers could handle him, couldn't they? There's more ways of killing a cat than by choking him to death with butter. That jock, Shaughnessy, would just as soon ride you into the rail as not."

"That's right," assented Hogan, with rising cheerfulness. "What price ought this Laura Jane trick to be?"

"Wish I knew," said Smith. "Your horse will likely be favorite at six to five, or even money. Mine ought to be the second choice, and it's a cinch he'll be played. Lahore and Abdul are the only others which might be figured as having a chance, and they ought to be five or six to one apiece. On her last race, nobody will be looking for Laura Jane to do anything, and she ought to open at ten or twelve to one. If we lay off until the last few minutes, her price ought to go to twenty, and then the betting commissioners will wade in and feed 'em Laura Jane money until they holler for help."

"Fogarty is going to handle the bank roll for the bunch, they tell me," said Hogan.

"Yes," said Smith. "He'd be the best man for the job. We're to meet him to-night at Kelly's place, and turn over the coin. He's got some new men to do the actual betting, and these fellows themselves don't know whose money it is, so the whole business is nicely under cover. All we've got to do is to stand out in the paddock and bull the suckers. I'm going to alibi myself with a good bet on my colt, and take pains that certain people see me making it. Then if the judges call me into the stand after the race I can flash the ticket and put up a roar about a bad ride, or interference, or something. You'd better send in a nice piece of change on Exmoor, and show your tickets to a newspaper man—in confidence. Then if there's a squawk you've got him for your alibi. Along about saddling time, when Laura Jane gets as high as she ought to go, Fogarty will give his hired men the nod, and they'll cut loose all over the ring at once. If nobody gets wise we'll put over a hog killing that these bookmakers will talk about in their sleep for ten years to come."

"Well, I certainly hope nothing goes wrong," said Hogan.

"Rabbit!" said Smith. "There you go again!"

There was a time in this country when horse-racing was called "the sport of kings," and not without reason, but that was long ago. Those were the days when gentlemen owners thought it no disgrace to match speed with speed; the days when the best horse had the best chance to win, and jockeys rode as if their lives depended on their being first past the post. There was betting, yes, but it was largely of the hand-to-hand variety. A man backed his conviction, knowing that he would get an honest run for his money.

Then came the professional gamblers—the bookmaker, with his slate of tempting odds, and the better, who followed the game not for the love of it, but for the money which might be won. The "sport of kings" slowly degenerated into a business, and a sordid one, at that. The thoroughbred horse became the servant of strange masters, the tool of get-rich-quick tinhorns, the living counters with which a dirty game was played. The easy-money fever spread from the betting ring to the stables. Races began to be decided the night before they were run. Owners, who saw no sin in fighting fire with fire, formed offensive combinations with an eye to the looting of the fat satchels of the bookmakers; the bookmakers had defensive combinations of their own. Jockeys became little men of business. With certain owners entered in a purse race, it became not so much a question of which horse *could* win, but of which horse was going to try. The shrewd owner thickened his bank roll in proportion as he was able to cover his tracks.

Standing far on the outside of this choice inner circle of plot and counterplot, the public was permitted to look on and to guess, as men guess around a crooked roulette wheel. And with as much of a chance. Outwardly the sport retained its attractiveness, its charm, and its hold upon popular fancy. Most red-blooded men like to see fast horses run. There is something about the last quarter mile of a race which sets the heart to thumping—the rush of the thoroughbreds, the flashing silks of the riders, the yells from the grand stand, the final effort at the wire—and how is Mr. Mark, in the grand stand, to know that Jockey Jones, riding such a whirlwind finish for second money, might easily have won with his mount if he had tried?

Yes, it was good to look at; but at heart horse-racing was rotten, and by that rottenness doomed to an early decay. The present-day gambler rails at the law and whines about the decline of the American thoroughbred. To locate the blight which fell upon the racing game, the gambler should look nearer home. The sport of kings died when it became the business of crooks.

The presiding judge was not libeling any one when he characterized Hogan, Early, Smith, and Charlie Merrill, of the Sundown Stable, as four of the choicest burglars that ever sported owners' badges. During the meeting these men had been running their horses to suit the betting, but so clever were they in obliterating all traces of their pact that it was next to impossible to secure tangible evidence against them.

With the end of the meeting in sight, and all the turfmen squaring away for traveling expenses, this precious quartet decided upon a final and crushing attack upon the bookmakers' cash boxes. There were nine horses entered in the race which was to be the medium of this killing, and eight of the owners knew that Tom Powell's filly, Laura Jane, was to be the winner. The owner who did not know was Old Man Curry, and into this eight-way combination he had introduced the bad horse Nehemiah, and put a stableboy on him. Had Nehemiah been regarded as a dangerous outsider, Old Man Curry might have been approached by one of the conspirators, but Pete Smith, who was the brains of the syndicate, decided that this was not only unnecessary but very risky.

"He'd be likely to go and bawl you out," said Smith to the others. "Let him alone. He ain't got no more chance than a roast pig at a nigger barbecue."

Tom Powell, the owner of Laura Jane, was a young outsider who had

raced his horses in hard luck throughout the meeting. He had no "connections" of any sort—a fact which had thinned his bank roll to the point of emaciation. Against him there was no shadow of suspicion; he had never before been associated in a business way with the Smith syndicate. Laura Jane was not much of a filly at best, but she was conceded to have a chance in a cheap selling race, though not good enough to be compared with Exmoor, Murillo, Abdul, or Lahore. These were the "class" of the race, the horses which would be watched and played on past form. Being in hard luck, and ready to clutch at straws, Tom Powell readily fell in with Smith's proposal to "shoo in" Laura Jane. It meant get-away money for Powell, and lack of get-away money has warped many a racing man's principles.

"But are you sure you can do it?" asked Powell. "There's some good horses in that race."

"They won't be good horses *that* day," said Pete Smith, with a wink. "The only four that could beat you if they tried won't be trying. The rest of 'em will know what's going on, and everything in the race will be 'dead' to you. All you've got to do is to get away from the post and keep running. Everything will be fixed, I tell you. Keep your mouth shut, and don't do any touting. Savvy?"

"Sure!" said Tom Powell. "What do you think I am?"

On the eve of this grand assault upon plutocracy, a little, bullet-headed black boy in Old Man Curry's tack room was inserting himself into a new silk jacket of robin's-egg blue, with broad black bars on the sleeves. His legs were incased in new white silk trousers, baggy at the seat and tight at the knee. Shiny new racing boots and a gorgeous cap completed his magnificence. Mose buttoned the jacket, tucked the skirts into his trousers, and twisted to see as much of himself as possible.

Sidney Albert sat on a leather trunk and viewed the spectacle with a feeling akin to envy.

"Well, Jock Walker," he said, "I got to hand it to you. The ol' man cert'n'y never bought all new things faw *me*. You look like a leader of men now, an' that's a fact! Hey, where yo' goin' in them clothes?"

A little later Nehemiah, dozing in his stall, and taking no thought of the morrow, received a small visitor. Mose, clad in full racing regalia, even to the spurs, slipped through the door.

"Look at me, Nehemiah hoss," he whispered. "You and me is sure goin' to the races!"

Nehemiah snorted suspiciously, but the sound of the voice reassured him. Mose rubbed the horse's muzzle, and soothed him with love talk. Nehemiah had the disposition of a hermit crab, but he liked Mose. Mose brought him lump sugar and apples to eat, and never slashed him with the whip when Old Man Curry was not looking, as Sidney Albert used to do. Sidney Albert's hands were heavy as hams; Mose had hands as light as a baby's, but Nehemiah had found that there was strength in them which must be respected. Sidney Albert had a bad seat; Mose had a knack of helping a horse along at the right time. Sidney Albert used to curse Nehemiah when out of Old Man Curry's hearing; Mose kept up a stream of crooning conversation calculated to quiet the equine nerves. Nehemiah blew out his nostrils and pricked his ears to show that he was listening.

"Nehemiah hoss," said Mose softly, "we'll fool 'em to-morrow. You and me. How you like these white pants, hey? No cotton there, boy. *Silk!* Class, eh? Well, I guess yes! And pipe this shirt. I reckon that's poor, ain't it, boy? The boots stood the ol' man twelve bucks. Look 'em over, Nehemiah! I put 'em on fo' you to see. To-morrow I'll braid yo' mane and tie pink ribbons in it, and dude yo' all up till yo' look like a stake hoss! That fool nigger, Sid, he bet me a dollar you'd be last. He don' *half* know what a hoss yo' is, Nehemiah! I'm goin' tell yo' a secret: *The ol' man is goin' bet on you, straight acrost the board!* You wouldn't throw the boss down when he bought me all these pretties, would you?

No, *suh!* Good night, Nehemiah hoss. Git yo' a good rest, because to-morrow we're sure goin' to the races!"

It is a part of a race-track judge's duty to keep a wary eye on the betting, as most "jobs" advertise themselves by a sudden shift in the market. Colonel Randolph, the presiding judge, sized up the opening prices which his messenger brought him, and tugged at his Vandyke beard as he did so.

"Ed," said he to his assistant, "these figures look all right. Exmoor, favorite, and he ought to be, seven to five. Murillo, thirteen to five; Lahore, five to one; Abdul, six to one. These other horses are no account. Laura Jane, fifteen to one. That filly's going out of her class here. And Nehemiah, twenty to one." The colonel lifted his voice: "Send Duke here at once."

Duke, a quiet young man with gold teeth, climbed the steps, and removed his hat.

"Go down to the paddock," said the colonel, "and keep an eye on Hogan, Smith, Early, and that crowd. There may be nothing going on to-day, but I want you to watch Pete Smith, and let me know who talks with him and all about it."

Duke faded away, and the judge returned to the betting slip. The second report from the ring, after the prices had settled, indicated that Exmoor was the strong public choice, having gone from seven to five to even money. Murillo had lengthened to four to one; Lahore had been played to threes; and Abdul had slipped up to ten. Laura Jane was quoted at twenty-five to one, and Nehemiah was held at forty to win, ten to run second, and five to show.

"Still all right, Ed," said the colonel. "Nothing has developed yet of any consequence."

Down in the paddock the conspirators were playing their parts nobly. Pete Smith whispered to several inquiring friends, in the strictest confidence, that he had bet quite a chunk on Murillo; and some of them saw a ticket calling for five hundred and twenty dollars to two hundred dollars. Pete indicated that he thought his horse should win, and also stated that if Murillo went any higher than four to one he would make another bet. Hogan, the "rabbit," maintained a strict silence about the chances of Exmoor, but word crept around the paddock and into the ring that the stable checks were down on the favorite. Joe Early thought Lahore should be no worse than second, and might win; while Ed Merrill hinted that such a long price on Abdul made it look as if the bookmakers "knew something." Tom Powell shook his head when questioned, and when pressed for an opinion admitted that the filly might finish in the money.

"But she's a little outclassed," said Powell.

Old Man Curry was the only owner who did not lie when approached for information. He said he didn't know whether Nehemiah would run a good race or not.

The horses were just leaving the paddock for the post when the messenger from the betting ring dashed up the steps to the judges' stand, and reported a sudden raid upon Laura Jane.

"She was thirty to one," he panted. "When I left she was down to fifteen, and they were rubbing her all over the ring."

"Find out who's doing the betting," said the colonel; and the messenger hurried away.

"Now, sir," said the presiding judge as he stepped outside to take a look at the parade, "whom have we here? Ah! Shaughnessy on Murillo, Leek on Abdul, Bronson on Lahore, and Powers on Exmoor. Helverson rides Laura Jane, and—Ed, look at that little darky on Curry's horse! He's as proud as a girl with her first ball dress!"

The thoroughbreds minced by the grand stand, dancing with impatience at the slow pace. One by one, when a certain point was reached, they broke into a rocking canter, and started around the turn to the post. It was a three-quarter-mile race. Mose, sitting very straight in the saddle, never even glanced in the direction of the stands; but he felt the concentrated gaze of

thousands upon him as it might have been the focused rays of a burning glass. Nehemiah, very gay with pink ribbons, and curried until he shone like a wet seal, had never seen such a crowd before, and performed a few nervous side steps.

"Now, babe," said the little rider, "quit that monkeyshinin'. You'll have all the chance yo' want to *step* in a minute or so. Easy, now, Nehemiah hoss, easy! Thass right!"

Once more the messenger arrived, breathless.

"Judge," said he, "it ain't any one outfit that's betting on Laura Jane. They're playin' her from one end of the ring to the other. She was eight to one when I left, and some books were holdin' her out altogether—got loaded up at the high, I reckon. Oh, yes! Nehemiah's gone from forty to one down to twenty. Old Man Curry is in there bettin' 'em five-dollar bills again, straight, place, *and* show."

"Laura Jane!" said the presiding judge. "The Smith-Hogan syndicate usually manages to win the purse, and it isn't likely that they've let any one in with them. *Laura Jane!* Powell owns her, and he's a very decent chap. Ed, it must be just one of those fool tips which come along every so often and raise the mischief. On form, Laura Jane doesn't really belong in this kind of a race. She—well, Duke?"

Duke made his report like a soldier, concise and precise:

"Hogan is betting on Exmoor, colonel. Three hundred with the Monte Carlo Club. Smith took the opening betting on Murillo, and bet two hundred with Fred Harris' book. Hogan told Charlie Hayes that he thought his horse would win *sure*. I couldn't find out anything about Merrill, but Joe Early is playing Lahore to come second. There's a hot tip or something cut loose on Laura Jane, and they're playin' her like it was all over, but I had a talk with Tom Powell, and he tells me he thinks the filly is a bit outclassed. Tom wouldn't lie to me, colonel."

"No, of course not," said the presiding judge dryly. "Well, it's on the knees of the gods. All we can do now is to watch the race and try to spot any crooked work. I wish I'd warned those jockeys. They're at the post, Ed."

The messenger arrived with the final bulletin.

"Laura Jane three to one!" he gasped. "It's the hottest thing of the season! Backed from thirty to one, and she'll close favorite."

"Something doing, colonel—something doing!" remarked the man addressed as Ed.

"Yes—but what?" answered the presiding judge. "And *on* what? That's what I want to know."

"Now, then," said the starter, a large man with a rough voice and a firm belief that noise added to an order made it more binding, "you crooked-legged little devils, get up here! Helverson! What you tryin' to do? Steal a running start? Powers! That's the last time I'll speak to *you!* You've been suckin' around here for a suspension all meetin', an' you'll get it! Bronson! Turn that horse around!" Et cetera, et cetera.

Nehemiah had drawn ninth position, which meant that he was entitled to start from the extreme outside. Laura Jane was down near the rail. Helverson, a tow-headed little Swede, had evidently received careful instructions, and been impressed with the gravity of the situation, for he was extremely nervous, keeping Laura Jane constantly on the move.

"Get a runnin' start with her," Powell had said. "Let old Murray fine you if he wants to. *You get the filly away flying.*"

Nehemiah, with his ears pinned back and the whites of his eyes showing, surveyed the preparations for the start with disdain. He knew *his* business, did Nehemiah. When the barrier went up he would stand perfectly still in his tracks, and if it pleased him to run afterward he would run. But not in company. Mose kept up a steady flow of soft conversation:

"Now, babe, show 'em you ain't got pink ribbons in yo' mane fo' nothin'. An' when they leave this place we'll go right along with 'em, hey, Nehemiah?"

Nehemiah would have smiled had he caught that last remark. This soft-voiced little boy, who never used the whip, how was he to force Nehemiah to do a thing which he did not wish to do?

Mose, with one eye on the shifting line, saw it wheel, straighten, and move forward imperceptibly. He sensed the situation, and just as Starter Murray jerked at the lever Mose went out between Nehemiah's ears with a yell that cut the air like a knife.

"*Yi-i-ip!*" he yelled. "You won' be lef' at no post to-day!"

Nehemiah, who did not know that the soft-voiced little boy had a screech like the upper register of a steam calliope, was actually amazed into taking a few steps with the others, and then he tried to stop. Old Man Curry was not the only owner who was unfortunate in the start. Laura Jane, the good thing—Laura Jane, who was to be shooed in—got away almost on even terms with Nehemiah, the rest of the field lengths in front. Little Helverson slashed the filly a few times with the whip, and she flew after the others; but Nehemiah sawed his head from side to side, and showed a strong inclination to stop running.

"Well," said the colonel, "the good thing didn't get away any too well, Ed. About five lengths the worst of it she took. Hello! Where's Exmoor's early speed to-day? He and Abdul ought to be out there in front, burning up the track."

Where, indeed, was Exmoor's early speed? Jockey Powers, Exmoor's pilot, had received comprehensive instructions covering every possible contingency, and he would have given much to know what had become of Laura Jane. Her place was supposed to be in front, or at least within striking distance of the pacemaker. Powers had a nice ticket on Laura Jane, "at tops."

Shaughnessy, on Murillo, ranged up alongside.

"Where's the good thing?" demanded Powers.

"She got tangled up at the start," panted Shaughnessy, "but she's coming all right now. You and me better hold this pace back a bit, and then we'll let her come through into the lead in the stretch. Put on the brakes." And Shaughnessy took another wrap on Murillo's head.

"Don't make it look *too* bad," warned Powers. "You got that bird's head in your lap now."

All this time Nehemiah had been running last—not a very bad last, but last enough to make Sidney Albert chuckle and show his teeth.

"One thing," said Sid to Old Man Curry, "Mose, he got the ol' hoss to runnin' sooner'n I thought he would."

"He's too far back to have a chance now," said the owner.

"Too much class in front," said Sidney Albert.

Mose, ten lengths behind the leaders and rounding the upper turn, was trying to coax out the burst of speed which he knew lurked in the system of the reprobate Nehemiah.

"Babe," said he, "you ain't never goin' to make me *lose* that bet to Sid? Think how he'd have the laugh onto me! I ain't askin' yo' to *win*, but I do ask yo' to pass a *few* of them hay hounds. Get up so's I kin see yo' on the fawm chart where it say: 'Nehemiah finished fourth. Good ride.' Thass all I want, babe! Come on! I'll take you way, *way* on the outside, where nothin' can't git clost to you an' scare you. Here's the head of the stretch, babe. Show 'em we knows the way home!"

Straightening out for the run down to the wire, Nehemiah was still last in the procession, but some of the outsiders were beginning to straggle a bit in spite of the fact that the pace had been slow enough to make the colonel wag his head. Powers swung a trifle wide with Exmoor coming into the stretch, and as he did so Jockey Leek, who was close to Helverson, called out sharply:

"He's opened up for you! Go on through there, and take the lead!"

Helverson shot Laura Jane through the opening, and Powers, Shaughnessy, Bronson, Leek, and the other "crooked-legged little devils" heaved a sigh of relief when they saw the shoo-in going on about her business. Incidentally a number of bookmakers were threatened with heart failure. The Smith-Hogan syndicate began to breathe naturally.

"Gee!" said Powers to Shaughnessy. "He took his time about it. I thought he never would get through there."

"Yes," said Shaughnessy, the syllables bumping out of him one at a time, "but where's the little fool goin'? He'll ride her to death before he gets down there, and she'll stop on him."

Helverson, seeing plain sailing in front, and knowing that the Powell fortunes were at stake, could not resist the temptation to "set Laura Jane down" for all that she had left. He was not as experienced as Powers or Shaughnessy, or he would have waited for the final eighth to make his ride, trusting something to the competent artists behind him—boys who could absolutely anchor a horse while appearing to make every effort to hustle the last ounce out of his hide.

"Choke 'em up a little," grunted Powers. "If we ain't careful we'll run over that filly at the finish. She's goin' to blow up!"

To the grand stand it seemed that Laura Jane had slipped through a fortunate opening and stolen a commanding lead on the field; it also seemed that Jockeys Powers, Leek, Shaughnessy, et als, were making frenzied efforts to overtake the heavily played "good thing." From the judges' platform matters took on a slightly different aspect, especially when viewed through a powerful pair of binoculars.

"Ed," gritted the colonel, and the fighting line of his jaw showed through his beard, "they're going to shoo that Laura Jane in on us, sure. Smith's crowd again. Look at Powers! And Shaughnessy has messed Murillo all over the race track. Oh, I'll get these burglars yet!"

"Now's your time, colonel," said the assistant judge. "You ought to be able to get 'em with—— *Suffering cats!* Look at that blue fellow coming along on the outside!"

"Old Man Curry again!" said the colonel calmly. "So *he* was under cover here, too! Come on, you Nehemiah! If you beat this Laura Jane, I'll forgive you everything."

Mose never knew how it happened—whether it was due to his own excellent ministrations, or whether it was a kink in Nehemiah's warped temper which suddenly ironed itself out—at any rate, Nehemiah no sooner found himself in the middle of the track, and alone, than he settled down to show that he knew how to run on occasions. In fifteen jumps he was abreast of the stragglers, and halfway down the stretch he was fast overhauling a division made up of Exmoor, Murillo, Lahore, and Abdul, traveling under skillful pilotage in the order named. Six open lengths in front of the scientifically restrained Exmoor was Laura Jane, a very tired, leg-weary filly. In the first place, she had been forced to make up ground at the beginning of the race; then Helverson's premature sprint had drawn heavily upon her small reserve, and there she was, a tired selling plater alone in front with strong horses closing fast.

Jockey Willy Powers, who had faced many an emergency without winking, and many a judge without fear, measured the closing gap between Laura Jane's tail and Exmoor's muzzle with troubled eyes. Confound that fool kid Helverson! Here he had put it up to Powers to "snatch a favorite" right under the judges' nose! But the money was down, and the thing must be done. Helverson turned a scared white face over his shoulder as he passed the paddock gate. Then he drew his whip.

Just at this instant Jockey Leek, sleigh riding tranquilly along behind Lahore, heard the drumming of hoofs. Jockey Leek turned his head to see what might be causing this commotion. There, fairly abreast of him, in the

middle of the track, was Nehemiah; but he did not stay abreast very long.

Jockey Mose Walker, sitting out almost between Nehemiah's ears, was urging him onward with all his lung power.

"Oh, babe!" he shouted. "Show—'em the—way—to—go home!"

No sooner had Jockey Leek seen this apparition than he cried a warning to Powers, at the head of the procession. Small good was in that warning. In order to interfere with Nehemiah, Powers would have been forced to take Exmoor almost at right angles into the center of the track. Powers was a cool, desperate youngster, and Shaughnessy would put a rival rider into the fence as soon as look at him; but neither one had the nerve to foul a horse in front of the grand stand, and turn at right angles to do it.

The plunge of Laura Jane had attracted all the pikers at the track; nearly every one of them had a Laura Jane ticket in his pocket; consequently the cheering was all for the Powell entry. Half the rooters overlooked Nehemiah completely until Old Man Curry's horse was on even terms with Exmoor. Then a gasp of consternation burst from the stand. What business had this blue thing butting in like that? *Ride her out, you Helverson! Ride her out!*

But Helverson had already ridden her out. Laura Jane, rocking with weariness, had nothing with which to offset Nehemiah's wild-eyed rush in the final sixteenth. Helverson plied the whip with all his strength. Laura Jane responded, but the heart went out of her fifty feet from the wire, when Nehemiah, running all alone in the middle of the track, poked his nose in front. Close behind now, and flogging desperately, came Powers, Shaughnessy, Leeks, and Bronson; and the grim look showed about the judge's mustache as he watched that noble, if belated, effort.

One last roar from the Laura Jane contingent—a yell which had its birth in hope and its death in despair—and Nehemiah fairly burst under the wire, aided thereto by a finish which would have reflected no discredit on a Walter Miller or a Tod Sloan. There were other whirlwind finishes, too, but the colonel noted with narrowing eyelids that none of the hard-riding jockeys saw fit to beat Laura Jane. She was drunk with weariness, and rolling blindly in her gait, but she took second money—a circumstance which saved the books a tidy fortune. They had Old Man Curry to thank for this, but such a selfish thing is human nature that some of the bookmakers' cashiers were quite stuffy with the old gentleman when he called around with a stout canvas bag to collect his wagers on Nehemiah.

After the winner had left the ring, proudly squired by Sidney Albert and the "swipe," and Jockey Mose Walker was on his way to the jockeys' room to strip off his splendor and become a ragged colored boy again, Old Man Curry labored up the steps and presented himself before the judges.

"In case you want to know, gentlemen," he said, "I bet on Nehemiah today. Being that the boy's name't rode him was Moses, it looked to me like it was a hunch, so I backed Nehemiah from forty down to twenty."

The colonel laughed.

"Every one else was betting on Laura Jane. That was the hottest tip we've had around here this season. What did you think of that, Mr. Curry?"

"Well, judge, I'll tell you," answered the old man slowly. "I never know what anybody's a-doing except just myself. If I think I can win, I bet, and I never ask anybody else in the race for to tell me anything. It's just as I told you—the boy's name was Moses, and——"

After he had gone, Ed looked at the colonel, and the colonel looked at Ed, and the official starter looked at both of them.

"Gentlemen, what happened?" asked the colonel.

"Too many for me," said Ed. "Here this old fellow goes and bets up against a cinch—and wins again."

"Colonel," rumbled the starter, "if

you ask me, here's what happened: That old windbag is a smooth crook—the smoothest I ever saw on a race track. The bunch went to put over the Laura trick, *and this Curry double crossed 'em!* Oh, he's slick, all right! 'The boy's name was Moses!' Where does he get that noise?"

"Well," said the colonel, "however it happened, it put an awful crimp in Pete Smith's gang. Duke, get the bookmakers' sheets on the last race. I'm going to whisper to Pete Smith and Frank Hogan and that outfit that the climate is likely to become unhealthy for them within the next few days. Let 'em go somewhere else. I suppose I ought to soak it to Curry, but I haven't got the heart."

We close with a moving picture of Sidney Albert Johnson and Jockey M. Walker, strolling elegantly under the walnut trees which border the stable lines. Sidney Albert's splendor is slightly tarnished, but Jockey M. Walker shines like a good deed in a naughty world.

"And all because yo' name was Moses," remarked Sidney Albert.

"Nigger," said Jockey Walker sternly, "the man what *pay* me kin call me anything he wants ter, but I'm lettin' yo' know that my old mammy done christen me *'Moseby!'*"

You will hear something about "Opportunity in Optimo" in the next POPULAR. Van Loan spins the yarn. In the first February number, on sale January 7th.

WHEN THEY FIRED BRYAN

EARLY last spring a town in Missouri, full of the champions of culture, and Champ Clark, engaged William Jennings Bryan to deliver a lecture under the biggest tree within the corporation limits. Then came the Baltimore convention, at which Bryan did all he could to force the nomination of Woodrow Wilson over Clark.

The day after the great slaughter the peerless leader received this communication from the Missouri town:

DEAR SIR: Please cancel your engagement with us. After what you did yesterday, we have decided to substitute for you Doctor Cook.

NOT A FLEA IN SENATORIAL CIRCLES

WHEN Arizona was admitted to Statehood and Henry F. Ashurst was sent to Washington as senator, he took with him a wife socially equipped for the job in every sense of the word, and brainy and educated to a great degree. Irish by birth, she has been celebrated, ever since she came to the United States, for her wit. All of that, however, was of little avail when she came to mix in the muddle of political precedence.

She was confronted by the necessity of having to call on the wives of senators who outranked her husband in service, and at the same time to receive the return visits of those upon whom she had already called. When she fulfilled the obligation on one side, Thursday being senatorial calling day, she could not discharge it on the other. If she omitted a call, some senator's wife was sure to complain of her lack of attention, and, if she did call, another senator's wife asked why she did not observe her Thursday at home. So there she was between the upper and nether millstones.

It was at the Dolly Madison breakfast that some one arraigned her for her apparent faults.

"Ah, I see," she commented, with her charming Irish accent; "you surmise that I am the traditional Irishman's flea and can be in more than one place at a time, but, as a matter of fact, I am not even an Irishman's wife."

A Lee Shore Christmas

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "The Wrecking Master," "The Fugitive Freshman," Etc.

If it hadn't been Christmas time, Captain Barker might have easily found a substitute for his "crew" of one, which had deserted; but, as his rather pessimistic cook remarked, any sailors that have the good luck to be ashore "want to stay there and get drunk over Christmas." Thus it happens that the skipper has to press into service a human derelict. How he was responsible for both a calamity and a very happy Christmas is told with genuine tenderness and sympathy by Ralph Paine.

THE coasting schooner *Martha B.* was not as old as her skipper, but it was apparent, and rather pitifully so, if one had sympathetic vision, that both had long since passed their prime. Up and down the New England coast ply many little vessels like the *Martha B.*, carrying ice, granite, and lumber, patched and leaky and short-handed, earning hard and scant returns, surviving summer squalls and winter gales as much by good luck as good seamanship. Full forty years had Captain Ozro Baker owned and sailed this two-masted schooner of his, but he could not yet quit her to spend his old age ashore. Freights were low, repairs dear, and there were the wife and the little house on an island of Casco Bay to provide for.

The *Martha B.* was loaded and ready to sail from a Portland wharf on a freezing, blustering afternoon of December. It was a wrench to leave home two days before Christmas, but a man must think first of his bread and butter. Wrapped in a shabby ulster, a knitted muffler tied under his chin, a fur cap pulled over his ears, Captain Baker climbed out of the box of a cabin, and stood gazing anxiously at the wind-blown, deserted wharf. A white-bearded, round-shouldered patriarch was the master of the *Martha B.*, and he moved with a rheumatic limp, but vigor still flashed in his faded blue eyes, and his voice had not lost the deep and powerful note that could make itself heard against a shouting wind.

Stumping forward, he pulled open the galley door, and said to the cook, who was coughing over the smoky stove:

"I don't see nothin' of Tom. The tug is alongside, and we're due to pull out of here. What did he tell you, Henry, when he went ashore?"

The cook had also grown gray in the *Martha B.*—a round, rosy little man, harmless and amiable, who talked to himself when he could not find a listener.

"Tom is younger than you and me, Cap'n Ozro," he replied, "and he's inclined to be a leetle mite wild. I was just sayin' to myself while I was fightin' this dod-ratted smoke that mebbe Tom wouldn't show up. It's Christmas week, and Tom has a girl he's sweet on over at Cape Elizabeth, and he'll want to go out with the boys, too, and, says I, mebbe we'll have to go to sea without him."

"But I can't sail without a crew!" protested Captain Baker. "You and me ain't enough to take the *Martha B.* to Boston in winter weather."

"Guess you'll have to step ashore and

find a man, then, though I was just sayin' to myself that it won't be easy to ship a hand in Tom's place at such short notice. What sailors as is ashore will want to stay there and get drunk over Christmas."

"Well, I'll have to grab somebody, Henry, and mighty quick. I can't afford to keep the tug waiting."

The skipper hauled himself over the bulwark and limped along the wharf in the direction of the nearest saloon, where he might perhaps pick up a "crew" of one man. He was disturbed by the desertion of the graceless Tom, who was a ready and capable seaman.

The quest was discouraging. Captain Baker trudged from one convivial resort of the water front to another, but the loafers were mostly longshoremen, who scoffed at the idea of making a voyage in the ancient, unseaworthy *Martha B.* The skipper felt weary and chilled. Much walking fatigued him. In the last place he sought he ordered a hot toddy, and his corded hand trembled a little as he raised the glass. The bartender, familiar, but respectful, asked with an air of interest:

"Aren't you feeling first class to-day, Captain Ozro?"

"Fair to middlin', thank you, but I guess I ain't as young as I was, and my blood is gettin' kind of thin. Nice and warm in here."

The skipper pulled up the collar of the ulster, tucked in the ends of the knitted muffler, and was about to go his way when he was accosted by a young man who had been hovering undecidedly near the door. His face was too white for that of a sailor, nor was his physique at all robust. Seedy garments, broken shoes, and an unshaven chin marked him as one of shipwrecked fortune. Captain Baker expected to be asked for alms, but the forlorn stranger said to him:

"If you want a man, I'll go with you, and work cheap."

The skipper eyed him with disapproval, and replied with a snort:

"I ain't takin' any tramps in the *Martha B.* What makes you think you're fit to sail coastwise? You don't look as if you and hard work was on very intimate terms. Ever been aboard a vessel?"

"Yes, sir. I've sailed in schooners before."

The young man's eyes were honest, and his smile had an appealing quality. In accents less severe, the captain grumbled in his beard:

"You're about as fit to stand a winter voyage as a bowl of mush. But you ain't got the cut of a rummy; I'll say that much for you."

The shabby young man shivered as a gust of icy wind surged in from the opened door. In such weather as this the kindly old mariner would have been inclined to befriend a stray dog. He surmised that the derelict had sought the saloon for the sake of warmth, and would presently be hustled into the street.

"Come along with me," gruffly exclaimed the skipper, grasping the young man by the arm. "I guess I'll have to take your word for it that you've been to sea before. I've got to snatch any kind of a man I can find. I can fit you out with warm duds and oilskins. What's your name?"

"Briscoe—James Briscoe, sir," was the muttered answer as they passed into the street. He had nothing more to say as Captain Ozro Baker convoyed him down the wharf to the *Martha B.,* where Henry greeted them with a disgusted expression on his cherubic countenance as he surveyed the recruit. However, he was an optimist of sorts, and, with his wonted chuckle, he rallied to observe:

"I know'd you would find a hand, Cap'n Ozro. Anything is better than nothin', and I was just sayin' to myself that we're lucky to have a cargo and plenty of vittles to eat when there's lots of poor folks ashore that don't know where their Christmas dinner's comin' from."

"Well, you fill Jim up with some of them vittles while I'm castin' off," said Captain Baker. "He looks dreadful thin and empty. Then we'll all turn to

and make sail while the tug is takin' us out to the red buoy."

There was no forecastle in the *Martha B.* The master, the cook, and the "crew" lived in the small cabin aft, which contained two staterooms and a space between them, with a stove, table, lockers, and chairs. The new sailor was made one of the family, for there was no room for the social distinctions of shipboard. Henry gave him a steaming dish of fish chowder, and cheerfully prattled on:

"While there's bigger vessels than the *Martha B.*, there ain't a better man to sail with than Cap'n Ozro Baker. You do your duty, Jim, and he won't find a mite of fault. I was kind of disappointed when I fust set eyes on you, but mebbe you're ruggeder than you look. I'm always willin' to help shorten sail and take the wheel and stand watch, so I guess the three of us will put the old schooner where she aims to go."

The young man appeared slightly bewildered. Evidently he had not expected this sort of reception. His face lost something of its haggard, discouraged expression. These elderly shipmates were showing a fatherly interest in him that was both novel and surprising. It was worth enduring hardships and the perils of the sea to sail with them. He thanked Henry, his lips twitching with emotion, and relapsed into a taciturnity which baffled the amiably curious questions. Hurrying on deck to report to the captain, he found the *Martha B.* moving away from the wharf in tow of a small and noisy tug, whose sides were white with a sheathing of frozen spray. The skipper, standing at the wheel, sang out in his strong, musical voice:

"Set the jib, and then you and Henry can tuck a reef in the mains'l, and I'll help you h'ist away on it."

The "crew" ran forward, and did as he was told without need of further direction. When the tug blew the signal to let go the towing hawser, the schooner was heeling under lower sails and the wind-blown water was flying across her deck. The short winter afternoon had darkened, and lights were twinkling in the houses on the islands. The overcast sky had broken to disclose a scattering of stars, and the night promised to be clear, with a stiff breeze bowling out of the northward and as cold as the breath of the pole. As soon as the *Martha B.* had run clear of the outermost harbor marks and was fairly offshore, Captain Baker told his hobo seaman to take the wheel, and watched him until convinced that he knew enough to hold the vessel on her course. Then the skipper went below to eat his supper across the little cabin table from the beaming Henry, who bobbed his head devoutly while grace was said with earnest reverence.

"What do you think of our new hand, Cap'n Ozro?" asked the cook. "I was just sayin' to myself that he ain't quite the kind of a tramp you run across every day. There's something sort of decent about him. Mebbe he had a good home once before he got so down and out."

"I ain't had much time to study about him," slowly returned the skipper. "He's willin', and he knows one end of the schooner from t'other. And he has sense enough to keep his mouth shut—though I don't mean nothin' personal, Henry."

"Meanin' to say that I talk too much?" And the cook had the hurt look of a grieved child.

"Not a mite of it," was the hearty reply. "The *Martha B.* 'u'd be lonesome without your sociable gabble clatterin' along night and day. Perhaps this Jim Briscoe will loosen up and be good company, with you settin' him the example."

Later in the evening Henry took a spell at the wheel, and the lone seaman crawled into the cabin, where the skipper found him thawing his fingers in front of the coal stove. It was the first opportunity to scrutinize the young man closely, and Captain Ozro perceived that he was somewhat older than the boyish contour of his face and the slender frame had suggested. The light from the swinging lamp revealed a premature sprinkling of gray in the black hair, and there were fine wrinkles

about the eyes. The world had gone all wrong with this silent, pensive tramp.

"Where did you learn your seafarin', Jim?" inquired the captain as he shook the ice from his white beard. "You take hold real quick and handy."

"I've knocked around a good deal," replied Briscoe, staring absently at the glowing stove. "A rolling stone has to pick up a good many trades to keep from starving."

"You don't talk like a hobo. And I ain't heard you cussin' none, though the *Martha B.* is tryin' to the temper till you get well acquainted with her. Had you been in Portland long?"

"No; I landed there this morning. The weather isn't as rough as it was. This wind may die down."

Thwarted in the attempt to make Jim talk about himself, Captain Ozro went on to say:

"You can turn in till I rouse you out. I'll stay on deck a while, and Henry will relieve me. Then you can take her till daylight. Short watches give us all a chance to sleep and keep from freezin'. It's blowin' no more than a fair freeze now, and it ain't liable to freshen or haul to the east'ard before sunrise."

Through the long hours of the bitter night the *Martha B.* crept down the coast, whose guiding lights winked and flashed from foreland, shoal, and island. Her ancient timbers groaned complainingly as the choppy waves made her lift with sluggish motion. It was as though she were protesting against this battering servitude, and longed to lay her bones on the smooth sand of some quiet cove. There were no alarms to summon her master on deck after he had said his prayers and trustfully crawled between the blankets. A sweet serenity of soul was his shield against anxieties.

The late December daylight was dispelling the darkness when Captain Ozro got into his ulster, muffler, and fur cap and poked his head out of the companionway. Lame though he was, his tread was light, and his rubber-soled sea boots made no sound on the wooden stairs. His exit halted abruptly, and he stood for a moment halfway out of the little hatch, like a Santa Claus about to pop from a chimney.

Jim Briscoe had let go the wheel and crossed the poop to the low rail as if to obtain an unobstructed view of something beyond the schooner's bow. His feet slipped on the icy planking, and, with nothing to grasp to save himself, he pitched headforemost over the vessel's side.

The skipper saw him vanish, heard a heavy splash, and, with a tremendous shout of horrified amazement, leaped for the taffrail, and stared down at the schooner's wake. He saw Briscoe come to the surface, his arms and legs moving very feebly. Wrenching loose a life buoy from the side of the cabin, Captain Ozro hurled it as far as he could, but it fell considerably short, and the sailor made no effort to swim toward it. Evidently the cold during his watch on deck had benumbed him, and the freezing water must soon make him insensible. Jamming the wheel hard over to bring the *Martha B.* into the wind, the skipper thundered an appeal to Henry, who came scrambling from the cabin, his chubby features befogged with drowsiness. Captain Ozro shook him fiercely, then waved an arm at the sea astern, and bellowed:

"Jim is drowndin'! The skiff is frozen fast in the chocks, and we can't get it over in time to pick him up before he sinks. I'm goin' after him, Henry. Heave to, and stand by with a coil of line to fish us aboard."

The old man magically flew out of his ulster and boots, and was gone while Henry stood staring with eyes and mouth opened exceedingly wide. The rosy cook was by no means stupid, however, and the hazards of the sea had schooled him to use his wits once he had collected them. With a kind of choking groan, he rushed to bring the schooner about and to endeavor to lay her closer to the men in the water. The *Martha B.* rounded to with clumsy, maddening deliberation. The cook toiled heroically, scarcely daring to lose a precious moment by glancing in

search of Captain Ozro and Jim. The headsails fluttering, he braced his stubby legs against a cleat, and flattened the mainsail, almost breaking his back. The schooner filled, and stood slowly back, close-hauled, Henry puffing at the wheel, babbling to himself with tremulous incoherence.

Captain Ozro, swimming powerfully, had laid hold of the life buoy, and laboriously floundered nearer and nearer the almost inert Briscoe, whose head came up only to disappear, and again become visible. He was about to sink in the last gasp when the skipper pushed the cork ring over his head, tugged despairingly at his arms, and raised them so that the buoy slid down and rested beneath the man's shoulders. Then Captain Ozro caught hold of one side of the buoy, and found sufficient support to keep him afloat.

By now he was no more than able to lift his mouth clear of the water. His strength had been wrested from him by the fearful cold which stabbed him through and through. Death by freezing could not be long delayed. Henry was knotting a bight in a coil of halyards. It was one chance in a hundred that he could make the rescue as the schooner drifted past. He glanced tearfully at the skiff lashed on deck amidships. No, he could never launch it overside in time. Running to the rail, he gazed down at the wave-washed figures clinging to the life buoy. The skipper's head had fallen. The water lapped his face, and his hoary beard rose and fell like seaweed.

Henry yelled terrifically, and prepared to swing the line with the large loop in the end of it. Captain Ozro fought off his stupor, languidly paddled, and looked at the cook with wordless appeal, but his eyes were tragic with helplessness. Henry flung the coil of rope. It wavered, straightened out, and then the loop fell and brushed the skipper's shoulder. He clutched for it, and fortunately the loop slithered under the edge of the buoy and was momentarily caught. Captain Ozro exerted himself in a supreme effort, and lifted the loop so that as it was dragged taut it settled around his own body and that of the sailor.

Henry heaved and hauled until the two men were close to the schooner's side, and then he belayed the rope so that they could not sink beneath the surface. But he comprehended that lone-handed he would be unable to raise them to the deck. He must behold them die of cold, and they were so near that he could almost reach down and touch them.

Running forward, tumbling over obstacles, the loose end of the rope trailing behind him, he passed it around the iron winch used for handling cargo. There was no time to rig a pulley whip. Releasing the rope where he had made it fast at the rail, he scampered back to the winch, and tugged sturdily at the crank. The winch was rusted with spray, and stiff to move, with a heavy, dead weight to lift. Henry tussled with it in a kind of insane fury, but he could turn it no more than a few revolutions, and then it balked.

He fled back to the schooner's side, wringing his bleeding hands. Captain Ozro had slightly revived, so that now he could keep his head clear of the sea. The spark of his indomitable courage could not be quenched. Comprehending Henry's plight, he freed himself of the rope, and let the loop slip under Jim's arms. The cook shouted a wild protest. The skipper's lips moved, and no sound came, but Henry understood that he was trying to tell him to save the sailor first. Captain Ozro managed to shift the life buoy so that it would not be drawn on board and he might have it still to cling to.

The cook caught up a second coil of line, and dropped it over the skipper's head in order to prevent his drifting away from the vessel. Then he ran to the winch, and was able to lift the slender body of Jim Briscoe a few inches at a time until he was half doubled across the rail. Hauling him inboard, Henry let him fall senseless on deck and led the second rope to the winch in the hope of saving Captain Ozro while the life was left in him.

The cook was utterly exhausted, but

he was given strength to serve the need, and when he had ceased to strain at the squealing winch the bitter sea no longer gripped the skipper. Henry tugged at him until he was sprawled close to the cabin hatch. Then he put his arms around him and pulled him below, returning to perform the same errand of mercy for Jim Briscoe.

The *Martha B.*, her deck deserted, yawed aimlessly to and fro, the sails slatting in the breeze. Henry took no thought of the schooner. She must shift for herself. He stripped the clothing from his dripping shipmates, rolled them into bunks, and covered them with all the bedding he could find. Into a pot of boiling coffee he dashed a half bottle of rum, and forced a few spoonfuls between their bloodless lips. They were like dead men, but Henry had no notion of surrender.

It was the skipper who first became reanimated. Toughly seasoned like stanch timber, he had endured so much of cold and wet and cruel hardships in a long lifetime at sea that the shock of this experience could not kill his tenacious vitality. The color came back to his seamed, leathery cheek; he opened his eyes and unsteadily murmured:

"Thank you kindly, Henry, for pullin' me aboard. Close shave, hey? How's Jim?"

"He ain't come to yet, Cap'n Ozro, but his heart is beatin'. What in time possessed you to make me pull him in first? Ain't you wuth more than all the tramp sailors afloat? And you with a wife waitin' for you at home! I'm surprised at you."

"Don't scold me, Henry. I ain't feelin' real spry. You'll have to do your best with the *Martha B.* till I get warmed up and rested. Mebbe you'd better take her into Portsmouth harbor and drop anchor."

"I can keep her goin' as long as the wind holds fair and light," stoutly replied the cook. "But I was just sayin' to myself that I'd better put in overnight."

The old man immediately went to sleep, and Henry hovered over Jim Briscoe, whose comatose condition was alarming. His pulse fluttered uncertainly, and his breathing was no more than perceptible. The cook administered more of the potent stimulant from the coffeepot, and tucked bottles of hot water around him.

"I suppose I ought to roll him on a barrel to spill the salt water out of him," reflected Henry, "but there's no room in this cabin for the performance, and I can't roll him on deck. I've done my best, and I'm dreadful short-handed for such goin's on as this."

Reluctantly he went on deck, and put the *Martha B.* on her course. His simple soul was in a turmoil. He felt helpless and forlorn beyond words. Captain Ozro had said nothing about setting a distress signal and asking a passing steamer to tow the schooner into the nearest port. And Henry was well aware that the cost of such assistance would eat up the meager profits of more than one voyage of the *Martha B.* Besides, there was nothing at present in sight to respond to such a summons. The sea was unusually clear of sail or smoke. With melancholy visage, the cook lashed the wheel while he hurried to the galley and returned with a plate of cold beans, pickles, and bread, for he had been given no time to prepare breakfast.

An hour later anxiety drove him into the cabin to visit what he called his "floatin' hospital." Captain Ozro had awakened from his heavy sleep, and was trying to get out of his bunk, but his strength had not come back to him, and after swaying a step or two on his trembling legs he was compelled to ask Henry to help him crawl into his blankets. Jim Briscoe was conscious, but made no effort to rise. Silent except for chattering teeth as one violent chill after another racked him, he gazed at Henry, who vehemently assured him:

"You ain't to worry a mite, Jim. You couldn't help fallin' overboard any more'n Cap'n Ozro could hold back from jumpin' in and fishin' you out of the wet. That's his way. And it ain't nothin' against you, but I scolded him for insistin' on my heavin' you aboard

first. Old men have some rights, as I was just sayin' to myself, and he plumb near froze to death before I could hitch onto him with the winch."

The tramp struggled to find speech, and muttered thickly:

"What! The skipper went over after me? I don't remember anything. Well, I'll be damned!"

The exclamation did not savor of profanity. It was a tribute, an expression of the most profound amazement. It conveyed a world of meaning. The cook understood. He wagged the bald head that was ringed about with gray like a tonsure, and earnestly affirmed:

"He did an almighty big favor for you, young man. And I hope you're wuth it."

Jim said nothing more, but Captain Ozro called out from his tiny stateroom across the cabin:

"Henry, you shut up! What do you mean by talkin' that stuff? Do you want to make Jim feel worse than he does now? And I don't ask anybody to go blowin' and braggin' about what I done in the line of duty."

Henry meekly resumed his ministrations, and hastened on deck. He was still very low in mind—not that he was afraid of the responsibility of navigating the *Martha B.*, but he sorely missed the dominant presence of Captain Ozro, and the knowledge that he could not come when called made the schooner seem almost untenable, like a derelict. It was evident that neither of the men in the cabin would be fit for duty inside the next twenty-four hours. The wind was falling until the little schooner was no more than making steerageway. Henry's duties were, therefore, of the lightest; but the aspect of the sky to the eastward perturbed him. Banks of clouds were massing, heavy and dark, and the promise of a bright day was rapidly vanishing. The dying breeze was drawing in fitful breaths from the east.

"It looks kind of like a blow," murmured the cook. "And it's comin' up sudden if I know anything about weather. Deary me, but I do seem to be in a real awkward fix."

He wet a pudgy finger, and held it up. Yes, the wind was shifting, and the calm streak was a sort of interim. He decided to do what he could in the way of shortening sail. The distance into Portsmouth harbor was considerable, and he could not be certain of reaching it to find a sheltered anchorage before the changing wind might rise in a sudden gale. The somber clouds were moving rapidly and spreading to obscure the sky far above the horizon. As the languid breeze continued to freshen in wayward puffs, a flurry of snow fell upon the schooner's deck.

The cook toiled earnestly, but clumsily. He knew what should be done, but nature had not designed this elderly, roly-poly hero to be a nimble seaman. Only the lower sails had been carried overnight, but they were still stiff with frost; sheets and halyards were difficult to cast loose, and Henry's hands were cut and bruised from the struggle with the winch. He lowered the foresail and secured it, leaving the schooner under a jib and single-reefed mainsail.

He could do no more. The wind was now blowing with steadily increasing weight, and he took his station at the wheel. The schooner moved in a world of gray sea and sky which was rapidly whitening with snow that came no longer in flurries, but in a blinding downfall which the wind drove at a slant. It curtained the *Martha B.* roundabout, and made her solitary, invisible, beyond reach of help.

Henry's round face, framed in a yellow sou'wester, was puckered with dismal anxiety. He felt as if he were the only living soul afloat upon this obscured, baffling sea. He dared not try to run for Portsmouth harbor with naught but a compass course to guide him. It meant groping, blundering navigation in this bewildering snowstorm, and he knew that he would be safer at sea until he should be able to discern the coast. Therefore he hauled out to work offshore as far as possible and be ready to heave to and ride out the blow.

Wild and wicked came the wind, whooping out of the east. The schooner's mainsail was old, and it carried only a single reef. The *Martha B.* buried her lee side, and was slow to rise and respond to Henry's frantic efforts to luff and ease the strain on the canvas.

It split and tore and whipped in fluttering rags. The schooner fell off and began to drift to leeward. The cook sadly perceived that he had been beaten in the first round. So far as handling the vessel was concerned, he was now little better than a spectator. Diving into the cabin, he bawled in a shrill voice:

"Mains'l blown all to flinders, Cap'n Ozro, and I can't get no storm canvas on her by myself to save my soul. I done my durndest to weather it, but I guess we're in a terrible pickle this time. I was just sayin' to myself that we're liable to blow ashore."

The skipper heaved himself out of the bunk, his will power mastering physical weakness. Henry steadied his uncertain steps as Captain Ozro made for the companionway, and huskily exclaimed:

"Help me into my ulster, Henry, and haul me on deck if you can. This ain't no time for me to be stretched on my back."

"It'll kill you!" cried the cook. "You're no more'n half thawed out yet. And there's nothin' to do but hang on."

"Shut up, and do as I tell ye!" growled the skipper.

The altercation aroused Jim Briscoe from his sick stupor. He shoved the blankets aside, and managed to sit up, but the cook shouted at him:

"You stay where you be, Jim! If the schooner shows symptoms of goin' to pieces I'll get you out of here somehow."

Captain Ozro crawled up the stairs on hands and knees, the cook yanking him by the shoulders, and slid across the sloping deck until he was huddled in the lee of the house. He told Henry how to lash a fragment of canvas to the main rigging to serve as a weather cloth and help throw the schooner into the wind.

The cook made a manful attempt, but the gale whipped the canvas out of his hands, and when he succeeded in making it fast, a tremendous gust whisked it to leeward like so much paper.

The skipper was not one to utter futile lamentation. Grim and silent, he stared into the snow and spindrift, and watched the *Martha B.* drift toward the unseen coast, rolling and lurching like a hulk. And her master could not use his strength and skill, all the resource and intelligence of his forty hard years at sea, to ward off the cruel fate that menaced her.

The tragedy was prolonged through several hours before Captain Ozro staggered to his feet, held a hand at his ear, and listened to the sound of breakers on a granite shore.

"Time to get Jim on deck," he said to the cook. "Even if I wasn't all crippled up and weak as a cat, I don't believe I could have saved the vessel, Henry. It's as vi'lent a winter gale as ever I see, and mebbe the *Martha B.* was too old to fight clear of a lee shore."

"It looks to me as if the jig is up," sorrowfully observed the cook. "But I was just sayin' to myself that you couldn't expect the old schooner to last forever."

"Well, Henry, we'd rather be blown ashore than to founder in the deep sea. Don't lose your trust in the goodness of the Lord."

When Jim had been fetched out of the cabin the vessel was so close to the surf that the booming chorus made it impossible for speech to be heard. The three men waited for the end. It was a shipwreck of no heroic dimensions, merely the loss by stranding of an ancient little coasting schooner whose value was less than that of the automobile which the rich man discards at the end of its first season. To Captain Ozro Baker and Henry, the cook, it was a disaster singularly momentous even should they escape with their lives. They were unable to conceive a future bereft of the *Martha B.*

She drifted past a headland of crags and bowlders and spouting breakers dimly glimpsed through the driving snow, and swung in a little behind it so that the fury of wind and sea was somewhat broken. Then she struck upon a ledge that held her fast. The breakers battered her incessantly, but the timbers held together more stubbornly than was to be expected, and the three men clung to the hope of survival.

They discovered that the tide was ebbing, and as the white curtain of snow lifted a trifle it was seen that between the *Martha B.* and the beach extended an irregular line of foam-covered rocks. It was a perilous causeway along which a man might perhaps fight his way if he bided his time until the tide was low.

To wait for succor was to freeze or drown. No sooner had the rocks begun to expose their black and ragged backs than Henry floundered over the schooner's side, and was crawling and slipping and scrambling shoreward. Captain Ozro saw him gain the beach and slowly limp from sight in the swirling snow.

Astonishingly soon several men came running from somewhere inland. They recklessly struggled out to the stranded schooner, and carried the skipper and Jim Briscoe to the beach in their arms. While they halted to wait for a horse and wagon, the *Martha B.*, her back broken, parted amidships, and one end of her slid off into deep water. Captain Ozro had nothing to say, but his wrinkled, bearded face worked with painful emotion.

The kindly folk, fishermen and farmers, put the castaways in bed under the same roof. It was the morning of Christmas Day when Captain Ozro came out of the long sleep of exhaustion with the comfortable sensation of being warm and dry and physically revived. His old bones ached with rheumatism, but he was no longer chilled and helpless. Then there came swiftly, like a tremendous blow, the realization that the schooner which he had owned and sailed for forty years was nothing but splintered wreckage. He choked down a sob, and when Henry came in to greet him the old man smiled with his unquenchable serenity as he said:

"Merry Christmas to ye, and thank God for His mercies. It's wonderful that we didn't all go down in the *Martha B.* How's Jim?"

"He's able to be up, Cap'n Ozro. I guess we can all toddle down to breakfast. But I don't see no Merry Christmas to all these dreadful goin's on."

"Well, I dunno as I'd call it exactly a Merry Christmas, Henry, but it might be worse."

"What's your plans?" And the cook rubbed a frostbitten ear.

"If we're fit to travel in the steam cars, we'll go to Portland to-day, and then I'll hurry home to the wife. And I guess you'd better go with me for Christmas. Got any other place in mind, Henry?"

"Nowheres in particular, Cap'n Ozro. I've been livin' aboard the *Martha B.* so long that I feel kind of lost and all adrift."

They found Jim Briscoe in the kitchen of the farmhouse, a pallid, shaky survivor, who looked even more like a tramp than when he had joined the schooner. The skipper felt pity for him, and was moved to exclaim, with genuine friendliness:

"You played in hard luck when you insisted on sailin' with me, young man. But you didn't lose much, far as I can see."

"I had nothing to lose," said Jim. "But I'm to blame for all the trouble, and you must wish I had drowned before you saw me fall over."

"I can't help feelin' sorry for you, same as I did when I first saw you," gently returned Captain Ozro. "I suppose you're broke, and don't know which way to turn? And you ain't fit to pick up a dollar by tryin' to work at anything. You come along home with me, Jim, and rest up over Christmas. My wife will be glad to give you a welcome, and the crew of the *Martha B.* ain't quite due to part company yet."

The young man stammered his thanks, and his expression oddly sug-

gested that he doubted the skipper's sanity. Soon after breakfast their host drove them to the railroad station, and the old man began the homeward journey with his two unfortunate shipmates in tow. They were not the most cheerful company, for the optimism of Henry had been shaken to the foundations, and he woefully pictured himself as henceforth a starving wanderer like poor Jim Briscoe.

It was in the late afternoon of this same day when they came to the island in Casco Bay where the skipper's wife waited alone in the small white cottage for her man to come back from the sea. The windows were brightly lighted as the three castaways stumbled wearily up the path that led from the steamboat landing. The cook and Jim Briscoe hung back, restrained by a natural hesitancy, while Captain Ozro stumped to the front door and pushed it open. They heard him call out in his resonant voice:

"Hello, Martha! Where are you? I've come home for Christmas."

An active, white-haired little woman came running to the door, and was caught up in the skipper's arms.

"Why, Ozro, what's happened? Did you get weather bound and have to put back? It's a grand Christmas for me!"

"I lost the vessel," he slowly answered. "She's all stove to bits to the north'ard of Portsmouth. And I fetched the others along—Henry and a young man that went as crew with me."

"The *Martha B.* is wrecked!" she quavered, his arm still around her trim waist. Then she added, with a brave little laugh that held more pathos than tears could have expressed: "Now you'll have to stay ashore with me, Ozro, unless you can find another vessel. Gracious me, I've lost my mind! Tell Henry and your sailor to come in out of the cold."

The two guests entered rather sheepishly, with the feeling that they were intruders. To their amazement, the low-raftered sitting room glowed with Christmas cheer. A backlog blazed in the large fireplace. Wreaths of holly were hung in the windows, and ropes of evergreen were festooned on the walls. In the chimney corner stood a small hemlock tree whose branches bore many colored candles and sparkled with tinsel.

"We always keep Christmas," expained Mrs. Martha Baker, "whether Ozro is at home or not. It's sort of in memory. Our son was born on Christmas Day, and he died when he was a little boy. And he was terrible fond of Christmas fixin's. And somehow it helps keep us from feelin' so lonesome without him."

"I guessed it would cheer up Henry and Jim to find a real Christmas waitin' for 'em," said the skipper.

"Excuse me while I get supper," smiled the bright-eyed, capable Martha. "Make your friends comfortable, Ozro. Light the fire in the spare chamber right away."

Henry was already beaming. He could not remain unhappy in such a place as this. Jim Briscoe had lost his crushed, careworn aspect. It was as though misfortune and sorrow and despondency had been shut out beyond the walls of this humble cottage. Captain Ozro and Martha had splendidly refrained from discussing the loss of the schooner. It was their own private burden. They would not cloud the Christmas welcome due their guests. The skipper appeared to think of nothing else than their comfort. He rummaged closets and chests for changes of clothing, carried up hot water, and honed his spare razors.

When supper was ready, Henry and Jim were men of decent, respectable appearance. They were invited to a table set with homely fare—baked beans, fried potatoes, apple sauce, and mince pie. The weather-beaten old skipper was across the table from his wife, and Henry, purloining a white apron, insisted on hopping up to change the dishes and carry things from the stove. There was pleasant talk at random, the men trying to delay the story of the last voyage of the *Martha B.;* but it was uppermost in the minds of all, and the skipper's wife heard it by

bits, between intervals of heavy, thoughtful silence. This was a tragic Christmas for every one excepting Jim, the tramp sailor, who had lost nothing. He gazed much at Captain Ozro and Martha.

And more than once he turned to look through the open door of the cheery sitting room, whose glow may have appealed to him as reflecting the warmth that dwelt eternal in the hearts of this old shipmaster and his wife. They had lost by shipwreck that which meant ever so much to them, but they possessed treasure infinitely more precious, and nothing could take it away from them. Love and the spirit of Christmas dwelt in this cottage.

The mince pie had been cut, and the glasses were filled from a huge brown pitcher of cider, when Captain Ozro rose from his chair and declaimed with a formal flourish of his fist:

"Here's a health and God bless you, my friends! And I'm glad that you could be here for Christmas with Martha and me."

Henry chuckled and wagged his bald head, but it was the hobo, Jim Briscoe, who found his feet to reply to the skipper's toast. His slouching, disheartened demeanor had been cast aside like an old garment.

"Here's to our hosts! May they live to have many Christmas Days together. I can say with all my heart that to one of their guests there has never come so joyous, so wonderful a Christmas."

His face was illumined by a light from within. The others could not understand it; nor was his radiant smile any less inscrutable. They vaguely comprehended that this transfigured tramp was about to make some astonishing revelation, to explain himself, to disclose a mystery hitherto unsuspected. He stood musing for a little interval, and they kept silence, looking up at him with a bewilderment almost comical. It was in a casual manner he asked, as if this immensely vital question were of trifling consequence:

"By the way, I imagine that your livelihood depended on the schooner that was lost, Captain Ozro?"

"She was about all we had to earn us our vittles, Jim," answered the skipper, with an air of reluctance. "The *Martha B.* wasn't insured. She was too old. I don't mean to air our troubles, but you put it p'intedly."

"I thought so," resumed the young man who had taken command of the situation. "And I haven't heard a whimper from either of you; not one word to indicate what a tremendous catastrophe has befallen you. All that I have found in this home is the spirit of Christmas, and lovely memories, and kind thoughts that make that boy of yours seem like a living presence. Now, my dear people, let us go into the other room and sit by the fire. I have a story to tell."

Gazing at the fiery backlog, the puzzling guest leaned forward in a wooden rocking-chair, and began to talk in low tones, as though he were communing with himself:

"I was a miserable coward—a quitter whom you would have despised. I actually believed that I was tired of life. The world was a rotten place, and I wanted to get out of it. So I went to Portland with the intention of taking steerage passage in one of the transatlantic steamers and throwing myself overboard as soon as she was at sea. I wished to vanish utterly, to leave no traces. This was why I put on the disguise of a tramp. The sailing was delayed, and when you found me, Captain Ozro, I was looking for a chance to leave port in any kind of a vessel.

"It was not an accident when I fell overboard from the *Martha B.* It was the most deliberate thing I had ever done. I waited for daylight because I could not bear to go out in the dark. And you would not let me die, but almost lost your own life to give mine back to me. And because of this the schooner was left short-handed, and she was wrecked, and you were ruined."

The skipper was glowering at his inexplicable seaman. The tale was too fantastic for credence.

"Your brain ain't frostbit, is it, Jim?" was his solicitous query.

"No, you can't understand," the

guest went on to say, and his smile was again sorrowful. "There are men who feel old and tired of everything by the time they are thirty. And they magnify their troubles and become morbid and lose their grip. Often it is because they have too much money. I was one of that kind. My soul was sick. Perhaps you have heard of Bryce Drummond? I am his son."

"I've read pieces about him in the papers," said Captain Ozro, whose opinions were wavering. "Bless my stars, Jim, am I dreamin'?"

"No. I have awakened from bad dreams. I am cured. And the miracle has been wrought by you, and by Henry, and by Mrs. Martha Baker. There may be many people in the world like you, but I had not known them. You have shown me that life can be filled with sweetness and courage and light and self-sacrifice. I have seen what trouble really is, and how nobly it can be endured. I want to tell you much more, but it is very hard to say the things that are in my heart."

"Well, all I can say, Jim, is that this was wuth losin' the schooner for," boomed Captain Ozro. "You've knocked me all in a heap."

Young Drummond, alias Jim Briscoe, had come to the most difficult part of his task. Laying a hand upon Captain Ozro's knee, he said:

"I am in debt to you—much more than I could ever make you understand. You must just take my word for it. And I know that you and Henry and Mrs. Martha would feel hurt if I were to hint at such a thing as payment. But on Christmas Day people exchange gifts with their friends. I have received a great gift from you. And you cannot refuse a remembrance from a friend—oh, such a trifling little remembrance beside what you have given him! Tell me, Captain Ozro, what would you and Mrs. Martha most like to do?"

"Have a chance to see each other oftener," wistfully spoke up the old shipmaster. "We're gettin' on in years, Jim. I'm most seventy, and Martha has turned sixty-five. But we've never asked favors from nobody."

"You are my skipper no longer. I shall do as I please," was the reply. "Will you be contented to stay ashore? Would you care to live somewhere else, with a bigger house, with servants, and all that sort of thing?"

Martha Baker slipped her hand in her husband's as she said:

"It's safe for me to speak for both of us. We don't want any other home but this, and just to be by ourselves."

"I'd be perfectly contented to stay put right here, and never go to sea again," agreed Captain Ozro.

"What about you, Henry?" And the young man turned to the flabbergasted cook.

"I'd like to have a little house down here on the island, and a sailboat to go fishin' in, and a dory for my lobster pots, and a garden, and a phonograph, and a man to cook for me, so that I could growl at him when his vittles didn't suit. I'd feel dreadful lonesome to live too far away from the skipper."

Drummond laughed boyishly. It was delightfully easy to play Santa Claus to persons who knew precisely what they wanted.

"I stipulate that the spare chamber must be reserved for a visit from me every summer," cried he. "I can run up here in my big schooner, and perhaps you will like to make a cruise with me."

"In your own yacht! So that's where you learned your seafarin'?" shouted Captain Ozro. "Well, Jim, you certainly were a cute one. But, mind you, I didn't know you was wuth a cent when I jumped overboard after you."

"No more'n I did when I hauled him aboard. He didn't look it," blubbered the cook, wiping tears of joy from his rosy cheeks. "I was just sayin' to myself that for a real, genuine Merry Christmas, this surely does beat all."

A long novel by Ralph D. Paine coming soon—that is only one of a big number of good things we have planned for next year.

In the Name of the Law

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "Fifty Feet of Rawhide," "The Silver-Legs," Etc.

The scarlet coat of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police means more, even, than kinship. That is the theme of this strong story of how a corporal set himself determinedly to see that peace was kept at whatever sacrifice to himself in the camp of Pothole in the Peace River country

THEY were brothers. That fact in itself nowise explains the mental and physical antithesis of the two. It but serves to sharpen the contrast, to make each stand out a trifle clearer, perhaps. A brief twelve months apart in birth, flesh of the same flesh, they were as unlike as men ever come to be. Only one thing they held in common—nerve, sheer grit. There was never so tiny a streak of yellow in either man. Albeit, even that quality was of a differing order as it manifested itself in the brothers Hall, Lee and Bob, "Red Bob" Hall.

He was a big man—Bob Hall—raw-boned, muscular, bold-eyed, and arrogant among his kind. It was his boast, when whisky loosened his tongue a bit, that he had never stepped aside an inch for any man that ever stood in a pair of boots. Which may have been blatant, but was simple truth.

On the other hand, Lee Hall just got into the Northwest Mounted Police by less than the thickness of the page this is printed upon, so close did he shave to the lack of stature that would have disbarred him. But he passed—and therein lies the meat of this account. For thereby he ranged himself on the side of law and order; two things for which Red Bob Hall had a profound contempt.

But this is getting overhasty in the matter of narration. There is no effect without its efficient cause. Wherefore let us move forward with due regard to the continuity of cause and effect in so far as it bears upon the brothers Hall.

The seed of the tree of discord was sown in school days when Red Bob was "Robby," and first beginning to feel the pride of triumphing over other males in battle. Even then he was a muscular super-youth, glorying in his strength, keen to test it. From the beginning he lorded it over Lee, took his tops and marbles, asserted all of an older, bigger brother's privileges. And the slender, fair-haired, quiet Lee never took issue with him on any point. With other boys, when hard pressed, he gave no ground; and when he did turn he waged fistic war with a dynamic fierceness that seemed incompatible with his slenderness, his habitual mildness of manner. But with Robby—in his heart Lee did homage to Bob's athletic fitness, his punishing power with "the gloves," his perfect proportions, and his unconscious patronage of those less favored by nature in the matter of bicep and thew. He rendered fealty to Bob, even if at times, and more frequently as they grew older, he resented the big brother's dominance.

Their first clash came over a girl, in their second high-school year, when they were respectively sixteen and seventeen. How the miss in pigtails came to be a bone of contention is somewhat irrelevant, except in so far as she was the cause upon which Lee nailed his colors to the mast. They fought—in the hush of a June evening, behind a

tumble-down barn, with a mild-eyed cow chewing her cud while she looked upon the strange antics of the pair—and Lee took the first beating of his life, took it without a whimper, fought back silently, rancorously, while he could see and stand.

Followed upon this twelve months of veiled hostility, held in check only by their parents. Their schoolmates all knew that the Hall boys "had it in for each other." And inevitably as the downflowing of a mountain stream, they clashed again. This time it hinged on a cross word from Bob to his mother, as he rose from the dining table.

Lee floored him with a single punch, put him down amid a crash of dishes; and carried a winning fight to Bob when he rose. For the nonce speed and desperate earnestness discounted superior strength and skill. Then their father rose from his evening paper, and stopped the row. In addition to his paternal authority, Hall, senior, was handy with his hands. Also, he was possessed of a stinging vocabulary, and Bob had to listen to a choice selection therefrom.

That night he packed his clothing in a bag, and quitted the place of his birth. A year later report had it that he was working on a stock ranch in the Cypress Hills, in northwest Canada. This he verified with a letter to his mother; after which he wrote no more, and letters from home were returned, stamped "Addressee unknown."

When Lee was twenty-two his parents died within six months of each other. There was no property. He was heir to a few keepsakes and a heritage of good health. And, like many another youngster, his feet turned westward, toward the land of opportunity. After two years on the ranges of the Northwest, he joined the Mounted Police.

Which, with allowance for a certain lapse of years, brings us to Pothole, and to a somewhat more intimate view of the brothers Hall.

Red Bob Hall reigned cock of the walk in Pothole. From the beginnings of the camp he had had a hand in everything that led to trouble, and always he had come out on top. Consistently he went his own way without regard to Territorial statutes, concerned himself principally with a chance for making a more or less dubious dollar. He trafficked in whisky, took all sorts of chances with a careless grin. Of the ninety-odd inhabitants of the camp, which included less than a dozen women, Red Bob Hall was the biggest, the toughest, the noisiest, the most careless of word or deed. Whereby the fame of Pothole traveled, and likewise the name of Red Bob. He could whip any two men in the Peace River country, and he was always ready for trouble of any sort or size.

In the smoky Indian summer of Pothole's second tumultuous season, the Territorial powers-that-be spoiled this excellent state of affairs by sending mounted policemen into the district, and also appointing an ex-Hudson's Bay clerk as petty magistrate.

The mounted policeman was Lee Hall, now a corporal, still fair of hair and slender, but, nevertheless, a capable and efficient member of an organization that harbors only the fit and tried. It took Brother Bob a week to discover the relationship. Then he came to where Lee, with two half-breeds to help him, labored at the erection of quarters.

"Well," said he, when he had satisfied himself that it was indeed Lee Hall, "they say you're here to settle the camp down. Don't it strike you that that's liable to be a man-size job?"

Corporal Hall appraised the huge dimensions of Red Bob with a sober and critical eye.

"I'm under orders," he said briefly, "and they make laws to be enforced in this country. Law is law."

"Some places maybe," Red Rob returned, suddenly aggressive in tone. "But not in Pothole. Not for a while, anyway. The dope that's handed out at Regina ain't strong enough to reach this far."

"I've reached here," Lee reminded him.

Red Bob snorted disdain.

"It'll take more than one tow-headed slim-jim to make a goody-goody town of this," he declared.

Corporal Hall resumed his ax work for a few strokes. Then he leaned on the shaft of his blade and looked his brother over. Red Rob towered over him, a great, wide-shouldered bulk of a man, ruddy of hair and cheek, with a palpable sneer curling his full, red lips.

"Whatever I am compelled to do," Lee spoke gently, "will be within the law, and in the name of the law. And *that's* bigger than you, bigger than Pothole. I hope you aren't going to make it a point to be ugly. I don't know why you should. At the same time—you've no reason to hold a grudge against me, Bob."

"Me hold a grudge?" Red Bob burst into a roaring laugh, but a forced laugh, nevertheless. The glint in his eye belied the smile on his face. "Me hold a grudge against you? What for should *I* hold a grudge? Why, you darned shrimp, I could take you in my hands and break you across my knee! A man doesn't hold a grudge against children—and other small fry. Why, you ain't even growed up yet."

He had purposely raised his voice, since he had observed two or three Potholeites within earshot. And having delivered himself of these gratuitous insults, he thrust his hands into his pockets, and walked off, whistling a cheery tune.

Corporal Hall shrugged his shoulders, and fell to work again. A tiny spot of color glowed on each cheek bone. But it was written in the rules and regulations that such things a mounted policeman must suffer in dignified silence. He must not brawl. He must abide in peace until the peace is broken, and then he must act the cool, impartial upholder of constituted authority. Lee hacked savagely at the log. From one's brother——

A small-sized cabin for a storehouse they made and roofed in with what speed three skilled axmen could muster. Then they set to the upbuilding of another, larger, of heavier logs. Twelve feet by twenty-four it spanned. Midway a partition, of a like thickness to the outer wall, bisected it. Twelve feet by twelve was police headquarters, dining room, bedroom, and kitchen for Corporal Hall. And twelve feet by twelve was given over to the first jail in Pothole, where, by ringbolt, shackle, and handcuff might be secured those obstreperous souls who should come before the new-created court for their misdeeds.

This done, the corporal took his camp in hand. The appointed magistrate was himself a man of nerve, all his life somewhat used to rough places and rougher men. It was set down in plain black and white for him to read that for such and such offenses there should be meted out such and such penalties. And to those whom Corporal Hall brought before him he showed neither fear nor favor, but dealt with them according to their deserts.

The amazing effrontery—amazing from the Pothole standpoint, that is—of them carried them through many a tight place, and bore them over many a tentative showing of Pothole teeth. But it was by grace of one dispensation only—the absence of Red Rob Hall. Winter drew nigh, and for the sake of his own pocket, which had before been well lined by the appeasement of the liquor thirsty, Robert the Red was out south after supplies. A perfectly legitimate errand presumably. So that the corporal was left to carry out his instructions with no more than the usual amount of friction which such matters generate in high-stomached and new-organized communities.

That is to say, Corporal Hall shut down Pothole's public gambling joint—except for the poker games, which he could not touch. Also, he kept his eagle eye cocked for signs of the flowing bowl. The Territories were "dry" by Dominion enactment. In consequence, a man who betrayed unsteadiness of gait or unaccountable thickness of speech received a measure of the corporal's attention. By one means or another, he nailed two or three whisky sellers. On these Magistrate Bonner plastered fines of goodly proportion.

And one or two of the hapless suffered a taste of the ringbolt and shackles for the folly of resisting an officer. The statutes read, "Fine or imprisonment—or both," and Louis Bonner was not the man to shirk a duty, or to let a tipsy, belligerent prisoner off with mere admonition.

In the ordinary run of events, Corporal Hall would have tamed Pothole with no great to-do, made of it a peaceful, law-abiding placer camp in the span of two weeks. Other mounted policemen had wrought greater miracles out of more stubborn material, and done it single-handed. The red jacket stood for subsidence of riot and license, it was a guarantee of orderly progress wherever and whenever it appeared. So runs the history of the Northwest Territories.

But, in the midst of it, ere Pothole was yet done growling over the curtailment of what it deemed its individual privileges, Red Bob Hall came back.

Came back and opened up the big log building, where he held forth and openly issued a round of drinks to the little crowd that gathered. For no obvious reason—since every one knew and took it for granted—he made a point of announcing that he had whisky to sell, and that he proposed to sell it so long as there was a man with nerve and the money to buy.

"And if anybody gets flossy about it, and tries to get gay," he further declared, "I'll be Johnny on the spot to settle his hash. You can gamble on *that.*"

Before so very great a lapse of time the gathering in Red Bob's place grew so noisily convivial that the sounds of their drunken joy were wafted to the uttermost limits of the camp. So that presently Corporal Hall came down to see about it.

He knocked at the door. Red Bob himself answered. It flashed into the mind of Lee that Red Bob had been waiting for that knock—so prompt was he.

"Good evening, corporal," he greeted, ironically courteous. "Would you care to step in? It's perfectly safe. We may be a trifle rough in our way, but we don't mean no harm."

The corporal stepped in. A haze of tobacco smoke eddied to the unhewn beams of the low roof. A five-gallon keg of whisky stood on a table. Red Bob, once the door was closed behind his caller, moved nonchalantly over beside this table.

"What was it," he observed, in a slow drawl, "the governor of North Carolina said to the governor of South Carolina?"

And a dozen voices chorused the time-worn reply. Red Bob served the round of drinks. He seemed to have forgotten the policeman. Between drinks, unsteady singing and tales of utter coarseness became current. Joy ran rife, full-blooded, reckless hilarity.

The corporal took it all in silently, standing as straight as though he stood at attention. He was trapped, and he knew it. Here was ample grist for the legal mill of Louis Bonner, and the filling up of that twelve-by-twelve pen—to say nothing of the well-merited and lengthy sentence a higher court would administer to Red Bob Hall for his prime share in the debauch. But—the job was too big for one policeman; especially was it too big for *him,* with Red Bob watching out of one corner of his eye for the first move. Corporal Hall was keenly alive to the significance of his brother's attitude. Of the score of men in the room, Red Bob was the only absolutely sober one—and the dangerous one.

It was a forlorn hope. Still—back of Corporal Hall loomed all the traditions of the force. No mounted policeman gave ground when his hand was to the task. He stepped up to the table where his brother loomed vast of breadth, his big, red face wearing a grin of comprehension.

"You are under arrest," the corporal told him evenly.

Red Bob Hall smiled broadly. He shook his head, running his thick fingers through his flaming hair, as if he were puzzled.

"Ain't you made a mistake?" he inquired mildly.

There was nothing to be gained by talk. At no time is argument a weapon of the Mounted Police. Corporal Hall whipped out his "nippers" and laid hold of the big man's arm. Red Bob, still smiling, suffered himself to be led halfway to the door. Then, with all eyes fixed upon him, and a sudden, astounded hush upon the assembled company, he stopped and jerked himself free with a wrench that nearly threw the policeman off his feet.

"Arrest *me?*" he said. "Not on your tintype. Why, I don't want to be arrested."

Lee clung to him, struggling vainly to snap the shiny steel wristlets upon him, but in those mighty arms he was helpless. Red Bob overtopped him eight inches, outweighed him a hundred pounds, and every ounce and inch of extra bone and tissue was vibrant with power, rampant, aggressive force.

The corporal's face burned. He was being made a fool of. The uniform he wore was being scoffed at. For once the power of the law was without effect, a thing of no worth. And he had no weapon but the law, and his hands. For it is written that no mounted policeman shall use his side arms except in defense of his life; he shall not shoot until he is first shot at.

And Red Bob Hall was not shooting. He was holding his uniformed brother off at arm's length, and grinning evilly, making a mock of his efforts, and every man in the room was laughing, flinging coarse jests. The corporal knew that he had lost prestige, that never again would he be permitted to arrest a man in Pothole without a struggle.

Red Bob dragged him bodily to the door.

"This is no place for a lady, nohow," he roared, grinning in appreciation of his own jest.

And with that he gave Lee a push that sent him reeling out the open door.

"You've pinched the last man you'll ever pinch in *this* camp," he shouted after him. "You ain't weighty enough for the job."

Then he slammed the door in the policeman's face.

Lee hesitated a moment, as if he was of a mind to reënter the place, but he turned away finally, and went slowly to the cabin of Louis Bonner. His business there was brief and formal, and he wasted no words in explanation. From there he tramped back to his own cabin. Once inside, he stood looking blankly at the floor, both hands thrust deep in his coat pockets. Presently he sat down at a table and, drawing to him paper and a pen, wrote steadily for a few minutes—a briefly detailed report of the affair to his commanding officer. He sealed and stamped the envelope, and laid it in the middle of the table. Then he buckled on his revolver belt and went to the nearest cabin, in which lived a mild-mannered old Scotch prospector.

"Jamison," said Corporal Hall, "I have left on my table a letter all ready to post. I'm going to arrest a man, and I may have trouble. If anything happens to me between now and night, will you see that that letter gets out by the first mail?"

Jamison promised he would, and Corporal Hall went his way.

In Red Bob's cabin the hilarity continued at the same alcoholic pitch. Lee paused a second with his hand on the latch. His brows pinched together, as if it were a task little to his liking. Then he shrugged his shoulders and stepped in without the ceremony of knocking.

Red Bob sat on a stool, a flaring match in his fingers. He turned his head at the creak of the door. A shadow of surprise flitted briefly over his face. He crossed his legs nonchalantly, and put the blazing match to his pipe. The noisy gabble stilled an instant. And in the expectant hush Red Bob drawled:

"Well. Here it is again. It must like our company. I wonder if it wants to be entertained?"

A drunken guffaw ran around the room.

Corporal Hall kept his eyes on his brother. "I have here," he said evenly, "a warrant for you on two charges; illegal liquor selling, and resisting an of-

ficer. In the queen's name I arrest you."

He stepped forward and touched Red Bob lightly on the shoulder, as he uttered the last sentence.

Robert the Red swung one clenched fist viciously as the policeman's move brought him within reach. But that was exactly what the corporal expected. He ducked the blow, and, before Bob Hall could recover his balance, Lee smashed him fair on the sneering mouth with all the power he could put in his arm—and he was no weakling, even though he lacked bulk. The one punch served to put Red Bob down.

He scrambled up, a raging fury, spitting blood and hoarse oaths, before the corporal could snap the handcuffs on. And as he came up, the drink-inflamed carousers launched themselves at the policeman.

He sensed the new danger and leaped back, facing them. In the same instant he drew his revolver and planted a bullet in the floor at the feet of the foremost. That halted the others, but Red Bob dived under his brother's gun, like a football player tackling clean and low. Lee side-stepped and struck downward with the heavy service revolver.

This time Red Bob lay where he dropped, blood oozing from his nostrils and streaming from a gash across his scalp.

Corporal Hall clicked the irons on his wrists, and stood up. He eyed reflectively the dozen men who had backed away in varying stages of drunken astonishment at the swift undoing of their host. For a second he was tempted to arrest the lot of them. But, after all, they had only made a tentative showing of teeth; and, knowing how the law would deal with the arch offender, he concluded that the penalty inflicted on Red Bob would be lesson enough to serve Pothole for many a day.

"Get to your cabins, and sober up," he told them. "If any of you show up around the camp drunk I'll run you in. Clear out, now."

They obeyed without demur. Red Bob remained insensible, and Lee took advantage of his condition to empty the whisky in the snow as soon as the men were gone. He saved a cupful, and, lifting his brother's head, poured a little between his lips. He was already beginning to revive, and, when the whisky brought him completely to his senses, he sat up, glaring at the steel on his wrists, and cursing a black streak.

"There's no use talking like that," Corporal Hall observed. "I had to arrest you, and I have done it. You had warning, and now you are going to find out that the law of this country is bigger than you or any other man who sets out to defy it. So get up and come along quietly."

Red Bob squatted on his haunches, and swore that he would not walk a step.

"Then I'll drag you by the coat collar through the snow," said Lee, "and you'll be a spectacle for Pothole to talk about for the next six months."

"Let's see you drag me, you——"

Lee ignored the epithets, though they made his face burn. But he had no choice about moving his prisoner. And so he caught the big man by the collar and dragged him bodily across the floor and out into the snow, sliding him now on his back and now on his stomach, according as he struggled.

Twenty feet of that was enough for Red Bob. "I'll walk," he growled. "And some day I'll walk up and down your carcass for this."

Corporal Hall waited till he got to his feet, then he drove him ahead to police quarters, and locked him in the twelve-by-twelve log pen. Then he went into his own end of the cabin and washed the blood off his hands. He had offered to dress the cut on Red Bob's head, but the big man would have none of his treatment. And then Corporal Hall sat down to a pipe, feeling that the god of chance had favored him largely in the outcome of his task.

Just how Red Bob Hall freed himself of the irons and got out of the rude jail is something that Pothole and the Mounted Police will probably never

know. It is scarcely essential that it should be known. Stranger things have happened. The meat of the matter is that he did get out—during the hour that Corporal Hall spent with Louis Bonner setting his affairs in order for a trip to the outside; for Red Bob's offenses were of a nature to be tried in a higher court than that of a local magistrate.

Red Bob, however, secured his freedom. Donald Jamison came to Bonner's place and called the corporal out.

"Yer man's escaped," said he. "I saw him a minute since. He's gone ta his ain place. An' some o' his fr'en's were wi' him, talkin' verra loud an' brave o' their intentions."

"Out—when I left him locked in and handcuffed," the corporal declared. "You must be mistaken."

"I am not," Jamison asserted. "I spoke wi' him, I tell ye."

Lee grabbed his cap and ran to his quarters. The door stood wide. Red Bob had tarried long enough to wantonly kick over the table, the stools, and boxes. It was a clean jail break. The corporal did not tarry to speculate on how it had been accomplished. He still wore his side arms. And he turned and retraced his way back among the clustered cabins of Pothole.

Halfway to Bob Hall's cabin, and opposite the rambling structure which served the dual purpose of trading store and hotel, Red Bob stepped suddenly into the clear from behind a cabin. He was armed, carrying a rifle gripped in both hands, the muzzle forward and drooping slightly. He walked straight toward the policeman.

The corporal halted an instant. Then he, too, advanced slowly, both arms hanging straight by his sides. In ten more steps he could see the white of Red Bob's eyeballs, and the angry curl of his full, red lips. Also, he was conscious that faces were pressed against frost-glazed windows, and that doors were being drawn a trifle ajar. But he did not take his eyes off Red Bob; he did not dare. Nor did he speak until less than thirty yards separated them, each stepping slowly, tensely forward.

Then said he:

"Put down that rifle. You're only making a bad matter worse."

For answer Red Bob threw up his weapon. At his motion the corporal cast himself sidewise in the snow, drawing his revolver as he fell. The roar of the rifle came a trifle before the snappier report of the hand gun. A second time the service revolver barked crisply in the thin, frost-bitten atmosphere. And while the echoes were bandied about on the mountain above, Red Bob Hall stood swaying, his feet set wide apart, holding the rifle stiffly out in front of him. For perhaps five seconds he rocked drunkenly, the fingers of his right hand fumbling uselessly at the lever of his weapon. Then he pitched heavily forward.

The corporal ran to him, lifted his head, and looked briefly into the wide-open, glazing eyes. He had seen men die before, had Corporal Hall, and he let Red Bob's head sink gently back in the reddening snow.

He stood up and looked about. There was not a breath of air stirring, nor a voice lifted, nor a man moving in Pothole. It was as if for a space the camp held its breath. Yet he knew that every eye had watched the encounter. And while he turned slowly on his heel, Louis Bonner came running bareheaded. Doors opened here and there; men appeared. The corporal beckoned three or four.

"Lay hold here," he said. "Carry him to his own cabin."

They did his bidding, he helping them, and they spoke in hushed, slow voices while they performed the task. And when the body was laid decently on the bed, they stole out soft-footedly, leaving the corporal alone—all but Louis Bonner.

Lee folded the dead man's arms across his breast, and smoothed the tangled, ruddy hair back from the forehead. Then he leaned against the wall and covered his face with his hands.

Bonner took him gently by the shoulder.

"Come," said he, "there is no use to grieve. You did only your duty. He

was a desperate man. And 'twill work out best in the long run. There will be no more trouble in Pothole."

"He was my brother," Lee whispered, "my brother."

Bonner looked at Red Bob, stretched quietly on his bed. Then he turned again to the corporal.

"Lad," said he, "that was a great pity. But this"—he laid a tentative forefinger on the scarlet police sleeve—"means more, even, than kinship. Ye are a sworn officer. It is written in the law that peace must be kept—and what ye were forced to do was done in the name of the law. And that's the end of it. Come away."

And with that they went out soberly, closing the door softly on Red Bob Hall, Bonner to his cabin, and the corporal to his quarters, to add a grim postscript to his official report.

In the first February POPULAR Bertrand W. Sinclair introduces Pierre Latour, a Bear Tooth Mountain guide. Get it January 7th.

ALWAYS ON THE JOB

AS a real companion and helpmeet, Mrs. John Hays Hammond, whose husband is now the most famous mining engineer in the world, has set a record. She has accompanied Mr. Hammond in all his wanderings in search of wealth and success—into the mining camps of the West, into the wild regions of Mexico and Central America, through the discomforts and troublous times of South Africa, and across Russia. Moreover, she has written a book describing the events in connection with the unjust sentencing of her husband to death by the Boers in South Africa.

A NEW DEMOCRATIC ACHIEVEMENT

IN the last session of Congress the Democrats of the House had a fierce quarrel as to whether they should authorize the building of two battleships, one battleship, or no battleships. Among those who wanted two ships but who had decided that it was impossible to get them, was an Irish member from Ohio. Expressing his displeasure, he wept as follows:

"The party is about to ruin itself over this naval program, but I suppose I'll have to stand for it. I've been a Dimmycrat all my life, and I hope to die one if I live."

THE REPARTEE THAT RIPS

REPARTEE is a delicate instrument, a fine product, a thing of hints, lights, and shadows. Anybody who does not believe this, please stand up. Apparently, everybody agrees to the description. Wherefore there is now related the example of the crudest repartee ever indulged in by man or woman.

It was in a Western city, a place which had risen to the dignity of having "fashionable suburbs" in which the inhabitants resented the arrival of people who "did not belong." One day there appeared in the community a woman who had lots of money and a fine and ornamental lack of tact in dealing with her neighbors. She called and called and called on the women in the suburb which was "fashionable," and, strange to relate, she could never find them "in."

One woman particularly disliked her and was never to be seen. At last the newcomer met the one who had avoided her in such marked manner.

"My dear," said the avoider, "it is such a pity that when you call I am always out—always."

Responded she who had been snubbed:

"Out of your home—or your head?"

The Sunburnt Nymph

By Rupert Hughes

Author of "The After Honor," "Excuse Me," Etc.

Dirk Memling, artist, sculptor, and some other things not so creditable, believes in work for work's sake and finds joy in the toiling—luckily, for his most carefully planned coup results only in the realization that he is a great painter

IF anybody was to come this way, Heaven presoive me, that's all!" Nellie fretted.

"Oh, don't worry," Dirk Memling answered carelessly.

"*You* don't have to worry," said Nellie. "But look at *me!* That is, you *needn't* look at me; but just *look* at me."

"You are looking your very best."

"This is no time for idle comp'ments, Doik. What I want to know is, what happens to me if anybody comes along?"

"Nobody's coming along, in the first place, and in the second, we have a scout on the watch to warn us if anybody does come along."

"But when the scout comes along to warn us, what about the scout?"

"Oh, I'll manage somehow. Don't fret!"

"Oh, I'll manage somehow. Don't fret!" Nellie repeated, like a sullen echo. "The woist of it is, I oined my punishment by talking too much."

"That's true, Nellie, and I give you credit for suggesting a wonderful idea. I'm trying to carry it out now, and it will give immortal fame to both of us."

"Immortal for about fifteen minutes!" Nellie sniffed, "and fame that nobody will know of but ourselves! What's the use of that confidential fame?"

Memling sighed so deeply that Nellie regretted her temper. She was usually battling fiercely to ward off from him any discouragement, but now she was heaping it upon him.

"Forgive me for that outboist, Doik," she pleaded tenderly. "It's not you I'm abusing; it's the things that weigh you down like a coisse. I want you to be what you desoive to be, the famousest artist in the woild; and here you are squanderin' your genius on paintings that have to be rubbed off as soon as you get to America. Everything you do seems to put you deeper in the mire. You got a brain that's a poifect wonder, but you're exoitin' it only to cover yourself up deeper and darker, and drag you foither and foither down. It's like a man diggin' his own grave. He may be a fine ditch digger, and he may trim it off as neat as can be, but, after all, he's digging his own grave. And the better he does it, the woisse it is."

Memling put down his paint brushes and palette solemnly, and took his knee into his hands. Ordinarily he was petulant when Nellie interrupted the silence of his work with her chatter. But what she said now hurt him beyond peevishness.

"You're right, Nellie. We must get out of this rut. We're on the wrong road. If we can only carry this scheme through, we'll turn honest and upright. And we'll have money enough to afford it."

"That's what you always say, Doik. And it never woiks out. Either we don't get the cash we thought we would, or we spend it on a sploige, or lose it

somehow. Thieves' money seems to have more wings than honest money."

"I'm not so sure," said Memling. "My money flew away just the same when I earned it honestly. The main difference, I imagine, is that there's a general conspiracy among the plain people to make it difficult for a hard-working thief to get rich or stay rich. Our office hours have to be so irregular. And then, modern business seems to depend so heavily on advertising, and thieves don't dare advertise."

"Don't you believe it! I've read plenty of thieves' advoitisements," Nellie insisted.

"Oh, mining stocks, and patent medicines, and games of that sort. But even those are having their field narrowed more and more. Some day we might try how much we could steal in a big advertising campaign."

He had relieved his gloom by his favorite method of talking it away, and now he picked up his brush and palette once more.

"Meanwhile, let's clean up the harvest we've sown here. The job is almost finished. We ought to have sailed for America last week. Max Strubel is getting anxious, and De Vervins is growing so polite I'm sure he'll insult me in a few days."

Memling had, as he said, nearly completed his latest wholesale dishonesty in the congenial realm of the beautiful. He had persuaded the crooked art dealer, Max Strubel, of New York, to fund the enterprise. He had persuaded Strubel's foreign partner, the crooked art dealer, De Vervins, of Paris, to contribute twenty-five of the very masterpieces of modern European art. And he had worked for several weeks covering these over with paintings of his own.

In a few days he would be ready to return to New York, masquerading as an American artist who had spent a year or two in France, and was now bringing home his canvases. The customhouse inspectors would look them over, accept them for what they were supposed to be, and pass them through without dreaming of scraping off the surface paint and demanding the fifteen-per-cent duty levied on foreign paintings under twenty years old.

And inasmuch as these twenty-five paintings had a market value of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, the duty saved would be thirty-seven thousand five hundred dollars, of which Memling was to receive one-third as soon as he had successfully erased his own paintings, and restored the foreign pictures to the light of day.

One by one, he had painted over the canvases in their various sizes and shapes. Some of the painters who appealed to his art ideals, he hated to hide even for a few months. Others of them, that offended his prejudices, he wished he might suppress forever.

With almost the first of the concealed canvases unforeseen trouble had arrived. Nellie had posed for a peasant girl leaning against an oak, and the old French painter, La Berthe, had persuaded her to let him submit the painting to the jury of the Autumn Salon without letting Memling know of it till afterward.

The picture had been accepted, and Nellie was overjoyed till she told Memling the good news. He collapsed with horror as he reminded her of what she had quite forgotten—that his painting was resting upon a twenty-five-thousand-dollar canvas hallowed by another artist, no less a painter than Uzanne.

There was nothing to do, however, but leave it to be exhibited and remain the full period of the Salon. To recall it would rouse suspicion and inquiry. Memling could not afford to set the faintest match of suspicion to the fuse of inquiry. Besides, he had a gnawing curiosity to know what the critics would say of his work.

He did not dare, however, to tell the owner of the under picture what had happened to it. But De Vervins found it out. As soon as the Salon was opened, the critics fell foul of Memling's painting. It was original in handling, completely personal, full of observations that critics had not learned to make for themselves; so they hammered it hard.

Nellie was for "moidering" the critics one after another, but Memling rhapsodized: "It reminds me of the way they lambasted all the great innovators, Millet, and Manet, and Monet. We M's seem to get it, don't we? Just so the critics ridiculed painters who painted horses as they really run, instead of the way painters had painted them. Then along came the instantaneous photograph, and showed the truth. And now the critics won't endure a man who lacks the camera eye. It was the same way with Monet's full sunlight. The critics could not make head or tail of his fierce ambition to set his canvases ablaze with noon. And now that they are used to him, they can't tolerate old-fashioned light and shade. It's the same way with me. You remember how I struggled to see what I really saw, and then to nail it to the canvas without previous prejudices. The critics can't understand it. They don't remember how sunlight really would look in such a place. So they give me the broadax. But it only proves I'm a real painter, a seer, a faithful reporter. Nellie, I'll have to plead guilty to being a great genius."

Nellie was used to these moods. She merely answered:

"Help yourself to the molasses, Doik!"

The bludgeons of the critics gave Memling a sort of perverse encouragement. But they also brought down on his head the wrath of the owner of the canvas. De Vervins read the criticisms. Memling's name caught his eye. With him to think was to suspect.

He hurried to the Salon, found Memling's exhibit, and stood pondering it. The peasant leaning against the tree did not interest him. But the size of the canvas did. It reminded him of the dimensions of his Uzanne.

He hoped that it was not his beloved Uzanne, which he had reluctantly intrusted to Memling. But the size of it! While he was stewing over the problem, Uzanne himself strolled up, and, with unwitting generosity, praised this new man, Memling, to the skies, advised De Vervins to buy the painting, and make a fashion of Memling as he had of so many other pathfinders in art.

Something about the irony of this situation convinced De Vervins. He sent Memling a telegram to come to Paris at once, and when Memling reached there, asked him politely if by any chance his painting could be one of the overlays. Memling confessed that it was. With confirmed trepidation, De Vervins asked if the hidden work might be an Uzanne. Memling confessed that his painting was indeed superimposed on an Uzanne, and De Vervins proceeded to have hysterics.

Memling never mentioned Nellie's part in the affair, but took the blame on himself. Realizing the weakness of apologies in such a case, he fought fire with fire, and defied the lightning. Now De Vervins grew pathetic.

"What am I to do?" he whined. "The painting cost me thousands of francs; it should bring me in America better than a hundred thousand francs; and now it must perish under your miserable, imbecile, detestable daub. Worse yet, I hear that the French government wishes to buy your painting for the Luxembourg Gallery, and will offer you a thousand francs for it."

Memling almost expired at the compliment.

"The French government? The Luxembourg? Immortality! Oh, sell it to them, by all means!"

De Vervins squealed like a pig under a gate:

"And my hundred thousand francs! Who pays me those? And Uzanne! Who explains to him what has become of his painting when he asks? He goes to America himself next year. He expects this painting to be a missionary. He will wish to see it. Shall I tell him it is hanging in the Luxembourg under that atrocious crust of yours? Uzanne is a fighter; when he is angry he demands a duel. Will you fight him?"

"No," said Memling; "I could not kill a man who has taste enough to praise my work. But of course I really ought not to disappoint the French government. If it wishes my painting, it ought to have it."

"Name of a name of a name!" De Vervins broke out with frightful profanity.

But Memling only smiled.

"Don't worry. It will all turn out for the best."

And he left De Vervins clutching his skull as if he were trying to unscrew it from his spine.

II.

Memling chuckled all the way back to Montigny, and a nervous pottery maker in the compartment with him was convinced that he was a lunatic. Memling told Nellie about his interview, and reveled in the misery of De Vervins. He had a misery of his own, too, for the temptation to get into the Luxembourg was almost more than he could resist.

Nevertheless, he took pains that his other canvases should not be such as to tempt Nellie or La Berthe to exhibit them. He painted studies of casts, unfinished landscapes, still life, fruits and silver, copper utensils from the kitchen of the hotel, and life studies from the nude.

One of these was a nymph, a snowy-white nymph deploying her length along the bank of a stream. The River Loing posed for the stream out of doors, but Nellie posed for the nymph in the studio that Memling had sublet, and an old tapestry represented the mossy bank.

Nellie was restless, as usual, but this time it was because she was suffering from the effects of unwonted exercise in the sun. She had rowed a boat on the River Loing, and drifted about on its glowing surface with sleeves rolled high and throat open. In consequence, her tender skin was baked a painful brown. This moved her to say:

"Those fresh-air nymp's you alwavs see lolling round these paintings have always got skins like the after-taking ads of a beauty parlor. But if those dames really stayed out in the sun and rain all summer, they'd have hides like a punkin pie. Here I been rowing around that toy river a few days, and my arms and neck are so sunboined I look as if I had Indian blood breakin' out on me in spots. If a nymp' lived outdoors all her life, she'd be cooked to a toin. And she'd have big feet and hands, and her hair full of burs. For what would she comb it with? I wonder some of these artists don't get wise and do a real nymp'!"

"That's a great idea, Nellie. You shall be a real nymph, and the tint of your neck and forearms shall be your general color scheme."

"All right, Doik, and it'll be as good as a soimon to some of these near-artists."

Her enthusiasm flickered before Memling's next idea:

"Another thing, Nellie, it's hopeless to get real open-air effects in a stuffy studio like this. We'll find some hidden nook in the forest, and you can pose there."

"Outdoors?"

"Outdoors."

"In the all-at-once?"

"Well, let us say you don a little classic drapery."

"A Toikish bath sheet? Not while I got my health; and strength enough to resist," Nellie averred. "Ump-umm, Doik; a coupla ump-umms!"

Memling pleaded: "But it's all for the sake of art and truth and reality, and——"

"Those things never got me anything. And all they'd get me outdoors would be being arrested by a French John Darm or infested with a bronichal cough."

"There wouldn't be the slightest danger of that."

"Suppose somebody comes along."

"The forest is practically deserted in the morning, and we'll find a secluded spot, and to make assurance doubly sure, we'll take along a scout to warn us."

"Just as much obliged, but no, thank you!"

"All right," Memling sulked, "if you don't want to help me. I feel that I could do something great, something epoch-making."

"In that case, o' course," and she quoted as she surrendered, "in the

woids of Joshua Whitcomb Riley, 'I got nothin' at all to say, my daughter; nothin' at all to say.'"

III.

It was a bright morning in August, and three solitary horsemen on bicycles might have been seen threading the loneliest, grassiest roads of the great thicket of Fontainebleau. One of the three men was a woman. They sought one of those characteristic Fontainebleauish spots, a sort of reversed oasis, a patch of desert in the green woods, where outcropping bowlders seemed to be flung and heaped like a giant child's neglected playthings. It was a sort of cave turned inside out, and drenched with sunlight.

There was only one path of approach, and Memling stationed the scout there, at a safe distance.

While Nellie was removing her twentieth-century clothes and arraying herself in classic drapery, Memling was setting up his easel. The canvas was especially large. Before Memling had received it on trust it had revealed a scene in a café by Théophile Tonty. Memling hated the canvas; he hated all of Tonty's work. It was to him an anarchy of drawing, and a chaos of color, an affectation of eccentricity in place of individuality. But Tonty had the public at his feet, and his mannerisms and pretenses were hailed as genius. And the value of this canvas was fifteen thousand dollars.

Memling had not intended to spend much time on the concealment of this picture, but Nellie had kindled a desire to paint a realistic nymph in a real glare of sun.

He soon had Nellie instructed in the pose he had decided upon, a graceful reclining attitude among great bowlders, with the face full of vague animal wonder.

The pose was one of infinite grace; but Nellie found her resting place on the rocks anything but pleasant. She grew petulant with Memling:

"Leave me here a while longer and I'll be the color of molasses."

"Be quiet a little longer, and you'll be the living original of a masterpiece."

"If I live."

A shrill whistle broke up the quarrel. The scout had scented a wanderer. Nellie was frozen for a moment into such a statue as Diana must have made when she saw that Actæon saw her in swimming. The scout came running up with his warning, bringing it in person.

Nellie was angry enough to have turned the rash youth into a stag for his hounds to tear to pieces; but in the first place she lacked the goddesslike power, if not the goddesslike beauty; and in the second, she had no hounds to tear him to pieces.

Clutching the toga with shaking fingers, she rolled awkwardly off her rock, and crawled on all fours into a sort of cave, calling to Memling:

"Hoil a rock at that infoinal cub!"

The youth came crashing through the shrubbery, gasping:

"Attention, m'sieu'; prenez garde, m'sieu'!"

"Prenez garde yourself!" shouted Memling. "Get out! *Eloignez-vous, décampez, scootez-vous* to the *diable!"*

Memling could only stop his advance by running to meet him halfway. He seized him and shook him and how-dare-you'd him. He shook out of him the information that strangers were advancing. Memling peered from the rock and saw, indeed, a family sauntering merrily his way. To his horror, he saw that they carried lunch baskets.

He ran to tell Nellie, who gave him one look. It had all the reproach and profanity and wrath in the world. If that look could have been spelled, it would have to be printed with a dash.

Memling shriveled before it, then ran, gathered her things together, shoved them into the lair where she had retreated, and, clutching up easel and canvas, fled himself with much scattering of brushes.

Straight to the open-air studio climbed the family, a family of small shopkeepers out for a day of fresh air. They sat down where the easel had been, and spread out a cloth for lunch-

eon. The children showed a desire to explore, and were just making their way to Nellie's hiding place when the mother announced that the feast was ready.

Nellie grew desperate with delay. The cranny into which she had glided was so small that she could not sit up straight in it. But she grimly set to work to get back into her things and make ready for escape. The frequent collisions of her skull with the low roof did not improve her temper.

Just about the time the family finished lunch and the good man of the family spread a handkerchief over his face and prepared for a nap, Nellie was ready to crawl out. The children discovered her, and stared in terror. She put her finger to her lips, and hypnotized them for the time being into silence.

Memling stole from his adjoining cavern and followed, lugging his big canvas, the stool, brushes, and color box. He began to apologize, but Nellie slashed him with a look like a broadsword.

It was not till after luncheon that she showed a sign of ever speaking to him again. Then she suddenly exploded into laughter.

"It's a good thing I loined to dress in a lower boith on a sleepin' car!"

Memling began to laugh with relief. She turned on him:

"How dare you laugh! How dare you!"

He sobered instantly. She frowned a while. Then she began anew to giggle, to cachinate, to shriek, and this ended in a good cry.

Memling was so afraid of her that he would not venture to ask her to resume the sittings. He just sat about, looking mournful, and casting sad glances toward the neglected canvas.

At last, on the second day, Nellie said:

"Say, Doik, when you going to begin woik on the nymp' again?"

"The minute you say the word," he gasped.

"All right. Come along."

So they returned to the unwalled studio. Only this time Memling stole a number of signs from various parts of the forest, signs forbidding people to pass, "path-closed" signs, and even one that warned the wayfarers against explosives.

He set these up round about the retreat, and they were not interrupted again.

As Memling worked he fell into his stride, and fell more and more in love with his subject. He was given insight into the dazzling reality of the sun flow, the deep riches of the shadows; given power to transfer them to canvas, and courage to refuse to see with academic eyes.

For days he toiled while Nellie labored almost equally hard to keep immobile, and yet to look alive, for the model must collaborate with the artist, or the work will lack soul.

Memling's lifelong training and feeling for sculpture inspired him to endow the body of the nymph with melody of line, and the roundness, the solidity of reality. His new passion for light and color fired him to constant discoveries, novel mixtures of tint and truths of value. He was unhampered and unafraid.

He spent days at it for every hour he had meant to spend. And when it was done he looked on his work with shameless pride. As a piece of craftsmanship, the canvas was already a classic; as a document in mythology it was as epoch-making as Millet's peasants. Millet painted the poor as they really looked. Memling established the nymph as she must have been if she had ever been, blistered with sun and wind and rain, unkempt and savage, yet strangely, wildly beautiful.

"It's a miracle, Nellie! I've got it! It's great, that's all; it's great!"

"He admits it himself," said Nellie. Then she went to the canvas, stared at it, and adored it. It had not only the technical bravura that the artist would admire, but the winsome charm that appeals to the common people.

Nellie gazed, and a tear rolled out of each eye. Memling stared at her:

"Why the tears? Is it so disappointing?"

"It's so beautiful it makes me want to cry. And then, when I think that you're going to wash it all off, I get so choined up I want to scream. Oh, you can't destroy that, Doik!"

Memling's eyes filmed with dark revolt as he muttered:

"But underneath it is a Tonty worth fifteen thousand dollars."

"Your nymp' is woith a dozen Tonties. Couldn't we poichase the Tonty and just leave it lay?"

"How much can you contribute toward the price?"

"About thoity cents."

"I'm afraid the nymph will have to go."

"Sumpum tells me you'll never destroy her, Doik."

His brows writhed, and his teeth set hard as he murmured:

"The same something tells me the same thing."

IV.

This time Memling and Nellie made the same steamer. They were not entirely glad to be bound homeward. Artists acquire a secondary patriotism, and it is usually to France. Memling and Nellie had the normal amount of Fourth of July in their blood, but America meant danger to them. It meant that they walked among snares.

Memling's past crimes had gone undetected, but he was sure that they were not forgotten by their victims. Detectives were doubtless still looking alive to some of them, and every corner that was turned, every ring of a doorbell might mean the arrival of some vengeance in uniform.

Furthermore, Memling, who was such a believer in personality in art, could not but realize that crime has also its personality. Every lawbreaker leaves his autograph somewhere, and the multiplication of crimes is the subtraction of alternatives. Gradually the possibilities narrow down, and cancellation brings the pursuers closer to the one mind that could have carried out all these similar schemes.

So Memling grew haggard at the thought of landing in America. For all he knew half a dozen detectives would be waiting to battle for him. It is times like these that try the criminal's soul, and tempt him to be disloyal to his profession.

Memling did not dread the ordeal of passing through the customhouse with his paintings. That would be a jovial adventure. He could pose as an artist, for he was an artist. His pictures must be accepted as the work of an artist, for he was deeply satisfied that they were the highest of art. But during his absence in France, what might have been brewing he could not know.

The ever-hovering fear of a thief is that some confederate may turn stool pigeon to buy from the police mercy for other crimes. Some of Memling's fellows would some day surely do the same; perhaps Gold-tooth Lesher had already betrayed him. But that was for the future. Thinking could not find it out. The future alone could unveil itself.

Meanwhile, the sea air was glorious; the voyage was smooth, and the deck slid across the ocean like a huge flat car. At table they were seated with half a dozen assorted Americans. Some of these were of the pushing sort; one of them particularly an aggressive bigot who made patriotism almost odious.

He informed everybody that his name was Tice.

"James G. Tice, of Sent Paul, Minn. I'm not one of your measly double L. D.'s or Ph. D.'s, but I wear the title of L. C. B. B. M."

You were expected to ask what all that might mean, whereupon he would wag his head, and answer, with a sly smile:

"That's a title that fools 'em all. L. C. B. B. M.! I've had college professors with the headache over that. It means Largest Canner of Baked Beans in Minnesota. See? L. C. B. B. M.—Largest Canner of Baked Beans in Minnesota. That's me. Fact is, I pack more baked beans than any other two in the whole State put together. But that makes the title a little too long.

Pretty good, eh? When I meet any of these long-horned college men with their A. M.'s and P. M.'s and M. D.'s and D. D.'s, I spring that on 'em. Never found anybody who could guess it yet."

At the first meal aboard, Mr. Tice had introduced himself to the first comer at the table; also he introduced himself to the second comer; then he introduced the other two to each other. He nominated himself chairman, and elected himself unanimously.

Memling and Nellie had expected to meet no one. They had tried to get a table for two, but arrived at the chief steward's altar too late. Mr. Tice introduced himself to them, and then had the effrontery to introduce them to the others. The others looked sheepish, but, once the job was done, everybody assumed to know everybody.

Tice winked at the rest, and tossed Memling his card. Memling glanced at it and thanked him. Tice waited a moment, then asked:

"Did you get on to the title?"

Memling glanced at the card again, and said:

"Ah, yes," and resumed his conversation with Nellie.

Tice fidgeted, and when he could endure the indifference no longer, insinuated:

"Ever know anybody with that title before?"

"No," said Memling, and returned to Nellie.

"I bet you can't guess what the title means," Tice urged, growing frantic.

"I bet I couldn't, either," said Memling.

Tice was a trifle beady about the brow. He would not have his life joke ignored. So he nudged Memling, asked himself the question, and answered it.

"Very ingenious," Memling tossed over his shoulder. Tice would not be dismissed:

"It's true, too. Have you ever been to Minnesota? No? Never seen Sent Paul? The idea! And you coming back from Europe! I tell you a man's got no right to go traipsing over foreign countries till he's seen his own."

"No?" said Memling.

"I'm one of those see-America-first fellows. Europe's got the ruins, but we've got the men. There's people that go punting on the Thames every year that don't know whether the Mississippi is a river or a lake!"

"Which is it?" said Memling, with malicious ignorance.

"The Thames!" said Tice, fairly expectorating the "T." "The Thames! Why, you could pour ten Thameses in the Mississippi and not raise a ripple. And you could lose the Rhine and the Rhone and the Rhene and the Rhune and never find 'em. The Mississippi starts, you know, just a little above our city. Yes, you might say the river gets its first real start at Sent Paul. Ever seen Sent Anthony's Falls? No? They belong to Minneapolis, of course, but they're very pretty in spite of that! You've never seen Sent Anthony's Falls? It's a shame!"

"I've seen many of his temptations," Memling said, "but I always understood that he didn't have any falls."

"Don't you believe it," said Mr. Tice. "They run the biggest flour mills in the world."

"He must have been a saint when his very lapses do such noble work," said Memling.

Mr. Tice had just returned from his first hasty view of the Old World, and he did not like it.

"Europe is the biggest con game in the world," he proclaimed. "Nothing but a side show. Everybody's out for the American dollar. Everybody's got his hand out for tips."

"Don't they give tips in St. Paul?" said Memling.

"Well, of course they do! Do you think we're in the backwoods? We've got some of the finest hotels in the world there in Sent Paul. Of course we tip. What do you think we are?"

But inconsistencies never annoy as energetic and forthright a soul as Tice's. Memling did not attempt to point out any of the large industrial achievements, the mechanical and commercial and scientific accomplishments of Europe. He was afraid to answer

any of Tice's arguments for fear he would bring down more of them.

Another member of the round table, however, was a Mr. Brundage, who was the exact opposite and opponent of Tice. Mr. Brundage had lived abroad for a few years, zealously endeavoring to conceal or atone for his American birth. He was as unfair to America as Tice to Europe. They wrangled all the way across the ocean. They were equally fallacious and emphatic in defense and assault. Memling wanted to knock their heads together.

Nellie acquired a special odium for Tice. She said to Memling one day, as they sat tucked up in their deck chairs:

"That Tice hasn't got brains enough in his head to make a koinel for a peanut. I'm goin' to advise him to take his own bean and bake it—and can it."

"Let him alone," said Memling, "or he'll ask you if you know what his title means."

"He's been trying for days to woim out of you what your business is. Whyn't you tell him you're the smallest eater of baked beans in the univoise?"

"Sh-h!" said Memling. "Speak of the devil, and you sniff sulphur."

Along came Tice, who was doing the deck trot as if he were plowing a furrow. Seeing Memling and Nellie, he stopped at their feet, and, without invitation, sat down on the end of Memling's steamer chair. Memling would gladly have kicked him over the rail, but his feet were bundled up in the blanket.

Tice was evidently laboring under an anxiety. It came out soon. He could no longer tolerate his ignorance of Memling's business. He began with conspicuous carelessness:

"Does your business take you to Europe often, Mr. Memling?"

"Not often," said Memling.

"Been away long?"

"Not very."

"Glad to get back?"

"Not especially."

"What do you think of the outlook for fall trade?"

"Not much."

"Beans have been rather hard and slow, too. Any signs of a pick-up in your line?"

"None to speak of."

"Let me see—I didn't just get what your business was."

"Didn't you?" There was a silence of acute discomfort. Tice had maneuvered Memling into a corner. He could not get out without violent discourtesy. Memling writhed at the invasion of his sacred right to have a business of his own and mind it, but it was hard for him to be brutally rude, so he sighed: "I am a painter."

"A painter! Is that so? No wonder you couldn't guess what my title meant. Well, it must be a very nice kind of a business. I don't know much about ar-rt, but I know what I like. I started to go through the Loover there in Paris, but gee whiz, it's a regular Marathon, ain't it? After I'd walked about ten blocks, I was blind and stiff-necked and spavined, and hollerin' for a guide to lead me to the nearest door. Some very nice work there, though—yep, some right classy stuff. Sorry I missed the Monna Lizzie. Somebody stole her before I got there. I must say, I don't hanker much after the old masters. The paint looks so tired. We got some fine frescoes and things out in our State capitol. Ever see it? But you said you'd never been to Sent Paul."

"Yes—no!"

"Just what is your line?"

"I haven't any."

"I mean, do you go in for landscapes, or portraits, or just fancy pictures?"

"Just fancy pictures, I imagine."

"Ever do any advertising work?"

"Not yet."

"There's the field for an up-to-date artist. Some of those fellows get big immense prices for clothing ads and breakfast-food pictures. High as a couple of hundred dollars."

Nellie broke in wrathfully: "Mr. Memling wouldn't look at anything less than a coupla thousand, would you, Doik?"

"Well, I might look at it."

Tice was overwhelmed: "You must turn out some mighty smooth stuff!"

He took off his hat and mopped the inner band.

"He's got a picture hanging in the Salong de l'Otong now," said Nellie.

"You don't say so! He must be some painter!"

"The French gov'ment is trying to buy it off him now for the Looksongboig Gallery."

"You don't tell me!" said Tice. "I wish I could see some of it. Got any samples with you?"

"You've got one picture in your stateroom, haven't you, Doik?"

"The nymph—oh, yes; but Mr. Tice wouldn't be interested in her."

"Wouldn't I, though? I'd give a lot to see it. Maybe—— Well, I wish I could get a peek at it."

"Maybe—some day," said Memling wearily. Tice lingered uncomfortably, then rose and stumbled on. His backward bow was marked by a new homage. When he was out of hearing, Nellie began to bubble with a new idea.

"I tell you what, Doik. That bean moichant's gotta lotta dough. Like as not, if we woiked him, you could get a job painting his portrait."

"A portrait of a baked bean?"

"What's the diff, so long as he comes across with the price? Show him the Sunboint Nymph, and that'll clinch it."

"He'll fall dead at the sight of it."

"You can't tell. You'll have to go pretty far West before you find a man that's impoivious to that kind of art. Go on, let me show it to him."

"Anything you say," yawned Memling. "I'm too sleepy to care."

V.

Memling had packed the other paintings in cases consigned to the hold, but the Sunburnt Nymph he was afraid to trust below hatches. He wanted this picture where he could gloat over it. He kept it in his cabin.

And there one morning Mr. Tice visited him for a sight of the masterpiece. Membling explained the idea. Mr. Tice breathed rather hard when the canvas flashed upon him, but it was a pleasurable excitement.

"It's great," he said, after a long stare. "It's sure nifty; it's the goods, all right, all right. It would be grand in a lithograph or one of those three-color half tones. I been looking for a genuine work of classy art that would do for a kind of a trade-mark. You remember how those soap people used that 'Bubbles' picture? If I had something like that I could give away a large-size copy without printing on it for so many cuepons. I could use a small plate of it on the cans, too. And I could use it in the ads, something like this: 'I wish I had a can of Tice's nonborated beans,' or: 'In primeval times they lived on roots and nuts; nowadays we have Tice's enticing beans.' Our copy man could think up just the thing."

Memling stared at him with eyes full of wrath at the sacrilege. He was a priest listening to blasphemy. He wanted to hurl Tice from the stateroom, but, as usual, when his wrath flamed fiercest, his language was most cool.

"My dear Mr. Tice," he murmured, "you haven't got money enough to buy this work for any such purpose."

He could not have touched Tice's pride on a quicker nerve.

"Not money enough!" Tice roared. "I guess you don't realize how many cans of beans I sell in a year. I got money enough to buy the Statue of Liberty, and put a can of beans in place of her torch."

"Well, go get her if she's on the market," said Memling. "This painting isn't." And he put it away as if the very look of Tice profaned it.

The men separated, Tice full of rage at defeat, and Memling fuming at his impudence. Nellie was more furious still. But it was like Memling to retreat from any position in which anybody agreed with him fervidly.

The more Nellie raged at Tice's presumption, the more Memling began to believe that there might be something to say in his favor.

"Of course, in a way," he pondered

aloud, "if an artist or an author has done good work, the more widely it is published, the better. If the painting were hung in a private gallery, a dozen people might see it in six months. If it were hung in the Metropolitan Art Museum, a few hundred would glance at it every day. If it were used for an advertisement, millions would see it again and again. Copies of it would be framed and hung up in thousands of homes. It would be doing a great work for the cause of art. It would be educating——"

"Good night, noisse," said Nellie. "When you begin that education stuff, it's all over but the last act. Good-by, Miss Nymp'!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that you've decided to sell that tanned lady to that bean moichant."

Memling sighed. "It's an artist's fate to sell his children, Nellie. Writers may have shelves full of their own works without diminishing their prosperity, but the poor painter must send his dream waifs out into the world."

"Don't pull out that sob stop, Doik. You'll have me boo-hooin' in a minute. Speak up like a man, and say: 'Nellie, we've got a chance to sell sumpum that belongs to somebody else, so I don't see how we can refuse.'"

Memling grinned sheepishly. "All right, Nellie, consider it said. But how much are we going to get for it? Since we're selling stolen goods, we deserve a high price, eh?"

"Well, I hate to copy your methods, but I really believe we're doing a noble bit this time. Anything that hoits Strubel is a voituous deed, and it's soitainly good woik to take money away from anybody who's got as little right to it as that bean butcher."

With this campaign agreed upon, they did not, of course, approach Tice with a request to reopen his offer. They pretended to have forgotten the incident altogether. And, of course, as resolute a cannery king as Tice declined to accept the first rebuff. The next day he was perched on Memling's steamer chair again, saying:

"Mr. Memling, I'm a man of few words. I'll take that painting off your hands for five hundred dollars."

"Mr. Tice," Memling echoed, "I'm a man of few words, too. You will not."

Tice thought a while, and ventured: "Six hundred, then."

"Six hundred, never!"

Several waves had flopped against the ship's side before Tice came in with a tidal wave:

"What would you say to a thousand?"

"Nothing at all."

"Good Lord, I could get five first-class illustrations for that!"

"Why don't you? I'm sure this nymph wouldn't be of the slightest use to you."

"I guess I'm the best judge of the bean-booming business."

"Perhaps. But, if you don't mind, I'll take a little nap. This sea air, you know."

The hand he put up to mask his outrageous yawn fell at his side, his eyelids drooped, and his breathing was slow and shallow.

Tice turned to Nellie. "Can't you use your infloonce?"

Nellie said: "Sh-h! Let the poor fellow sleep. I'll take a toin round the deck with you." And she tiptoed away with Tice at heel. Memling, lifting one eyelid to glance after them, smiled, and said to himself: "He's putty in Nellie's hands!" and felt so sure of her that he really fell asleep.

"The trouble with these artists," Nellie began, "is that they don't know the value of money. He told me he wouldn't take ten thou for that."

"Ten thousand dollars!" howled Tice, as they breasted the gale on the forward turn.

"It isn't woith it to you, I know," said Nellie, purposely keeping out of step with him so that his incessant efforts to get back into step with her might jiggle his brain. "Artists are always picking the wrong woik for their best. Now, I don't think the Nymp' is a patch on the Peasant Goil."

Tice brightened up: "The Peasant

Girl! Now, maybe she'd go better with beans. Maybe I'd better buy the Peasant Girl."

"Oh, but she's hanging in the Salong. See, here she is in the catalogue. I happened to be looking it over this forenoon."

Tice looked and saw her duly registered at the hotel of canvases. He grew zealous for her.

"Now, I might pay a higher price with the Salong tag on her. It would be a better advertisement. I guess I'll take her."

"Unfortunately," said Nellie, "the French gov'ment has beat you to her. The President of France has offered fifteen thousand dollars for her."

"You don't tell me!"

"He wants to hang it in the White House, or the Maisong Blong, as they call it over there."

"Is that possible? He's some painter, ain't he?"

"He's some, and then some!"

"Too bad I missed that one!"

"But it's just as good advoitisement to say that this is by the author of the famous Shay-doiver now hanging in the president's lib'ary."

"That's so. Well, I might go as high as five thousand for it. It's an awful wrench, but I might make it."

"It wouldn't do any good. I'm not sure he'd even let it go for ten thousand. Mr. What-you-may-call him, the pickle prince, offered him six thousand, and Doik just laughed. Pierpont Morgan offered him eight thousand five hundred, and only got insulted."

Tice was figuring up how many beans it would take to pay for the painting at fifteen cents a can retail, and three thousand seven hundred and thirty-nine beans in an average can by actual count. The total appalled him. It amounted to a whole skyful of beans—a Beany Way across the heavens. But he was a stubborn man once he got hold of an idea.

Nellie walked him round the deck till his tongue was hanging out, and finally she led him up to where Dirk was lying fast asleep. She spoke to him several times before he looked up drowsily.

"Well, Doik," said Nellie, "I couldn't convince Mr. Tice that he didn't want that picture. I never saw a man with such detoimination. No wonder he's the biggest bean booster in Nebraska—or wherever it is. He's offering you ten thousand now."

Memling frowned reprovingly. "I don't see how a man can succeed in business who is so extravagant!"

"I can afford it, I guess," growled Tice.

Finally Memling yielded. Tice asked only one thing—a photograph of his check to use in the advertisements. He agreed to furnish the camera. When he went to get it, Nellie said:

"We better have an extra copy of that snapshot, and get it framed. Heaven knows the photograph will be all we'll have to remember it by."

"I wonder what we'll tell Strubel," said Memling.

"You got time to think up a good story. And it'll have to be a boid to get past Strubie."

VI.

The day after he landed, Memling invited Strubel to the old studio, which he had reopened. The thirty canvases, all but two, were unpacked and aligned along the walls. Strubel stared at them incredulously.

"There they are," said Memling. "They came through the customs as if they had skids on them."

"I see a lot of chromos, and they're all rotten!"

"Thank you, Strubie," said Memling. "I was dreading this moment. I was so afraid you might admire my work. That would have been a blow to all my hopes. Now I know it's good art—you don't like it."

Strubel frowned. "I'm not int'rested in your chokes. I'm int'rested in the pictures that De Ferfank gave you."

"There they are," said Memling. "Under the rose. All that is needed now is the application of a bottle or two of my secret restorer."

"Vell, get bissy," said Strubel, and hurried away.

A few days later he was there again, and now the canvases were aglow with the work of many distinguished artists, each in his own sphere, with his own style. Strubel greeted them with joy, welcomed them to the city. His hands clasped and rolled together.

"T'irty mesterpieces, and feefteen per cent saved on the toody," he chortled. "Now, all ve gotta do is sell 'em."

"That should be easy for one of your ——" Memling began graciously; then he paused, for Strubel was counting the pictures. He shook his fat forefinger at each of them in turn, then paused, bewildered, and counted again.

"I only make it tventy-eight, Memlink. Count 'em yourselluf!"

"I could never hope to count better than you, Strubie. There are only twenty-eight there."

"But De Ferfank wrote me he gave you t-t-t'irty!" he stammered.

"So he did."

"Vell?"

"Well, I had a strange accident with one of them—the Uzanne. After I had covered it over with one of my own paintings, which you find so rotten, a French painter—La Berthe, whose work you would love, for it really is rotten—he had the impudence to send my painting, unbeknownst to me, to the Autumn Salon, and the jury was imbecile enough to take it and hang it. I couldn't get it back. The French government wanted to buy it, but I nobly declined. You wouldn't let me wait till the exhibition closes, so De Vervins will ship it over to me in your care with a letter speaking of it as my work, so there'll be no duty to pay on it."

Strubel was grossly indignant, but he could do nothing in the matter. He reverted to the other missing picture:

"But the udder one—vere iss it?"

"I don't know. Ask of the waves that wildly roar."

Strubel, growing frantic, turned to Nellie:

"Vere iss it?"

"You can soich me! It's on the ocean somewheres."

"The ocean! The ocean!"

"Yes," Memling spoke with eager haste. "You see, I brought one of the paintings over in my stateroom. Some friends wanted to see it, so I took it up on deck, where the light was brighter. One of the passengers carried it to the rail to see better. Just then a big gust of wind came along and blew a dozen steamer caps overboard. The painting went with them. I was going to leap overboard for it, but I was forcibly restrained."

Strubel dallied with apoplexy a long while. He went to the divan like an avalanche. He grew calmer; he became more himself. When he returned to himself, the story Memling had just told recurred to his memory.

"I don't believe it! It is a lie!"

Memling smiled. "It's a good one, though, isn't it?"

Strubel looked like all the Herods. "You bring me that paintink or I—I put you in chail for life! I sue you for demaches!"

Memling beamed on him patiently: "And will you tell the court the whole story of the transaction, the smuggling, and all that? Will you let them confiscate the twenty-nine? Be reasonable, Strubie. The Tonty is gone forever. Make the best of it."

"You—you—oh, you——" Strubel sputtered, his own wrath throttling him, and his brain aching for a terrible enough word.

"I admit all you'd like to say," said Memling. "But I've done my best. I brought you over twenty-nine-thirtieths of my cargo. Circumstances that were more powerful than I have taken the Tonty off the market. But it is all for the best. The Tonty was very bad. It would have done you no credit, Strubie."

Strubel sat glaring. Suddenly his eyes lighted up.

"I vas to pay you swölf t'ousant dollars for your share. The Tonty is vort fünfzehn t'ousant. Give me drei t'ousant dollars and I call it sqvare."

Memling looked at Nellie. "He's funny, isn't he, Nellie? Wouldn't he be great in musical comedy? Me give you three thousand dollars, Strubie?

Hasn't he a wonderful imagination, Nellie?"

"He'll be trying to squeeze blood from a toinup next," said Nellie.

Strubel had to make the best of it. "I deserve it," he said, "for trusting you. My only consolation is I don't pay you your share."

"I shouldn't expect it," said Memling, with a promptness that startled Strubel. "I can't tell you how I regret the loss of the picture."

Strubel wandered away like a somnambulist after seeing his twenty-eight masterpieces carried from the studio to his own building. He wondered what Memling's game was. He wondered how Memling planned to keep from starving.

Memling and Nellie danced a turkey trot of triumph after he had gone. They had robbed a thief, spoiled the spoiler, and they had big money in the bank.

The bell rang. A messenger boy brought a letter from a New York hotel. Memling signed the book, tipped the boy, and opened the letter. He handed it mutely to Nellie. It was from Tice:

DEAR MR. MEMLING: On consulting with my partner, who met me at the pier, I find that he is unwilling to O. K. my purchase of your painting. Have, therefore, been compelled to telegraph to St. Paul to stop payment on the check. Am sending the painting to you this afternoon, charges prepaid.

Regretting any inconvenience this may have caused you. Yours truly,

J. G. TICE.

Nellie and Memling looked at each other. Their looks were a funeral march.

"The——" Nellie began.

"Don't waste breath on him," said Memling.

"But can't you sue him or sumpum?"

"Like Strubie, the farther I can keep from the courthouse the comfortabler I'll be."

"Take the picture to Strubel and tell him you just found it."

"And rub out the sunburnt nymph?"

"Oh, no; you couldn't do that. But we haven't got a cent."

"We've had our trip to Paris, though. And I've learned what a great painter I am."

"But we haven't got a cent."

"Don't worry. Satan finds some mischief still."

SOLITAIRE IN COLUMBUS

NOT long ago the police of Columbus raided a tailor shop and arrested nine knights of the needle and goose whom they charged with playing poker. The prisoners were taken before Samuel Osborn, the police cadi of the city.

"Dismissed," was the decree of the court. "There is no law against playing solitaire."

"But there were nine of them playing together," protested the prosecutor.

"But it takes nine tailors to make a man," was the supplemental ruling. "And one man can't play poker."

UNTOUCHED

AT the Democratic convention in Baltimore last summer two of the sergeants-at-arms were Ohioans: Colonel John Bolan, of Toledo, and Captain Joseph Dowling, of Dayton. Bolan is the wit who laid down the maxim that "anny man who parts his hair in the middle is no Dimmycrat."

When Cardinal Gibbons had finished the opening prayer, he descended from the rostrum and made his way toward the door. As he neared the exit where the two Ohio men were on guard, Bolan whispered:

"Joe, touch him whin he passes ye."

"All right, colonel," replied Dowling, with an innocent air. "What pocket has he got it in?"

This amazing mystery story began in the POPULAR issued two weeks ago. Ask for the first January number.

The Mind Master

By Burton E. Stevenson

Author of "The Marathon Mystery," "The Boule Cabinet," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS.

While summering in the Bronx, Godfrey, a reporter, discovers strange neighbors in an adjoining mansion which is surrounded by a twelve-foot wall. At twelve o'clock each night he has witnessed the fall of a mysterious star that regularly bursts over two white-robed figures standing on the roof of the secluded house. Godfrey invites his lawyer friend, Lester (who tells the story), to view the midnight spectacle. Seeing it together leads them to decide to solve the enigma during Lester's four days' visit. Godfrey has already ascertained that the mansion is the property of a rich, queer old man, Worthington Vaughan, who lives there with his only child, a daughter. Perched in a tree next day, Lester witnesses an extraordinary pantomime enacted by three white-robed figures in the wall-inclosed premises—Worthington Vaughan, his daughter and a swarthy man who appears to be forcing the father and daughter to some serious issue. The girl, Marjorie Vaughan, espies Lester, and throws a letter over the wall to him. It is addressed to one Frederic Swain, who happens to be then in Lester's office studying law. Lester telephones Swain to come to him in the Bronx. When he arrives the revelation is made that Marjorie Vaughan and he had plighted troth in earlier days, and now the girl begs him to meet her in the garden some night within three days, or it will be "too late." Ladders are procured and Swain scales the wall that night, while Godfrey and Lester wait in the darkness. Swain returns to them, evidently bewildered; also his wrist is bleeding. A woman's scream is heard and Swain again rushes up the ladder and over the wall. Godfrey and Lester follow. A scene of horror greets the two men upon reaching the Vaughan mansion. Worthington Vaughan has been strangled to death by means of a knotted cord; Swain, apparently out of his senses, is administering to Marjorie, who has fainted. Upstairs, Godfrey and Lester searching for help, come across a Hindu mystic and his cobra staring in a trance at a huge crystal globe.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FRESH ENIGMA.

GODFREY met my eyes with a little, deprecating smile, put his torch in one pocket, took a handkerchief from another, and mopped his forehead.

"Rather nerve-racking, wasn't it, Lester?" he remarked, and then his gaze wandered to the couch, and he stepped toward it quickly.

I saw that a change had come in Miss Vaughan's condition. Her eyes were still closed, but her body no longer lay inert and lifeless, for from moment to moment it was shaken by a severe nervous tremor. Godfrey's face was very grave as he looked at her.

"Stop stroking her wrists, Swain," he said. "That does no good," and when Swain, without answering or seeming to hear, kept on stroking them, Godfrey drew the hands away, took Swain by the arm, and half lifted him to his feet. "Listen to me," he said more sternly, and shook him a little, for Swain's eyes were dull and vacant. "I want you to sit quietly in a chair for a while, till you get your senses back. Miss Vaughan is seriously ill, and must not be disturbed in any way. I'm going to get a doctor and a nurse at once; they'll do what needs to be done. Until then she must be left alone. Understand?"

Swain nodded vaguely, and permitted Godfrey to lead him to a chair near the outer door, where he sat down. As his hand fell across the arm of the chair, I could see that a little blood was still oozing from the wound on the wrist. Godfrey saw it, too, and picked up the hand and looked at it. Then he laid

it gently down again, and glanced at his watch. I followed his example, and saw that it was half past one.

"Have you nerve enough to stay here half an hour by yourself, Lester?" he asked.

"By myself?" I echoed, and glanced at the dead man and at the quivering girl.

"I've got to run over to my place to get a few things and do some telephoning," he explained. "We must get a doctor up here at once; and then there's the police—I'll try to get Simmonds. Will you stay?"

"Yes," I said, "of course. But please get back as soon as you can."

"I will," he promised, and, after a last look around the room, stepped out upon the walk.

I went to the door and looked after him until the sound of his footsteps died away. Then, feeling very lonely, I turned back into the room. Those regular tremors were still shaking the girl's body in a way that seemed to me most alarming, but there was nothing I could do for her, and I finally pulled a chair to Swain's side. He, at least, offered a sort of companionship. He was sitting with his head hanging forward in a way that reminded me most unpleasantly of the huddled figure by the table, and did not seem to be aware of my presence. I tried to draw him into talk, but a slight nod from time to time was all I could get from him, and I finally gave it up. Mechanically my hand sought my coat pocket, and got out my pipe—yes, that was what I needed; and, sitting down in the open doorway, I filled it and lighted up.

My nerves grew calmer presently, and I was able to think connectedly of the events of the night, but there were two things which, looked at from any angle, I could not understand. One was Swain's dazed and incoherent manner; the other was the absence of servants.

As to Swain, I believed him to be a well-poised fellow, not easily upset, and certainly not subject to attacks of nerves. What had happened to him, then, to reduce him to the pitiable condition in which he had come back to us over the wall, and in which he was still plunged? The discovery of the murder and of Miss Vaughan's senseless body might have accounted for it, but his incoherence had antedated that—unless, indeed, he knew of the murder before he left the grounds. That thought gave me a sudden shock, and I put it away from me, not daring to pursue it farther.

As to the house, its deserted condition seemed sinister and threatening. It was absurd to suppose that an establishment such as this could be carried on without servants, or with less than three or four. But where were they? And then I remembered that Godfrey and I had not completed our exploration of the house. We had stopped at the gruesome room where the adept and his serpent gazed unwinking into the crystal sphere. There was at least one suite on the same floor we had not looked into, and no doubt there were other rooms on the attic floor above. But that any one could have slept on undisturbed by those piercing screams and by our own comings and goings seemed unbelievable. Perhaps there were separate quarters in the grounds somewhere.

And then, without conscious will of my own, I felt my body stiffen and my fingers grip my pipe convulsively. A slow tremor seemed to start from the end of my spine, travel up it, and pass off across my scalp. There was some one in the room behind me; some one with gleaming eyes fixed upon me; and I sat there rigidly, straining my ears, expecting I knew not what—a blow upon the head, a cord about the neck.

A rapid step came up the walk, and Godfrey appeared suddenly out of the darkness.

"Well, Lester——" he began; but I sprang to my feet, and paced the room, for I could have sworn that I had heard behind me the rustle of a silken dress. But there was no one there except Swain and Miss Vaughan and the dead man—and none of them had moved.

"What is it?" Godfrey asked, stepping past me into the room.

"There was some one there, Godfrey," I said. "I'm sure of it—I felt

some one—I felt his eyes on me—and then, as you spoke, I heard the rustle of a dress."

"Of a dress?"

"Or of a robe," and my thoughts were on the bearded man upstairs.

Godfrey glanced at me, crossed the room, and looked out into the hall. Then he turned back to me.

"Well, whoever it was," he said, and I could see that he thought my ears had deceived me, "he has made good his escape. There'll be a doctor and a nurse here in a few minutes, and I got Simmonds and told him to bring Goldberger along. He can't get here for an hour, anyway. And I've got a change here for Swain," he added, with a gesture toward some garments he carried over one arm; "also a bracer to be administered to him," and he drew a flask from his pocket and handed it to me. "Maybe you need one yourself," he added, smiling dryly, "since you've taken to hearing rustling robes."

"I do," I said, "though not on that account," and I raised the flask to my lips and took a long swallow.

"Suppose you take Swain up to the bathroom," Godfrey suggested, "and help him to get cleaned up. I'll go down to the gate and wait for the doctor."

"The gate's probably locked."

"I thought of that," and he drew a small but heavy hammer from his pocket. "I'll smash the lock, if there's no other way. I'd like you to get Swain into shape before any one arrives," he added. "He's not a prepossessing object as he is."

"No, he isn't," I agreed, looking at him, and I took the garments which Godfrey held out to me. Then I went over to Swain and put the flask into his uninjured hand. "Take a drink of that," I said.

He did not understand at first; then he put the flask to his lips, and drank eagerly—so eagerly that I had to draw it away. He watched me longingly as I screwed on the cap and slipped it into my pocket; and there was more color in his face and a brighter light in his eyes.

"Now, come along," I said, "and get that cut fixed up."

He rose obediently, and followed me out into the hall. Godfrey had preceded us, found the light switch after a brief search, and turned it on.

"There's a switch in the bathroom, too, no doubt," he said. "Bring him down again as soon as you get him fixed up. You'll find some cotton and gauze in one of the pockets of the coat."

Swain followed me up the stair and into the bathroom. He seemed to understand what I intended doing, for he divested himself of coat and shirt, and was soon washing arms and face vigorously. Then he dried himself, and stood patiently while I washed and bandaged the cut on the wrist. It was not a deep one, and had about stopped bleeding.

"Feel better?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, and without waiting for me to tell him, slipped into the clean shirt which Godfrey had brought, attached the collar and tied the tie, all this quite composedly and without hesitation or clumsiness. Yet I felt, in some indefinable way, that something was seriously wrong with him. His eyes were vacant, and his face flabby, as though the muscles were relaxed. It gave me the feeling that his intelligence was relaxed, too.

He picked up his own coat, but I stopped him.

"Don't put that on," I said, speaking to him as I would have spoken to a child. "The sleeve is bloodstained, and there's a long tear down the side. Take this one," and I held out the light lounging coat Godfrey had brought with him.

Swain laid down his own garment without a word, and put on the other one. I rolled the soiled garments into a bundle, took them under my arm, turned out the lights, and led the way downstairs.

A murmur of voices from the library told me that some one had arrived, and when I reached the door I saw that it was the doctor and the nurse. The former was just rising from a rapid examination of the quivering figure on the couch.

"We must get her to bed at once," he

said, turning to Godfrey. "Her bedroom's upstairs, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Godfrey. "Shall I show you the way?"

The doctor nodded, and, lifting the girl carefully in his arms, followed Godfrey out into the hall. The nurse picked up a surgical case from the floor and followed after.

I had expected Swain to rush forward to the couch, to make a scene, perhaps, and had kept my hand upon his arm; but to my astonishment he did not so much as glance in that direction. He stood patiently beside me, with his eyes on the floor, and when my restraining hand fell away, he walked slowly to the chair in which he had been sitting, and dropped into it, relaxing limply, as with fatigue.

Godfrey was back in a moment.

"That doctor was the nearest one I could find," he said. "He seems to be all right. But if Miss Vaughan isn't better in the morning, I'll get a specialist out."

"Godfrey," I said, in a low tone, "there's something the matter with Swain," and I motioned to where he sat, flaccid and limp, apparently half asleep. "He is suffering from shock, or something of that sort. It's something more, anyway, than overwrought nerves. He seems to be only half conscious."

"I noticed it," said Godfrey, with a little nod. "We'll have the doctor look at him when he comes down," and he sank wearily into a chair. "This has been a pretty strenuous night, Lester."

"Yes; and it isn't over yet. I wonder what the man with the snake is doing?"

"Still staring into the crystal, no doubt. Do you want to go and see?"

"No," I said decidedly, "I don't! Godfrey," I added, "doesn't the absence of servants seem strange to you?"

"Very strange. But, I dare say we'll find them around somewhere—though they seem to be sound sleepers! We didn't look through the whole house, you know. I'm not going to, either; I'm going to let the police do that. They ought to be here pretty soon. I told Simmonds to bring two or three men with him."

I glanced at the huddled body of the murdered man. With all the night's excitements and surprises, we had not even touched upon that mystery. Not a single gleam of light had been shed upon it, and yet it was the center about which all these other strange occurrences revolved. Whose hand was it had thrown that cord about the throat and drawn it tight? What motive lay behind? Fearsome and compelling must the motive be to drive a man to such a crime! Would Simmonds be able to divine that motive, to build the case up bit by bit until the murderer was found? Would Godfrey?

I turned my head to look at him. He was lying back in his chair, his eyes closed, apparently lost in thought, and for long minutes there was no movement in the room.

At last the doctor returned, looking more cheerful than when he had left the room. He had given Miss Vaughan an opiate, and she was sleeping calmly; the nervous trembling had subsided, and he hoped that when she waked she would be much better. The danger was that brain fever might develop; she had evidently suffered a very severe shock.

"Yes," said Godfrey, "she discovered her father strangled in the chair yonder."

"I saw the body when I came in," the doctor remarked imperturbably. "So it's her father, is it?"

"Yes."

"And strangled, you say?"

Godfrey answered with a gesture, and the doctor walked over to the body, glanced at the neck, then disengaged one of the tightly clenched hands from the chair arm, raised it, and let it fall. I could not but admire his admirable self-control.

"How long has he been dead?" Godfrey asked.

"Not more than two or three hours," the doctor answered. "The muscles are just beginning to stiffen. It looks like murder," he added, and touched the cord about the neck.

"It *is* murder."

"You've notified the police?"

"They will be here soon."

I saw the doctor glance at Godfrey, and then at me, plainly puzzled as to our footing in the house; but if there was a question in his mind, he kept it from his lips, and turned back again to the huddled body.

"Any clew to the murderer?" he asked at last.

"We have found none."

And then the doctor stooped suddenly, and picked up something from the floor beside the chair.

"Perhaps this is a clew," he said quietly, and held to the light an object which, as I sprang to my feet, I saw to be a bloodstained handkerchief.

He spread it out under our eyes, handling it gingerly, for it was still damp, and we saw it was a small handkerchief—a woman's handkerchief—of delicate texture. It was fairly soaked with blood, and yet in a peculiar manner, for two of the corners were much crumpled but quite unstained.

The doctor raised his eyes to Godfrey's.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

"A clew certainly," said Godfrey; "but scarcely to the murderer."

The doctor looked at it again for a moment, and then nodded.

"I'd better put it back where I found it, I guess," he said, and dropped it beside the chair.

And then suddenly I remembered Swain. I turned to find him still drooping forward in his chair, apparently half asleep.

"Doctor," I said, "there is some one else here who is suffering from shock," and I motioned toward the limp figure. "Or perhaps it's something worse than that."

The doctor stepped quickly to the chair, and looked down at its occupant. Then he put his hand under Swain's chin, raised his head, and gazed intently into his eyes. Swain returned the gaze, but plainly in only a half-conscious way.

"It looks like a case of concussion," said the doctor, after a moment. "The left pupil is enlarged," and he ran his hand rapidly over the right side of Swain's head. "I thought so," he added. "There's a considerable swelling. We must get him to bed." Then he noticed the bandaged wrist. "What's the matter here?" he asked, touching it with his finger.

"He cut himself on a piece of glass," Godfrey explained. "You'd better take him over to my place, where he can be quiet."

"I've got my car outside," said the doctor, and together he and I raised Swain from the chair and led him to it.

He went docilely and without objection, and ten minutes later was safely in bed, already dozing off under the influence of the opiate the doctor had given him. "He'll be all right in the morning," the latter assured me. "But he must have got quite a blow over the head."

"I don't know what happened to him," I answered. "You'll come back with me, won't you?"

"Yes; I may be useful," and he turned the car back the way we had come. "Besides," he added frankly, "I'm curious to learn what happened in that house to-night."

He had certainly shown himself equal to emergencies, I reflected; and I liked his voice and his manner, which was cool and capable.

"My name is Lester," I said. "I'm a lawyer staying with Mr. Godfrey. We heard Miss Vaughan scream, and ran over to the house, but we don't know any more than you do."

"My name is Hinman, and I'm just a country doctor," said my companion; "but if I can be of any help, I hope you'll call upon me. Hello!" he added, as we turned through the gate into the grounds of Elmhurst, and he threw on the brake sharply, for a uniformed figure had stepped out into the glare of our lamps and held up his hand.

The police had arrived.

CHAPTER IX.

FIRST STEPS.

We found a little group of men gathered about the chair in which sat the huddled body. Two of them I al-

ready knew. One was Detective Sergeant Simmonds, and the other Coroner Goldberger, both of whom I had met in previous cases. Simmonds was a stolid, unimaginative, but industrious and efficient officer, with whom Godfrey had long ago concluded an alliance offensive and defensive. In other words, Godfrey threw what glory he could to Simmonds, and Simmonds such stories as he could to Godfrey, and so the arrangement was to their mutual advantage.

Goldberger was a more astute man than the detective, in that he possessed a strain of Semitic imagination, a quick wit, and a fair degree of insight. He was in his glory in a case like this. This was shown now by his gleaming eyes and the trembling hand which pulled nervously at his short, black mustache. Goldberger's mustache was a good index to his mental state—the more ragged it grew the more baffling he found the case in hand!

Both he and Simmonds glanced up at our entrance, and nodded briefly. Then their eyes went back to that huddled figure.

There were three other men present whom I did not know, but I judged them to be the plain-clothes men whom Simmonds had brought along at Godfrey's suggestion. They stood a little to one side until their superiors had completed the examination.

"I didn't stop to pick up my physician," Goldberger was saying. "But the cause of death is plain enough."

"Doctor Hinman here is a physician," I said, bringing him forward. "If he can be of any service——"

Goldberger glanced at him, and was plainly favorably impressed by Hinman's dark, eager face, and air of intelligence and self-control.

"I shall be very glad of Doctor Hinman's help," said Goldberger, shaking hands with him. "Have you examined the body, sir?"

"Only very casually," answered Hinman. "But it is evident that the cause of death was strangulation."

"How long has he been dead?"

Hinman lifted the stiff hand again, and ran his fingers along the muscles of the arm.

"About four hours, I should say."

Goldberger glanced at his watch.

"That would put his death at a little before midnight. The murderer must have come in from the grounds, crept up behind his victim, thrown the cord about his neck, and drawn it tight before his presence was suspected. The victim would hardly have remained seated in the chair if he had known his danger. After the cord was round his throat, he had no chance—he could not even cry out. There's one thing I don't understand, though," he added, after a moment. "Where did that blood come from?" and he pointed to the dark spots about the top of the white robe.

Hinman looked up with a little exclamation.

"I forgot," he said. "Did you find the handkerchief? No, I see you didn't," and he pointed to where it lay on the floor. "I noticed it when I first looked at the body."

Without a word, Goldberger bent and picked up the bloodstained handkerchief. Then he and Simmonds examined it minutely. Finally the coroner looked at Godfrey, and his eyes were very bright.

"There can be only one inference," he said. "The dead man is not bleeding—the cord did not cut the flesh. The blood, then, must have come from the murderer. He must have been injured in some way—bleeding profusely. Look at this handkerchief—it is fairly soaked."

I am sure that, at that instant, the same thought was in Godfrey's mind which flashed through mine, for our eyes met, and there was a shadow in his which I knew my own reflected. Then I glanced at Hinman. He was looking at the handkerchief thoughtfully, his lips tightly closed. I could guess what he was thinking, but he said nothing.

Goldberger laid the handkerchief on the table at last, and turned back to the body. He bent close above it, examining the blood spots, and when he stood erect again there was in his face a strange excitement.

"Lend me your glass, Simmonds," he said, and when Simmonds handed him a small pocket magnifying glass he unfolded it and bent above the stains again, scrutinizing each in turn. At last he closed the glass with an emphatic little snap. "This case isn't going to be so difficult, after all," he said. "Those spots are finger prints."

With an exclamation of astonishment, Simmonds took the glass and examined the stains; then he handed it to Godfrey, who finally passed it on to me. Looking through it, I saw that Goldberger was right. The stains had been made by human fingers. Most of them were mere smudges, but here and there was one on which faint lines could be dimly traced.

"They seem to be pretty vague," I remarked, passing the glass on to Hinman.

"They're plenty clear enough for our purpose," said Goldberger. "Besides, they will come out much clearer in photographs. It's lucky this stuff is so smooth and closely woven," he added, fingering a corner of the robe, "or we wouldn't have got even those. It's as hard and fine as silk."

"How do you suppose those marks came there, Mr. Goldberger?" Godfrey asked, and there was in his tone a polite skepticism which evidently annoyed the coroner.

"Why, there's only one way they could come there," Goldberger answered impatiently. "They were put there by the murderer's fingers as he drew the cord tight. Do you see anything improbable in that?"

"Only that it seems too good to be true," Godfrey answered quietly, and Goldberger, after looking at him a moment, turned away with a shrug of the shoulders.

"See if you can get the cord loose, Simmonds," he said.

The cord was in the form of a running noose, which had been knotted to hold it in place after being drawn tight. Although it had not cut the flesh of the neck, it had sunk into it, and Simmonds worked at the knot for some moments without result. I suspect his fingers were not quite as steady as they might have been; but it was evidently an intricate knot.

"That's a new one on me," he said at last. "I can't get it loose."

Godfrey bent close above it, and looked at it.

"It *is* a peculiar knot," he agreed. "If you'll permit a suggestion, Mr. Goldberger, you'll cut the cord and leave the knot as it is. It may help us to find the man who made it."

"You're right," agreed Goldberger promptly. "Cut the cord, Simmonds."

Simmonds got out his pocketknife, opened it, and slipped the blade under the cord, cut it, and pulled it out of the ridge of flesh. He looked at it a moment, and then handed it to Goldberger. The latter examined it carefully.

"It's stained with blood, too," he remarked, and passed it on to Godfrey.

"It looks like curtain cord," Godfrey said, and made a little tour of the room. "Ah!" he added, after a moment, from the door opening into the grounds. "See here!"

He was holding up the end of the cord by which the curtains covering the upper part of the double doors were controlled.

"You were right, Mr. Coroner," he said, "in thinking that the murderer entered by this door, for he stopped here and cut off a piece of this cord before going on into the room."

"Then he must also have stopped to make it into a noose," remarked Goldberger. "If he did that, he was certainly a cool customer. It's a wonder his victim didn't hear the noise he made."

"Making a knot isn't a noisy operation," Godfrey pointed out. "Besides, the back of the chair was toward the door. And then, of course, it's possible his victim *did* hear him."

"But then he would have jumped from the chair," objected Simmonds.

"Not necessarily. Suppose you were sitting there, and heard a noise, and looked around and saw me standing there—you wouldn't jump from the chair, would you?"

"No; I'd have no reason to jump from you."

"Perhaps Vaughan thought he had no reason to jump from the man *he* saw—if he saw any one. I'm inclined to think, however, that he didn't suspect any one else was in the room until he felt the cord about his throat."

"And, of course," said Goldberger, taking the cord again and looking at it, "it was while the murderer was making it into a noose with his bloodstained fingers that he stained it in that way. Don't you agree, Mr. Godfrey?"

"That is a possible explanation of them," Godfrey conceded.

"But why did he make this second knot?" inquired the coroner; "the knot which holds the noose tight and prevents it from slipping?"

"If he hadn't knotted it like that he would have had to stand there holding it until his victim was dead. As it was, he didn't have to wait. It's no little trick to tie a knot like that," Godfrey added thoughtfully. "I'd like to study it."

"All right," agreed Goldberger; "you can have it whenever you want it," and he got a heavy manila envelope out of his pocket and placed the cord carefully inside. "Now we must get that robe off. We can't run any risk of having those finger prints smeared."

It was a difficult job, but at last the robe was removed and the body itself lying at full length on its back on the couch. Seen thus, with the light full on it, the face was horrible, and at a sign from Goldberg Simmonds pulled down the portière from the inner door and placed it over the body. Then the coroner picked up the robe and held it out at arms' length.

"What kind of a freak dress is this, anyway?" he asked.

"It's a robe," said Godfrey. "Mr. Vaughan was a mystic."

"A what?"

"A mystic—a believer in Hinduism or some other Oriental religion."

"Did he dress this way all the time?"

"I believe so. It is probably the dress of his order."

Goldberger rolled the robe up carefully, and said nothing more; but I could see from his expression that he had ceased to wonder why Vaughan had come to a strange and violent end. Surely anything might happen to a mystic! Then he placed the bloodstained handkerchief in another envelope, and finally put his hand in his pocket and brought out half a dozen cigars.

"Now," he said, "let's sit down and rest a while. Simmonds tells me it was you who called him, Mr. Godfrey. How did you happen to discover the crime?"

The question was asked carelessly, but I could feel the alert mind behind it. I knew that Godfrey felt it, too, from the way in which he told the story, for he told it carefully, and yet with an air of keeping nothing back.

Of the mysterious light he said nothing, but, starting with my finding of the letter and summoning Swain to receive it, told of the arrangements for the rendezvous, dwelling upon it lightly, as a love affair which could have no connection with the tragedy. He passed on to his own arrival from the city, to Swain's return from the rendezvous, and finally to the screams which had reached us, and to the discovery we had made when we burst into the house.

"I summoned Doctor Hinman immediately," he added, "for Miss Vaughan seemed to be in a serious condition; then I called Simmonds, and suggested that he stop for you, Mr. Coroner, for I knew that the case would interest you. Doctor Hinman arrived perhaps half an hour ahead of you, and had Miss Vaughan put to bed at once. And I guess you know the rest," he concluded.

We had all listened intently. I was pretty sure that Simmonds would make no inferences which Godfrey wished to avoid; but I feared the more penetrating mind of the coroner. His first question proved that I was right to do so.

"Where is this man Swain?" he asked.

"He was suffering from the shock," said Godfrey, "and Lester and Doctor Hinman took him over to my place and put him to bed. That's where they were when you got here."

"He seemed to be suffering from a

slight concussion," Hinman explained. "There was a swelling on one side of his head, as though some one had struck him, and the pupils of his eyes were unsymmetrical. He had also a cut on the wrist," he added, after an instant's hesitation.

"Ah!" commented Goldberger, with a glance at Godfrey. "Had it been bleeding?"

"He cut himself when crossing the wall," Godfrey explained. "A mere scratch, but I believe it *did* bleed a good deal."

"Ah!" said Goldberger again, and then he turned to the doctor. "Did I understand you to say that he went to sleep?"

"He certainly did. I gave him a good strong opiate to make sure of it."

"Do you think he'll sleep till morning?"

"He'll sleep nine or ten hours, at least."

"Then *that's* all right," said Goldberger, and settled back in his chair again. "But didn't anybody live in this house except that old man and his daughter? Aren't there any servants?"

"There must be some somewhere about," answered Godfrey, to whom the question was addressed; "but Lester and I looked through the lower floor and part of the upper one, and didn't find any. There's a bell there by the door, but nobody answered when I rang. We didn't have time to go all over the house. We *did* find one thing, though," he added, as if by an afterthought.

"What was that?"

"There's an adept in one of the rooms upstairs."

Goldberger sat up and stared at him.

"An adept?" he repeated. "What's that?"

"An expert in mysticism. I judge that Vaughan was his pupil."

"Do you mean he's a Hindu?" asked the coroner, as though that would explain everything.

But Godfrey was having his revenge.

"I don't know whether he's a Hindu or not," he said airily. "I didn't get a very good look at him."

"What was he doing?" Goldberger demanded.

"He was just sitting there."

Again Goldberger stared at him, this time suspiciously.

"But, good heavens, man!" he cried. "That was three or four hours ago! You don't suppose he's sitting there yet?"

"Yes," said Godfrey dryly; "I think he is."

Goldberger's face flushed, and he sprang to his feet impatiently.

"Show me the room!" he commanded.

"Glad to," said Godfrey laconically, and led the way out into the hall.

The whole crowd tailed along after him. As I rose to follow, I saw that the outside world was turning gray with the approaching dawn.

The nurse, hearing our footsteps on the stairs, looked out in alarm, and held up a warning finger. Godfrey paused for a word with her.

"How is she?" he asked.

"Sleeping quietly," said the nurse; "but please don't make any more noise than you can help."

"We won't," Godfrey promised, and crossed the hall to the door leading into the little entry. Then he paused and looked around at Goldberger. "Better go slow here," he cautioned. "The adept has a pet cobra."

"A snake?"

"The deadliest snake in the world."

Goldberger drew back a little, as did all the others.

"I don't think it will bite us, though," added Godfrey cheerfully, "if we don't crowd it. It's sitting there, too," and he opened the outer door, passed through, and held back the curtain at the farther end.

I was just behind Goldberger and Simmonds, and I heard their gasp of amazement as they saw what lay beyond.

The scene had not changed in the slightest detail. The crystal sphere still softly glowed, with intangible shadows flitting across its surface; the adept still sat, cross-legged, staring into its depths; opposite him, the cobra, its

hood distended, swayed slowly to and fro.

But as we stood there staring, a single delicate ray of sunlight coming through a pinhole in the curtained window struck the sphere and seemed to extinguish it. The glow within it flickered and fluttered, and finally vanished, and it hung there dull and gray. An instant later the motionless figure raised its arms high in air, with a motion somehow familiar; then it got slowly to its feet, crossed to the window, drew back the curtain, and flung wide the shutter.

The sun was just peeping over the trees to the east, and for a second its light blinded me. Then I saw the adept bowing low before it, his arms still extended. Once, twice, thrice he bowed, as before a deity, while we stood there staring. Then he swung around to us.

"Enter, friends," he said calmly. "The peace of the Holy One be on you, and His love within your hearts!"

CHAPTER X.

THE WHITE PRIEST OF SIVA.

The adept was an impressive figure as he stood there with the sun behind him, throwing a yellow nimbus around his head. The robe he wore was of a rich purple, and gave an added effect of height and dignity to a figure already tall. His hair was dark and crinkled, like wind-swept water, his complexion dark, but with an underblush of red in the cheeks. His lips were scarlet, and his eyes coal black and of a brilliance almost startling. The whole effect he gave was of transcendent energy and magnetism, nor did he show the slightest fatigue from his long vigil.

His eyes swept our faces as we stood crowded there in the doorway. He did not seem surprised. If there was any expression in his face except courteous inquiry it was one of carefully suppressed amusement.

"Enter, friends," he repeated. "What is it you desire?"

His voice was rich and deep, and he spoke with a peculiar intonation, but without accent. It was something of a shock to hear the ordinary words of English speech coming from his lips, for they seemed formed to utter prophecies in unknown tongues.

Goldberger took one step into the room, and then stopped abruptly. Following his eyes, I saw that the cobra had also awakened from its trance, and was regarding us steadily, and hissing slightly. The adept smiled as he saw us shrink back.

"Do not fear," he said. "Come, Toto," and stepping across the room, he lifted the cobra in one hand, and held it a moment close to him, gently stroking the distended hood. The snake curled itself about his arm, and seemed to cuddle to him, but it kept its eyes fixed on us. I could not but smile at the incongruity of its name. Toto was well enough for a French poodle, but for a cobra!

After a moment, the adept lifted the lid of a round basket which stood on the floor near the divan, dropped the snake gently into it, and fastened down the lid. Then he clapped his hands softly, and an instant later the curtains at the rear of the room parted, and a strange figure appeared between them.

It was the figure of a man, not over five feet tall, and very thin. He was almost as dark as a full-blooded negro, and the white burnoose which was thrown about his shoulders and covered him to just below the hips made him look even darker. His legs were bare, and seemed to be nothing but skin and bone. The flat-nosed face, with its full lips and prominent eyes, reminded me of an idol I had seen pictured somewhere.

The newcomer bowed low before the adept, and, at a sign from him, picked up Toto's basket and disappeared with it through the curtains. He had not even glanced in our direction. The adept turned back to us.

"Now, friends," he said, "will you not enter?"

Goldberger led the way into the room, and stopped to look about it. The walls were hung with black velvet, so arranged that windows and doors could

be covered also, and the room was absolutely devoid of furniture, save for a low, circular divan, in the center of which stood the crystal sphere, supported, as I saw now, by a slender pedestal.

"I have a few questions to ask you," began Goldberger at last, in a voice deferential despite himself.

"Proceed, sir," said the adept courteously.

"Do you know that Mr. Vaughan is dead?"

The adept made a little deprecating gesture.

"Not dead," he protested. "A man does not die. His soul rejoins the Oversoul, that is all. Yes, I know that at midnight the soul of my pupil passed over."

"How did you learn that?" Goldberger demanded.

"I saw it in the sphere," replied the adept calmly.

"Where were you at the time?"

"I was gazing at the sphere."

"Do you mean," asked Goldberger incredulously, "that you sat for five hours and more staring at that thing?"

"My vigil began at sundown," said the adept, with a slight smile. "Last night was the White Night of Siva. It must be spent in meditation by all who follow him."

Goldberger worried his mustache with nervous fingers, as he stared at the adept, plainly at a loss how to proceed.

"Perhaps," ventured Godfrey softly, "your crystal could give us some further information which we very much desire."

The adept turned his dark eyes on the speaker, and it seemed to me that they glittered more coldly, as though they recognized an adversary.

"What information, sir?" he asked.

"Information as to the manner of Mr. Vaughan's passing. Can you tell us anything of that?"

The adept shook his head.

"I only saw the soul as it passed over. I knew, however, that it had been torn from the body by violence."

"How did you know that?" broke in Goldberger.

"Because of its color," answered the adept; and then, when he saw our benumbed expressions, he explained: "Souls which pass in peace are white; souls which the body has driven forth by its own hands are black; souls which are torn from the body by an alien hand are red. My pupil's soul was red."

I could see that Goldberger did not know whether to snort with derision or to be impressed. He ended by smiling feebly. As for me, I admit I was impressed.

"When an alien hand, as you put it, is used," said the coroner, "we call it murder in this country, and the law tries to get hold of the alien and to send his soul after his victim's. That's what we are trying to do now. We are officers of the law."

The adept bowed.

"Any assistance I can give you," he said softly, "I shall be glad to give; though to do murder, as you call it, is not always to do wrong."

"Our law doesn't make such nice distinctions," said Goldberger dryly. "May I ask your profession?"

"I am a White Priest of Siva," said the adept, touching his forehead lightly with the fingers of his left hand, as in reverence.

"Who is Siva?"

"The Holy One, the Oversoul, from whom we come and to whom we all return."

Again Goldberger worried his mustache.

"Well," he said at last, "until the mystery is cleared up, I must ask you not to leave this house."

"I have no wish to leave it, sir."

"And the other fellow—the fellow who took away the snake—where was he last night?"

"He slept in a small room opening into this one."

"May I look into it?"

"Certainly," and the adept swept aside the curtains.

The room into which we looked was not more than ten feet square, and empty of furniture, except for a mat in the middle of the floor and three or four baskets set against the wall. On

the mat was squatted the attendant, his legs crossed with feet uppermost, and his hands held palm to palm before him. On the floor in front of him were what looked to me like a strip of cloth, a bone, and a tooth. He did not raise his eyes at our entrance, but sat calmly contemplating these relics.

Goldberger's mustache lost a few more hairs as he stood staring down at this strange figure.

"What's that? His grandmother's tooth?" he asked at last.

"Those are the attributes of Kali," said the adept gravely, as one rebuking blasphemy.

"Very interesting, no doubt," commented the coroner. "Would it disturb the gentleman too much to ask him a few questions?"

"He speaks no English; but I shall be glad to translate for you."

The coroner thought this over for a moment, and then shook his head.

"No," he said; "I'll wait for the court interpreter. You might tell him, though, that there will be officers of the law on duty below, and that he is not to leave the house."

"I will caution him," answered the adept, and let the curtain fall as we passed out.

"I suppose there are some other servants somewhere about the place?" asked Goldberger.

"There are three—they sleep on the floor above."

"Are they Hindus, too?"

"Oh, no," and the adept smiled. "Two of them are German and the other is Irish."

The coroner reddened a little, for the words somehow conveyed a subtle rebuke.

"That is all for to-day," he said, "unless Mr. Simmonds has some questions?" and he looked at his companion.

But Simmonds, to whom all these inquiries had plainly been successive steps into the darkness, shook his head.

"Then we will bid you good morning," added Goldberger, still a little on his dignity. "And many thanks for your courtesy."

The adept responded with a low bow, and with a smile decidedly ironical. I, at least, felt that we had got the worst of the encounter.

Goldberger, without a word, led the way up the stair that led to the attic story, and there soon succeeded in routing out the three servants. The Germans proved to be a man and wife, well past middle age, the former the gardener and the latter the cook. Erin was represented by a red-haired girl, who was the housemaid. All of them were horrified when told their master had been murdered, but none of them could shed any light on the tragedy. They had all been in bed long before midnight, and had not been disturbed by any of the noises of the night.

This could be the more readily understood when, as a little investigation showed, we found that they had all slept with doors locked and windows closed and shuttered. Any sound from the house would really have to penetrate two doors to reach them, for their rooms were at the end of an entry, closed by an outer door. As to the windows, it was the rule of the house that they should always be closed and tightly shuttered during the night. They knew of no especial reason for the rule; though the Irish girl remarked that, with heathen in the house and lunatics, there was no telling how the nights were spent.

They were all evidently innocent of any connection with the tragedy; but Goldberger, for some ridiculous reason, brought them downstairs with him, and made them look at their master's body. This had no result except to send the Irish girl into hysterics, and Hinman for a few minutes had another patient on his hands.

"Well," said Goldberger, passing his hand wearily across his forehead, "I guess there's nothing more to be done. And I'm dead tired. I had just got to bed when Simmonds called me. I'll set the inquest for ten o'clock to-morrow morning, and I'll hold it here in this room. We'll want you here, Mr. Godfrey, and you, Mr. Lester. And—oh, yes," he added suddenly, "we'll want that Mr. Swain, whose story I haven't

heard yet. No doubt of his appearing, is there?"

"Absolutely none," I assured him.

"I could put him under guard, of course," said Goldberger pensively, "for I'm sure he'll prove to be a very important witness; but if you will be personally responsible for him, Mr. Lester——"

"I will," I agreed, and Goldberger nodded.

"Have him here at ten o'clock, then," he said.

"Doctor Hinman would better see him again to-day," I suggested.

"I'll call about four o'clock this afternoon," the doctor promised; and, leaving Goldberger to complete his arrangements and Simmonds to post his men, Godfrey and I stepped out upon the lawn.

It was after five o'clock, and the sun was already high. It scarcely seemed possible that, only six hours before, Swain had crossed the wall for the first time!

"We'd better go out as we came," Godfrey said, and turned across the lawn. He walked with head down and face puckered with thought.

"Can you make anything of it?" I asked, but he only shook his head.

We soon reached the ladder, and Godfrey paused to look about him. The shrubbery was broken in one place, as though some heavy body had fallen on it, and this was evidently the mark of Swain's wild jump from the wall.

At last Godfrey motioned me to precede him, and when I was over reached one ladder down to me and descended to my side. We replaced the ladders against the shed, and then walked on toward the house. As we turned the corner, we found Mrs. Hargis standing on the front porch.

"Well, you *are* out early!" she said.

"Yes," laughed Godfrey. "Fact is, we haven't been to bed yet. Will you have something to eat, Lester, before you turn in?"

A glass of milk was all I wanted, and five minutes later I mounted to my room. I glanced in for a moment at Swain, who seemed to be sleeping peacefully, and then darkened my room as well as I could, and tumbled into bed. I must have dropped asleep the moment my head touched the pillow, for I remember nothing more until I opened my eyes to find Godfrey standing over me.

CHAPTER XI.

SWAIN'S STORY.

"I hate to wake you, Lester," Godfrey said, smiling, "but it's nearly four o'clock. Doctor Hinman will be here before long, and if you're going to hear Swain's story, you'll have to be getting up."

I sat up in bed at once, all trace of sleepiness vanished.

"How is he?" I asked.

"He seems to be all right. He's been up for some time. I haven't said anything to him about last night—I wanted the doctor to see him first. Besides, I thought you ought to be present."

"I'll be down right away," I said, and twenty minutes later I found Godfrey and Swain sitting together on the front porch. As Swain returned my greeting I was relieved to see that his eyes were no longer fixed and staring, but seemed quite normal.

"Mrs. Hargis has your breakfast ready," said Godfrey, "and I think I'll join you. Will you come, Swain?"

"No, thank you," Swain replied. "I had my breakfast only about an hour ago. I'll just sit here, if you don't mind."

"All right," said Godfrey. "We won't be long," and together we went back to the dining room.

Mrs. Hargis was there, and greeted us as though stopping out till dawn and breakfasting at four o'clock in the afternoon were the most ordinary things in the world. A copy of the *Record* was lying, as usual, on the table, and a black headline caught my eye:

WORTHINGTON VAUGHAN MURDERED.

RICH RECLUSE STRANGLED TO DEATH AT HIS HOME IN THE BRONX.

I glanced at Godfrey in surprise.

"Yes," he said, reddening a little, "I was just in time to phone the story in for the last edition. I called the doctor first, though, Lester—you must give me credit for that! And it was a beautiful scoop!"

"What time did you get up?" I asked.

"About noon. I sent down the full story for to-morrow morning's paper just before I called you."

"Any developments?"

"None that I know of. Of course, I haven't heard Swain's story yet."

"Godfrey," I said, "it seems to me that this thing is going to look bad for Swain. I think Goldberger suspects him already. A good deal depends upon his story."

"Yes, it does," Godfrey agreed.

We finished the meal in silence. It was not a long one, for I, at least, was anxious to get back to Swain. As we rejoined him on the porch, Doctor Hinman's car came up the drive. He got out and shook hands with us. As he greeted Swain I saw him glance anxiously into his eyes—and saw also that the glance reassured him.

"You're feeling better to-day," he said, sitting down by Swain's side.

"Yes," said Swain quietly. "I'm feeling all right again."

"How is Miss Vaughan, doctor?" I asked.

Swain jerked round toward the doctor. "Is Miss Vaughan ill?" he demanded.

"She had a shock last night," answered the doctor slowly, "but she's getting along nicely. She'll have to be kept quiet for a few days."

I was looking at Swain curiously. He was rubbing his head perplexedly, as though trying to bring some confused memory to the surface of his mind.

"I seem to remember," he said, "that Miss Vaughan fainted, and that I picked her up." Then he stopped and stared at us. "Is her father dead?"

"Yes," I said, and he fell to rubbing his head again.

I glanced at Hinman, and he nodded slightly. I took it for assurance that Swain might be questioned. Godfrey, who had gone indoors to get some cigars, came back with a handful. All of us, including Swain, lighted up.

"Now, Swain," I began, "I want you to tell us all that you remember of last night's happenings. Both Mr. Godfrey and Doctor Hinman are in my confidence, and you may speak freely before them. I want them to hear your story, because I want their advice."

There was a pucker of perplexity on Swain's face.

"I've been trying, ever since I woke up this morning, to straighten out my remembrance of last night," he began; "but I haven't succeded very well. At least, everything seems to stop right in the middle."

"Go ahead," I said, "and tell us what you do remember. Maybe it will grow clearer as you recall it, or maybe we can fill in the gaps. Begin at the moment you went over the wall. We know everything that happened up to that time. You remember that clearly, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Swain. "I remember all that," and he settled back in his chair. "Well, after I went down the ladder I found myself in a clump of shrubbery, and beyond this was a path. I knew that the arbor where I was to meet Miss Vaughan was in the corner of the grounds at the back next to Mr. Godfrey's place, so I turned back along the wall, leaving the path, which curved away from it. It was very dark under the trees, and I had to go slowly for fear of running into one of them. But I finally found the arbor. I struck a match to assure myself that it was empty, and then sat down to wait. Once or twice I fancied I heard some one moving outside, but it was only the wind among the trees, I guess, for it was fully half an hour before Miss Vaughan came."

I could see how his hand was trembling on the arm of his chair, and he paused a moment to collect himself.

"What Miss Vaughan told me," he went on at last, and I saw that of the details of that meeting he did not intend to speak, "convinced me that her father was quite mad—much worse than I had

suspected. I knew, of course, that he was a student of the supernatural, but since the coming of this yogi——"

"This what?" Hinman interrupted.

"A yogi," Swain answered, turning toward him, "is, as nearly as I can make out, a sort of high priest of Hinduism. He knows all its secrets, and is supposed to be able to do all sorts of supernatural things. This fellow who lived with Mr. Vaughan is a yogi. Mr. Vaughan was his disciple."

"Where did the yogi come from?" Godfrey asked.

"I don't know. I don't think Miss Vaughan knows. He arrived, with his attendant, about six months ago; and since then things have gone from bad to worse. There has been crystal gazing and star worship and necromancy of all sorts. I confess I didn't understand very much of it," he added, "it was all so wild and weird; but it ended not only in Mr. Vaughan's becoming a convert to whatever religion it is the yogi practices, but in a determination that his daughter should become a priestess of the cult. It was from that she wished me to help her to escape."

He stopped, and again rubbed his head slowly.

"As I tell it," he continued, "it sounds absurd and unbelievable; but as she told it, there in the darkness, with those strange rustlings round us, it sent the chills up and down my spine. Perhaps those Orientals *do* know more about the supernatural than we give them credit for; at any rate, I know that Miss Vaughan had been impressed with the yogi's power. It fascinated and at the same time horrified her. She said he had a hideous snake, a cobra, which he petted as she would pet a kitten——"

His voice broke off again, and he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. I myself felt decidedly nervous. Godfrey threw away his cigar, which had broken in his fingers.

"At any rate," Swain went on, "I was so upset by what she told me that I could think of nothing to do except to beg her to come away with me at once. I remembered my promise to you, Mr. Lester, but I was sure you would approve. I told her about you—that it was into your hands the letter had fallen. She said she had seen you looking at her from a tree, and had known at a glance that she could trust you. You didn't tell me you were in a tree," he added.

"Yes," I said awkwardly, "I was just taking a little look over the landscape. Rather foolish of me, wasn't it?"

"Well, it was mighty fortunate, anyway. She had written the letter, but she had no idea how she was going to get it to me."

"You mean she couldn't go out when she wanted to?" demanded Godfrey.

"I gathered from what she told me," said Swain, his face flushing with anger, "that she has been practically a prisoner ever since the yogi arrived. Besides, even if she had succeeded in mailing the letter, it wouldn't have reached me until too late."

"In what way too late?"

"Her father seems to have had a sudden turn for the worse yesterday; he became almost violent in insisting that she consent to his plan. He told her that the life of his own soul as well as of hers depended upon it. He threatened—I don't know what. The yogi talked to her afterward. He, of course, believed, or pretended to believe, as her father did; moreover, he told her that her father would certainly suffer a serious mental shock if she refused, perhaps a fatal one. In despair, she finally agreed, on the condition that she be given three days in which to prepare herself. If she did not hear from me in that time, she had made up her mind to consent."

Swain stopped again, and I lay back in my chair, wondering if such things were possible in this twentieth century, here within the boundaries of Greater New York! My brain reeled at the absurdity of it.

"Vaughan was undoubtedly suffering from mania," said Doctor Hinman, in a low voice. "The symptoms, as Mr. Swain describes them, are unmistakable."

"It was that argument I used," said

Swain. "I told her that, since he was clearly mad, she must, in self-defense, place herself beyond his reach. But she refused to leave him. Then, I argued, in kindness to him she must have him committed to some institution where he would be taken care of, and where he might, in time, regain his sanity. I told her that it would be criminal folly to permit him to remain longer under the influence of the yogi. She had to agree with me, and she finally consented to sign an affidavit to the facts as I have told them, and a petition asking that a commission be appointed to examine her father. You were to have drawn up the papers to-day, Mr. Lester, and I was to have taken them to her for signature to-night."

"That would have settled the matter," said Godfrey thoughtfully. "It's too bad it wasn't settled in that way. What else happened, Mr. Swain?"

"Miss Vaughan had grown very nervous with all this discussion, and at last she sprang to her feet and said she must go, or her father would discover her absence. We rose to leave the arbor, and at that instant a white-robed figure sprang to her side, seized her, and tore her away from me. I was too startled for an instant to resist; then, as I started toward them, Marjorie pushed me back.

"'Go! Go!' she cried. 'It is my father!'

"But he stopped me. In a voice shaking and husky with rage, he warned me that if I entered the place again my life would be forfeit. I can't repeat the horrible things he said. I could see his eyes gleaming like a wild beast's. He cursed me. I had never been cursed before"—and Swain smiled thinly—"and I confess it wasn't pleasant. Then he led his daughter away.

"I stood staring after them. I didn't know what to do. I felt like a madman myself. I sat down and tried to collect my thoughts. I saw that some new plan must be made—that there was no hope of meeting Marjorie again. I was sick with fear for her; I thought of following to the house and compelling her to come with me at once. And then suddenly I saw two eyes gleaming at me. They were not human eyes—they were too close together—and they were swaying gently back and forth in the air, about a foot from the ground. I gazed at them, fascinated, and then I heard a soft, low whistle, followed by a faint hissing, as the eyes fell forward.

"In a flash I knew what it was—the cobra; I knew why it was there—Vaughan had said my life was forfeit. I sprang up with a shriek, dashed along the seat to the door, and out into the darkness. I struck my head against something—a tree, I suppose; but I kept on, and reached the wall and got over it somehow—it is all confused after that. I seem to remember hearing Marjorie scream, and finding her lying beside her father, who was dead—but I can't put things together," and he rubbed his head helplessly.

"I'll put them together for you," said Godfrey. "When you ran into the tree, you suffered a partial concussion. It's lucky it wasn't total, or Toto would have got you!"

"Toto?"

"That, I believe, is the cobra's name," explained Godfrey, with a smile; "unless, of course, there are two of them." And he told Swain in detail of the events which had followed.

Swain listened with staring eyes. I did not blame him. Indeed, I felt that my own eyes were staring a little, although I already knew the story. But Godfrey, with a gift of narration born of long newspaper experience, told it in a way that made its horror salient, and left one gasping.

"There is one question I want to ask you, Swain," he said, in conclusion, "and I want you to think carefully before you answer it. During your altercation with Mr. Vaughan, did you at any time touch him?"

"Touch him? No, of course not," and Swain shook his head decidedly.

"You are sure of that?" asked Godfrey earnestly.

"Perfectly sure," said Swain, looking at him in astonishment. "I was never within three feet of him."

Godfrey sprang to his feet with a gesture of relief.

"I seem to need a cocktail," he said in another tone. "Isn't that the prescription for all of us, doctor?"

"Yes," assented Hinman, smiling, "and, after that, complete change of subject."

CHAPTER XII.

GUESSES AT THE RIDDLE.

We tried to follow Doctor Hinman's prescription, but not with any great success, for it is difficult to talk about one thing and think about another. So the doctor took himself off before long, and Swain announced that he himself would have to return to the city. He had come out without so much as a toothbrush, he pointed out; his trousers were in a lamentable condition, and while Godfrey's coat was welcome, it was far from a perfect fit.

"Which reminds me," he added, "that I don't know what has become of my own coat and shirt."

I looked at Godfrey quickly.

"No, I forgot them," he said. "They're over in the library at Elmhurst," he added to Swain. "You can get them to-morrow."

"I shall have to be there to-morrow, then?"

"Yes, at the inquest; I've promised to produce you there," I said.

"At what time?"

"You'd better be there by ten."

"Very well; that's all the more reason for getting back to my base of supplies. If I went on the stand looking like this, the jury would probably think I was the murderer!" he added, laughing.

My answering smile was decidedly thin. Godfrey did not even try to force one.

"Wait a few minutes," he suggested, "and I'll take you down in my car. I'll try to get back early, Lester," he added apologetically. "I'm far from an ideal host—but you'll find some books on my desk that may interest you. I got them up to-day. Take a look at them, after dinner."

He went back to bring out his car, and Swain sat down again beside me.

"Mr. Lester," he said, in a low voice, "I hope you haven't forgotten your promise."

"What promise?"

"To put Miss Vaughan in a safe place, and to look after her interests."

"No," I said; "I haven't forgotten. I was going to ask to see her after the inquest to-morrow. If she wishes us to represent her, we will."

"And to protect her," he added quickly. "She hasn't even a mad father now."

"She's safe enough for the present," I pointed out. "Doctor Hinman has employed another nurse, so that one is with her all the time."

"I won't be satisfied," said Swain, "till you get her out of that house and away from those Hindus. One nurse, or even two, wouldn't stop them."

"Stop them from what?"

"I don't know," and he twisted his fingers helplessly.

"Well, the police will stop them. There are three or four men on duty there, with orders to let no one in or out."

His face brightened.

"Ah, that's better," he said. "I didn't know that. How long will they be there?"

"Till after the inquest, anyway."

"And you will see Miss Vaughan after the inquest?"

"Yes."

"And urge her to go to Mr. and Mrs. Royce?"

"Yes—but I don't think she'll need much urging. I'll get a note from Mrs. Royce. I'll telephone to Mr. Royce now, and you can stop and get the note as you come up in the morning."

Godfrey's car glided up the drive, and stopped at the porch. Swain held out his hand and clasped mine warmly.

"Thank you, Mr. Lester," he said, and a moment later the car turned into the highway and passed from sight.

Then I went in, got Mr. Royce on the phone, and gave him a brief outline of the incidents of the night before. He listened with an exclamation of aston-

ishment from time to time, and assented heartily when I suggested that Miss Vaughan might be placed in Mrs. Royce's care temporarily.

"She's a beautiful girl," I concluded, "and very young. I agree with Swain that she mustn't be left alone in that house."

"Certainly she mustn't," said my partner. "I'll have Mrs. Royce write the note, and get a room ready for her."

"Of course," I said, "it's possible she won't come—though I believe she'll be glad to. Or there may be a family lawyer who will want to look after her. Only she didn't appear to know of any when she was talking to Swain."

"Well, bring her along if you can," said Mr. Royce. "We'll be glad to have her. And take your time about coming back, if you're needed up there. We're getting along all right."

I thanked him, and hung up; and presently Mrs. Hargis came to summon me to dinner. That meal over, I went in to Godfrey's desk to see what the books were he had suggested that I look at. There was quite a pile of them, and I saw that they all related to mysticism or to the religions of India. There was Sir Monier Williams' "Brahmanism and Hinduism," Hopkins' "The Religions of India," a work on crystallomancy, Mr. Lloyd Tuckey's standard work on "Hypnotism and Suggestion," and some half dozen others whose titles I have forgotten. And as I looked at them I began to understand one reason for Godfrey's success as a solver of mysteries—no detail of a subject ever escaped him.

I lit my pipe, sat down, and was soon deep in the lore of the East. I must confess that I did not make much of it. In that maze of superstition the most I could do was to pick up a thread here and there. The yogi had referred to the White Night of Siva, and I soon found out that Siva is one of the gods of Hinduism—one of a great triad: Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Siva the destroyer. He had also spoken of the attributes of Kali, and after a little further search I discovered that Kali was Siva's wife—a most unprepossessing and fiendish female.

But when I passed on to Hinduism itself, and tried to understand its tenets and its sects, I soon found myself out of my depth. They were so jumbled, so multitudinous, and so diverse that I could get no clear idea of them. I read of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Brahmanas; of metaphysical abstractions too tenuous to grasp; of karma—or action; of maya—or illusion; and I know not what "tangled jumble of ghosts and demons, demigods and deified saints, household gods, village gods, tribal gods, universal gods, with their countless shrines and temples and din of discordant rites." At last, in despair, I gave it up, and turned to the book on crystallomancy.

Here, at last, was something comprehensible, if not altogether believable, and I read with interest of the antiquity of crystal gazing as a means of inducing hallucination for the purpose of seeking information not to be gained by any normal means. I read of its use in China, in Assyria, in Egypt, in Arabia, in India, in Greece, and Rome; of how its practitioners in the Middle Ages were looked upon as heretics, and burned at the stake or broken on the wheel; of the famous Doctor Dee, and so down to the present time. The scryers, or seers, sometimes used mirrors, sometimes vessels filled with water, but usually a polished stone, and beryl was especially esteemed.

The effect of gazing at these intently for a time was to abstract the mind from normal sensory impressions, and to induce a state of partial hypnosis during which the scryer could perceive in the crystal dream pictures of great vividness, scenes at a distance, occurrences of the past and of the future.

I was still deep in this when I heard a step outside, the door opened, and Godfrey came in. He smiled when he saw what I was doing.

'How have you been getting along?" he asked.

"Not very well," and I threw the book back on the table. "The crystal

gazing isn't so bad—one can understand that; but the jumble of abstractions which the Hindus call religion is too much for me. I didn't know it was so late," I added, and looked at my watch; but it was not yet eleven o'clock.

"I'm earlier than usual," said Godfrey. "I cut loose as soon as I could, because I thought we'd better talk things over. I saw Simmonds in town to-night."

"Ah," I said, "and what did he tell you?"

"Nothing I didn't know already. The police have discovered nothing new—or, if they have, they're keeping it dark until to-morrow. Simmonds did, however, regale me with his theory of the case. He says the murder was done either by one of the Hindus or by young Swain."

"What do *you* think?" I asked.

"I'm inclined to agree with Simmonds," said Godfrey grimly. "With the emphasis on the Hindus," he added, seeing the look on my face. "I don't believe Swain had any hand in it."

"Neither do I," I agreed heartily. "In fact, such a theory is too absurd to discuss."

"Just the same," said Godfrey slowly, "I'm glad he didn't touch Vaughan. If he had happened to seize him by the neck, while they were struggling together—in other words, if those finger prints Goldberger found had happened to be Swain's—things would have looked bad for him. I'm hoping they'll turn out to belong to one of the Hindus—but, as I said to Goldberger, I'm afraid that's too good to be true."

"Which one of the Hindus?" I asked.

"Oh, the Thug, of course."

I sat bolt upright.

"The Thug?" I echoed.

"Didn't you get that far?" and Godfrey picked up one of the books and ran rapidly through the pages. "You remember we found him squatting on the floor with a rag and a tooth and a bone in front of him?"

"Yes."

"And do you remember how the yogi described them, when Goldberger asked him about them?"

"Very distinctly—he called them the attributes of Kali."

"Now, listen to this." And he read:

"The Thugs are a religious fraternity, committing murders in honor of Kali, the wife of Siva, who, they believe, assists them and protects them. Legend asserts that she presented her worshipers with three things: the hem of her lower garment to use as a noose, a rib to use as a knife, and a tooth to use as a pickax in burying the victims. But the knife was little used, for the religious character of an assassination came to depend more and more upon its bloodless character, and for this a noose was used, with which the victim was strangled. The aversion to bloodshed became in time so great that many sects of Thuggee consider it defiling to touch human blood!"

He closed the book and threw it on the table. "Don't you think that proves the case?"

"Yes," I said thoughtfully. "And the yogi—is he also a Thug?"

"Oh, no; a White Priest of Siva could never be a Thug. The worship of Siva and of Kali are the very opposites of each other. The Saivas are ascetics. That is," he added, in another tone, "if this fellow is really a Saiva and not just a plain fraud."

"All these fellows are frauds, more or less, aren't they?" I questioned.

"No," was Godfrey's unexpected answer. "The real yogis are no doubt sincere; but a real yogi wouldn't waste his time on a soft-brained old man, and fire skyrockets off at midnight to impress him. My own opinion is that this fellow is a fakir—a juggler, a sleight-of-hand man—and, of course, a crook."

"Well?" I asked, as Godfrey stopped and failed to continue.

"Well, that's as far as I've got. Oh, yes—there's Toto. A cobra is one of a fakir's stock properties."

"But, Godfrey," I protested, "he is no ignorant roadside juggler. He's a cultivated man—an unusual man."

"Certainly he is—most unusual. But that doesn't disprove my guess; it only makes the problem harder. Even a roadside juggler doesn't do his tricks for nothing—what reward is it this fellow's working for? It must be a big one, or it wouldn't tempt him."

"I suppose Vaughan paid him well," I ventured.

"Yes; but did you look at him, Lester? You've called him unusual, but that word doesn't begin to express him. He's extraordinary. No doubt Vaughan *did* pay him well, but it would take something more than that to persuade such a man to spend six months in a place like that. And I think I can guess at the stake he's playing for."

"You mean Miss Vaughan?"

"Just that," and Godfrey leaned back in his chair.

I contemplated his theory for some moments in silence. It was, at least, a theory, and an interesting one—but it rested on air. There was no sort of foundation for it that I could see, and at last I said so.

"I know it's pretty thin," Godfrey admitted, "but it's the best I've been able to do—there's so little to build a theory out of. But I'm going to see if I can't prove one part of it true to-night."

"Which part?"

"About his being a fakir. Here's my theory: That hocus-pocus on the roof at midnight was for the purpose of impressing Vaughan. No doubt he believed it a real spiritual manifestation, whereas it was only a clever bit of jugglery. Now that Vaughan is dead, that particular bit of jugglery will cease until there is some new victim to impress. In fact, it has ceased already. There was no star last night."

"But you know why," I pointed out. "The yogi spent the night in contemplation. We can bear witness to that."

"We can't bear witness to when he started in," said Godfrey dryly. "We didn't see him till after half past twelve. However, accepting his explanation, there would be no reason for omitting the phenomenon to-night, if it is a genuine one."

"No," I agreed.

"And if it *is* omitted," Godfrey went on, "it will be pretty conclusive evidence that it isn't genuine. Although," he went on hurriedly, "I don't need any proof of that—anything else would be unbelievable." He glanced at his watch. "It's ten minutes to twelve," he said. "Come along."

I followed him out of the house and through the grove with very mixed sensations. If the star *didn't* fall, it would tend to prove that it was, as Godfrey had said, merely a fake arranged to impress a credulous old man. But suppose it *did* fall! That was a part of the test concerning which Godfrey had said nothing. Suppose it *did* fall! What then?

So it was in silence that I followed Godfrey up the ladder and took my place on the limb. But Godfrey seemed to have no uneasiness.

"We won't have long to wait," he said. "We'll wait till five minutes after twelve, just to make sure. It must be twelve now. I wish I could persuade that fellow to show me how the fake was worked, for it was certainly a good one—one of the best ever——"

He stopped abruptly, staring out into the darkness. I was staring, too, for there, against the sky, a light began to glow and brighten. It hung for a moment motionless, and then began slowly to descend—steadily, deliberately, as of set purpose. Lower and lower it sank in a straight line, hovered for an instant, and burst into a million sparks.

In the flare of light, a white-robed figure stood, gazing upward, its arms strained toward the sky.

As we went silently down the ladder a moment later, it seemed to me that I could hear Godfrey's theory crashing about his ears.

CHAPTER XIII.

FRANCISCO SILVA.

It was not quite ten o'clock when Godfrey and I turned in at the gates of Elmhurst next morning and made our way up the drive to the house, but in the library we found a considerable company already assembled. Goldberger was there, with Freylinghuisen, his physician, his clerk, his stenographer, and the men who were to constitute the jury; Simmonds was there, and with him was an alert little man in

glasses, who, Godfrey told me in an aside, was Sylvester, the head of the identification bureau, and the greatest expert on finger prints in America. The district attorney had sent up an assistant, also with a stenographer, and altogether the room was decidedly crowded.

It became impossible, a moment later, when a string of automobiles puffed up the drive, and disgorged a mob of reporters and photographers. As many as the room would hold pushed into it, and the others stood outside in the drive and complained loudly. The complaints of the photographers were especially varied and forceful. Goldberger looked around him in despair, mopping his face angrily, for the crowded room was very hot.

"You fellows will have to get out of here," he said to the reporters. "There's no room. I'll give you a transcript of the proceedings after they're over."

The protests redoubled. How were they to get any human interest out of a transcript? Besides, there were the photographers. What did he expect them to do—photograph the transcript? And finally the law required that the hearing be public, so they had a right to be present. It was a tense moment, the more so since Goldberger was not at all insensible of the value of newspaper popularity to a man in public life.

"Why not go out on the lawn?" Godfrey suggested. "It's only a question of moving some chairs and tables, and the boys will all lend a hand."

The boys applauded, almost forgiving Godfrey his scoop, protested their entire willingness to lend two hands, if necessary, and, when Goldberger nodded his approval, fell to work with a will. The lower floor of the house was denuded, the garden seats pressed into service, and at the end of five minutes the court was established amid the circle of trees, the reporters had their coats off and their pipes lighted, the photographers ditto and their cameras placed. Good humor was restored, peace reigned, and Goldberger smiled again, for he knew that the adjectives with which the reporters would qualify his name would be complimentary ones.

He took his place, rapped for order, and instructed his clerk to swear the jury. Nobody paid much attention to the jury, for it was used merely as a method of paying political debts, and its verdict was usually in strict accord with the wishes of the presiding officer. Then Goldberger looked at the vacant chair which I had kept beside me.

"By the way, Mr. Lester," he said, "I don't see Mr. Swain."

"He had to go back to the city last night," I explained, "to get some fresh clothes. He had an errand or two to do this morning, and may have been detained. I left word at the house for him to come over here at once."

"You seem to have a good deal of confidence in him," Goldberger remarked.

"I have," I answered quietly. "A great deal."

Goldberger frowned a little, but proceeded to open the case without further delay. Godfrey was the first witness, and told his story much as he had told it the night before. I followed him, but could add no new details. Both of us were excused without cross-examination.

To my great satisfaction, Swain arrived while I was testifying, and I could not deny myself a triumphant glance at Goldberger, but he was studying some memoranda, and affected not to notice it.

As soon as I left the stand Swain came and sat down beside me, and gave me a letter. It was addressed to Miss Vaughan.

"It's from Mrs. Royce," he said. "She's a trump! She's determined that Marjorie shall come to her. She says if you don't bring her she'll come after her herself. Do you know how she is this morning?"

"No," I said; "I haven't seen Hinman. But how are you?"

"Oh, I'm all right again—head a little sore yet, where I bumped it—but otherwise as fit as a fiddle."

"You look it!" I said, and I was glad, because I wanted him to make a good impression on the stand. I knew

what weight appearances often had; and no jury, I told myself, would believe that this bright-eyed, fresh-colored boy could have had any hand in a brutal murder.

Just then Hinman's name was called, and an officer hurried away to the house after him. They returned together almost at once, and Hinman was placed on the stand. He told of being summoned by Godfrey, and of the events which followed. He said that the murder had been committed about midnight, that death had been due to strangulation; and identified the cord and the bloodstained handkerchief which the coroner submitted to him. I fancied that Swain lost a little of his color when he saw the handkerchief and learned where it had been found, but he made no remark.

"Will Miss Vaughan be able to testify?" Goldberger inquired, just before the doctor stepped down.

"Unless it is absolutely necessary, I think she would better be excused," Hinman answered. "She is still very nervous. The ordeal might cause a serious collapse."

"We will try to get along without her," assented Goldberger. "If necessary I can take her deposition. Is she in bed?"

"Yes; I am keeping her as quiet as possible."

"Very well; we won't disturb her," said Goldberger, and Hinman was excused, and Freylinghuisen called. He merely testified to the cause of death, and that the autopsy had shown that the deceased was in fair health, and without organic disease.

Then the servants were called, but their evidence was unimportant. They had gone to bed about ten o'clock, and had not awakened until the coroner himself had pounded at the door. They had heard no unusual sound. Yes, they had slept with their doors locked and windows shuttered because that was the rule of the house. Yes, even in the hottest weather; that made no difference, since each of their rooms was fitted with a ventilator.

Questioned as to the manner of life of the other inmates of the house, the German and his wife were noncommittal. They had been with the family a long time; had taken care of the place when their master was abroad; only after his return had it been necessary to get another servant. He had been at home for a year, and the Hindus had arrived about six months later. Yes, they knew their master was studying some strange religion, but that was no affair of theirs, and they had never seen anything wrong. He had always treated them well; was a little strange and absent-minded at times; but neither of them really saw much of him. He never interfered in the household affairs, Miss Vaughan giving such instructions as were necessary. The man spent most of his time in the grounds, and the woman in the kitchen. She was a little petulant over the fact that one of the Hindus—the "ugly one"—refused to eat her cooking, but insisted on preparing his own food. Also, the housemaid had told her that there was a snake, but she had never seen it.

From the Irish housemaid a little more information was obtained. Neither Mr. Vaughan nor the yogi ate any breakfast; indeed, they rarely left their rooms before noon. The other Hindu mixed himself up some sort of mess over the kitchen stove. Miss Vaughan breakfasted alone at nine o'clock. At such times she was accustomed to talk over household affairs with the maid, and after breakfast would visit the kitchen and make a tour of the grounds and garden. The remainder of her day would be spent in reading, in playing the piano, in doing little household tasks, or in walking about the grounds with her father. Yes, sometimes the yogi would join them, and there would be long discussions. After dinner in the library, there would also be long discussions, but the girl had no idea what they were about. She heard a fragment of them occasionally, but had never been able to make anything of them. In fact, from the way they dressed and all, she had come to the conclusion that Mr. Vaughan and the

yogi were both a little crazy, but quite inoffensive and harmless.

"And how about Miss Vaughan?" asked the coroner.

"Miss Vaughan, bless her heart, wasn't crazy," said the girl quickly; "not a bit of it. She was just sad and lonely—as who wouldn't be! She never went out; in the five months I've been here she's never been off the place; and them front gates was never opened to let anybody in. The only people who come in were the grocer and milkman and suchlike, through the little door at the side."

"You say you have been here five months?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you come to apply for the place?"

"I didn't apply for it. I was sent here by an employment bureau. Miss Marjorie engaged me. I didn't see the Hindus till afterward, or I don't think I'd have took it. After that I stayed for Miss Marjorie's sake."

"You thought she needed you?"

"Yes, I did. With her father moonin' round in a kind of trance, and the yogi lookin' at her with eyes like live coals, and a snake that stood on its tail, and the other naygur going around with nothin' on but a diaper, I thought she needed somebody to look after her; and says I: 'Annie Crogan, you're the girl to do it!'"

There was a ripple of laughter, and the pencils of the reporters flew across their paper. It was the first gleam to enliven a prosaic and tiresome hearing.

"Were the Hindus obtrusive in any way?" asked the coroner.

"Oh, no; they minded their business. I've no complaint on that score."

"Did you see any of their religious practices?"

"I wouldn't call them religious—quite the contrary. I've seen them wavin' their arms, and bowin' to the sun, and settin' in the dark starin' at a glass globe with a light in it; that's about all. I got used to it, after a while, and just went on about my work without takin' any notice."

There was little more to be got from her, and finally she was excused. The reporters yawned. The jury twitched nervously. Worthington Vaughan was dead; he had been strangled—so much was clear; but not a scintilla of evidence had as yet been introduced as to who had strangled him. Then a movement of interest ran through the crowd, for a policeman came from the direction of the house, accompanied by two strange figures. One was the yogi, in robes of dazzling white; the other his attendant, wearing something more than a diaper, indeed, but with his thin brown legs bare.

The yogi bowed to Goldberger with grave courtesy, and, at a word from the attendant policeman, sat down in the witness chair. Everybody was leaning forward looking at him, and the cameras were clicking in chorus, but he seemed scarcely aware of the circle of eager faces.

"Hold up your right hand, please," began Goldberger, after contemplating him for a moment.

"For what purpose?" asked the yogi.

"I'm going to swear you."

"I do not understand."

"I'm going to put you on oath to tell nothing but the truth," explained the coroner.

"An oath is unnecessary," said the yogi, with a smile. "To speak the truth is required by my religion."

There was something impressive in the words, and Goldberger slowly lowered his arm.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Francisco Silva."

"You are not a Hindu?"

"I am of their faith."

"But by birth?"

"I am a Portuguese."

"Born in India?"

"Born at Goa."

The coroner paused. He had never heard of Goa. Neither had I. Neither, I judged, had any one else present. In this, however, I was wrong. Godfrey had heard of it, and afterward referred me to Marryat's "Phantom Ship" as his source of information.

"Goa," Silva explained, seeing our perplexity, "is a colony owned by Por-

tugal on the Malabar coast, some distance below Bombay."

"How does it come that you speak English so well?"

"I was educated at Bombay, and afterward at Oxford and at Paris."

"But you are by religion a Hindu?"

"I am a Saiva—a follower of Siva, the lord of life and death."

As he spoke, he touched his forehead with the fingers of his left hand.

There was a moment's silence. Goldberger's mustache, I noted, with a smile, was beginning to suffer again. "You are what is called an adept?" he asked at last.

"Some may call me that," said Silva, but incorrectly. "Among my fellow Saivas, I am known as a White Priest, a yogi, a teacher of the law."

"Mr. Vaughan was your pupil?"

"Yes; for six months he was my pupil."

"In what way did you come to accept this position?"

"Two years ago Mr. Vaughan visited the monastery of our order in Crete. He was at that time merely a student of Orientalism, and came to us from curiosity. But his interest grew, and, after a year spent in studying the holy books, he asked that a teacher be sent to him. There was none at that time who could be spared; but six month ago, having completed a task which had occupied me in Paris, I was assigned to this."

"Do you always go to so much trouble to secure converts?" questioned Goldberger, a little cynically.

"Usually we require that the period of study be passed at one of our monasteries. But this case was exceptional."

"In what way?"

"It was our hope," explained the yogi calmly, "that Mr. Vaughan would assist us in spreading the great truth by endowing a monastery for us in this country."

"Ah!" and Goldberger looked at him. "Did he agree to do so?"

"He did," answered the yogi, still more calmly. "This estate was to have been given to us for that purpose, together with an endowment sufficient to maintain it. Mr. Vaughan himself hoped to gain the white robe and become a teacher."

"What was to become of his daughter?"

"It was his hope that she would become a priestess of our order."

"You hoped so, too, no doubt?" inquired Goldberger sweetly.

"I did. It is an office of high honor and great influence. She would walk all her days in the shadow of the Holy One. So sweet a cup is offered to few women. The number of priestesses is limited to nine."

Goldberger pulled at his mustache helplessly. Evidently the witness' calm self-control was not to be broken down, or even ruffled.

"Please tell me where you were night before last," said the coroner finally.

"I was in this house."

"Did you see Mr. Vaughan?"

"I did not."

"How did you spend the night?"

"In contemplation. It was, as I have told you, the White Night of Siva, sacred to him from sunset to sunrise."

"Do you mean that you spent the whole night sitting before that crystal?" asked the coroner incredulously.

"That is my meaning."

"You know nothing, then, of the death of Mr. Vaughan?"

"I saw his soul pass in the night. More than that I know not."

Again Goldberger twitched at his mustache. He was plainly at a loss how to proceed.

"Was your attendant with you?" he asked.

"He was in his closet."

"At his devotions, too, perhaps?"

"The White Night of Siva is also the Black Night of Kali," said the yogi gravely, as one rebuking an unworthy levity.

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

"Mahbub is of the cult of Kali, who is the wife of Siva," said the yogi, touching his forehead reverently as he spoke the words. "He spent the night in adoration of her attributes."

Goldberger's stenographer was hav-

ing his difficulties; the pencils of the reporters were racing wildly in unison; every one was listening with strained attention; there was, somehow, a feeling in the air that something was about to happen. I saw Godfrey write a line upon a sheet of paper, fold it, and toss it to the table in front of Goldberger. The coroner opened it, read the line, and stared at the impassive Mahbub, who stood beside his master with folded arms, staring over the heads of the crowd.

"In other words," said Goldberger slowly, "your attendant is a Thug."

The yogi bowed.

"Yes," he said calmly; "Mahbub is Thuggee!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FINGER PRINTS.

A shiver ran through the crowd, like a gust of wind across a field of wheat. The words, "Mahbub is Thuggee," seemed to rend the veil which obscured the tragedy. Surely it was clear enough now; here was a man killed by Thuggee's peculiar method, and here was the Thug. It was as simple as two and two!

Every eye was on the barelegged Hindu, impassive as ever, staring straight before him. The camera men hastily pushed in fresh plates, and trained their machines upon him. Two policemen edged close to his side.

But Francisco Silva looked about him with scornful eyes, and presently he opened his lips as though to speak, and then he closed them.

Goldberger seemed perplexed. He looked as though, while rolling smoothly along the road toward a well-understood goal, he had suddenly struck an unforeseen obstacle. The possibility of Mahbub's guilt seemed to interfere with some theory of his own. He called Simmonds and the district attorney to him, and they exchanged a few low words. Then he turned back to the witness.

"I should like to question your attendant," he said. "Will you translate for me? I have not been able to find a Hindu interpreter."

Silva bowed his consent.

"Ask him, please, where he spent Thursday night."

There was a brief interchange between Silva and Mahbub, then the former turned to Goldberger.

"It was as I thought," he said. "He spent it in worship of the attributes of Kali."

The coroner opened an envelope which lay on the table at his elbow, and took out a piece of knotted cord.

"Ask him if he ever saw this before," he said, and passed it to the witness.

"I notice that it is stained," said Silva, looking at it. "Is it with blood?"

"Yes."

"Then Mahbub will not touch it. For him to do so would be to defile himself."

"He doesn't need to touch it. Show it to him."

Silva spoke to his servant, holding up the cord. The latter glanced at it and shook his head. Without a word, Silva handed the cord back to the coroner.

"Are there any further questions?" he asked.

Goldberger pulled at his mustache impatiently.

"There are a lot of questions I'd like to ask," he said, "but I feel a good deal as though I were questioning the Sphinx. Isn't it a little queer that a Thug should be so particular about a few bloodstains?"

"I fear that you are doing Mahbub an injustice in your thoughts," Silva said gravely. "You have heard certain tales of the Thugs, perhaps—tales distorted and magnified and untrue. In the old days, as worshipers of Kali, they did sometimes offer her a human sacrifice, but that was long ago. To say a man is a Thug is not to say he is also a murderer."

"It will take more than that to convict him, anyway," assented Goldberger quickly. "That is all for the present, professor." I bit back a smile at the

title which came so unconsciously from Goldberger's lips.

Silva bowed, and walked slowly away toward the house, Mahbub following close behind. At a look from Simmonds two of his men strolled after the strange couple.

Goldberger stared musingly after them for a moment, then shook his head impatiently, and turned back to the business in hand.

"Will Mr. Swain please take the stand?" he said; and Swain took the chair. "Now, Mr. Swain," Goldberger began, after swearing him, "please tell us, in your own way, what part you had in the incidents of Thursday night."

Swain told his story much as he had told it to Godfrey and me, and I noticed how closely both Goldberger and the district attorney followed it. When he had finished Goldberger asked the same question that Godfrey had asked.

"While you were having the altercation with Mr. Vaughan, did you grasp hold of him?"

"No, sir; I did not touch him."

"You are quite sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"You didn't touch him at any time, then or afterward?"

"No, sir. I didn't see him afterward."

"What were your feelings when he took his daughter away?"

"I was profoundly grieved."

"And angry?"

"Yes, I suppose I was angry. He was most unjust to me."

"He had used very violent language to you, had he not?"

"Yes."

"He had threatened your life if you tried to see his daughter again?"

"Yes."

"Now, Mr. Swain, as you stood there, angry and humiliated, didn't you make up your mind to follow him to the house and have it out with him?"

Swain smiled.

"I'm lawyer enough to know," he said, "that a question like that isn't permissible. But I'll answer it. I may have had such an impulse—I don't know; but the sight of the cobra there in the arbor put it effectually out of my head."

"You still think there was a cobra?"

"I am sure of it."

"And you ran out of the arbor so fast you bumped your head?"

"I suppose that's what happened. It's mighty sore, anyway," and Swain put his hand to it ruefully.

"Mr. Swain," went on the coroner slowly, "are you prepared to swear that, after you hurt your head, you might not, in a confused and half-dazed condition, have followed your previous impulse to go to the house and see Mr. Vaughan?"

"Yes," answered Swain emphatically, "I am. Although I was somewhat dazed, I have a distinct recollection of going straight to the wall and climbing back over it."

"You cut your wrist as you were crossing the wall the first time?"

"Yes," and Swain held up his hand and showed the strip of plaster across the wound.

"Your right wrist?"

"Yes."

"It bled freely, did it not?"

"Very freely."

"What became of the clothes you took off when you changed into those brought by Mr. Godfrey?"

"I don't know. Mr. Lester told me they were left here. I intended to inquire for them."

At a sign from Goldberger, Simmonds opened a suit case, and placed a bundle on the table. Goldberger unrolled it, and handed it to Swain.

"Are these the clothes?" he asked.

"Yes," said Swain, after a moment's examination.

"Will you hold the shirt up so the jury can see it?"

Swain held the garment up, and everybody's eyes were fixed upon the blood-soaked sleeve.

"There seems to have been a good deal of blood," remarked Goldberger. "It must have run down over your hand."

"It did. It was all over my fingers."

"So that it would probably stain anything you touched?"

"Yes, very probably."

"Did you think of that when you were in the arbor with Miss Vaughan?"

Swain's face suddenly crimsoned, and he hung his head.

"I'm afraid not," he said.

"How was she dressed?"

"In a white robe of some silklike material."

"A robe that would show a blood-stain?"

"Undoubtedly."

Goldberger paused for an instant, and then produced a pad, such as one uses for inking rubber stamps, opened it, and placed it on the table before him.

"Have you any objection to giving me a set of your finger prints?" he asked.

"None whatever," and Swain stepped toward the table, and placed the tips of his fingers on the pad. Then he pressed each one carefully upon the pad of paper which the coroner placed before him.

Goldberger watched him curiously, until all ten impressions had been made.

"You did that as though you had done it before," he remarked.

"I made a set once for Mr. Vaughan," said Swain, sitting down again. "He had a most interesting collection."

Goldberger passed the prints over to the head of the bureau of identification, then he turned back to the witness.

"Mr. Swain," he said, "have you ever seen this cord before?" and he handed him the knotted cord.

Swain took it and examined it curiously, without hesitation or repugnance.

"No," he answered finally, "I never saw it before."

"Do you know what it is?" and Goldberger watched him closely.

"I infer that it is the cord with which Mr. Vaughan was strangled."

"That is so. You did not see it around his neck?"

"I have no recollection of having done so."

"Please look at the cord again, Mr. Swain," said Goldberger, still watching him. "You will see that it is knotted. Can you describe those knots for me?"

Swain looked at the knots, and I was glad to see that his hands were absolutely steady, and his face free from fear. No murderer could handle so unconcernedly the instrument of his crime! Surely the jury would see that!

"The knots," said Swain, "seem to be an ordinary square knot with which the cord was made into a noose, and then a double bowline to secure it."

"A double bowline? Can you tie such a knot?"

"Certainly. Any one who has ever owned a boat can do so. It is the best knot for this purpose."

The coroner reached out for the cord and replaced it in the envelope. Then he produced the handkerchief.

"Can you identify this?" he asked, and handed it to the witness.

Swain changed color a little as he took it.

"I cannot identify it," he said, in a low voice, "but I will say this: When Miss Vaugan found that my wrist was bleeding, she insisted upon tying her handkerchief around it. This may be the handkerchief."

Again a little shiver ran through the crowd, and Goldberger's eyes were gleaming.

"You notice that two corners of the handkerchief are free from stain," he said, "and are crumpled, as though they had been tied in a knot. The handkerchief Miss Vaughan used would probably be in that condition, would it not?"

"Yes," Swain answered, his voice still low.

"You heard Doctor Hinman testify that he found the handkerchief beside the chair in which Mr. Vaughan was murdered?"

"Yes."

"Can you explain its presence there?"

"I cannot, unless it dropped from my wrist when I stooped to raise Miss Vaughan."

Goldberger looked at the witness for a moment, then he glanced at Sylvester, who nodded almost imperceptibly.

"That is all for the present, Mr. Swain," the coroner said, and Swain

sat down again beside me, very pale, but holding himself well in hand.

Then Simmonds took the stand. His story developed nothing new, but he told of the finding of the body and of its appearance and manner of death in a way which brought back the scene to me very vividly. I suspected that he made his story deliberately impressive in order to efface the good impression made by the previous witness.

Finally the coroner dipped once more into the suit case, brought out another bundle, and unrolled it. It proved to be a white robe with red stains about the top. He handed it to Simmonds.

"Can you identify this?" he asked.

"Yes," said Simmonds; "it is the garment worn by Mr. Vaughan at the time of his murder."

"How do you identify it?"

"By my initials in indelible ink, on the right sleeve, where I placed them."

"There are stains at the top of the robe. What are they?"

"Bloodstains."

"Human blood?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know?"

"I have had them tested."

"Did any blood come from the corpse?"

"No, sir; the skin of the neck was not broken."

"Where, then, in your opinion, did this blood come from?"

"From the murderer," answered Simmonds quietly.

There was a sudden gasp from the reporters, as they saw whither this testimony was tending. I glanced at Swain. He was a little paler, but was smiling confidently.

Goldberger, his face hawklike, stooped again to the suit case, produced a third bundle, and, unrolling it, disclosed another robe, also of white silk. This, too, he handed to Simmonds.

"Can you identify that?" he asked.

"Yes," said Simmonds. "It is the robe worn by Miss Vaughan on the night of the tragedy. My initials are on the left sleeve."

"That has also blood marks on it, I believe?"

"Yes, sir," and, indeed, we could all perceive the marks.

"Human blood?"

"Yes, sir. I had it tested, too."

"That is all," said Goldberger quickly, and placed on the stand the head of the identification bureau.

"Mr. Sylvester," he began, "you have examined the marks on these garments?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you make of them?"

"They are all unquestionably finger marks; but most of them are mere smudges. However, the fabric of which these robes are made is a very hard and finely meshed silk, with an unusually smooth surface, and I succeeded in discovering a few marks on which the lines were sufficiently distinct for purposes of identification. These I have photographed. The lines are much plainer in the photograph than on the cloth."

"Have you the photographs with you?"

"I have," and Sylvester produced them from a pocket. "These are the prints on the robe belonging to the murdered man," he added, passing four cards to the coroner. "You will notice that two of them show the right thumb, though one is not very distinct; another shows the right forefinger, and the fourth the right middle finger."

"You consider these plain enough for purposes of identification?"

"Undoubtedly. One would be enough."

Goldberger passed the photographs to the jury, who looked at them vacantly.

"And the other photographs?" he asked.

"I got only two prints from the other robe," said Sylvester. "All but these were hopelessly smudged, as though the hand had moved while touching the garment."

"You mean they were all made by one hand?" asked Goldberger.

"Yes, sir; by the right hand. Again, I have a print of the thumb and one of the third finger."

He passed the photographs over, and again Goldberger handed them on to the jury.

"Mr. Sylvester," said the coroner, "you consider the finger-print method of identification a positive one, do you not?"

"Absolutely so."

"Even with a single finger?"

"Perhaps with a single finger there may be some doubt, if there is no other evidence. Somebody has computed that the chance of two prints being exactly the same is one in sixty-four millions."

"And where there is other evidence?"

"I should say that a single finger was enough."

"Suppose you have two fingers?"

"Then it is absolutely certain."

"And three fingers?"

Sylvester shrugged his shoulders to indicate that proof could go no farther. Goldberger took back the photographs from the foreman of the jury, and ranged them before him on the table.

"Now, Mr. Sylvester," he said, "did you notice any correspondence between these prints?"

"Yes," answered the witness, in a low voice; "the thumb prints on both robes were made by the same hand."

The audience sat spellbound, staring, scarce breathing. I dared not glance at Swain. I could not take my eyes from that pale-faced man on the witness stand, who knew that with every word he was riveting an awful crime to a living fellow being.

"One question more," said Goldberger. "Have you any way of telling by whom those prints were made?"

"Yes," said Sylvester again, and his voice was so low I could scarcely hear it. "They were made by Frederic Swain. The prints he made just now correspond with them in every detail!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

The continuation of this story will be published in the first February POPULAR, on sale two weeks hence, January 7th.

THAT "BEST-GOWN" CRY

MRS. FRANKLIN MACVEAGH, the wife of the secretary of the treasury, has a fine collection of laces, jewels, embroideries, and such other curios in the gold and plate-glass cabinets in her drawing-rooms in Washington. She is proud of the fact that the empress of China has added to the collection not only some valuable jade rings, but also several jade tear bottles.

On one occasion a well-trained servant was showing the tear bottles to the wife of a new member of the House and explaining whence they came and for what they were used. But the explanation was never finished. The lady caught him frantically by the arm and exclaimed:

"For Heaven's sake, don't spill those tears! You will spot my best gown!"

A CURE FOR ALCOHOLISM

PRESIDENT TAFT, who neither drinks spirituous liquors nor believes in other people indulging in them, tells this:

A young man had fallen into the habit of struggling through his work every day and then making a much more desperate struggle to get home after he had patronized several saloons. Finally his long-suffering wife could stand it no longer, and she delivered a hot lecture to him on his bad behavior.

"My dear," he said seriously, "I'm a great man. All great men drink. Drinking and greatness go together. History shows it. Look at Poe, Bobbie Burns, and——"

"That's all right," cut in the wife, "and I agree to it. You just promise to quit drinking until you're great, and I'll be satisfied."

The Green Hour

BEING AN EXPLOIT OF YORKE NORROY, DIPLOMATIC AGENT, WHILE IN QUEST OF THE SIX JADE PLATES

By George Bronson-Howard

Author of "The Norroy Stories," "Snobs," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF FIRST PART.

Van Gruenberg Luyties, an eighteen-dollar-a-week shipping clerk in the house of Popson & Co., importers of teas, sugars and spices, is endowed with imagination and taste for the luxuries of life, and consequently finds his sphere a dull round. Suddenly into the midst of his dreams and longings Romance is projected, beginning with an unexpected "green hour" in a little out-of-the-way French tavern, where he sips his first drink of absinth. Joyously on his way to dinner, Luyties obeys the notion to visit an old skinflint pawnbroker from whom he had bought a jade plate, neither of them knowing its value at the time. Luyties exuberantly states that he wishes another plate, and thereupon the money lender becomes greatly excited, offering to buy back the first plate at an enormous advance. A bargain is struck, and the astonished young fellow gets one hundred dollars from the old man. Full of suspicion, Luyties goes home, where further adventure awaits in the form of a call from a beautiful young woman, Holly Lea, who also wants to buy the jade plate. She tells him there is a terrible secret written on it. Rising to the occasion of being magnanimous and magnificent, Luyties declares the plate is hers on the sole condition that she permit him to take her to dinner and the theater. Miss Lea consents, but leaves him a moment, during which she passes over the precious plate to her employer, Yorke Norroy, who meets her at the street door. When Holly Lea and Luyties ride off in a motor they are followed by a mysterious stranger who, in turn, is shadowed by the clever diplomatic agent, Norroy.

(In Two Parts—Part II.)

CHAPTER IV.

KIDNAPING ON THE HIGHROAD.

THE end of the enchanted evening was drawing slowly near; also the end of the hundred-dollar note. Van was too ecstatically happy to be aware of the first, and in his impersonation of the young clubman, which was nearer one of a perfect gentle knight, he would have scorned to be aware of the second; although, once, when he found himself obliged to part with half a dollar to some ex-banditti in charge of a cloakroom, who seemed to show by their reception of the coin that they never received a smaller pourboire, a faint remembrance that he had breakfasted and dined on that sum yesterday recurred to his mind—but he thrust the proletarian thought forth with contumely.

Say that a young prince was doing the honors for the pleasure of a pretty princess, and desired to spare her annoyance. Say that young prince was unknown among the purveyors of pleasures. Yet, say again, the young prince desired the pretty princess to be accorded the same courtesy from Manhattan menials that she would receive from the prince's own personal attendants. Then, indeed, must that young prince squander a small fortune in a single night, and, as Van *was* a prince, a dream prince, he desired this thing, and the fortune was expended.

His heart beat high when the first quarter of his all went for the stage box in which they sat alone, alone but very happy, through an entire performance of great beauty; where long, lighted boulevards, the interiors of golden Parisian cafés, the boudoirs of

beautiful women, and other scenes of a life among gay spender folk changed one into another.

The prima donna, most admired of all these happy people, a lady of many affairs of the heart, still beautiful, if plump, found something fascinating in the young pair in the box, and, more than once, gave Van a little wistful glance. Young boys with that happy, innocent smile were rare in her world now. The plainer people in the audience stared frankly and admiringly; and the gentlemanly blackguards of the front rows found Van's princess promised more possibilities of imagination than any one they were paying to see.

The sense of nearness, of being part of the performance, of being envied and admired by a whole theater full, made Van flush happily, and he hummed the soubrette's song almost audibly; whereupon she sang a verse directly at him, and a mysterious man away off bathed prince and princess in a circular sea of lambent light. Even the languid lineless ladies of the show rank gave Van evidences of their approval; which, if Van had read his theatrical books aright, was equivalent to putting the seal royal upon his pretensions.

But of all those who stared and made him happy, there was none more assiduous than the man who had driven up in the taxicab, and had received from the Irish charwoman the address of the theater. Van saw him continually that evening; he rubbed shoulders with him in the theater lobby, and on the pavement when Van was requisitioning a vehicle to whirl them to a cabaret as near like the one in the play as many paid entertainers could compass. And then, again, in the Carnival of Folly itself he caught occasional glimpses of the silent stranger's face, amid the drifting confetti, the many wandering gayly colored toy balloons, the tall, swaying staffs decorated with the figures of jesters in caps and bells, to which favor every lady of the night clung, generally with a little, jeweled hand.

Fortune had done her best for the young adventurer when she launched him on this romantic sea at so favorable an hour, and guided his footsteps aright to the proper places of pleasure; for one night in a week was gala night, each week designated differently, and tonight called the Feast of Folly. Jesters in their motley, Apaches of Paris, merry monks, and fluffy-skirted ballet dancers crowded one another in the center space, where the dancing was—hire folk, truly, but what cavilers we are to remember that—and girls in pretty costumes ran between the tables, throwing the confetti and distributing the favors of Folly. And truly expensive people received them.

On such a night as this, where tables were booked ahead, and invading princes like Van must give great largess to head waiters for putting in extra places, the restaurant could afford to be exclusive; so, were visiting revelers barren of a great expanse of spotless linen, or their ladies with covered shoulders, no seats were to be had. Corks popped mightily, you may be sure; and the refracted light of the great crystal chandeliers was shamed by the flashing of more expensive crystals on women's hands. Beauty was everywhere—youth was rampant, perhaps not rose-white, but beautifully rose-red.

The princess dipped into her champagne as might a canary; but she looked about her with eyes as wide as those of Van himself. He was laughing at everything—at nothing; and she, too, was laughing, except when, every now and then, she saw the man of the many elegancies who shone by his dress and demeanor among a large party of people who, one could see at a glance, lived on the "right" side of the park! They had welcomed him with shouts of delighted approval when he had appeared companionless at the door. There was always a welcome place at the tables of such people for the amusing Mr. Yorke Norroy.

Was it the latest story in London court circles—he knew it; or the last bit of gossip of the Paris half-world—he could give them that, too. Or who would be at Newport that summer, or Palm Beach that winter; or whose yacht was going into commission; and

the name of the peer who would soon visit them. Or did they wish to whirl in the last peculiar stage dance to find favor in society; why, Norroy could teach it to them then and there. And, to-night, it just happened that to dance spectacularly was what they *did* want; so Norroy signaled the head waiter, who saw his raised hand when he did not hear another's call, the band master was told, and the "Tonga," with its swaying South American music, broke out loudly.

Even the dancing professionals—who knew everything—watched Norroy's swift, sure, and sinuous motions as he took his partner, a pretty girl in blue, through the Tonga's tune.

Van was among the many whose eyes were centered upon this immaculate figure, this man of the many perfections of dress that Van had striven for, himself, in a humbler way. The grace of Norroy's movements went to Van's head; and the clerk's feet and hands kept time to the music. It had color, that dance, and a sudden overmastering resentment seized Van when it was finished. He applauded wildly, he called the master of perquisites, and gave him money for its repetition, and, then, when the strains broke out again, loud as though they were produced by brazen cymbals, Van, taken by an impulse he was never afterward able to explain, rose, and, bowing to the girl, led her into the center of the room.

Now Van had never danced in his life, except alone, in the exuberance of his spirits, when he was endeavoring in his hall bedroom to reconstruct the gay atmosphere of some song he had heard; but colorful music always set his feet tapping and his head swimming, and, deep down and unknown, there lay in him an almost perfect sense of time and rhythm which, hitherto, he had employed to no other purpose save that of remembering tunes.

Norroy paid him the honor of considerable attention, his agreeable dancing having inspired within the secret agent some idea manifestly pleasurable to him, for he nodded several times as he adjusted his soft French cuffs so that his links of jade and seed pearls showed to companion his waistcoat buttons of the same materials.

"Excellent! Bravo! Bravissima!" said Norroy, when Van and Holly, flushed and excited, had been left to dance alone, and were acquitting themselves with great merit. "She dances well."

"Indeed, and so does he," urged Mrs. Phillipse Van Reypen, Norroy's friend "Polly" of other days. "A handsome pair. I wonder I don't know them. But you know every one, Yorke. Suppose you supply the deficiency. Some stage people, I suppose."

"The young lady was found in a vaudeville house of very small pretensions a week or so ago," Norroy answered. "A gentleman, interested in her, has secured her the title rôle in 'The Devonshire Maid,' which opens here in a month—you saw it over the way, of course. The boy I don't know."

"Whoever the philanthropic gentleman was, Yorke," said Polly Van Reypen, "he taught her to dress à la mode very quickly, and as well as even you could do, yourself. Her frock is a marvel, and not even slightly Broadway. And if he's a jealous gentleman, I'd advise him to 'ware the good-looking boy. Otherwise he may make more than an ideal dancing partner of himself."

"You'll pardon me," said Norroy, rising in some haste. "But, as I told you when I sat down, I had another matter that might make me fly at any moment."

His signal for uprising had been the evident intention of Van Gruenberg Luyties and his pretty vis-à-vis to take themselves forth to some other place. It was close to one o'clock, and Holly had been forbidden, for the sake of her reputation and her future, to remain abroad at a later hour.

The assiduous stranger, noting the unrest that precedes such a departure, had passed forth hastily, leaving in his waiter's hands a gratuity almost the equal of his bill, sooner than be detained for change.

Had Norroy's friends been par-

ticularly observant, they might have noted that he had spared himself no pains to keep concealed from this assiduous stranger the sight of his face; nor would the secret agent have danced so publicly had he not first studied the room topographically, and perceived that the stranger's position behind a pillar precluded his viewing the performance. So the stranger went out of the gilded hall without the knowledge that, as he watched Van and the girl, so was he, himself, watched with equal, if seemingly unconscious, attention.

Outside, where the shadows of Assyrian lions and sphinxes lay large and distorted on marble flooring and rugs of Samarcand, lines of uniformed boys and of lace-aproned maids passed one to the other the products of the Rue de la Paix, the Place Vendome, Bond and Regent Streets, and Fifth Avenue, in the form of greatcoats, capes, and cloaks, of sable, gray fox, chinchilla, Persian lamb, mink, and muskrat fur; and there the lords and ladies of pleasure stood, en masse, wrapped for the wintry wind, and awaiting their motors and their cabs.

Van turned up the collar of a once fashionable Melton blue overcoat, and helped Holly through the swinging doors and to the pavement; and, though others struggled and gesticulated to be allowed to patronize the buccaneers of Broadway, a chauffeur ran immediately to Van and touched his hat mighty humbly, telling him his cab was ready and waiting, and that he was the man who had driven him there.

"Right across the street, sir—saves time backing her into line," and he led them over the icy tracks. He threw open his door, and turned from it to cranking up his car.

It was while Holly gathered up her filmy skirts of cobwebby gauze to show childlike feet and ankles, ready to step into the car, that they were both unceremoniously pushed aside, and a man entered the cab instead of them.

Holly heard a whisper and, so alarmed was she at a folly from the consequences of which she had been saved but narrowly, that she could hardly speak for the moment, but pulled Van behind the vehicle, so that, when the driver raised his head from his cranking, he saw no one, and consequently, supposing them within, he drove off as he had been directed to do, across to Fifth Avenue, and down that long lane of brilliant-purple crystals toward the Square.

CHAPTER V.

ADVICE TO A YOUNG MAN ABOUT TO BECOME A HIGHWAYMAN.

Inside the cab—which was no cab at all, but a very roomy limousine car—there was only pitch blackness; for the windows were hooded and sightless through the fact that the blinds were drawn; that pitch blackness so suggestive of nothing at all that it seems to hold the additional attribute of silence.

When Norroy entered, he had particularly troubled himself to say in a most solicitous and very boyish voice something from which one would have imagined he had with him a lady for companion. Now, with the door shut, and the cab on its way, Norroy urged the lady not to speak if she was tired; and, holding his breath, listened intently. It was apparent to his ears, trained to catch the most nebulous of whispers, that there was some disturbance of air within the car, something that gave him just the slightest auricular evidence to confirm suspicions first aroused by the hasty exit of the assiduous stranger. Undoubtedly there rode with him another person, no doubt the stranger himself, huddled up in a far corner of the car.

Yorke Norroy disliked the click and clatter, the shock and surprise consequent upon the use of firearms, but when one rides in the car of a kidnaper with silent strangers, and has, by a single alert movement, circumvented the same stranger, it is well to be prepared; so Norroy took from one pocket a small pistol of French make, in appearance not unlike a flat gun-metal cigarette case with a small spout, and from an-

other an ordinary-appearing watch, which, if rightly handled, showed a bright, illuminated dial when necessary.

He sat with these in his hands, patiently waiting; meanwhile relating to his imaginary female companion all the events of an evening in Paris. In the spaces between his words he listened sharply, and finally he knew that his silent fellow passenger had drawn a deep breath, preparatory to speaking.

Norroy concluded his story with haste, and waited encouragingly. The other cleared his throat. Norroy indulged in the expected start of surprise, and a startled ejaculation.

"Now, Mr. Luyties," said the voice pacifically, "don't be alarmed, sir; don't let the lady alarm you, either. Don't listen to her; you listen to me. She's cheating you, she is. I won't cheat you."

"The lady has fallen asleep," gasped Mr. Norroy, in his character part. "But who are you, and what are you doing in my cab—eh? What are you doing in my cab?" the last in crescendo.

"I'll tell you quickly, sir. I took the liberty of putting my car at your disposal; you're riding around the park in it, now. No harm will come to you or the lady, if you'll do what I ask you to do. But if you don't, I'm not answerable for consequences, Mr. Luyties. I'm only an agent acting under orders from men higher up; much higher up. They want that plate of yours—that green plate—and I've got orders to get it or not to let you go."

Norroy felt tentatively the bosom of his shirt where the curio, described as so much desired, rested, where two others, its sisters, had rested before; and he began to doubt the wisdom of the motive that led him to embark on this phase of the many adventures the plates had involved before, and would again; but he could not afford to have the girl held to the ransom of one plate, and he was, moreover, curious to know where Mr. Lycurgus Crawe—for the assiduous stranger was the well-known criminal of that name—had intended to take the pair, and how far he would go. But he was not desirous of prolonging any interview until such peril as he was in became clear to him, so he told Mr. Crawe, plainly and firmly, that he had given the plate to the young lady, and that it was now hers.

"Then she's got it with her," said Crawe, a note of pleasure creeping into his voice. "That's what I hoped. Now, how much did she give, or did she 'con' you out of it? Hey?"

From Norroy's dignified and hurt tone, Crawe adduced the truth.

"Well, see here, I'm no robber like the gang she belongs to. The plate's yours. You hand it over, and you get five thousand dollars. You said a thousand or so to the old man when he gave you the hundred this afternoon. So you won't deny that's a pretty fair price. Five thousand—and I guess she got it for a kiss. Lot of difference, ain't there?"

"Ssh," warned Norroy. "Don't wake her—and suppose I refuse?"

"You can't," returned the other, and Norroy did not doubt that he grinned. "Because I've got a little black fellow in my hand, and just the sight of him's the best argument I ever knew of for getting a fellow to throw up his hands, and letting you go through him. And if I was unlucky enough not to find it on either of you two, why, I'd speak through the tube here, and the chauffeur would take us out into the country to a place he knows about, and I'd keep you there till I'd searched your place and hers. And then, if I didn't find it, something mighty unpleasant would happen to the pair of you. *Something—mighty—unpleasant!*"

Mr. Crawe repeated the words as though he was very fond of them.

"So hand over the plate," he finished succinctly. "And," he warned, "no struggling, mind you, or trying to get my gun, 'cause I've got an awful nervous trigger finger, and, trembling with excitement like I am now, this thing's liable to go off any minute, and, like as not, hurt the young lady who's sleeping so innocent. And if it did," he further elucidated, "nothing would be done, 'cause you ain't even seen my face, and dunno me from a wooden Indian.

So come through with the plate, and look alive about it."

"How—how do you—know——" asked Norroy, successfully simulating a quavering voice. "How do you know I haven't got a g-gun trained on you, too, eh?—how do you kn-know that?"

"What'd a fellow like you be toting a cannon for?" returned Mr. Crawe, with great good sense. "It's a cinch she didn't tell you anything about those plates—trust her not to, and guns ain't like watches. Very few people has any place to put 'em, and no use to put 'em to. Besides, you probably never fired one in your life. I've had a lot of practice. Not shooting at bull's-eyes neither. Nor do people go after ducks, or deer, or animals and birds generally with the kind of guns that are carried in pockets. So I leave you to imagine what I got my experience shooting at; and, also, I want to remind you, you ain't, as yet, kicked in with that piece of crockery."

The sinister innuendo in this unpleasant scoundrel's speech was evident; would have been even to one unacquainted with Mr. Crawe and his brotherhood, and Norroy did not doubt the man would have little compunction in sustaining his reputation for truthfulness. Moreover, Norroy knew that Crawe's failure, in another instance, and the ignominious treatment he had received at the secret agent's hands, would impel him to extremes, rather than report failure again to his multimillionaire employer.

This affair had best be concluded as quickly and quietly as possible; although Norroy was sorry he would not be able to discover just where Crawe would have taken Van and Holly, had the plate not been found on either of them. However, that required a search of both parties, and as, even in the dark, one person cannot pass for two, when the sense of touch is applied to them, Norroy would be forced to withdraw from this rencontre with very little gained, except another scare for Crawe; and, one slip, one accident, and Crawe would triumph and secure the plate. Also, Norroy knew that Crawe would not be apt to let so dangerous an antagonist as himself live, if it was possible to make an end to him at no great risk to himself.

He paused for a moment to reflect, and then he said, in a rather unwilling voice:

"Give me the money."

"Repeat after me a solemn oath you won't tell the police or tell anybody who'll tell the police what's happened."

Norroy acquitted himself to Crawe's satisfaction.

"Here, then," said the latter, and, after fumbling, thrust a packet of notes into Norroy's hand.

"Now, let's have the plate, and no more palaver."

Norroy stowed away the money, smiling broadly. Now he knew in which hand Mr. Crawe held his weapon. The electric watch was not necessary. He picked it up from the seat where he had dropped it to take the bills. The exact place of Crawe's left hand he knew; consequently, when he dragged the plate from his shirt bosom, and held it out, it was in a position where Crawe must reach for it with the hand holding the revolver, or else turn sideways.

"Here," said Norroy.

"Nearer this side," growled Crawe.

"I can't," urged Norroy. "I've got one arm around her, and that's the hand holding it. I'm afraid of dropping it if I shift."

Crawe grunted again, and Norroy heard some movement. He reached out the other hand timidly, touching Crawe, and, finding he had done the only other thing to do, which was the sideways turning, Norroy knew that the hand holding the gun was now crowded into an extreme corner of the vehicle, with the weapon pointed outward toward the street. He felt a tug at the hand holding the plate, and a little note of relief was present in Crawe's ejaculation.

"All right," said Crawe. "Let go."

His fingers were closed tightly on the plate. At the minute Norroy was sure of this, his other hand shot across, to the angle where the revolver must be. He caught the fingers at a moment when

all the pressure of Crawe's body was in the eager hand that held the plate. The weapon yielded in his grasp with the ease a radish yields to the gardener.

Norroy had felt the small button of the car's electric switch at the back of his head while he sat silent, listening to Crawe. Now he pushed it into the wall with the butt of Crawe's gun, and, in that gold-brocaded limousine, with its elaborate toilet set, chased drinking bottle and glasses, its mirrors, and its flowers, he sat watching the discomfited kidnaper, half huddled, half tumbling—all splayfeet and disturbed eyes, still holding to his green plate.

His eyes slowly raised themselves, half dazzled and altogether stupid, until they rested on the jade and pearls of Norroy's studs and waistcoat buttons, higher up his ruffled shirt of fine pleats, and, branching over to the revolvers, one in each hand, until, finally, they took in his clear-cut features, his apparently anæmic skin, his indefinitely colored eyes. He started violently and dropped the plate.

"You! I mighta know it 'u'd be *you!"*

"I, yes," returned Norroy pleasantly. "Now, pick up that plate and throw it over here on the seat beside me. Let me warn you," he added, with silken suavity, "that nothing would please me better than shooting an unspeakable person who threatens to fire on women. So don't give me the slightest excuse, Mr. Crawe, or I'll yield to exceeding temptation. Man is but a weak vessel of desires, you know. Pick up that plate! Now, throw it over!"

The plate fell on the brocaded seat beside Norroy. The secret agent replaced his own small French pistol in place, hiding the plate afterward. Then he sneered openly at Crawe.

"Do you know, you impress me as being rather less than about thirty cents' worth of real criminal," he said. "A tupenny-ha'penny sort of burglar, on my word. I thought, from all I'd heard of you, I was going to have some trouble with you against me; yet the first time I meet you, I lock you up in a trunk and turn you over to the police, and the second time, I take your money again—just as I did on that other occasion—and in your own car, with your own chauffeur, and with a revolver on me all the time. Are you a fair specimen of criminal?"

Norroy extracted his thin gold case with one hand, and lighted one of his inevitable thin paper tubes. Crawe studied his enemy's shining boot toe, savagely resentful and silent.

"No, you aren't," Norroy answered for him. "You're just one of the sneaking monkeys who have cats to get them chestnuts; your greatest personal achievement is to rob the helpless—like that boy and girl you expected to rob to-night. You had an education, you could write get-rich-quick circulars, and swindle widows and orphans, you were a bank robber, yes—but with a specialty—babies' banks. I wonder what a man ought to do with dirt like you?"

"You can't go to the police; you're as bad as I am," said Crawe suddenly, with returning confidence. "You've got five thousand of mine that don't belong to you. You give it back."

"Why, my brave Claypole, my noble Fagin, my puissant Andrew, the Candle Worm," said Norroy, shifting his eye along the barrel of Crawe's revolver, a long, gleaming nickel one of steel, and getting it in line with Crawe's esophagus. "I was under the impression you'd given that as a present to my very dear young friend, Mr. Luyties. Correct me if I am wrong, and then tell me the address of the morgue, so that I can transmit it to the driver—I've really forgotten, myself—but a killer like yourself ought to know, and, if you have any preference in cemeteries, I'll try to see you accommodated. I saw a very neat 'Gates-Ajar' slab, too, in a stone mason's yesterday. With a little red paint to indicate what gates, or, say, a finger pointing downward, that ought to do you quite nicely. I beg your pardon—you were going to say something!"

Although Norroy spoke in a tone of pleasant, if ribald, humor, his eye was as cold as any sturgeon's, and as steady. Mr. Crawe belonged to a class of gam-

blers who had no sort of relatives whatever in Missouri.

"Oh, all right," he said, glowering. "I give it to him. Anything you'd like for the young lady? My watch or my right eye, or anything?"

"Just pick up that tube and tell your driver to take me to the Patricians Club —and no gammon, my dear Mr. Sneak Thief," replied Norroy, still pleasantly.

After a sullen pause, he was obeyed. The journey was finished in silence, until the car came to a standstill. Then Norroy eyed Crawe regretfully.

"I locked you up in a trunk last time," he said, hurt that his ingenuity could supply no present means of making Mr. Crawe ridiculous. In that moment inspiration came to him. His manner changed. He became conscientiously courteous.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Crawe," he apologized. "We're in a fair game. I beat you; but I've no right to be rude. Won't you come in the Patricians and have a drink with me? Do, please! Do!"

Crawe looked at him with suspicious, sullen eyes. The chauffeur had dismounted, and was holding open the door. The desire to say he had been in the famous club overmastered Crawe; that was something, anyhow, to wrench from defeat. Norroy repeated his solicitations. Crawe yielded.

At the head of a long flight of stone stairs, they were met by a stalwart doorman, who saluted Norroy respectfully.

"Ambrose," said Norroy, indicating Crawe. "Here is a most objectionable person. I want you to make him look ridiculous. See if you can make a dent in the pavement with his head."

And, as Crawe picked himself up later, rubbing painfully the indentations made on his person by sundry golden articles in his pockets, Norroy smiled, very pleased with himself.

"Thank you, Ambrose," he said, and tipped him. "I knew, if I thought hard, I could think of something," he added reflectively, as he entered the club.

What Mr. Crawe said could not have been printed even in the days of Rabelais.

CHAPTER V.

DAYBREAK AND DISENCHANTMENT.

On his cheap little bed, which he had made, himself, out of four high pegs and a platform, and which had two long, flat cushions covered with Hongkong stuffs, instead of mattresses—as near to a Chinese bed as he could compass—Van awoke at his accustomed hour next morning; for, despite excitement and revelry, one does not break the habits of years easily, and, besides, he had wound his alarm clock mechanically before retiring.

Now—as he lay there, and saw the gray clouds piling up like mountains of the sky to hide the morning sun—as he stared around at the cheap, familiar objects no longer glorified by imagination, the room ceased to be the sleeping closet of a luxurious studio apartment, and was only the hall bedroom of an eighteen-dollar-a-week clerk, who must rise incontinently, who had little time for matutinal ablutions, nor more than one serviceable suit.

Although the window was wide open to catch the winter air that blew fresh upon his head, the room seemed close and stuffy, and Van was nauseated. He thought of the stuff that masqueraded as coffee, the none-too-recent eggs, and the soggy bread that his usual breakfasting place provided for a few small coins—all he could conscientiously afford when he lived by routine; of the dull evenings and mornings that must follow this until his single day of release came each week. He groaned and turned over, hiding his eyes from the light.

No, he would not arise to such a life again. The theater and the restaurant last night had been crowded with people no more intelligent than himself, many not half so well appearing. Somehow *they* managed to live well for the work they did. Should *he*, then, discountenance himself by hard labor, with nothing to show for it except one suit, one pair of boots, an overcoat, and fifty-two decent meals a year? Sooner than that, he would be a tramp; at all events, he would travel from place to

place, see the world, and eventually reach China, his mental Golconda.

He groaned again as he thought of the money the plate would have brought, of the journey on the tea ship to the land of Marco Polo. Now, instead, he had nothing, indeed—worse than nothing, for he was indebted to an aged ruffian in the sum of a hundred. If he did not appear with the plate to-day, there would be trouble. The pawnbroker had his address. He must remove himself and his belongings; such of them as would go into trunks. The few sticks of furniture, mostly the work of his own hands, must stay.

But, to Van's credit be it said, he did not regret. He had spent a wonderful, enchanted evening, remarked by all, and with the most attractive young lady he had ever seen; a young lady who had smiled at him several times in a way that, had he been more egotistical, must have convinced him that she found her association with him to her liking.

Even now, he had her address tucked away in a waistcoat pocket, but that address had been given to an aristocratic and wealthy clubman, not to a poor shipping clerk, and even if she would overlook his deception, he would never again have the amount of such an evening's entertainment.

He wished he had her picture to carry on his travels, though; she was the only pretty woman of the better sort with whom he had ever exchanged a word, and now that he had, he would feel the deficiency forever.

He set his teeth. Somehow he must find a way to climb to the top. But then—he sat down with his head between his hands—people in his world were lucky if they got food and lodging permanently. Without a start or a chance, he would be no better than a shipping clerk all his life. While up in those Assyrian palaces on Broadway, men and women poured out the golden wine of life from ever-filling bottles.

It is when appalling contrasts such as these are forced on the minds of the intelligent under dogs that it seems good to them to meddle with cash drawers and practice imitations of their employers' signatures. But Van had not quite come to that yet, although it will be remembered that he had spent unblushingly money advanced him on a plate that he had been given with no thought of his obligation.

The morning was well out of the cloud banks before he had finished packing, and he was taking a final survey of the room, where he had dreamed away five of his twenty-one years. Van was counting what remained of his fortune; enough, he found, to carry him and his trunk to the State of the Golden Poppies and the Golden Gate—the Gate to Golden Golconda—where the shipping from the Orient and the South Seas lay, awaiting such adventurers as he. True, when he arrived there, he would be penniless; but he would be that much nearer the land of his dreams by distance, and by a bold breaking away from routine. He cheered up a little at this thought; if only he could make his way out there sufficiently well to send for *her;* and why not? He knew the tea trade, knew much of the Chinese language——

The knock that came to his door sent him trembling to his feet—the old pawnbroker had not found it well to trust him. Van waited, breathless and pale. Instead of California, it would be "the cooler" when he found himself unable to explain the plate's absence.

The handle of the door was slowly turned, and the man of the many elegancies entered—tall, slender, and immaculate in a morning coat, for the day was mild; a blend of green and lavender as to shirt and tie, gloves that matched in color the cloth tops of his patent boots, the lower parts of which were equaled by nothing on earth except his shining top hat. He carried an ebony stick with a golden crook to it, and he was smiling on Van.

A glance around the room told Norroy volumes; his smile became tinged with sympathy, and he laid a hand on Van's shoulder. Then, without a word, he placed in the younger man's hand the packet of bills presented by Lycurgus Crawe.

"For the plate," said Norroy. "Thanks."

Van took one look, and sat down to cry like a woman. Norroy waited. Moved by a certain curiosity concerning the movements of any one so unique as a youngster capable of the expenditure and the sacrifice of last night, yet who had had only clerk's wages all his life—for Norroy, you may be sure, had investigated Master Van pretty thoroughly—he asked him what his future plans were to be.

Van told him, almost hysterically, of China and the hope, soon to be realized, of sending for the girl. Norroy listened, tapping meditatively on the floor with his ebony wand.

"But——" and Van suddenly halted as he gazed at the money paid for the plate. "She's not likely to come—she's rich—I forgot that—she's rich."

"Just what she said of you this morning, my boy," returned Norroy. "And regretted it, too. 'If only he wasn't rich,' she said to me. She's a little lady out of moving-picture vaudeville, being trained for the title rôle in 'The Devonshire Maid.' And when I saw you two dancing together last night, I made up my mind you should make your début with her. They need a good-looking boy who's worthy of her in appearance. He doesn't need to sing; only to act and to dance; and, after your impersonation of a young spender Johnnie last night, and your dancing of the 'Tonga,' why—if you want the place, it's yours. As far as China is concerned, you may be just the man I need, later. You know Chinese, you say? And you're game! But, meanwhile, until we locate three more plates like yours, it's better for you to stay in New York and dance—and help me—and, if you show yourself worthy, you may enter a certain employment where your appearance"—Norroy was eying him approvingly—"and your manner will be of service to me." For Norroy was ever on the lookout for available underground-diplomat timber.

Knowing that, under the circumstances, Van would not be able to speak coherently for some little while, and dreading broken thanks, Norroy went on hurriedly:

"Meanwhile I'd advise you to spend some of that money in neckwear, boots, and linen, and I'll have your measure sent to my London man for some clothes. You might send those boxes of yours to this number on lower Fifth Avenue"—he scratched it with a gold pencil on the tag of Van's trunk—"where they have very decent small bachelors' lodgings—and I'll take you over to the theatrical manager's myself. And, then, I believe you are to accept the hospitality of Miss Lea at luncheon in return for yours of last night—— Don't look so flabbergasted, man!"

Norroy laughed uproariously.

"But then I don't blame you," he said, sobering down, "because it's only in fiction and the drama, generally, that a foolish act of generosity like yours of last night is rewarded tenfold like this. What in the name of Heaven would have happened if I hadn't taken a fancy to you—a purely idle fancy, chiefly founded on the way you tie your tie—so few people know anything about dress ties," said the great man confidentially, as he linked his arm in that of the ex-clerk's, and, so talking, closed the door on Van's room and Van's poverty forever.

All of which, if one wants to be synthetical or categorical in his reasoning, shows the exceeding wisdom of giving a poor youth an ugly but aristocratic name to live up to.

THE END.

You will hear about "The Secret Stairway"—another exploit of Norroy's in the next POPULAR, on sale January 7th.

Bears and Bystanders

By Courtney Ryley Cooper

Christmas without candy and the show and a big dinner and a lot of companionship is pretty bad, but here is something still more sad—to struggle for three solid weeks in the hills to get a Christmas bear and then wake up on the last day of grace without even a hair of his hide.

AS far as Friday was concerned, he was an old hand at the bear business, and he talked as if it didn't make any difference to him if he never got one. Besides, all Friday cared about was to stay at the shack and do the cooking and clean the guns and talk about the good old days when life was life, and bears as big as the mountains themselves roamed the hills, just pleading to be shot. With Bill Grenolds it was almost as bad. Bill had eighteen notches on the butt of his thirty-thirty, and every one of them told a story of some black beauty that had taken the long journey. But as for me—well, I was a tenderfoot. I'd never seen a bear outside a cage, but I wanted to. I'd tramped every mountain from Baldy Point to the Scraggly Teeth, until my gun had worn blisters in the hollow of my arm, but I hadn't gotten a smell of one. Hadn't even seen a print of a paw. And here it was the day before Christmas.

Maybe you think Christmas without candy and the show and a big dinner and a lot of companionship is pretty bad, but just try the proposition of struggling for three solid weeks in the hills to get a Christmas bear, and then wake up on the last day of grace without even a hair of his hide, and see how much you like life. For my part, I just caved. I was all in, disgusted with existence in general, and when I got up that morning and slammed my hunting shoes across the shack and knocked the coffeepot over, I didn't care who knew it. I think Bill and Friday felt almost as bad, but they wouldn't let on. Friday tried to put a philosophical view on it.

"Bears is just like a bunch of people at a boarding house," he ruminated as he fried the potatoes and picked up the coffeepot. "You'll find some of 'em likes salt on their tomatoes; others'll want vinegar and olive oil; somebody else'll die if he can't get this myaneeze, or whatever you call it; and still some other body'll just naturally fall dead if they can't eat 'em with sugar. That's the way it is with bears. Sometimes they're around, and sometimes they ain't. Now, if we'd been up here in October——"

"Yes," I broke in disgustedly, "if we'd been up here in October we'd have found out the only time bears ever came around was in January, June, August, September, or any other month except the time we happened to be on the spot. You can't tell me anything about this 'if-we'd-been-here' stuff. I've heard it all before. There never were any bears in these hills. I told you that when we came. We're too close to civilization."

"Something to that," Bill chimed in as he moved to our one window and reflected on the light fall of Christmas snow. "Things has kinda changed in the last ten years. Grand Pass has

grown to be a fair-sized town—five hundred or more, I guess."

"But we're ten miles from that," Friday interrupted. "The only shack around here besides ours is old Hezekiah Smith's, up on the hill. And that oughtn't to scare a bear."

Then we all grew moodily silent, while the potatoes spluttered in the pan and the coffee boiled over. An hour later we were still as glum. still as peevish with the world and with each other. I was frank about what was troubling me—I wanted that bear, and worst of all I wanted him for Christmas. Friday contented himself with blaming his distemper on the weather, and Bill wouldn't talk long enough to blame anything. Instead, he went kicking out into the snow, describing circle after circle around the shack, his face getting blacker every minute. Soon I joined him.

"Let's make another try, won't you?" I asked. He sent a little snowstorm into the air with one foot, and just kept on walking. I tried again: "We might run onto something. Bill, honest, I've got to have a bear. I won't go back without one."

Bill grunted.

"Darn Colorado!" he muttered. "Never liked the State, anyhow. All it is, is just a place full of hills and disappointments and——"

He never finished that sentence, and I wouldn't have heard him if he had. From afar up the hill, where the whirling smoke of Hezekiah Smith's frame mansion went straight up in the air, had come a shriek; then another—another.

Bill looked at me helplessly. "It's a woman!" he said.

Again it came—again: "Help!"

For just a second we stood there; then our shoulders crowded as we jumped for the door of our shack and reached for our guns. Faintly we heard Friday ask a question, and we shouted something in reply. Then together we hurried up the trail toward the little house on the hill.

Again and again as we went forward that sound of a shrieking woman's voice came to us. The notes were agonized, appealing. Now and then we heard the hoarser, coarser voice of a man.

Bill turned to me, and his face was ashen. "Spike," he said, and I noticed his gun was tight gripped, "if that's what I think it is, there's liable to be a funeral in the Smith family."

I did not answer. We pushed on. We came to a fork in the trail, and Bill pointed me to one side.

"You go that way," he said tersely, "and if you run onto that hide-bound, sneak-fisted son of a gun, push your gun in his face before he gets a chance to draw. And if he does start drawing, you shoot, and shoot to kill!"

I blanched. "What's up—do you think?"

"Think!" roared Bill. "I don't think anything. I know. A woman only yelps like that for some reason. That's when her loving, darling, good-for-nothing, worthless husband is beating the tar out of her. Now, hurry—and keep your eyes open!"

We parted. I saw Bill throw his gun into easy position and begin to creep forward through the underbrush along his side of the trail. I hurried forward along mine. Fifteen minutes later we met at the ramshackle gate which led to the Smith homestead. Hezekiah had not been seen, but I knew that Bill was right.

Walking here and there aimlessly about the yard was a woman. Her angular, heavy form seemed disjointed and loose. She waved her hands with rage and abandon.

"He whaled me, he did!" she yelled. "He whaled me—ding him!"

"Beat you?" I asked.

"Beat me!" Her face grew more crimson than ever. "Beat me! He slung me over the head with a scantlin', that's what he did. Whaffor did he do it? Nothin'—nothin' a-tall. Oh, Lor', why did I ever marry that critter? Whaffor did I ever hook up with him?"

Whereupon she swung her aimless walk into a rapid circle, and her long arms sought the skies. A wailing note came into her voice. The tears, big as

pool balls, started again, and I saw the frown on Bill Grenolds' face grow deep and dark. He jerked his gun forward.

"Come on, Spike," he ordered tersely; "we'll get that galoot!"

We hurried out of the gate and down the trail. We separated a bit, and crept through the snowy underbrush, our eyes on the ground. Suddenly Bill gave a little shout and pointed to heavy footprints. We rushed forward—then stopped about fifty yards from our shack.

Before us, standing by the door of our bunk house, were Friday and Hezekiah, talking amiably enough it seemed, yet with an air of strained relations plainly visible. Friday was smiling, but at the same time whetting a large butcher knife and feeling the edge now and then as he looked at the man before him.

Hezekiah appeared nervous. Now and then his feet would seem to wander out, as though bent on an effort at escape; then his eyes would sight the butcher knife again, and he would remain. I felt Bill Grenolds' shoulder against mine. He was trembling a bit. I saw his thirty-thirty begin to glide forward, and it was then I took action. I sprang forward. My gun went to my shoulder.

"Hands up!" I shouted.

"Keep your head now, you little fool—don't shoot!" Bill cautioned in unison with my voice.

"I'll keep my head," I answered back, and frowned when I saw that Hezekiah had not heard me. My voice went into falsetto: "Hands up!"

And Hezekiah heard that time. His face turned grayish white. He whirled, and his hands traveled far into the air. Friday grinned, and put away his butcher knife.

"Took you a long time to get here," he grinned as we came grimly toward him and his companionable prisoner. "I hated to start anything, so I just thought I'd do it absent-treatment like. I knew he wouldn't move on as long as I had the butcher knife."

"Get out of the way," Bill ordered. His voice had lost its old friendliness. He glared at Hezekiah, and raised his gun parallel with mine.

Hez quavered. "Don't shoot!" he begged. "Don't——"

"Shut up!" Bill ordered. "Spike, put down your gun. You're too young to handle this sort of game. I'll attend to him."

"Just let me cover him a minute longer," I begged. "I——"

"Put down that gun!" Bill's voice was snappy. "This thing's going to be all fair and legal. Give that shooting iron to Friday. Now, Hez Smith, you're a fine sort of bird, ain't you? You're a peach! You big, long, lank, cowardly son of a gun, you!"

"Lemme tell you how it was." The prisoner's voice was pleading. "I——"

"Shut up!" Bill ordered again. "Turn around, there. Keep up those hands."

Hezekiah turned, but he tried to keep his eyes in the direction of that gun barrel.

"Gents," he begged, "don't—don't do nothin' rash with me. I'll tell you how it was. You see——"

"Close your trap! I don't want to know how it was!" Bill Grenolds always was an obstinate cuss. "We're going to take you down to Grand Pass, and we're going to turn you over to the law and see that you get what's coming to you. Now, hit the trail, and keep those hands up. Hear me?"

"Please——"

"Hit the trail, you mountain goat, you! And if you try to start anything, you'll look like a broken fish net. We ain't playing, be-lieve me! I've got a Remington here with steel bullets that'll go through a railroad flange, and there's six of them in the chamber. Start something, and you'll get 'em all. Keep those hands up! Understand?"

The Honorable Hezekiah went eight feet in the air. Bill had raised his rifle, and splattered a small snowbird a foot or so to one side of Smith into a thousand feathered bits.

"Just wanted to show you I could shoot and still have something left in this gun," Grenolds grunted. "Now, if you want holes in you big enough for

elephants to play tag in, just lower those hands and try to run."

"I'll keep 'em up," groaned Hezekiah as he turned his back and started at our direction down the trail to Grand Pass.

"Wish he'd lower them," I muttered as I grasped a chunk of a bowlder. "I'd like to see how far I could bounce this rock off his head. A fine piece of horseflesh, you are, beating a woman! Why don't you try a man once in a while?"

Hezekiah's face was piteous as he turned it to us.

"If you'd only let me explain——" he began again.

"Tell it to the sheriff," I checked him abruptly.

And so there was silence for a long time as we picked our way down the snowy, rocky trail toward town, Hezekiah with his hands straight in the air, the wrinkles around his eyes growing more and more acute as his shoulders ached with the unusual strain; I with my bit of stone, swinging my arm now and then, as does a pitcher in the box, and taking imaginary aim ever so often as Hezekiah's cranium; Bill with his gun, and his finger trembling to get at the trigger.

But even though the game before us was big—quite the biggest I had ever experienced—still, it could not keep a certain queer thumping out of my heart, and a certain choking out of my throat. The realization still was with me that this was the day before Christmas, that for three weeks we had whetted our appetites for bear steak, strong though it might be—and that our Christmas repast probably would be the same old seven and six—hog sides, potatoes hot from the grease, beans, and coffee. I looked to the right and to the left as we stumbled along. Not a bear track. In search of distraction, I turned to Bill.

"What charge'll we put against him?" I asked.

"Assault with intent to kill," Bill answered grimly.

Hezekiah heard and turned. "What do you suppose they'll do with me?" he asked meekly.

"Ain't wishing anybody bad luck, but I hope they lynch you," came malevolently from Bill.

"But if you'd only let me——"

"Shut up!"

And Hezekiah swung his head. However, a few minutes later he began to seem to take a bit of interest in life. We had come in sight of the town, and in the noonday sun we could see below the figures of many men—in from the camps and ranches for their Christmas celebration, walking around the little open space before the stores. I, at one side, noticed a glint come into the deep-set eyes of Hezekiah Smith. His face became suddenly sanguine. We marched on.

Down the long trail we went, around the knob of a hill, and then, with a sudden sweep, we were in the town.

Bill Grenolds, his shoulders hunched forward, his rifle half in position, gave a glance at the faces of the men who came crowding toward us.

"Where's the sheriff?" he asked shortly.

A stocky, red-haired man stepped forward. "I'm him," he said.

"Arrest that man."

"Arrest him?"

"Slam him so far in jail he'll never see daylight again," came Bill's bawling voice.

The sheriff grinned. "Ain't got no jail," he answered.

Bill waved his one free arm. "Then put him in the post office—I don't care. But I want him pinched, and pinched hard. He's committed a crime——"

"What's he done?" The sheriff seemed a deliberate individual.

Bill Grenolds almost leaped into the air in his exasperation.

"What's he—say, didn't I just get through saying he's committed a crime? Didn't he beat his wife this morning, slam her over the head with a scantling, cave in her face, bust her ribs, knock her eyeteeth out, break——"

"That ain't no crime."

"No crime!"

"It's bravery." The sheriff was grin-

ning again. "Mebbe you don't know Mrs. Hezekiah."

It was then that a wild shout broke forth upon the noonday air. Hezekiah, safe in the midst of his friends, was waving his arms like a windmill, and pouncing up and down. His eyes had become glaring. His mouth uttered one war whoop after another.

"That's what I tried to tell 'em," he yelled. "The slant-eyed, dudified city galoots! Gents, listen a-here—ain't I always been a respectable, law-abidin' citizen? Ain't I tried to do my durndest by that there woming? Ain't I—huh—ain't I? An' this yere mornin', when she sp'iled the slapjacks, cooked 'em on one side and left 'em raw on t'other, I didn't say nothin'. Then when she spilled the coffee down the back o' my neck and giggled to herself I never even made a move—no, sirree! But, gents, when she ups an' smudges my beauty by pastin' me in the face with the potty side o' a hot griddle, then—ding it!—I gets mad. A man's got a right to get mad onct in a while—yes, he has! A man's got a right to get plumb downright het up, an' I'm a-feelin' that way ag'in right now. I'm riled, I am. I'm a locoed pinto in a herd of jack rabbits. I'm pizen! I've held my hands up to the skies till I want to get wings an' be an angel! Who's got a gun? Gents, is you goin' to stand idle by an' see a respectable citizen insulted like this? Gimme a gun! Gimme a gun!"

Hands were reaching for belts and hip pockets. Scowls were everywhere. I felt a strong hand grasp me and jerk me back.

"Get behind me!" It was Bill's voice, short and snappy as that of a colonel in the field as he again turned his eyes toward the crowd ahead of him and raised his rifle to his shoulder.

"The first man that draws a gun decorates a wooden kimono," he said crisply. "There are five shots in this gun. That means a little cemetery, and I'm willing to start it right now. Keep behind me, kid—keep behind me!" he muttered over his shoulder.

The crowd's hands stopped in their motions. But the threats only angered Hezekiah the more. He had the safety of numbers now. He was growing braver every minute.

"You goin' to stand by an' let me be insulted ag'in?" he called wildly. "Gimme a gun—gimme a gun!" He made a leap to one side and grasped at the willing belt of a friend. Something glittered in his hand.

Bill's head went deep in his shoulders. There was a crack of his rifle, and a revolver went flying into the air, while Hezekiah, with a scream of rage, grasped his stinging hand.

"I'll hit your flesh next time instead of your weapon," Bill threatened. Then with a whirl he grasped me, and together we scampered across the open space and jumped for the safety of a big rock. A bullet or two splattered after us. Blanch-faced, I watched him as he pushed a couple more loads in the chamber of the rifle.

"I wish I'd let you bring your gun, kid," he muttered. "We're going to have a—— *Hands up!*"

His gun was on the sheriff, who silently had stolen around the rock and was facing us. That individual grinned.

"I've quieted the boys—for a minute," he volunteered, "but I don't know how long I'm going to keep them that way. Now," his eyes lost their humor, "I'm thinking you two have started enough trouble around here. Get away from here as fast as you can, and when you get to your camp, wherever it is, break it up as fast as you can, and get out of the country. Smith's a good man—in a way. We all like him. The boys ain't going to stand much more of this sort of fooling from you, and by night they'll be boiled as owls, and ready for trouble. So if you don't want trouble, the best way to keep out of it is to run away from it. Understand? Now, there's the trail."

He pointed upward. He looked keenly at us for a moment, then turned.

"I guess he knows what he is talking about, Bill," I said. "We've got to give up that bear, and get out while the getting's good."

"Bear!" Bill turned toward me, and growled with a hoarseness deeper than that of any bruin: "Bear! What do I care about bears? But if you think I'm going to let a lot of range-chasing, hill-climbing, wife-beating dubs run me out of these hills, you've got your shoes on the wrong feet, that's all. I'm going to stick, and I ain't going to move till I'm good and ready, if I have to shoot up the whole Rocky Mountains."

Whereupon, as we turned and started up the trail toward our shack and the waiting Friday, glancing over our shoulders now and then at the gesticulating, crowded beings in the little square of the town, I was moodily silent. The day before Christmas, not a bear to be had, and no chance of one; the day before Christmas, and the ultimatum gone forth that we must move or fight for the privilege of staying.

"A fine Yuletide, huh?" I asked regretfully.

Bill kicked snow and said nothing.

Three hours later, as the sun, which all day had failed to melt a flake of snow, was beginning to lose even the faint warmth which it had given forth, we wearily knocked open the door of the shack, and entered. Friday was asleep. We roused him, and while he rubbed his eyes we told our story. He rose and looked about him. He stumbled to the door. Then he grinned sheepishly.

"Merry Christmas!" he said.

"Funny, ain't you?" growled Bill as he seated himself and began to clean his gun. "This ain't no time for comedy. You grab the kid's gun and get outside the door there."

"What for?" Friday's mental capacities were not yet fully awake to the realization of the situation.

Bill ceased poking the ramrod down the barrel of his gun, and looked up scathingly.

"Simply because this joyous Yuletide Eve is going to be spent in guarding the shack, three hours to the shift. It's your time first. That's why."

Friday asked no more questions. Slowly he bundled himself in his furs, grasped his rifle, and went outside.

Bill pointed to the bunk. "It's you to the hay, Spike," he ordered. "I'll call you when you're wanted. You're going to have the extreme pleasure of taking the first night watch. So turn in."

I tried to tell him that sleep was the farthest thing from my thoughts. I tried to remonstrate with him. He listened gravely a moment; then he rose, and gently but surely pushed me over on the bunk.

"Now, have some sense, and lie there," he ordered. "If anything starts, I'll call you."

The excitement of it all kept my eyes open a few moments, but little longer. When one's muscles are fairly soft, and when one has plowed through ten miles of snow down a trail and ten miles back, there isn't much of anything that can keep him awake, even at three o'clock in the afternoon. I remember, however, that I did turn over once and glance wearily out of one eye and ask of Bill:

"What do you think about it all, Grenolds?"

"What do I think?" He was slipping cartridges in his belt. "I think we are three of that famous, rare sort of animal called 'the innocent bystander'—and that we're goin' to get what's coming to us!"

Then he fell moody again, while I fell asleep.

When next I heard his voice it was dark without, and the lantern was dimly illuminating the cabin with its sickly rays. I saw that the one window had been barricaded and shaded so that no light shone without. Bill's cheeks were red; there effused from him and his clothing a distinct air of coldness; I knew that he had just come from his vigil outside, and that it was to be my turn at sentry work. I arose somewhat feverishly.

"Nothing stirring yet," said Bill, adding, however, in a lugubrious tone: "But it ain't time. They won't start nothing till they think we're asleep. That's the way with a bunch o' yahoots like that." Then he turned sharply. "Kid, don't take chances. Understand?

If you see anything or hear anything —shoot, and keep on shooting. We'll be with you. Get me?"

I nodded my head, and went out, jerking my cap over my ears. The night was crimpy cold and dark with a blackness which seemed to grow instead of diminish as I attempted to train my eyes to the objects about me. I looked toward the sky. It was overcast and ebony. I started my rounds about the house, shivering a bit at the crunching sound of my boots in the crisp snow.

Some way there was an eerie manner about the old mountain. Everything seemed still as death, yet alive. Now and then a slight breeze would wave the pines, rasping their cones and spines into creepy, ghostlike noises. From afar over the mountainside came the lonely howl of a timber wolf. I believe I trembled a bit; I don't know. Once again I made the rounds of the house, and seated myself on the log doorstep. It seemed more friendly there, more close, less isolated and alone. I hugged my rifle close to me and stared ahead into the black night.

Suddenly I thrilled. From down by the woodpile had come the faint sound of crackling underbrush. My rifle went forward. My hands clasped it tight, my finger clawed for the trigger. I felt my teeth pressing hard.

Again came the sound. It was advancing, like the noise of a man creeping through the brush and dead brambles. My heart jerked a bit. I attempted to shout something. The words would not come. Once more the crashing noise—heavier, nearer. My rifle went to my shoulder; I felt that I was aiming true, and that my hand was for some reason steady as steel. The fire shot out into the night, the lever rasped, the fire spurted again —again—again. I heard the tumbling of a body, and knew that my bullets had struck home. The blood shot into my face; I leaped up and pounded on the door of the shack, then whirled at the sound of a pleading voice as Bill and Friday came hurrying forth:

"Don't shoot again, mister—please!"

I blanched. The voice had not come from the direction in which I had shot.

Bill stared into the darkness, then frowned. "What do you want?" he asked of the hulking form which came stumbling forward, followed by another in woman's clothes.

"I want to make friends, that's what," the man answered.

"Hezekiah!" I gasped. "Bill, I've killed somebody out there in the underbrush. I shot at a noise, and——"

"Guess that was us you heard; noises is deceivin'," said Hezekiah as he came forward. I could see that the woman with him was his wife and that she was lugging a bundle. "Can we come in?"

"If you'll keep decent," Friday broke in. "But if you don't, you'll go straight up the chimney, and no mistake. We won't——"

"He'll keep decent," came the strong, almost masculine voice as Mrs. Hezekiah moved forward. "We're both goin' to keep decent. That's what——"

"Bill," I broke in—I was all a-tremble—"it wasn't any mistake. I heard somebody fall and groan when I shot. I know it!"

"You're dippy!" was the curt answer. "Get in the house." A friendly shove on the shoulder, and I was within. Hezekiah came next, to stand uncomfortably first on one foot and then on the other, to look helplessly at Mrs. Hezekiah, who had followed, and who seemed just as uncomfortable as her husband. She shifted her bundle from one great arm to the other, then nodded for Hezekiah to speak. He removed his hat, and twisted it in his hands.

"Gents," he began, "I guess me an' the old woming acted sorter pizen bad this morning. We've come to make up fer it. We've got together, and we've made up our minds they ain't nothin' to this squabblin' business. 'Tain't respectable. So we've stopped it, ain't we, Maggie?"

"Yeh," assented Maggie; but I scarcely heard her. My mind and heart were out there in the underbrush, where I felt sure that a man, perhaps some

wanderer of the mountains, was bleeding out his life. My brain was burning; my whole being was crying out to know; yet I was afraid to see for myself, afraid to stumble out there in the snow and look down into the staring, dead face——

Hezekiah was speaking again:

"Yep; 'tain't respectable, so we've quit it—honest. Now we're a-goin' to be decent. She ain't a-goin' to lick me, an' I ain't a-goin' to whale her——"

"I'm glad of that," Bill broke in.

"And we've sorta felt like 'twas you-all what brung it on, this here peace business, y' know, an' so we've toted you over a leetle mite o' a present fer Christmas. Maggie, show 'em the turk."

The sound of rattling paper—it gave me the shivers, like the noise of the clods on the coffin of the man I had killed. Maggie Smith brought forth a great, plump turkey, dressed and picked, and laid it awkwardly on the table. She straightened and attempted to say something. But I could stand the strain no longer. I leaped up, and I know my eyes were wild.

"Bill—Friday," I began, "I can't stay in here any longer after what's happened." My hands were clenching. "I shot somebody, or something. I know it! I'm sure of it! I've got to know; I can't go myself—I——"

"Well, for the good lamb's sake, I'll see, and satisfy you," Friday said disgustedly. "You were shooting at the wind, but, anyway——"

He stepped forth into the night, and walked slowly to the underbrush. I heard him waving the dead branches aside. In the dim light I saw him half stumble over something, then quickly kneel down. I heard an ejaculation. My heart pounded like a trip hammer.

"Then it was something!" My voice was almost screaming.

Bill jumped forward.

"Yep," came slowly from the underbrush. I felt my face drain of its every drop of blood. My nails bit into my flesh.

"A man? Tell me!" I begged. "Good Lord, I——"

A laugh interrupted. Friday straightened.

"No," he shouted back, "'tain't a man. Something a dern sight better—a six-foot bear!"

Courtney Ryley Cooper has written a series of short stories for us which will appear in the POPULAR during 1913.

THE CRADLE AND THE COIN

WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST, who is a persistent performer in charitable works, decided immediately after the famous earthquake and fire in San Francisco that one of his missions should be the care of the "earthquake babies," as the youngsters born during the excitement were called. Many of the mothers died or were lost in the falling buildings, and the Hearst relief committee was compelled to give the kids names as well as care.

The newspaper men close to Hearst exhausted all the Berthas, Johns, Williams, and Graces and then began naming the babies after distinguished Hearst writers of both sexes. There were many named Arthur Brisbane, Homer Davenport, Dorothy Dix, S. S. Chamberlain, John Temple Graves, and so on down the line.

One evening Mr. Hearst sauntered into the offices of his relief committee, and a proud manager showed him the list of babies that had been saved and helped. The big publisher looked the list over once or twice in a rather puzzled manner. Then, with a twinkle in his eye, he looked up and asked:

"What is this anyway, the pay roll?"

Ellis in Search of a Feather

By Daniel Steele

Author of "The Twist of a Screw," "Adventure of Prince Pozzanceit and the Pearl Necklace," Etc.

A "history of England," a green feather, and a few other seemingly irrelevant items become all important to Robert Ellis in unraveling the puzzle of Seth Vöglein's mysterious death. A mystery yarn with a new twist.

(In Two Parts—Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

THE DARK VESTIBULE, AND WHAT CAME AFTER.

ROBERT ELLIS, attorney, sat in his inner office, drumming with a pencil. A sheet of perfectly blank paper lay before him. He was listening to a client's story, but as yet he had written nothing. Taking advantage of a pause, he uncrossed his long legs, got up with a restless movement, and threw open the shade and the window together, letting a bar of sunlight fall across the paper, as though he would at the same time untangle whatever was in his mind, and let in the light upon it, or fresh air, at least, for it was midsummer. Then he sat down again. But his clear-cut face, with its sharp, straight nose, still wore an absent expression, as though he were too tired to think, and were trying to force himself to pay attention. At length he spoke, breaking the pause.

"Yes," he said, "I have a theory that if you take a mystery soon enough, and get the facts before they are entirely obliterated by the moving hand of time or—what's worse—by the stupid hand of the police—— What's the matter?"

At the mention of police the young man had turned pale. His weak, dissipated mouth trembled, and his soft white hands shook also, though the latter was, perhaps, habitual. "You don't think the police will——"

"Will come into the case? Yes, so far as to prepare it in their rough routine way for that survival of the Middle Ages—that exquisite travesty on justice—known as the coroner's inquest. But from what you have told me, I doubt if——"

"You think my suspicions are foolish?" interrupted the client.

"My dear Mr.—ah—Vöglein, no, I will not say that, either. The more your relative's death resembles a suicide, the more I, as a professional unraveler of riddles, should be inclined to look upon the possibility of something else. I have a theory that a misgiving such as yours—but enough of theories." The lawyer smiled reassuringly. "Let us get the facts. Tell me everything, if you will, as—ah—minutely as possible."

"I'll tell you just how it was," said the young man. "It's a simple enough matter, and I'll try to be as exact as I can in detail. Night before last—Saturday night—I came in late. Quite late, in fact. I should judge it was about three o'clock in the morning."

"How do you fix the time?"

"I don't know."

"Were you drunk?" asked Ellis, with a smile that was not at all unkind.

Arthur Vöglein turned a frank gaze upon the lawyer. "I had been drinking, Mr. Ellis," he said, smiling, "but I wasn't drunk."

"All right; go on."

"I think," pursued the young man, "it was three o'clock. Well, say between two and three. The streets were wet, though it wasn't raining. It was a dark night, and a little chilly, and yet it was somehow oppressively warm, too. I remember feeling a queer sensation, as though something was going to happen. Of course, you can think that my imagination has developed that idea since, if you wish. But I swear as I climbed the scratchy old brownstone steps, and stood inside the dim, clammy vestibule, feeling for my key, I felt afraid to go in. A boarding house, dark, and shut up for the night, always gives you a queer, homeless feeling. It seemed to me then almost as if some one else—some invisible presence—were with me, and I began to feel my flesh creeping. I turned with my back close to the wall, and felt around inside to make sure no one was there. Then I stood there a long time, trying to think what was the matter.

"In order to put the key in the inner door I would have to stand with my back to the open outside door. And I found I was afraid to do it, and so, having yielded to an imaginary fear, I stood there while it grew on me like an obsession. Every time I moved a little way from the wall I felt as though something slipped in behind me. The back of my neck itched as though a feather or something was tickling me."

Ellis glanced curiously at the young man, as though taking note of his power of close description, so unusual in the average client, the display of which he himself had evidently called forth by his request for a minute statement of the case. He scrawled something on the paper before him, and then his eyes wandered off again.

"I must have gone to sleep there, standing propped up in the vestibule, for what length of time I have no idea, for I remember suddenly waking up with a jolt as my foot slipped about six inches and the heel of my shoe brought up against a loose tile in the vestibule floor. I finally screwed up my courage, and turned to the inner door. My hand was in my pocket, and I discovered that instead of a bunch of keys, as I had supposed, I was clutching instead a small vial of medicine wrapped in paper—a doctor's prescription that I had had filled at a drug store earlier that evening, at Cousin Seth's request, and had carried around since in my pocket."

"You mean your aged relative, Seth Vöglein?"

"Yes. He was my third cousin, own cousin to my grandfather. And he and I were without any other family connections. We were alone in the world. Now I am alone."

Young Arthur Vöglein made an effort to control himself. His face worked slightly. He waited a moment, and then continued:

"I suppose my mind was unconsciously on my cousin, and that is why I had the small bottle in my hand. I let go of it, and took out my keys, and, finding the right one, opened the door in a sort of fearful haste, and plunged in. A warm gust of air snatched it from my fingers, and drew it shut with a slam, and I stood inside in the pitch dark. It was dark and musty, indeed, with the peculiar smell of a hot, unventilated interior in the summertime. You know what weather we are having now, and you can imagine it—the smell of boarding-house carpets, dust-laden and tracked, it seemed to me then, with the footsteps of innumerable uncomfortable ghosts, whose presence haunted me.

"As I brushed past the hall rack, and laid my hand on the banister, it was warm and damp, as though hands had just let go of it; and there was a tight feeling in my throat, as though the imaginary being that had haunted the vestibule had slipped in behind me before the wind had slammed the door shut, and now had its invisible arms around

my neck, so that I must carry it upstairs to bed with me.

"As I had hesitated in the vestibule, so now I stood there, afraid to slide my hand up the banisters for fear of encountering some nameless warm hand, and yet suffering fear as I stood sightless in the pitch dark.

"There was a queer smell, a pungent odor, that seemed borne on the atmosphere of dust from the carpeted floor, and perhaps from the oilcloth of the basement below, with its nameless category of rubbish. It came in waves; sometimes I thought I detected it, sometimes not. And so for a moment my imaginary fears subsided, as I began to wonder what it was. But that nameless horror that I was in the midst of something unknown and evil enveloped me again.

"At length, with an idea that I could leave it behind, I let go the banister, and bounded up the stairs. I went up quickly, two steps at a time; but I nearly missed at the top, where is the turn of the staircase, and, to save myself from falling, put out my hand. It encountered something wet—a cold, wet hand, I thought—and I groaned aloud, and the air whisked back involuntarily in my throat.

"It took me but a second, I suppose, though it seemed longer, to discover that it was only a wet cloth of some kind hung on the rail to dry. You will probably laugh at the fear I was in, which so far nothing but the lateness of the hour, the loneliness of the dark hallway, and my nameless premonition had combined to produce. But such was the fact." He paused, and glanced deprecatingly at Ellis.

"Go on," urged the lawyer.

"My cousin's room is a front-hall bedroom," said the young man. "Mine is the room directly over it on the floor above. A strange plane of living, you will say, for gentlemen in our circumstances. But Cousin Seth was—well, never mind. It doesn't matter now. I had to pass his room as I turned to go up another flight to my own, and the smell became very strong. I had gone halfway up the second flight, much shaken inwardly, when I turned back. The landlady's room is the larger one next to my cousin's. I had an inspiration that the smell came from there. I knocked on her door. She opened it instantly, as though she had been waiting for me, and stood there in the dim light from her own gas jet. She had on a wrapper, and looked shockingly queer and old.

"'What's the matter with you, Mr. Vöglein?' she said sharply. 'You'll wake the whole house.'

"'Don't you smell something?' I asked. I was trembling all over.

"'No,' she answered, and shut the door quickly in my face.

"I turned to go upstairs again, but as I passed my cousin's room I got a strong whiff. I bent over, and smelled at the keyhole. Then I knocked. The landlady appeared again in her wrapper. There was no answer to the knock. I have a confused recollection of a gentleman who lives on the floor above coming barefoot downstairs, and asking in a whisper what was the matter; after that he knocked loudly, and more loudly still, for I told him Cousin Seth was partly deaf. Then he tried the door. It was locked on the inside. He put his shoulder to the door, and forced it.

"My cousin's room was full of gas. It burst out upon us. The gentleman sprang in, unfastened and threw up the window. I went in after him, and then we both came quickly out again. By the dim light which came from the open door of the landlady's room, and which fell diagonally across the hallway, we could see Cousin Seth, fully dressed, lying upon the bed. The door screened the upper part of the bed from view, but beyond it there stuck out over the edge of the counterpane a lower leg and foot. It had touched me when I passed the bed, and now it stuck out ghastly and stiff in a horrible way, and I think some one screamed. The gentleman from upstairs is a physician. Almost immediately he went in again. Cousin Seth was dead."

The young man stopped abruptly. Dry sobs shook him for a moment. Then he went on:

"Now, Mr. Ellis, any one who knew Cousin Seth will tell you he was the last man to kill himself. He was careful and methodical. He wouldn't have turned the gas on by accident, either. And he *never* had his window shut in summer—or in the winter, for that matter. And, besides all this, there is the bottle of medicine he asked me to get. Surely he wouldn't have done that if he had contemplated suicide. I can't believe it."

The client paused, and fell to sobbing again. His eyes stared with just a suspicion of wildness. The lawyer, on the other hand, had attended in an absent, listless way to this strange recital of an apparently abnormally sensitive young man. Indeed, any one taking note of Ellis' face would have found difficulty in guessing from its inscrutable expression whether he gave the tale absolute credence as a frank avowal of all the facts, or thought that something was held back, or whether, since he had scrawled that brief memorandum on paper, he had paid any particular attention to it at all.

"Tell me carefully," he said, apparently coming to, and noticing the pause in his client's story, "just what you found in there."

"Why, we found nothing. The room was in order, the bed made, my cousin's body, fully dressed, lying on it. The window was shut and locked, and the door locked. The gas is just an ordinary old-fashioned burner."

"The door—how was it locked?"

"There was an ordinary lock with a key in it, I believe, and, in addition, a bolt across the inside."

"And that was broken?"

"That was broken to get in."

"Who was the first one in?"

"Doctor Burt, the gentleman from upstairs."

"Yes, but who searched the room? Was anything found? After the gas in the room was lit, I mean."

"I don't remember. I am confused about it. The whole household seemed awake and crowding around in the hall."

"It's a pity your memory becomes indistinct just at the point we need it most."

"I know, but I can't help it," answered the young man.

"When did you see your cousin last?" pursued Ellis.

"About a quarter of seven that evening. I left him after dinner in his room. He went in, as he often does, to spend the evening reading."

"That's the last you saw of him?" Ellis eyed his client narrowly.

"Yes, sir. And, so far as I have heard, no one else saw him at all after dinner."

"Do you know of any one with a motive to kill him?"

"N-no, sir."

"Did you go in the room yesterday or to-day?"

The young man shuddered. "No," he replied; "I have lain awake most of two nights, and worried all day yesterday; and I finally decided last night to come and see you."

Ellis studied him a moment. "You inherit property from your cousin, and you wish me to take charge of your affairs?" Vöglein nodded. "Well, we'll discuss that later. Just now the first thing is to examine that room. We may find something if we go there at once."

He took out his watch. "Saturday night," he mused, "or, rather, Sunday morning, at three o'clock. H'm! It's now ten o'clock Monday morning. Yes, I'm glad you came to me at once. We'll go straight to the house."

Ellis rose briskly, and his client leaned forward to regain his hat. In doing so he glanced casually at the sheet of paper which had lain all this time upon the lawyer's desk.

"What's this?" he inquired.

"Oh, nothing," answered Ellis, handing the paper to him; "just a memorandum, a guess, that came into my head—a suggestion, based on your story, of a possible clew to your aged relative's death."

Vöglein looked at the paper, and then handed it back to Ellis with a blank, mystified expression on his face. The

lawyer had scrawled across the top of the paper three words. They were:

The green feather.

CHAPTER II.

THE HISTORY OF ENGLAND, AND A FEW OTHER SEEMINGLY IRRELEVANT ITEMS.

Mrs. Amelia Gross was not, so to speak, a professional boarding-house keeper. She was socially superior to such a station in life, as one with any perception at all might easily guess after a very few minutes' conversation with her on any subject. It seemed that misfortune had compelled her to accommodate certain ladies and gentlemen of refined tendencies with apartments and meals. This she did from pure friendship, and it would have shocked her delicate sensibilities to refer to the matter as "keeping boarders," particularly as she resided in a neighborhood where many of the residences had frankly undergone the change to boarding houses, and where some had even sunk to the level of catering to theatrical persons.

What extraordinary laceration her delicate sensibilities must have undergone when an old gentleman whom she esteemed highly, and who resided in the apartment at the end of the hall, one flight up, was found to have departed this life; and not only that, but in so unusual a manner, late at night, as to suggest—Heaven forfend!—suicide; what tremendous perturbation must have shaken her being may be better imagined than described. Indeed, it would not be too much to say that the lady of the house scarcely slept at all the remainder of that night.

Furthermore, how she ever managed to pull her fragile existence through the day following—which included a visit from a coroner's physician, who, though doubtless a well-meaning man, was evidently lacking in breeding; and another from a person belonging to the class known as undertakers—and how in so prolonging her existence through all these horrors she managed to do justice at each turn to the exact state of her feelings, communicating the same to certain other ladies of the household, who possessed an equally appreciative refinement; all this is explained, if at all, only on the ground that where there are delicacy and sensibility there also is strength.

Sundry whispered conversations there were; much mystery and noddings of the head between the aforementioned ladies; and a great undercurrent of feeling bordering on hysteria. Added to this a perhaps noticeable looking askance, an unusual silence in the presence of a certain young man, the unfortunate deceased's relative; more whisperings, and more noddings, until the air was fairly charged with a combination of refinement and mystery. Whither was it all tending, and what storm was about to break—what awful event was about to happen?

Indeed, what did happen finally was that on Monday morning, when young Mr. Vöglein, in the company of a strange gentleman, let himself in with a key at the very moment when Mrs. Gross happened to be passing through the hallway, that last-mentioned lady was in such a state that she brushed past the young gentleman without deigning to notice him.

"Mrs. Gross!" Vöglein called after her. The lady turned.

"Mrs. Gross, this is Mr. Ellis, my attorney."

Let it be understood at once that, however far the precincts of her nature were invaded by suffering, she was still a lady, and could observe the proprieties. She bowed distantly, and said: "How do you do?" (Notice carefully that she did not say "Pleased to meet you.") Having done this, she glared sorrowfully at her young boarder—we should say the relative of her deceased friend—as much as to put in words: "Young man, young man, your attorney! I expected that it would come to this!"

But in the presence of courtesy from a gentleman what lady's heart will not melt? Ellis, with an air at once dignified and confidential, after greeting Mrs. Gross, mentioned the fact, in a

low tone, that he was to take charge of certain—ah—property interests which, owing to the unfortunate—ah—demise of his aged relative, now devolved upon the young gentleman. And if it was agreeable to her, he should like to examine the room upstairs. Possibly certain papers——

At the mention of property, Mrs. Gross unbent still farther, and with alacrity, the connection between property and gentility being well known, and the mention of the former being, as it were, to the elect a kind of talisman; and permission to see the room—so far as *she* was concerned—was graciously accorded.

As Ellis, followed by his client, ascended the stairs, the latter observed, sotto voce:

"I guess she doesn't like me."

"Worse than that, my boy," replied Ellis; "she looks as though she thought she had something on you. The dev——"

Ellis stopped short at the turn of the stairs. It was not the devil, however, who emerged from the bedroom of Mr. Seth Vöglein at that moment, and passed them on his way to go down the stairs, but a short, red-faced, thick-bodied man with a heavy mustache.

"Hello, Langham!" said Ellis. "You here?"

"I'm just going, Mr. Ellis. Coming to search the room, are you? On opposite sides to-day, are we? Well, well, wish you luck, my son."

"Oh, nothing like that, I hope," replied Ellis.

"Who's that?" whispered Vöglein, after the red-faced man had, with an air of perfect satisfaction, clattered noisily down the stairs.

"Detective sergeant from headquarters," said Ellis. "Chesty, isn't he?"

Arthur Vöglein turned pale, and, as the two entered the bedroom, he edged away from the bed, sat down in a chair, buried his face in his hands, and shook.

Ellis shut the door, and, with his back to it, gave one look around the little, crowded apartment, took in at a glance bed, washstand, bureau, mantel, gas fixture, window, shelf, and clothes hooks. Then he swore softly.

"What is it?" Young Vöglein looked up.

"I'm not afraid of any coroner or coroner's physician—but blast that Detective Sergeant Langham! He's beaten us to it. He's cleaned up the place."

"What's he beaten us to?"

"Heaven only knows what he's got on us—whatever was in here. And, what's more, I'll bet a hat your landlady knows something, or thinks she does. And I'll bet she gave him the tip to come here, else why should he butt into a suicide like this?"

Vöglein sat up with a startled look in his face. Finally he spoke. "The room looks just as it always has looked," he said, glancing wearily around.

Ellis paid no attention to his client's remark, but proceeded on a minute examination of the room. While doing this, he was watched by the other with a hangdog look of misery that gradually changed to one of mystified interest.

First Ellis threw open the blinds, which were closed to the hot sun, letting in the utmost of sunlight. Then he leaned out and examined the stone ledge minutely, going over every bit with his fingers. He even called to Vöglein to give him a hand while he stood up in the position assumed by window cleaners, and examined every windowpane from the outside. There was a little three-cornered piece missing from one pane in the upper sash. Then he clambered in.

"What did you find?" asked his client.

"Nothing; and I am absolutely sure no man either got in or out of this window between seven and three o'clock last Saturday night."

"I should say not!" exclaimed Vöglein, glancing up and down a sheer descent of smooth brick wall with no cornices or projections.

"But wait a moment," said Ellis.

He turned to the window again, while the other drew in his head, and, tired of so much minuteness, went and sat

down again. At length he looked up, to see Ellis pushing the window up and down, up and down, balancing books and other small objects on the sash, as though he were performing some tedious and mysterious rite. After a good deal of that, Ellis went and experimented with the gas cock, which was placed near the head of the bed, turning it off and on several times.

After that he proceeded to examine the doors. There was, or had been at one time, a door connecting the room with the landlady's room adjacent; but this was now walled up. At least, it was covered with wall paper, and served for a thin partition between the rooms. It could not have been opened without visibly tearing the paper which covered it. The only other possible means of communication with the outside was the door leading to the hall. Ellis carefully examined this; also the old-fashioned bolt and spring lock and latch, and the torn woodwork where the iron catchplate had been wrenched away, and now hung down loosely by a single screw. Following this, the lawyer proceeded to get down on his hands and knees, and search minutely every portion of the walls and floor, tapping them in places, and moving the bed and other furniture.

He then examined the dozen or more books that the room contained. The most of them occupied a small portion of the mantelpiece, and proved to be —every one—works on the history of England. They were none of them of recent imprint, and they contained four volumes of Macaulay. Arthur Vöglein explained that the history of England was a hobby of his cousin's. Ellis proceeded to open each one, and, holding it by the back, to let the leaves fly loose in order to discover any loose paper that might be inside. There proved to be not a scrap of paper either in the books on the mantel or in the room at all.

Ellis next went through the clothes in the bureau, and unmade and made the bed. Then he stood up, tired, and stretched his arms with the air of one who has finished his task. Fully three-quarters of an hour had elapsed since he had been in the room, and he had found nothing. On the mantel an old-fashioned china clock, ticking slowly away, pointed to half past eleven o'clock. Ellis compared it with his watch.

"Was that clock in here and going night before last?" he asked suddenly.

"I think so. Yes, I know it was," answered Vöglein.

Ellis, having examined the clock closely, was about to leave the room when an idea seemed to strike him, and he took down one of the histories of England from the mantel. He looked it over carefully. It had gilt edges, and in the surface made by the top edges of the leaves there were a number of slight indentations or digs.

"Do you know how that happened?" he asked.

The other shook his head. The digs resembled something which might have been made with the end of a pair of scissors, or a nail, or some small, blunt instrument of that character—as though, perhaps, some one ignorant or careless of the value of books had wantonly and lightly stabbed at the gilt surface.

"I don't remember ever seeing those digs before," observed Vöglein; "but what of it?"

Ellis opened the door into the hall, and glanced around. The hall and adjacent stairway were empty. Then, motioning significantly toward the covered doorway which separated them from the landlady's room, to indicate the possibility of being overheard in that quarter, he said, in an undertone:

"It's quite important, and it confirms my first idea. Now, let us go upstairs."

"What for?"

"I want to look at your room. May I?"

"Certainly," replied Arthur Vöglein, but wearing a look more mystified than ever as he led the way upstairs.

Arrived there, Ellis glanced carelessly about his client's bedroom. There were several photographs scattered about on mantel and bureau—mostly snapshots, unmounted prints; otherwise

it was much like the room beneath it. Ellis went at once to the gas fixture, and examined it closely. It was rigged up with a chain, the pulling of which alternately lit and unlit the gas.

"There is one hypothesis I want to disprove," remarked Ellis, "and that is that your aged relative was reading, and fell asleep; that in some way the gas was turned off in the cellar, and on again, which would cause first the light to go out, and secondly would allow the gas to flow into the room through the open cock."

"I think I can disprove that idea, Mr. Ellis," replied Arthur Vöglein. "This fixture here, as you see—and there are several others like it in the house—is always burning with a tiny flame from which, when you pull the chain, the large opening is lit. I am sure it was burning in here when I went out last Saturday night, and when I came in again I pulled the chain, and found it still alight, as usual. It would be an easy matter to ascertain that other gas jets were lit during that same time."

"Never mind; it isn't necessary."

"Mr. Ellis, what do you think of the case?"

Ellis turned, at his client's question, and hesitated a moment. "See who's at the door," he remarked in an undertone.

Vöglein tiptoed obediently to the door. As he did so, Ellis took from the bureau an unmounted snapshot, which, as he glanced at it hastily, appeared to be a picture of a young woman. He slipped it in his pocket without saying anything, and at that moment the quickly opened door revealed Mrs. Gross, wearing a palpable air of having journeyed up two flights of stairs for the sole purpose of asking what she could do for them.

Ellis, accepting her offer in the spirit in which it was given, remarked that he would like very much to meet Doctor Burt, and accordingly the three journeyed down to that gentleman's office on the first floor.

The doctor was courteous and reserved. "I should not care to discuss Mr. Vöglein, sir," he said to Ellis. "There is really nothing I know about the affair, to begin with. And I have received this subpœna to attend an inquest by the coroner and testify next Thursday."

"I understand perfectly your position, doctor. There is only one question—the cause of death. Was it the gas?"

"I can answer you that, Mr. Ellis, unmistakably, both from the circumstances and from the fact that Mr. Vöglein was a patient of mine for some time. His death was caused, beyond all question, by asphyxiation. I understand the coroner's physician has made an examination, and holds the same opinion."

Going down the steps of the house, Ellis glanced again at his watch. "Mr. Vöglein," he said, "I shall have to bid you good day. I have an engagement. But I shall see you later to talk over business matters. I think I begin to see daylight in the case. And I don't believe Langham has so much on me as, perhaps, he thinks, to judge from his assured manner a little while ago. I'm ready now for the inquest, ready to protect your interests in whatever way they may be involved. In fact, I generally welcome an inquest for the chance it gives you to see the other side's hand without showing your own."

"But you think it is a suicide, Mr. Ellis?" said the young man, looking anxiously into the countenance of his lawyer.

"On the contrary," replied Ellis, "I do not. From the examination of the room we have just made, I have deduced a well-formed hypothesis to account for your aged relative's death. Mind you, though, I haven't confirmed it yet."

"And what is your hypothesis?"

"Stated roughly, it is this—or, rather, my conclusion drawn from it is this: Your relative's death is due, not to his own hand, but to that of another. His slayer, I think, is to be found in the company of a certain woman of the stage, whose name or whereabouts I do not know, but concerning whom I shall immediately in-

stitute inquiries based on the clews already in our possession. In fact, your relative's slayer appears to be what you would call a gay bird. I might even go farther, and hazard a description of him, if I had the time. Suffice it that he travels under the name of George Macready."

He paused, and smiled as he glanced again at his watch. "I think, Mr. Vöglein, that is a pretty fair morning's work. Good day, sir."

But Arthur Vöglein was too taken aback to answer. He stood still, with eyes popping out of his head, and gasped. Meanwhile, Mrs. Amelia Gross, standing, by pure accident, where she could observe the young man through her lace curtains, wondered, in her turn, what had so astonished him.

CHAPTER III.

THE VOICE IN THE DEAD MAN'S ROOM.

"I vill allow der qvestion." The coroner spoke with a lofty dignity that dominated the courtroom—a dignity not one whit impaired by the fact that he was fanning himself violently. The jury, red-faced and uncomfortable, handkerchiefs stuffed inside collars, were also fanning themselves; and so were the others in the courtroom, even those outside the inclosure for counsel, sitting scattered on the common benches in the rear of the room—a number of witnesses and a police officer or two, waiting for their turn to be called, or their case to be opened.

It was a hot day. In fact, every one in his graded degree of dignity and his particular locality of graded honor was fanning himself or herself. The windows were open, and the noise and rattle of the streets had the effrontery to enter, and to some extent mingle with the solemnity of the proceeding; though, it being the nature of streets in general to behave with a confused hum, this fact was ignored as much as possible by the important public functionary who had just said he would allow the question.

"But, if your honor please," objected Ellis, rising, "the question is utterly irrelevant. What this young man was thinking of—how will that throw any light upon the cause of death? A coroner's inquest, sir, begins and ends with the endeavor to specify the cause of death. But my learned friend, Mr. Warner, the assistant district attorney, appears to be on a fishing excursion. My client is called here simply as a witness. Why should we waste the time of these gentlemen and of yourself by these utterly irrelevant questions?"

"Why do you vaste de time?" asked the coroner, turning fiercely to the assistant district attorney.

"But, if your honor please," replied that gentleman, leaning negligently upon the rail which separated the jury box from the space for counsel, "I consider it an important matter, bearing weightily on facts I am prepared to prove, that this young man, returning home late at night, ignorant, as *he* claims, of the fact that his aged relative lay dead upstairs, should have stood three-quarters of an hour in the vestibule. I do not wonder his counsel tries to keep it out. I repeat my question. Mr. Arthur Vöglein, why did you wait there in the vestibule so long before entering the house?"

"I allow der qvestion," said the coroner, reversing himself for the second time, whereat Ellis gave up the ridiculous contest, sat down, leaned back in his chair, and looked up at the ceiling, thereby impressing the jury with the fact that he was bored to death, and that he had tried his best to keep them from being bored also.

Arthur Vöglein, sitting propped up in the witness chair, where he had been under fire for about fifteen minutes, was a little pale, but determined. His eyes returned the lawyer's gaze frankly. He hesitated a moment, and then replied, in a low, even, distinct tone:

"I was afraid to go in."

There was a stir of attention from the jury at this answer.

Young Assistant District Attorney Warner was visibly elated with righteous triumph. He pursued his advantage:

"Why were you afraid to go in?"

"I don't know."

"Was there anything that you knew to be afraid of?"

"No."

The assistant district attorney glanced sideways at the jury for a second, as much as to say: "Ah, he dodges!" Then he continued:

"Mr. Vöglein, you have already testified that you left your cousin, the deceased, at his bedroom door at seven o'clock last Saturday evening, and that you did not see him again until you broke into his room at about three o'clock in the morning. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"And you did not return to the house at any time between seven o'clock and the time you stood so long in the vestibule, afraid to go in?"

"No."

"Sure of that?"

"Yes."

"Where did you go when you left the house at seven o'clock, and what did you do from then till two or three o'clock the next morning?"

"I can't tell you."

"Why not?" severely.

"Perhaps," interposed the coroner, "he t'inks it shoult, maybe, incriminate him."

Ellis had sprung to his feet. "I object," he urged, "to this attempt of my learned friend, Mr. Warner, to insinuate into the minds of the jury the ridiculous idea that my client—who is here, I repeat, simply as a witness under subpœna—murdered his aged and unfortunate relative by turning on the gas and then got out of the room, leaving it locked and bolted on the inside."

"Do you object to answer on the ground that it will incriminate you?" pursued Warner, addressing the witness.

"No," said Arthur Vöglein.

"Then answer. Where were you, and what were you doing, during that period of six or seven hours?"

"I can't tell you."

"Well, where were you between seven and eight o'clock?"

"I can't tell you."

"Can you bring any one else as a witness to tell where you were between the hours of seven and eight o'clock on Saturday evening last?"

"No."

"Were you drinking?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Where did you get your first drink?"

"I—I can't tell."

"I ask your honor to instruct the witness to answer."

"And I," interrupted Ellis, "ask your honor to instruct Mr. Warner to proceed with his examination, and not waste any further time on the subject of drinks."

"Yes," exclaimed the coroner fiercely, "you are vasting time."

"All right, your honor," said Warner, satisfied with the effect he had produced on the jury, and accepting the situation, in his turn, with a grimace. "Now, Mr. Vöglein, you say you saw your aged relative alive last at about quarter of seven. Where?"

"In his room."

"The room he was found dead in?"

"Yes."

"What was he doing?"

"He was reading a book."

"What else was he doing?"

"Talking to me."

"What about?"

The witness hesitated again, and at length answered:

"He was referring to my conduct at college."

"One moment, Mr. Vöglein. Your cousin, you have already told us, was the sole proprietor of Vöglein Brothers, the well-known dealers in wall paper. And you, his distant relative, were an orphan, and his heir at law?"

"Yes."

"Yes. And you were dependent on him?"

"I was."

"Now, what did he say to you about your conduct in college?"

"He didn't approve of it."

"Anything else?"

"Yes; he referred to my having left college and gone into business."

"What was it, Mr. Vöglein? Give

us the substance of the whole conversation."

Arthur Vöglein hesitated a moment, glanced at Ellis, and then at the jury. Then, with a certain dignity, he answered:

"My cousin said I hadn't showed the slightest ability to ever be able to take charge of the business of Vöglein Brothers, and carry it on, and that he had come to the conclusion that I would be better off if left with a small income in trust, and if he willed the bulk of his property elsewhere."

"He spoke of a will, did he?"

"Yes."

"Did he show you a will?"

"No."

"What?"

"He showed me the draft of one—all drawn up, but not witnessed or acknowledged."

"It simply lacked the formal execution to become a will?"

"Yes."

"Did you read the document?"

"Yes."

"What did it provide, in substance?"

"Why, it left the bulk of his property to the college."

"Did he tell you why he intended to do that?"

"Yes. He said he wanted to make up to them for the trouble he had caused them by sending me there."

The tension of the jury, some of whom had forgotten to fan themselves, broke at this. There was a short laugh, and Ellis, taking what advantage of it he could, observed that a rich and peculiar relative was not an uncommon possession.

"And so, Mr. Vöglein," said Warner, returning to the attack, "you left him that evening under the belief that he intended to disinherit you?"

"No."

"No?"

"I thought he would change his mind," said Arthur Vöglein. "My cousin and I were fond of each other." His soft lip struggled a moment until he drew in his mouth in a firm line. Ellis looked feelingly at the jury.

"You thought he would change his mind, eh?" said Warner.

"Yes, and tear up the will."

"Ah—tear it up! I am curious to know, Mr. Vöglein, just why you make use of that expression 'tear it up.' Had he ever had a will before, and torn it up, to your knowledge?"

"No."

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Vöglein, did he tear it up?"

"No—not to my knowledge."

"Then what made you use that expression?"

"I don't know."

"Where is the will now?"

"I don't know."

"Your relative, I believe, was slightly deaf, was he not?" asked Warner, apparently veering off on a new tack. "So that, if he slept, one might walk softly around in his room without disturbing him?"

"Yes. I believe so—yes."

"Now," cried Warner, with a suddenness which made the jury sit bolt upright, "isn't it a fact that between the hours of seven and eight o'clock last Saturday evening you were in your cousin's room, and *tore it up yourself?*"

Having delivered this broadside, Assistant District Attorney Warner pivoted on one foot till he faced the jury, and stood there in the triumphant, fixed attitude of one prepared to wait for days, if necessary. Ellis had risen to his feet.

"I submit," he said quietly, "that question has been answered already."

Suddenly Warner swung around, and started to fumble with the papers which lay scattered on the table beside him.

"Here, Langham! Langham!" he called.

The red-faced detective sergeant approached him in a lamblike manner, and handed him something.

"I show you," pursued Warner, addressing the witness, "a torn document, the fragments of which are pieced together and pasted on transparent paper, and ask you if this is your cousin's draft of a will you have referred to."

Ellis took the restored document from Warner, read it through slowly and unconcernedly, keeping everybody waiting, and then, when he had quite finished, handed it back to Warner, who handed it to a court officer, who handed it to Vöglein, who looked curiously at it.

"Yes," he answered, at length, "that's it."

Whereupon the coroner took it from him, and the assistant district attorney sat down. "That's all," he said.

"No more questions, Mr. Vöglein," said Ellis, waving him aside with a genial expression, his manner saying plainer than words: "Gentlemen, the whole thing is trivial, and we have nothing to conceal."

Arthur Vöglein left the witness chair dazed, and came and sat down beside his counsel, wearing the look of a man who had been pulled through a knot hole. He hardly seemed to be attentive to what followed, and when the name of Mrs. Amelia Gross was called, and that lady rose and moved toward the witness chair, it would be hard to say whether he even realized who the lady was, much less guessed the purport of her presence.

Meanwhile, dressed in her most genteel costume of black, looking very virtuous, very restrained, and quite stiff, the lady was sworn.

"Mrs. Gross," said Warner, "where do you live?"

Mrs. Gross moved her lips feebly.

"What?"

The lady's lips parted again.

"Madam, you'll have to speak louder. These gentlemen can't hear you."

Mrs. Gross, overcome with her position, made a great effort, and said something which the stenographer, writing at a table beside her, caught, and hurriedly put down in his book.

It was finally arranged that a court officer should stand at her elbow, catch her answers, and bawl them out in repetition, under which set of circumstances the reader is to understand the examination as proceeding.

Thus proceeding, the lady was led to relate the fact that on the Saturday evening in question, she was sitting in a rocking-chair in her bedroom, to which she had repaired immediately after dinner. Owing to the thinness of the partition, which used to be simply a door, and which separated her room from that of the deceased, and not at all owing to her desire to overhear what wasn't her business, she had been a listener to the conversation between Mr. Arthur Vöglein and his aged relative, the deceased, as already testified to by Mr. Vöglein, to which testimony she added her corroboration. From this she was led to recount the further fact that her window, beside which her rocking-chair was placed, bowing out slightly, commanded a view sideways of the adjacent window opening out of the deceased's bedroom, though not such a view as would enable one to look directly in through the window.

"Mrs. Gross," said Warner, "did you hear anything further after Mr. Arthur Vöglein bade his aged relative good night at a few minutes before seven o'clock?"

Mrs. Gross allowed her eyes to wander a moment over the courtroom, and then answered in the affirmative, as much as to say she hadn't thought of it before; in fact, she had quite forgotten it; but, now that it was mentioned, she did recall that circumstance.

"One minute, Mrs. Gross. You were constantly in your room from that time on until Mr. Vöglein knocked on your door, between two and three o'clock? And you did not go to bed?"

The lady, it appeared, had been too worried to go to bed.

"Very good. Now, what did you hear?"

"I heard Mr. Arthur Vöglein go downstairs. I heard Mr. Seth Vöglein move around in his room and lock his door. The bed creaked—probably Mr. Vöglein lay down to rest. Then all was still for a long time. I heard no one reenter the room, but I heard a noise of the window shutting slowly and gently, and I heard the noise of the catch."

"Could you, looking sideways from your bay window, see Mr. Vöglein's window shut?"

"No. I could just barely see the farther edge of the casement of his window."

"Go on."

"After I heard the window shut, I heard some one moving around. It was like some one feeling around gently in the dark."

"Could you tell whether Mr. Vöglein's gas jet was still lighted?"

"No, I could not."

"What else, if anything, did you hear?"

"I heard the sound of paper being slowly torn up, and I heard a voice."

"What time was this, madam?"

"It was between seven and eight o'clock."

"Whose voice was it?"

The jury were craning forward, trying to catch, if possible, the answer before the court officer repeated it. Ellis had risen to his feet, and stood beside Warner, towering above him.

"I couldn't say. It wasn't Mr. Seth Vöglein's, I am sure. It was some one else. I couldn't say who."

"Madam," flashed the assistant district attorney angrily, "when I spoke to you outside the courtroom a little while ago, didn't you tell me it was the voice of Mr. Arth——"

"I object!" shouted Ellis.

"Objection is sustained," thundered the coroner, for once making a proper ruling.

There was a pause. At length Warner spoke.

"Tell his honor and this jury," he said, "what you heard."

"It sounded," said the witness, "like some one who was frightened, talking to himself in an undertone. I didn't catch all that was said." The witness paused and looked helpless. The assistant district attorney came to the lady's rescue with a leading question:

"Did the expressions you heard contain the use of profanity?"

Mrs. Cross wore the air of a martyr on the altar of refinement as she answered that it sounded to her like profanity.

"I insist," said Ellis, "that the witness give the exact words without being led."

"You shall have them," returned Warner, as he signed to Mrs. Gross to proceed.

"I heard," continued the witness, "the expressions 'damn' and 'hell' and 'Lord.' I cannot remember all that was said. It was confused. I heard the expression 'Who would have thought the old man had so much——' something I didn't catch. I also heard the voice say 'Out' several times, and 'It's time to do it!' and 'What should I care when no one can ever know it? I am a soldier.' That is all I recall."

"Mrs. Gross," asked Warner, looking significantly at the jury, "do you happen to know if Mr. Arthur Vöglein is a member of any military organization?"

"I believe so," was the answer. "I think he belongs to the Seventh Regiment."

Warner glanced over at Arthur Vöglein, who, sitting shrunk into himself beside Ellis, bore at that moment very little of a martial appearance.

At this juncture the coroner caught sight of the gold watch and chain which were strewn across the curve of his vest, as though its possession were a complete surprise to him, and he called all the world to bear him witness that he was for the first time in his life examining it in detail. He announced that the proceeding stood adjourned until two o'clock. Then, with a bearing of such loftiness as to suggest that instead of luncheon he was about to spend the ensuing hour in deep meditation, he left the bench, and disappeared into his chambers.

At once Ellis put on his hat, and, hitting the assistant district attorney a slap upon the shoulder, exclaimed: "Mike, blow me to lunch, will you? I want to talk to you."

Warner smiled genially up at his friend and erstwhile opponent. "How does Pontin's suit you?" he said. "Come on."

TO BE CONCLUDED IN THE NEXT ISSUE, ON SALE JANUARY 7TH.

A Tip by Wireless

By Charles Neville Buck

Author of "The Key to Yesterday," "Sir Lucifer," Etc.

This was the tip by wireless: "There is a murderer on board." Surely a tip sufficient to set the S. S. *Pachitaro* aflutter with dread, for there were only ten Americans on board, a small group which several days' companionship had made more or less intimate. Under the smiling exteriors pounded a heart torn by nauseating dread. Which one?

CAPTAIN SPARSBURG, of the *Pachitaro,* was a lean, fever-bitten man, whose fund of personal recollection ran back to those days when, under Admiral O'Higgins, he had seen the Peruvian flag lowered from the masthead of the *Huascar,* and had watched Chilean arms waste and ravish the city of Lima.

South America was his world, and he knew it. Now, as his four-thousand-ton steamer, carrying, in the words of the company's prospectus, "regular fast passenger and cargo service between Panama, Callao, and Mollendo," was making her ordered fifteen knots southward, he was edifying a small group of passengers with reminiscence. His auditors sat under the deck awnings and listened inertly, for the equator spraddled in a swelter only twenty-four hours astern, and the brown-and-cinnamon barriers of the Andes, off the port bow, beat back merciless waves of dry heat.

"It's a different west coast now," he told them; and, though he should have felt pride in the forward march of the times, he seemed to speak regretfully.

"In Lima you will no longer go on Sunday afternoon to the Plaza de Toros to see the feats of the bull ring, but to imported sports of the polo club or race track. You will chat with tourists in the Plaza de Armas, where, not so many years ago, I have smelled powder and seen the dead littering the cathedral terrace. You will sip tea to the music of a Viennese orchestra. Now all the world is of one piece, but in those old red days, when I first came down the Pacific, it was otherwise. When you crossed the Isthmus you kissed familiar things good-by. When you met countrymen going south you asked no questions. You knew that in Callao there was no extradition, and you realized that your countrymen knew it, too, and were, perhaps, going there for that exact reason. Even Henry Meiggs, who flung the Oroya Road up impossible steeps to the crest of the Andes, was said to have his secrets—but that was probably slander."

From the overhead parallels of the Marconi wires came an insistent buzzing like the swarming of bees. Captain Sparsburg paused, and snorted.

"And that newfangled contrivance that keeps its finger on you wherever you go—I can't get used to that, either. Dewey cut the cable at Manila that he might fight unhampered by instructions from some theorist sitting behind a mahogany desk. Nowadays the theorist would get him with that thing."

From the several men who listened all energy seemed to have oozed and evaporated, leaving them too listlessly hot to agree or disagree; but the one woman in the group glanced up eagerly, and one could read in her blue eyes the promise of debate. The brown hair which broke into small tendrils of

curls at her temples stirred in a tepid breeze hardly stronger than the breath of a ghost. She was very young and pretty, and in the air which scorched and stifled others she remained fresh, crisp, and unwilted. That may have been because two young men, more energetic than their fellows, leaned forward on either side, and fanned her with unflagging constancy.

"Yet now we have a different and finer sort of romance, don't you think?" she challenged. "Instead of carrying a passenger list of silent men running away from something, you carry men who go to do things. Mr. Burton here" —the man who operated the fan on her right flushed with pleasure at such honorable mention—"goes to add a link to the railroad that Henry Meiggs built above the clouds. Mr. Tilbrook"—with a nod at the fan wielder on her left—"goes to dig out the gold that the Incas left behind. The drama of construction has supplanted the melodrama of destruction."

Urged on by this encouragement, Mr. Tilbrook came to life, and entered the lists of discussion. "And when it comes down to that," he observed, "we still have all kinds. If you believe that picturesque and bizarre crime is dead, read any newspaper. It's been only a few months since I myself was a passenger on a train that was stuck up by robbers in the Big Bend country near the Mexican border. They took a cool fifty thousand from passengers and express car, and made a clean get-away."

"When do we reach Paita?" interrupted Burton, as though even so dry a topic as barren Paita were preferable to Tilbrook's adventures. It had occurred to each of these two men that the presence of the other was superfluous.

They had met hardly two weeks before, when on a raw afternoon they hung, like brothers over the deck rail of a United Fruit Company's steamer, while the fangs of lower New York became blurred, and the torch of Liberty waved them bon voyage from Bedloe's Island. At the captain's table the next morning both had met Miss Kinnaird, and each of the men had eyed the other dubiously. At first meeting they had welcomed the idea of companionship; at second this companionship threatened to become oppressive and cloying. As the seas and air grew warmer, their greetings became colder. They had more and more openly, and more and more futilely, parried and fenced in the effort to monopolize Miss Kinnaird, shadowing each other like thief and detective, until their mutual dislike had become conspicuous and—save to themselves—amusing.

"Please tell us about the holdup," demanded the girl.

"With Mr. Burton's permission," ironically acceded the fan bearer on the left. "The subject seems to annoy him."

"Go as far as you like," retorted he on the right, with an expression of utter boredom. "Don't mind me."

The girl looked from right to left with a suppressed twinkle of amusement. This schoolboy hostility was no more obvious to her than its cause, and it appealed to her sense of humor that these two flannel-clad strangers, each undoubtedly good-looking, each capable and bronzed, were so much of a type that on casual glance one might almost have been mistaken for the other.

Burton sat back, a picture of ennui, while Tilbrook resumed his tale of personal adventure.

"We were crossing a stretch of empty prairie, broken only sparsely by ranch houses," he said. "Presumably the bandits, under cover of darkness, boarded the train at a water tank, and concealed themselves on the roofs of the coaches. Shortly after midnight they proceeded to carry into effect a carefully rehearsed plan which lacked nothing of dramatic intensity. There were four of them, and their teamwork was excellent. After disconnecting the signal cord, they surprised the Pullman and train conductors, who were sleepily going over the day's records in a smoking compartment. Under the eloquent persuasion of revolvers, these gentlemen relinquished their keys, and were locked up.

"Through the three Pullmans the robbers made an expeditious trip, forcing the negro porter in each car to accept from the passengers all purses and jewelry. The porter, as he tremblingly obeyed, was convoyed by two highwaymen, who made their mission clear, and urgently requested all hands to remain extended—empty—over the aisle. The other two guarded the doors. To indicate their sincerity, they shot through the shoulder the first passenger who grew belligerent. From that moment on, all hands remained outstretched. After working the sleepers they divided into two parties. One pair got the drop on the Wells-Fargo messengers, and instructed them to open the safe. One of these proved quick on the draw, and succeeded in slightly wounding his assailant; but it cost him a bullet through the lungs. The second obeyed, and was then neatly tied up. Meanwhile, the other two highwaymen had disconnected all the coaches back of the express car, and left them on the roadbed, while they invaded the cab, and persuaded the engineer and cabmen to take train orders from them in person. At a point near the Rio Grande they were flagged by confederates, and, stopping the engine, made their departure on ponies that were waiting."

"What were the passengers doing all this while?" demanded Miss Kinnaird, with indignation.

"They were, for the most part, holding empty hands out over the aisles of stationary cars several miles back on the roadbed," Mr. Tilbrook assured her.

Miss Kinnaird was looking searchingly at the story-teller, and her sensitive lips curled a little. "And you made no resistance? You simply surrendered your belongings to these gentlemen of the road, and went to sleep?"

The narrator flushed deeply, and Mr. Burton, looking off absently across the sapphire waters of the Pacific, permitted himself to smile.

Mr. Tilbrook caught the smile, and scowled resentfully; then, turning to the girl, he explained:

"Well, you see, I hadn't meant to speak of that, because it was really an irrelevant detail. I told you they shot one passenger because he kicked. As it happened, I was the goat."

Mr. Burton's smile died. He had no honorable wounds to announce. He felt that he must appear colorless and prosaic.

The man who could only build railroads, and who had never been shot, dismally lighted a cigarette, and studied it carefully. "Could you identify any one of those highwaymen if you were to meet them again?" he inquired.

"Why do you ask?"

"Oh, I just wondered. Isn't that the usual question?"

The story-teller knitted his brows in annoyance at the cavalier manner of his rival; then shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know," he answered curtly. "They all wore hat brims turned down, so that their faces were shaded."

Colonel William Kinnaird, of interest only because he was Miss Kinnaird's father, had been sitting in his steamer chair, and had given no evidence of listening to the conversation. He so rarely spoke that his fellow voyagers had dubbed him William the Silent.

Burton had talked of the railway extension which he was to push forward from Huancayo, in the valley of the Oroya, to Ayacucho; and Tilbrook had chatted volubly of a placer-gold tract which he was to inspect for an American syndicate; but Colonel Kinnaird had volunteered nothing of his mission or affairs. Those silent men who in the days of "no extradition" had sought haven in Callao had come with no greater taciturnity than he.

So marked had been his exclusive silence that he might have been in turn ignored, except for the fact that his daughter had won the favor of all on board; and for her sake they accepted him as an elderly gentleman who was ill, and showed him every courtesy. Colonel Kinnaird was gray, and his face showed the ravages of illness, which made him seem a decade older than his sixty years.

He sat in unbroken silence for hours at a time, gazing off across the indolent swell of blue waters. His piercing eyes seemed to be searching not only an expanse of almost tideless sea, but an expanse of bygone years as well. He always reminded Burton of some solitary hawk, perched aloof, and brooding on a bare limb at the summit of a forest.

Now, for the first time, he spoke, turning his face to Tilbrook to inquire gravely:

"Were these—these men all young?"

The young prospector shook his head.

"No, sir; the one who shot the express messenger was perhaps sixty."

"And," said Colonel Kinnaird, in a detached manner, after a moment's silence, "the Wells-Fargo man died."

"Then you know something of the case?" questioned Tilbrook.

"It was quite fully reported in the daily press," replied the elderly man, turning his eyes seaward, and relapsing again into silence.

"Naturally," suggested Burton. "A fifty-thousand-dollar robbery capped with a murder would be mentioned."

That evening, shortly before the dinner gong sounded, when Miss Kinnaird had disappeared into her cabin, Burton and Tilbrook met in the otherwise deserted smoke room, and exchanged curt nods. For a time they sat with silence and half the space of the saloon between them; then Burton rose, and came over.

"Tilbrook," he began coolly, "it occurs to me that for no reason at all we are being rather nasty to each other."

"Indeed?" inquired the other, glancing casually up. "I hadn't marked that you'd been noticeably offensive. If I had, I should have told you so."

Burton ignored the repulse given his advances, though almost imperceptibly his jaw stiffened.

"The worst of it is," he continued, "that it serves only to make us both rather ridiculous. We found each other fairly congenial two weeks ago."

"Since then we may have revised first impressions," mildly suggested Mr. Tilbrook. "It frequently happens."

"Since then," went on Burton steadily pursuing his own line, "nothing has happened except a thing for which we should both be very grateful. We have met Miss Kinnaird."

Tilbrook devoted an unnecessary amount of care to knocking the ash from his cigar. His voice, when he spoke, was distinctly chilling:

"If you insist on discussing our alleged differences, do you regard it as necessary to mention any lady in connection with the matter?"

Burton flushed. "If I didn't regard it as absolutely necessary, I shouldn't do it."

"There we are at variance," said Tilbrook smoothly. "To me it doesn't seem necessary—and I decline to do it." He tossed his unfinished cigar into an ash tray, and rose. "You will excuse me?" he added, as he turned toward the door.

But Burton, who stood barring the way, did not move. "One moment," he insisted. "I wish to be courteous, but I must ask as much of you. It is rather absurd to assume that I need any reminder of respect for Miss Kinnaird."

"Well, what is it?" The inquiry was curt.

"I shouldn't care to bestow confidences on you. Nor would I seek a favor from you. I am here to offer as much as I ask."

"So far," interrupted Mr. Tilbrook vacantly, "I fail to get your drift."

"We pass Paita to-morrow morning; then there are Pascamayo, Chimbote, Samanco. In three days we separate at Callao." He paused, but Tilbrook offered no comment, so he went steadily on again: "In that time I have much to say to Miss Kinnaird which I don't care to say under your chaperonage."

"At last," said Tilbrook ironically, "your meaning dawns on me. Query: Will I please obliterate myself? Answer: I will not."

"As it is," pursued the railroad builder evenly, "we only block each

other. I am willing to divide time fairly. I am not asking odds. I shall obliterate myself half the time. If you have any reason for wanting to be constantly with Miss Kinnaird, this arrangement should be as welcome to you as to me. If not"—Mr. Burton's voice took on a deeper note—"your conduct is despicable."

Tilbrook frowned, and started to speak, but changed his mind, and devoted some moments to reflection. Then he smiled, and extended his hand. "The hatchet is buried," he announced. "And you, as the sponsor of this truce, will kindly become invisible at eight-thirty o'clock this evening."

Burton shook his head. "We will meet to-morrow morning and arrange a schedule," he proposed. "This evening the moon is full—and it is my birthday."

"In that case," Tilbrook acceded, with a frank generosity, "I must yield. In the words of the poet, 'The night is thine.' "

The moon was, as young Mr. Burton had prophesied, full. Under its luminance the phosphorus of the water was dimmed, and the magnified stars of the South were softened.

The night breeze had freshened, and the girl, standing very tall and slender in the shadow of the after cabin, had thrown a filmy scarf about her shoulders, which flashed softly with a glint of silver spangles. Burton, his elbows on the rail, looked at her, and she looked at the moon's irridescent path of dreams across the sea. The night breathed intoxication and fragrance and silent music.

"But," she at length argued, rather weakly, "we know nothing of each other. What do you know of me, or I of you?" Her eyes brightened mischievously. "As it happens, I'm the only girl on the boat. How do I know that you would be here talking to me if there *were* any other girls on the boat?"

"I know all I need to know," he assured her. "I know the miracle which is you. Wise men don't seek to analyze miracles. You would still be the only girl on the boat if there were a thousand others."

"Two weeks ago," she mused skeptically, "neither one of us had ever heard of the other; and yet we were both fairly happy."

Her hands were resting lightly on the rail. One of his own slipped out and closed over her fingers, but she quickly drew them away, and shook her head.

"We know nothing of each other," she insisted. "Perhaps even in these days, in spite of the captain, people do run away to hide. I might be an adventuress——" The man interrupted her with a laugh of ridicule. "We might all be adventurers," she went on, "running from our sins. You might even be one of the train robbers that Mr. Tilbrook spoke of. Of course, in point of fact, none of us is any of these things; but it proves that we must wait before we grow sentimental."

He would have interrupted once more, but she stopped him with a raised hand, and continued:

"I don't even know whether it is really you talking, or just the moon and the Southern Ocean talking through you."

"There are three days more," said Burton slowly. "You will know me better before we land."

The girl shivered a little, and the man bent forward to wrap the scarf more closely about her throat.

"And, what is worse," she told him, in a low voice, "I don't know when the moon and the Southern Cross may begin talking through me; so I'm going to make you take me in."

They turned and went forward, but at her door her smile seemed to say something more than just "Good night."

Burton took himself and his thoughts to the tiny space surrounding the cage of the wireless operator, where he had discovered he could find seclusion between tarpaulined lifeboats. The space was theoretically barred to passengers, but the sign which forbade trespassing was in Spanish, and he preferred not to understand it.

Shortly, however, McAndrews, the

operator, came out to roll and smoke a cigarette. As he struck the match, he recognized Burton, and nodded affably.

"Can you keep something under your hat, Mr. Burton?" he inquired, with ill-suppressed excitement.

The man nodded, but without enthusiasm. He had sought solitude, and found loquacity.

The operator drew nearer, and lowered his voice. His manner was freighted with portentous secrecy. "We've got a Texas train robber and murderer on board!" he whispered. "What do you know about that?"

Burton stood silent, his face deeply thoughtful.

"That's right," went on McAndrews eagerly. "The tip just came by wireless."

"Who do you think it is?" asked the other suddenly.

"Who is he?" sarcastically echoed the operator. "If I was hep to that, I'd cop the reward. It's a cool thousand in real American money. The message only said to watch all passengers. Now, we have only ten Americans—all bound for Callao. The consul general will come aboard there with the officer of the port and a few police—and he'll have the full description. Some blow-off that, eh?"

But Burton was disconcertedly pacing the deck. At last he halted, and spoke earnestly to the operator.

"See here, McAndrews," he said. "You can rest assured I'll keep quiet, but don't speak of this to any one else. The captain knows?"

"Sure thing! All messages go to him hot off the wires."

But despite Burton's injunction, the secret leaked, and an hour later he found Tilbrook and Girard, a commercial traveler, discussing it importantly in the smoke room.

"It's a good one on me," laughed Tilbrook. "I've been sitting round here relating my experiences as a holdup victim, and in all probability one of the robbers was listening while I was telling it—and laughing in his sleeve."

"If I were you," earnestly suggested Burton, "I wouldn't talk about that message. I'd keep it very quiet."

"Why?" Tilbrook looked up with questioning eyes.

Burton answered slowly: "First, it might get McAndrews into trouble. He's responsible for leaks in his office. Second, the captain may be able to get better evidence if it's not generally known and discussed."

"Possibly you're right," acceded Tilbrook; "but I have the detective instinct—and a grudge against highwaymen. I'm going to do some sleuthing of my own. It's rather singular that this chap got away so neatly at the time, only to be traced down thousands of miles away."

"The character of the country," argued Burton, "favored escape. It was a comparatively short dash to the Mexican border. They probably cached the gold and scattered."

Tilbrook intently studied the speaker's averted face.

"Then you know the locality?" he inquired.

"I ought to," said Burton. "I've surveyed all through the Big Bend country."

"By the process of elimination," put in Girard, "one should be able to spot the fellow if he is really on board. There are ourselves. Certainly Mr. Tilbrook didn't rob himself. I have a perfectly good alibi. I suppose Mr. Burton has one also. Then there are the priest from Houston, Texas; Hendricks, the fellow connected with the Harvard Observatory at Arequipa, whom the captain has known for years; those young college chaps, who are mere children; Colonel Kinnaird—— Let's see, who else?"

"I think we can omit Colonel Kinnaird," suggested Burton, with a touch of asperity.

"And yet," stubbornly insinuated Girard, "one would think of him instinctively. He is our man of mystery—silent, uncommunicative, and repellent. He palpably broods over something. What is it? The only time he spoke this afternoon was when he volunteered the information that the express mes-

senger had died of his wounds. The man who shot that messenger was about sixty. So is Colonel Kinnaird. Men are presumed to brood over murders."

"What are you talking about, man!" Burton started indignantly to his feet, but Tilbrook laid a hand on his arm, and turned to the drummer. "Girard," he said quietly, "this is sheer nonsense. Cut it out!"

Girard shrugged his shoulders, and fell silent.

They looked up, and saw Captain Sparsburg standing, with his arms folded, above them.

"So this thing has leaked?" he commented. "I'm sorry. In a case like this, there is general constraint and uneasiness and false suspicion. Such incidents spoil a voyage. I must insist that you give this matter no further currency."

"That," said Mr. Burton, "is exactly what I was urging."

And yet, with a virulent contagion, the news percolated so that during the next day one might have seen scattered knots of passengers talking excitedly in low voices.

Each man who felt secure in the consciousness of innocence was sensible of a secret thrill of excitement. Under some one of these smiling exteriors pounded a heart torn by nauseating dread. Here in a small group which several days of companionship had made more or less intimate was an arch breaker of the law. Over the entire passenger list an impalpable accusation seemed to whirl and dance, like the blurred and leaping ball of a roulette wheel. Soon it would come definitely to rest.

Miss Kinnaird spent the major part of the afternoon in her stateroom, and when she appeared at dinner was unwontedly silent. Later she allowed Tilbrook to lead her to the stern rail, and listened without animation while he talked. She was grateful that he made his conversation impersonal. Perhaps he guarded himself so cautiously because he saw that she was distraught and troubled. She explained that she was anxious about her father, who was even less well than usual. It was not until she herself suggested the topic that he alluded to the note of suspense which had buzzed from the wireless apparatus into their midst, and set the *Pachitaro* aflutter.

"It's rather an adventure," he said, "and I have a well-grounded suspicion. I suppose every man who is not hopelessly grown up has the itching to prove himself a Sherlock Holmes. It's something to feel oneself clever enough to outwit a master rogue."

But she turned on him quickly, with a hint of tremor in her voice.

"Why should one human creature wish to hunt down another?" she demanded. "Why should men make bloodhounds of themselves?"

Tilbrook looked at her flashing eyes, genuinely astounded at the sudden outburst.

"I think I should prefer to shield every unfortunate wretch in the world," she went on, in a low voice. "At least, these were bold malefactors. They succeeded only because their courage was greater than the combined courage of all the other men on the train."

"And yet," he smiled, "you could hardly expect me to glorify them. You forget that they robbed and shot me. Isn't it natural enough that the victim should try to aid in apprehending them?"

She was a long time silent, while the wake broke into a wet and shattered fire of phosphorus, and the sea lapped itself into a fantasy of pale-green lights. At last she asked:

"Whom do you suspect?"

Tilbrook frowned and hesitated.

"One does not like to make such an accusation lightly or prematurely," he said. "Whatever I may myself think can work no injustice so long as it remains unuttered. Besides"—he flashed on her his peculiarly infectious smile—"my detective ardor has vanished. You disapprove."

"Was it——" She halted; then went on hesitatingly: "Was it that you have actually recognized some one?"

"Hardly so definite as that," answered her companion. "I had not thought that I recognized any one at first, but of late, from somewhere in the back of my head, the memory of a face has been materializing—which tallies with one on board this boat."

She stood silent, but her pose became almost rigid, and her fingers squeezed hard on the rail.

"However," Tilbrook laughed good-humoredly, "I'm done. I'm out of the case." After a moment he added: "And yet I shouldn't be frank if I didn't tell you that the captain has questioned me, as one who was an eyewitness, and I, of course, answered frankly. He had the right to call upon me."

"What did you tell him?" The girl put the question with quick, unguarded interest.

"I'd rather not answer that, because it might seem an attack on an innocent man. We went over the case, and agreed on several points."

"I insist on an answer," she urged, leaning eagerly toward him.

After a few moments of weighing an unpleasant alternative, he went on:

"Very well; I told him of the half-remembered face seen somewhere before, but I also reminded him that there were four robbers, and my ghost of memory applied to only one. Whether it was *the* one we could only know when the description came from Callao."

"Whose face was it?"

"Please wait. This isn't a pleasant thing to recite, and if you'll let me get at it in my own fashion it will be easier. When I told my story of the hold-up, one auditor seemed to grow uneasy, and attempted to stop me with interruptions."

"Mr. Burton!" The name fell from the lips of Miss Kinnaird with an expression of reproach for his accuser, but the man did not wince. He went on:

"Even then, when my recital affected us no more directly than ancient history, he asked a question which should have been of interest only to one concerned. He wanted to know if I could identify."

"That was nothing," she defended. "I was on the point of asking that myself."

"Mere straws when taken together become cumulative," said Tilbrook. "When the wireless operator let the news of the message leak, it was this man who at once demanded that it should be hushed up. Why was he so insistent on that point? Was it because, with every brain on board working, some one might work successfully? Then there's the face."

Her voice shook a little. "It's all flimsy assumption," she protested. "It's not proof."

The man spoke very earnestly after a long pause. "I was afraid," he said, "that you would misunderstand my motive. Suppose I could identify without doubt—would you wish me to refuse? Of course, you know that I would obey your wishes—to the point of perjury."

"I?" she stammered. "Why should I wish it?"

Tilbrook leaned a little closer, and breathed deep. "I don't ask why you might wish it," he told her. "I don't question your motives. I only ask whether you would wish it so. For me that is enough."

She caught her breath quickly, and answered in a low, gaspy voice: "I don't know! I can't say!"

The next day, as Burton and the girl were pacing the deck together, she glanced at him sidewise, and asked, with mock gayety: "Have you your alibi ready for Callao?"

"Shall I need one?" he demanded.

"Shan't we all need them?" she countered.

Upon Burton there had already begun to descend an intangible, telepathic realization that the fluttering pointers of suspicion were converging on him. Eyes that he could feel focused on his back, which dropped furtively as he turned, brought home the uncomfortable assurance. He became moody and held himself aloof. This was precise-

ly what an innocent man, too indignant to deny, might be expected to do; also, it was just what a man with a guilty conscience and a dread of tomorrow might do.

Meanwhile, the tepid Pacific was sliding astern, and more and more openly the question was discussed. How did the unfortunate highwayman hope to escape when the consul general should board the *Pachitaro* with police and formal charges? What would be the climax?

The portentous morning came at last when, at the foot of Andean slopes rising through diamond-clear air, San Lorenzo and La Punta lifted their sentinel heads over the frontward horizon. Even before the luggage had been brought up and piled on deck, every passenger was in evidence, pacing back and forth, counting noses, unwilling to chance the missing of the dénouement.

Colonel Kinnaird alone seemed uninterested, sitting silent as usual in his deck chair. His daughter, crisp and fresh as ever, laughed and chatted among the tired voyagers; but a close inspection of her eyes betrayed that she had spent a wakeful night, and one not entirely tearless.

Slowly—very slowly it seemed to the impatient passengers—the *Pachitaro* crept to her anchorage. Back of the fortress and the long mole that projected its rounded end like a seagoing exclamation point rose the yellow town. Dominated by the tower of La Matriz, it sprawled, sun-baked, over its brown sand and rock, until its environs lost themselves in dun slopes that climbed to the foot of San Christobel.

From the end of the mole came the health officers' boat, and with it a launch flying the American flag. That would be the consul general, and through glasses one could see the red patches that were the trousers of the Peruvian uniforms. Behind them bobbed an animated flotilla of baggage-handling *fleteros*.

Even when the health officer had come over the side and exchanged ceremonious compliments with the steamer's commander, and the consul general, with his military escort, had joined the group, there was interminable delay. Then followed an interview which the passengers watched with impatient eagerness. The facts, so far as the American representative knew them, were these: A desperado had been mortally wounded in a clash with the police at San Antone, and had made a dying confession.

He said that the ringleader in the Big Bend holdup had been a young man of college education, age about thirty-five; height five feet ten inches; weight about one hundred and seventy pounds; dark-haired, good-looking. They had known him as "Beau" Lurton.

He had several aliases, and, after having filched from his confederates the major portion of the booty in gold, he had disappeared. A cablegram from Panama had come for the captured man after his death, signed only with initials. It had said merely:

Lurton, alias Brayton, sailed by *Pachitaro,* presumably for Callao. Present alias unknown.

"That," summarized the consul general, "is all I have to act on. I hope you can help me."

"Wait a minute," replied the captain. "There is some one here who may help us—a passenger who was robbed at that time."

The captain beckoned to Tilbrook, who left Miss Kinnaird's side to join them. As he went, he knew that she had flashed him a quick, almost agonized, glance of entreaty.

There was a brief colloquy.

Miss Kinnaird caught the word "identify," and saw Tilbrook shake his head. A moment later he detached himself from the official group, and came back. The captain and consul general strolled about, furtively scrutinizing faces, as they talked in low tones. Finally they came to a halt before Burton, and Captain Sparsburg spoke quietly:

"I'm sorrier than I can say, sir, but for the present I shall have to detain you. I hope——" But he did not finish the expression of good wish. It seemed futile.

For a moment Burton did not speak. There was a murmur from the deck, such as greets the word "guilty" falling with finality from the lips of a jury foreman. From somewhere at his back the accused man heard an excited "What did I tell you?"

Miss Kinnaird stood very pale and rigid. Her lips parted spasmodically, and closed again tightly.

Then Burton laid a hand on Tilbrook's arm. "Tilbrook," he said slowly, "thank you for declining to incriminate me. May I have a word with you in your cabin?"

Tilbrook flushed with embarrassment. "Certainly," he answered.

Burton drew the captain and consul a step apart, and spoke for their ears only.

"I ask ten minutes of indulgence," he said. "When I have entered Mr. Tilbrook's stateroom and closed the door, I want you to give a message to Miss Kinnaird, and to do me one other favor. When you understand, you'll realize that it's justified."

He dropped his voice even lower, and whispered something at which Captain Sparsburg scowled and glanced questioningly at the consul general. That gentleman considered a moment; then hesitantly nodded assent.

The accused turned and followed the other passenger into his cabin. Tilbrook closed the door, and seated himself on a camp stool, waving his guest to another. But Burton remained standing.

"Are we quite alone?" he asked. "This is confidential."

"Quite," said the other; "but I must begin by asking you not to make me your confidant. I did all I could when I refused to identify."

"Very good," agreed Burton. "Now I'm the man picked, and I know that I am not guilty."

Tilbrook politely repressed a skeptical smile.

"And, what is even more to the point, you know it, too," added Burton steadily.

"I?" Tilbrook lifted his brows. "How could I know it? To be quite frank with you, Burton, I believe you are guilty."

"You know I am not that man, because"—Burton paused; then went on, in an absolutely level tone—"because you know *you* are."

Tilbrook came to his feet, and his face went momentarily black, but at once he controlled himself, and then broke into a laugh.

"Burton, on my word, you are a cool one!" he said. "You are fighting for your liberty, and I scarcely blame you, but if this is all you have to say we may as well end it."

"Wait!" The monosyllable broke so imperatively from Burton's lips that the other man, who had taken a step toward the door, halted. "If you go out now," cautioned the accused, "it will ruin you. You'd better listen."

"I don't mind listening, but for God's sake be brief. I'm anxious to get ashore." Tilbrook was retaining his good humor under difficulties.

"You thought yourself extremely clever," went on the even voice. "It would be a pity to spoil it all now. You completely alibied yourself before the thing was known. You did it so neatly with your yarn about being the victim of a robbery which you yourself engineered that when the alarm came you were the one man who escaped suspicion."

Tilbrook came over and looked Burton in the face, eye to eye. "This farce is getting tiresome," he said. "It has passed the point of being funny." The two stood confronting each other at such close quarters that their outthrust chins almost touched.

"You thieves," continued Burton, "have an expression which defines the action of an innocent man who temporarily assumes the blame for a crime. 'Standing for the collar,' I think you call it. Do you fancy I'm going to 'stand for the collar' for nothing? Now if you have any such hallucination open that door and go out." He stepped suddenly aside, and left the exit clear.

"What in Heaven's name are you raving about?" inquired Tilbrook wearily. "I don't get you at all."

"Then why don't you go out at that door?" taunted Burton. "You know that if I am arrested you will have time to make a clean get-away. I will be locked up, and will in due time prove my innocence. But what do I get out of it? That's what I want you to tell me. It involves some personal inconvenience. What's in it for me?"

"They know who they want," Tilbrook reminded him. "They have your description."

"Which fits you as well as me. With that pointed out, what becomes of your scheme to escape by muddying the water? And, aside from that, I can tell them several other things."

"What?" For the first time, Tilbrook's splendid crust of satirical indifference cracked, and showed underlying depths of fear.

"Never mind. You are a cowardly, man-killing thief. Back in Texas they're waiting to hang you. I can save you. I am not afraid to go back—but if I *do* save you, you split with me, and split even."

A long silence ensued. Slowly Tilbrook's face paled and turned greenish. His debonair bearing wilted into that of a man who is desperately nauseated. Finally his voice sounded in the startlingly altered timbre of whining appeal:

"I—I have only ten thousand with me. The rest of it is banked——"

"Give me five thousand, then."

"I—I need it. I've got a long route to travel. I'll give you three thousand."

"Three thousand?" inquired Mr. Burton satirically. "For being dragged from a steamship in irons—for wasted months in court—for lawyers' fees—for compounding your felony! You humiliate me, Mr. Brayton."

"Four thousand," pleaded Tilbrook. "Four thousand in gold, just as it came out of the express packages."

Burton stepped a little farther to the side, and drew his watch from its pocket. "Thirty seconds from now I open this door," he announced. "Do we split on the old, established basis of fifty-fifty, recognized among crooks the world over, or do we not?"

He moved across, and stood waiting with his hand on the knob.

"Wait! For God's sake, give me a minute!" shrieked Tilbrook. "Yes, I'll give you five thousand—now—in American gold!" He was clawing wildly through his clothes at the money belt which he wore about his waist.

But Burton's reply halted him.

"That will do," he said. "That's all I need." The door swung open, showing the astonished faces of the captain and the consul general, and back of their shoulders the wide, amazed eyes of Miss Kinnaird.

Tilbrook gave the tableau one tortured glance; then went doggedly back, and sat down, averting his face.

Captain Sparsburg closed and locked the door quietly.

"I think," he said, "he will be quite secure there. Let's leave him to himself."

"Now you understand," said Burton, "why the favor I asked of you when I went in there—which you hesitated to grant—was that you should appear to play eavesdroppers outside. You know, too," he turned to Miss Kinnaird, and spoke quietly, "why I asked them to persuade you to listen with them at the keyhole." His voice was apologetic. "It wasn't my choice of methods, but it seemed the only one. I really knew nothing except that I was innocent. The rest was pure bluff—but if he had not been guilty he would have laughed at me."

"Captain," asked Burton later, as he shook hands at the gangway, "what is that place on the Plaza de Armas where the Viennese orchestra plays?"

Sparsburg told him, and he turned to Miss Kinnaird, who had also waited for the last boat.

"Will you and the colonel dine there with me to-night?" he invited.

"Perhaps," said Miss Kinnaird softly. "But to-night is a long way off. We are to be at the Hotel Maury, and so——"

Burton laughed. "The Hotel Maury is good enough for me, too," he interrupted.

Precious Water

By A. M. Chisholm

Author of "The Boss of Wind River," "The Winning Game," Etc.

CHAPTER XXX.

CASEY and Sheriff Dove did not start the next afternoon. A telegram had detained the sheriff, and he did not reach Chakchak till night. He spent the evening with them, taking a great fancy to Clyde. He even blossomed out as a story teller, spinning yarns without embellishment and with great clearness. He told of cattle wars, of outlaws, of Indian fighters, of strange occurrences, of strange men, primitive of mind and of action, who had played their parts in the history of the West. It was information at firsthand, rare nowadays, and the listeners found the evening too short.

"Blanket time," said the sheriff, looking at his watch. "I ain't a young nighthawk no more. If we're to git a good start——"

"We'd like to hear more, sheriff," said Clyde.

"Sho!" said Sheriff Dove, well pleased. "I could keep yarnin' half the night to a pretty girl. I ain't too old for that. Maybe when we get back we'll have another session."

Outside on the veranda she slipped her arm in his. "Take good care of Casey for me, sheriff, please."

"I sure will, little girl," he replied. "Don't you go to worryin', now. There's no call to. If it was easier travelin' you might come along, for all the trouble there'll be." He smiled down at her in fatherly fashion, his great, sinewy arm pressing hers, and the pressure reassured her.

"Thank you, sheriff. You—you're a *dear!*"

"Do I git a bid to the weddin'?"

"Of course you do." Clyde blushed and laughed. "Only I don't know just when it will be."

"Make it soon," he advised. "Life's short, little girl. Take all the happiness you can git. Good night."

They rode westward in the morning before the sun had risen, and camped that night in the foothills, having seen nobody. They entered the pass, and immediately came upon the trail of horses.

"Looks like there's been some travel," said the sheriff. "This here pass used much?"

"Not at this time of year. The Indians use it in the fall. They hunt across the range."

"These horses is shod," the sheriff remarked. "I sh'd say there's been half a dozen of 'em. Not less. Maybe more. I've knowed men that could tell exact."

"Not many of them left now."

"That's so. There ain't much need for trailin' these days. Too many telegraph wires."

They held to the pass, as did the hoofprints, eventually dropping down into the valley of the Klimminchuck, where they camped for the night beside the ford, cooked supper, unrolled their blankets, and lay by the fire, smoking.

"This bunch of hosses," the sheriff observed, "seems to have split up here. Two or three of 'em crossed over, but the most went down the valley. What's down there?"

"Just valley. It's partly open and

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part heavy timber. There was a pack trail cut through once, but it's mostly grown up."

"Nobody lives down there?"

"Not a soul. Now and then somebody traps in winter."

"Um." The sheriff was thoughtful for some moments. "Does McHale know the country hereabouts?"

"Fairly well. Better than I do. And McCrae knows it better than he does."

"Um." The sheriff became silent again. "When a man goes to hidin' out," he observed after a long pause, "he 'most always hits for the country he knows. Seems like it's human nature. I'd do it myself, and so'd you. Seems like a man that's wanted is suspicious of strange ground. He don't know what's in it, and he's afraid of gettin' cornered. He don't know what he's goin' to run up against any mile. It's a mean feelin', that. It keeps a man on edge every minute. So he naturally makes for the district he's at home in. It's a mistake, but they all make it. They figure they can dodge around where they know the trails and cut-offs. Consequently it's just a matter of time till they're caught. It's like an old buck that won't leave his range. Any man can git him that wants to spend a week at it."

"That's so," Casey agreed.

"So when I want a man and don't know where he's gone, I find out what place he thinks he knows best," the sheriff continued. "The system wins nine times out of ten. Now you say McHale's only out temporary. He's got a clear self-defense case, or thinks he has, and he's merely side-steppin' trouble. In that case he won't go as far as another man might. My *tumtum* is that he's somewheres down along this valley."

"Good reasoning," Casey admitted.

"The way to see a man down in a hole is to look over the edge," said the sheriff; "and the way to find a man in a valley is to get up on a hill. They ain't no such thing as a smokeless camp fire invented yet, though, if a man rustles dry sticks and does his cookin' at noon of a bright day, he don't make much smoke. A feller fooled me once that way. He didn't take a chance on noon, but done his cookin' at night, down in a hole. Only way I got him, the fire burned in under a rock into some old roots, and sorter smudged along one mornin' when he was asleep."

Casey glanced up at the bulk of the ranges outlined in blackness against the sky. "If you say so, sheriff, we'll climb."

"I hate to," the sheriff admitted. "Couldn't you make a good guess?"

"No. I don't know any more than you do."

"Well," said the sheriff thoughtfully, "we'll try the valley first. We may come on some sign. It's bound to take time, anyway. There's a whole heap of country here if it was smoothed out and stretched level."

He knocked out his pipe and pulled his blanket around him, for down in that deep, watered valley the nights were cold. Casey followed his example. In two minutes both men were asleep, with the rush of the water and the crunch-crunch of the horses' teeth cropping the grasses in their ears.

They breakfasted in the dawn, saddled, and took a course downstream. The trail petered out; the hoof marks vanished. They rode with care through thick brush, and more easily in open, parklike glades. Grouse rose almost under their horses' hoofs, to sit bright-eyed on adjacent limbs, watching the travelers. Occasionally deer by twos and threes bounded springily away, white flags waving. Once the horses snorted and showed a disinclination to proceed, sniffing the air nervously.

"Bear," said Casey.

"Down among them berry bushes, I reckon," said the sheriff.

As he spoke, a black, furry head, short ears, and sharp muzzle rose above the tangled bushes. A narrow, red tongue licked out. Cunning little eyes regarded them with indignant suspicion.

"Woof!" said the bear. The sound was something between the snort of a hog and the first interrogative note of a watchdog, who hears a noise that requires explanation.

"Well, sport," said the sheriff, "berryin' good this mornin'?"

But at the sound of the human voice the black head disappeared beneath the surface of foliage. There was a momentary swaying of bushes in one spot, like the swirl of disturbed water after a fish; but there was nothing to mark the line of the beast's flight. For all his bulk he melted through the tangle as soundlessly as a spirit.

"Bears is learnin' manners nowadays," the sheriff commented. "Course, these here black ones never was much different from pigs. But take grizzlies. When I come West with my old people, a little shaver just able to set a pony, they was plumb sassy. I never did see such biggotty-actin' critters. Britchloaders hadn't been in so durn long, and men didn't go huntin' grizzlies with the little old pea rifle just for fun. They was range bosses, and they knowed it. Now it's only once in a while you'll find one that wants all the trail."

In the afternoon they came to an abandoned cabin, and dismounted to investigate. Casey shook his head at the filthy litter. "Nobody's been here," said he.

The sheriff peered narrowly about. "No?" he said. "Well, how about that?" He pointed to the ground. "Moccasin track, or part of one. Who wears moccasins?"

"McCrae does, most of the time."

"Then he's been here. He couldn't pass without lookin' in."

"Why not?"

"Because four men out of five can't go by an old shack without takin' a peep inside. I can't, myself. I judge you can't, either. Do you remember ever doin' it?"

"Why, no," Casey admitted, "now you speak of it, I don't. And I do remember rubbering into dozens of old wikiups one place and another."

"Sure," said the sheriff. "Human nature again. Anything that's made by a man and left behind will draw another man like molasses will a fly. I never knew a man yet that wouldn't nose around an old camping spot. Not that he expects to find anything, or wants to. He just can't help it. McCrae didn't stop here. Where did he go? We might as well look around a little."

In the process of looking around, they came on an abandoned camp. By the quantity of ashes a number of fires had been burned. There were the poles of a lean-to and a bough bed beneath it, and at a little distance were other beds of boughs. The ground was trampled, and the grass beaten down in the vicinity.

The sheriff nosed among the sign, lifting the boughs of the beds, trying the ashes with his finger for heat, making an examination of the ground, and wandering off in a circle around the camp, where horses had been picketed. Finally he came back to the fireplace, filled his pipe, and lay down. Casey, meanwhile, had been forming his own conclusions.

"Well?" he asked.

"Well," said the sheriff, "I reckon you been usin' your eyes, too. Let's hear about it."

"It's your hunt."

"So it is. McCrae's met up with McHale. This here is their camp."

"How do you know?"

"You askin' because you don't know yourself, or because you want me to tell you?"

"I think you're right, but I'd like to know how you get at it."

"Well, I ain't no Old Sleuth nor Sherlock Holmes," said the sheriff, "but I've lived some years out of doors. I ain't workin' out no chain of reasonin'; I'm just usin' my eyes and a bit of savvy. This is how she works out:

"McHale and McCrae is both footloose, and both know this part of the country. They leave about the same time, and chances is they make for it. Then they meet. That's easy. Then we find the moccasin track. That fits McCrae. Next we find a lean-to with a two-man bough bed. There's the hollows where two men lay. That helps prove our first guess. It shows that some one was with McCrae, and the only other man hidin' out is McHale."

"But there are other bough beds.

How do you know they weren't all made by one outfit?"

"There's only one lean-to."

"Two men may have been more particular than the others."

"The boughs of them other beds were cut later than this lean-to one."

"But the boughs are all green."

"The ends where they were cut are different. There's more gum on these than the others. That shows they were cut before. Then there's more needles broken off and sifted through to the ground beneath this bed. That shows it's been slept on more. Where would a man get his boughs? The nearest trees, of course. Well, there's more gum where the limbs were cut on the nearest trees than on them farther away. Then there's been a bunch of horses staked out. Why didn't they bell 'em and let 'em range? Either because they didn't have no bells, or didn't want to use 'em. McHale and McCrae would keep their hosses on a rope so's they could make a quick get-away if they had to. They wouldn't take a chance on their strayin'. Now the grass that's been eaten down by the hosses is beginnin' to sprout again in some places, and not in others. That shows that some hosses was here before the rest. That's about all. She works out all right, don't she?"

"Down to the hock card," Casey admitted. "I saw some of the signs, but not all. You filled in the gaps."

"It's a pity if I wouldn't savvy a few things about my own business," said the sheriff. "Some of it's guesswork, but the main features ain't. Now, when we go farther, we got to do straight guessin'. Who was this bunch that come in here where the two men was already camped? My guess is that it was this here Dade and his outfit. But they don't find the two here when they come, or there'd sure be sign of it. It looks to me like them two boys got to know that somebody was on their back trail, and moved camp sudden. But not so durn sudden they had to leave anything behind. Question is, where have they went to—the whole b'ilin' of 'em?"

"Down the valley. Otherwise we'd have seen some sign."

"I reckon that's so. If Dade works out things the way I have, he knows he's close onto McHale. Say he's got four or five men with him. He can comb the valley pretty clean. But here's another thing: How long will them two boys let themselves be chased?"

"Not very long. It's not safe to crowd either of them."

"If it was me," said the sheriff reflectively, "and a feud party was out on my trail, I'd be apt as not to bushwhack 'em some. You bet I wouldn't stand on ceremony with such hostiles. If I knowed the country I'd cache myself alongside some good open spot, wait till they got into the middle of it, and then slam loose. With two men that savvy their guns any one that got away would sure have a pull with Providence and be workin' it awful hard."

"Sandy would do that in a minute; but I think Tom doesn't want any more trouble if he can help it."

"He may get it shoved onto him. Well, seein' we're here, we may as well eat. Then we'll move on."

When their meal was over they followed the valley. Sunset found them at the edge of thick timber.

"How far does this run?" asked the sheriff.

"I don't know. I was never here before."

"Then we'll camp," said Dove, "and tackle her by daylight."

It was almost dark when Casey, sitting by the fire, suddenly held up his hand. "Somebody coming."

The sheriff listened for a moment. "Two horses," he announced. "May be Jack Pugh." Nevertheless, the old frontiersman shifted his position so that his gun lay ready to his hand.

A moment later two shadowy horsemen appeared, resolving themselves, as they approached, into Farwell and old Simon.

"Hello, the camp!" cried the former. "That you, Dunne?"

"Yes. What on earth are you doing here?"

"Same thing as yourself. This old Siwash missed you somehow. He found McHale and young McCrae, and, on the way out, he ran into Dade, Lewis, and the rest—six in all. When he got to the ranch you were gone, and nobody could tell him where. He came over to Talapus to tell them he'd seen Sandy. That's where I ran into him. And so, knowing that Sandy was with McHale, I got the old man to come back with me. I wanted to be in it if help was needed. We picked up your trail—or he did—and here we are."

"Well, it's blamed decent of you, Farwell," said Casey. "I didn't know that you and Sandy were such friends."

"We're not. The kid doesn't like me, I told you he pulled a gun on me once. All the same, it was up to me this time. I'm going to marry Sheila."

"The devil you are!" Casey exclaimed.

"You're blamed flattering," said Farwell. "You bet I'm going to marry her."

"You're getting one of the finest girls on earth."

"I know that as well as you do," said Farwell. "Then you see how it was up to me——"

He broke off suddenly. Rolling softly along the hills, flung back and forth across the valley from rock wall to rock wall, repeated and magnified a hundred times, came an echo. So distant was it that the original sound itself was not heard; merely the reverberations of it struck the ear. But unmistakably it was made by a far-off gun. Before the echoes had died away others followed, until their resonance resembled continuous thunder.

"*Hiyu* shootum!" said Simon.

"You bet," the sheriff agreed. "I reckon the boys has got tired bein' moved on. Or else they been jumped sudden. That shootin's all of six miles off. Maybe more. It'll be plumb dark in no time. If there's no more shootin' it's settled by now. If there is it's a stand-off. Either way we have to wait till it gets light."

CHAPTER XXXI.

"I been thinkin' we might as well move on a ways," said McHale. "Here's old Simon drops in on us. Somebody else might. I don't feel right about it. I want to git some place, like up in one o' them basins, where strangers won't be passin' by every day."

"Well, I'll go you," Sandy agreed; "but there's an old bear that I want first. He's got a foot as big as a fiddle; I'll bet he weighs as much as a steer."

"What'll you do with a bear? We don't want to go packin' a green hide about with us. The horses hate the smell of it."

"Let 'em get used to it, then," Sandy returned. "I'm starting after that bear now. Better come along. If I don't get him I'll go to-morrow."

But McHale refused to accompany him. He hated climbing. If he could go on a horse that would be different. Therefore Sandy set out alone.

He ascended a shoulder of the mountain, working his way upward to where he had located the range of the big bear. It was steady climbing, and rough as well, but Sandy was in hard, lean condition, with the limitless wind and springy muscles of youth. He arrived at his objective point, a spot which gave him a clear view of the mountainside for a mile on either hand. Somewhere in that area, he had already decided, the bear would be feeding. He settled down for a long, careful inspection; first with the naked eye, which yielded nothing, and next with a pair of binoculars. Sandy, when hunting, possessed unlimited patience. He settled himself comfortably, and kept the glasses at work. Finally his patience was rewarded. A mile or more up the hillside a huge, brown shape shambled into view.

"Lord! he's a big brute," Sandy muttered. "That's a hide worth getting. I'll wait till he settles down for keeps."

Apparently the bear had found food to his liking. He was busy with paw and tongue beside a rotten log. Sandy mapped out a route in his mind, and decided to make a start. It was then

noon. As he rose he happened to look up the valley.

It lay below him, ashimmer in the summer sun, a panorama of green, light and dark of shade, with the silver ribbon of the Klimminchuck appearing and disappearing down its length. It was, perhaps, as beautiful a mountain valley scene as eye ever beheld; but Sandy McCrae would not have looked at it twice save for a thin, gray thread which appeared above the treetops some miles away. It became a column, ballooned, and then was invisible. But he knew that somebody had just started a fire.

He picked out the spot with the glasses. Smoke was plainly visible through the powerful lenses. It was close to the river—beside the bank, in fact—and he could catch glimpses of one or two horses. But, because of the trees, he could see little more.

"Darn the luck," said Sandy. "There's the biggest hide in the whole range waiting for me, and somebody has to come butting in. Well, there's only one thing to do."

That thing being to get back to camp as fast as possible, Sandy proceeded to do it. He went downhill at a pace that would have shaken an older and heavier man to pieces; for going downhill is, contrary to the popular idea, much harder on the human frame than going up. He broke into camp and roused McHale from a state of somnolence and tobacco.

"I could 'a' tanned your young hide when you bulled off after that bear," said the latter. "Now I seem to see what them salvation scouts calls 'the finger of Providence' in the play. In other words, it's plumb safe to keep one eye skinned. Do I look like I was scared, Sandy?"

"Nah!" said Sandy contemptuously.

"Well, you're going to see me act like I was." He rose swiftly, his laziness falling from him now that there was work to do. "Go and fetch in them cayuses. I'll break camp."

The horses being on picket caused no delay. When Sandy brought them in, McHale had their entire outfit in two heaps, ready to pack. With the skill and swiftness of experience they made the packs, threw the hitches, drew the lash ropes tight. The result was two compact bundles which could not work loose.

"I dunno who our friends are," said McHale, as they rode out of camp, "but if it's this here Dade bunch, say, what a surprise they'd have give me all by myself. I can just see me gettin' up in time to fall down."

"They've got no license to chase us all over," said Sandy. "We don't have to stand for it, do we? How'd it be if we held up their camp? Or else we could lay for them as they came along, and settle it right there."

"Bushwhack 'em?" said McHale. "No, I reckon not. We want to keep out of trouble. If we held 'em up what'd we do with them? We couldn't tie 'em and leave 'em; and we couldn't pack 'em around. Nothing for it but to run like men. The country's big enough for both of us."

Sandy grunted disapproval, but said no more. Personally he would have welcomed a fight. He was a marvelously quick and accurate shot with either rifle or revolver, and he was ready to make a friend's quarrel his own. However, he deferred to McHale's views.

Farther down the Klimminchuck they turned up a nameless tributary creek, following its course with difficulty, for the way was choked with down timber and slides, until they reached a beautiful little basin high up above the valley. There the creek had its source or sources; for the drainings of the basin were collected in a little lake lying beneath bare cliffs. The water was swarming with trout, so that one supply of food was assured.

Beside the lake and the cliffs they made camp. They could not see the valley, neither could they be seen thence; but by walking half a mile they could look down into it. Sandy, mindful of his disappointment, began to prospect for bear.

McHale relapsed once more into a morass of sleep and tobacco. But while Sandy was ranging afield he lay on the

edge of the basin drowsing and watching the valley, for he did not intend to be taken by surprise.

But that was exactly what happened. He had withdrawn from his post of observation earlier than usual, and he and Sandy were smoking after supper in the fading light, when a little cavalcade rode into the basin, preceded by one who walked slowly, studying the ground.

McHale saw them at the same moment that they perceived the camp. He leaped to his feet with an oath, snatching up his rifle and a gunny sack, which, among other things, contained their cartridges. His belt gun he never laid aside.

Sandy also jumped for his gun, slamming the lever down and up as the weapon came to his shoulder. He stood fairly in the open, covering the foremost man. But McHale caught his arm.

"Come on and get back among them rocks," he cried. "We can't stand 'em off here."

Behind them as they ran a sudden yell went up, and a single bullet buzzed past like a mad bee. But they reached the shelter of the rocks fallen from the cliff at some remote period, and dropped to cover. Before them the great slabs formed a natural breastwork; behind them rose the sheer cliff, gray and weather-stained. Their backs were amply protected; in front they must take care of themselves.

The newcomers dismounted in the concealment of trees. Five minutes afterward a man walked leisurely forward. McHale recognized Dade. At fifty paces he halted him.

"I wouldn't come no nearer, Dade, if I was you."

"I'm coming a heap closer pretty soon."

"All right; you're expected," McHale retorted. "You call a feud on me, do you? Now you listen here: You call if off and call your bunch off, or there'll be doin's."

"I'm talkin' to your partner," said Dade. "I s'pose it's young McCrae. We got nothing against you, McCrae. You come out o' there, take your horse and your dunnage, and git. Nobody'll hurt you."

"Is that so?" sneered Sandy. "Take a little tip from me and go home, will you?"

"I'll think about it," said Dade coolly.

"You'll do more than think about it if you crowd in here," Sandy retorted.

"Nobody wants to crowd you," said Dade. "We're after McHale, and we're goin' to get him. Don't you mix up in it. If you do you may get hurt."

"That ain't such bad advice, kid," interrupted McHale. "I'm able for 'em, I reckon. Better pull your freight like he tells you. This ain't your show, nohow, and you've got your folks to think of."

"Do you think I'm a yellow dog, or what?" Sandy snapped back, glaring at him. "Quit? I think I see myself. I'll smash this Dade's belt buckle right now." He lifted his rifle.

"Hold on," said McHale. "This kid is some obstinate," he called to Dade. "His *tumtum* is that he'll stick. *I* don't want him in it."

"He's got his chance," said Dade. "It's up to him."

Young McCrae launched a string of epithets at him, the cream of the vocabularies of certain mule skinners of his acquaintance. Meanwhile his finger itched on the trigger.

"You're a durn poor persuader," said McHale. "The kid will stick. Far's I'm concerned, if you want me, come and get me. Don't show your hide no more. I'm surely done talkin' to you."

Dade turned and walked away. Sandy covered him.

"Not in the back," said McHale.

Immediately afterward a thirty-thirty struck a rock in front of them, glancing off at an angle, wailing away into the distance. Sandy McCrae, lying at full length peering along the slim barrel of his weapon, pressed the trigger and swore in disappointment.

"Centered a stump," he said. "There it is yet. It looked like somebody."

All was quiet for five minutes. Then a sleet of lead pelted their position, patting against the cliff behind them, and

splashing upon the rocks in front. Splinters and particles of stone, lead, and nickel flew everywhere.

"Git down low," McHale advised, hugging a bowlder.

"I am down," said Sandy.

"Then dig a hole." McHale laughed, and then swore as a sharp fragment of rock ripped his cheek.

"Hit you?"

"Nope. Rock sliver. I'll bet their guns is gettin' hot. This won't last."

The fusillade ceased. McHale shoved his rifle barrel through a crevice.

"Maybe some gent will stick out his head to see how many corpses there is of us. This light's gettin' durn bad. I wish I had an ivory foresight, 'stead o' this gold bead. I can't see——"

His rifle muzzle leaped in recoil as he spoke. Two hundred yards away a man making a rush forward for a closer position winced and half halted. Instantly Sandy's rifle lanced the dimming light with a twelve-foot shaft of flame. The man straightened, staggered, and threw both arms upward as if to shield his face. Sandy fired again as the lever clashed back into place. The man fell forward.

"Got him!" cried Sandy exultantly. "Centered him twice, Tom!"

"I reckon you did. That's one out of it." He fired again without result. Sandy shot three times rapidly, and swore at the light.

"You're overshootin'," said McHale. "You can't draw the foresight fine enough in this light. Hold lower."

"Nothing to hold on," grumbled McCrae. "They're cached close. If one of them would only come out to fetch in that dead one I wouldn't do a thing to him."

McHale eyed him speculatively. "Seems like your young soul ain't swamped by no wave of remorse at killin' a man. Don't make you feel shaky nor nothin'?"

Young McCrae smiled grimly. "Not that I can notice. All that lead they slung at us scared remorse clean out of my system. I'm lookin' for a chance to repeat."

But darkness settled down without that chance, making accurate shooting impossible. Objects at fifty yards became indistinct. Only the smoky-red reflection of the sunset remained.

"Think they've got enough?" asked Sandy.

"Why, they ain't got started yet. Lucky we had our supper. We can stand quite a racket on a full stomach. Might as well smoke, I reckon."

Sandy shivered slightly as the chill of the mountain night air struck through his thin clothing. "Wish I'd grabbed a blanket or a coat."

"It'll be a heap worse before mornin'," said McHale.

"You're a cheerful devil!"

"Think of how good the sun'll feel. Maybe something will happen to warm us up before then."

A forty-pound stone suddenly crashed down to one side of them, smashing in the rocks and bushes with terrific impact. Sandy leaped to his feet, his revolver streaming continuous fire at the top of the cliff.

"Git down, you durn fool!" cried McHale.

Sandy dropped just in time. A volley came from in front, and a leaden storm howled overhead.

"Talk about luck!" said McHale. "Don't you take a chance like that again." He rolled over on his back and put his rifle to his shoulder. "If I could only git that cuss up there against the sky line——"

But the top of the cliff was fringed with bushes. Another stone bounded down, struck a projection, leaped out, and hit ten feet in front of them. McHale fired by guess; but, like most guesswork shooting, without result. Another stone struck in front. He moved in closer to the cliff and chuckled grimly.

"We're right under a ledge. Them rocks all bounced off it. Mighty lucky for us. You feelin' any warmer now?"

"You bet. Summer done come again. I wish I could see to shoot." He fired at the flash of a gun, and winced suddenly.

"Burned me that time!"

A glancing bullet had ripped the flesh of his left side along the ribs. McHale made a bandage of the handkerchief he wore around his neck.

"You'll sure have a sore side, kid. Keep down tight. Don't take no more chances." But a moment afterward he grunted and his rifle clattered against the rocks.

"What is it?"

"My right arm. Busted above the elbow." He breathed deeply with the first pain throbs following the shock, and gritted his teeth. "Ain't this hell? I'm out of it for rifle shootin'. Here, come and cut off my shirt sleeve and tie her up some. See how much blood she's pumpin'! Take a turn above the hole and twist her up tight. Blamed if I want to bleed to death. I got a lot of things to see to first."

Sandy examined the wound by the feeble light of matches, which McHale held in his left hand, and declared that the arteries were uninjured. He cut off a leg of his trousers below the knee, and, with McHale's shirt sleeve, organized a bandage, binding it with the thongs of his moccasins, swearing steadily below his breath.

McHale leaned back against the rock and demanded his pipe. Sandy filled it, and held a match to the load. McHale puffed great smoke clouds into the darkness.

"Tobacco's sure a fine anæsthetic. She beats chloroform and tooth jerkers' gas. And now, kid, you git!"

"Do what?"

"Make a get-away. Hike. Leak outa this. You can do it in the dark just as easy as a weasel."

"Say," said Sandy, "you didn't get hit alongside the head, too, did you?"

"Not yet. This is straight goods. I mean it. There's no use you stickin'. There's too many accidents happenin'. Come mornin' maybe you don't git a chance."

"Come mornin'," Sandy replied, "when I can see my sights, I'll clean the whole bunch out."

"Other people can see sights then. Kid, they got me rounded up. I ain't no good except on a horse. If I could make a get-away I would. But I can't. You can. There's no sense in both of us bein' wiped out. Also, there's your folks. I ain't got any. And, then, I've lived longer than you, and I've had a heap more fun. I'm plumb satisfied with the deal. If I quit the game now I break better'n even. Shake hands and git outa here while you can."

"No, sir!" snapped Sandy. "No, *sir!* Would *you* quit *me?* Not any. D'ye think I could look Casey in the face, or Sheila, or my old dad? Would one of *them* quit *you?* You bet they wouldn't. I'll see this through. Here, gimme what rifle cartridges you got, and shut up that line of talk. I won't stand for it, and I won't go."

"'Most every family has one blame fool in it," said McHale. "All right, durn you, stay. If I could chase you out I'd do it. Reach down and pull my belt gun for me. I can shoot left-handed some."

They passed the night miserably, waiting for an attack which did not come. The pain of their wounds was added to the discomfort of the cold. Dawn found them shivering, numbed, weary-eyed, staring through the lifting gloom, their weapons ready. As the light grew they could see their own camp, but no one occupied it. Farther off a column of smoke rose.

"Cookin' breakfast down in a hole," said McHale. "Playin' it plumb safe. They ain't takin' a chance on your shootin'."

"They'd better not," said Sandy. His young face showed grimed and pinched in the growing light, but his eyes were hard and clear. "Do you s'pose I could sneak over and get a stand on them?"

"I wouldn't try. You bet somebody's keeping cases on these rocks."

Half an hour passed, an hour. The sun struck the basin, mottling its green with gold, striking their chilled bodies with grateful warmth.

"Say," asked Sandy, "don't you want a drink of water?"

"Quit foolin'," McHale replied. "I been thinkin' of it for hours. I could drink that there lake dry."

Still nothing happened. The waiting began to get on their nerves.

"What d'you s'pose they're framing up?" Sandy asked.

"Don't know. Durn it! I can't do nothin' unless they run in on us," McHale grumbled. "Wisht I could hold a rifle."

"Let 'em try to run in," said Sandy grimly. He had McHale's rifle in addition to his own. "They've got to come two hundred yards without cover. I'll stop every blamed one of them in one hundred."

Suddenly he lifted his rifle, hesitated, and lay with his cheek to the stock, staring along the sights.

"See somethin'?" McHale asked.

"Over there past those jack pines. Man on a horse. He'll come out again."

Far off among the trees they saw not one mounted man, but several. They could catch glimpses merely. The horsemen appeared to be making for the valley, but not by the way in which they had come.

"By thunder!" cried McHale, "it looks like they're pullin' out."

His further remarks were lost in a rolling fire as Sandy unhooked his entire magazine at the retreating figures. He caught up McHale's rifle and emptied that, too.

"Save some ca'tridges for seed," advised McHale. "What's the use of snapshootin' at that range? You can't hit nothin'."

"You never know what luck you'll have," said Sandy. "I couldn't draw a sight with them moving in the brush. How many did you count?"

"Five—near as I could make it."

"Say, how'd it be if I went after them?"

"It'd be one durn young fool the less," McHale replied. "You want to know when you're well off. Don't stand up yet. There may be some play to this that we don't savvy."

"Rats! They've got a bellyful, I tell you. Five's the bunch, ain't it?—all but that one we got. I ain't going to stay cached here all day. I want some grub."

But McHale persuaded him to wait ten minutes. Then, after exposing a hat and a rolled-up coat as decoys without the least result, they emerged from their fortress.

"Didn't rustle our hosses," said McHale. "That's luck. I wonder what they done with that feller you downed. Let's look at their camp."

Down in the hollow where the besiegers had built their fire they found what they sought. It lay covered by a blanket. Sandy stripped the covering away.

"Dade, by thunder!" he exclaimed. McHale looked down thoughtfully at the dead man.

"I'm sure glad it was him," he observed. "I reckon that settles this feud business. That's why them fellers pulled out. It was his war, and when he got downed they didn't see no sense carryin' it on."

"Well, they might have buried him, anyway," Sandy grumbled.

"Maybe they figured you'd want to peel off his scalp," said McHale, with mild sarcasm. "I'm sure willing to take a little trouble like buryin' Dade."

"So'm I," Sandy admitted, replacing the blanket. "I guess we're pretty lucky. Come on while I rustle some grub. We want to pull out of here. You've got to get to a doctor as soon as you can."

They were eating breakfast when Casey, Farwell, the sheriff, and Simon rode into the basin, causing Sandy to snatch up his rifle under the impression that their assailants were returning. The four had made the best time they could, but had been at a loss to know the exact point until Sandy's farewell fusillade.

"You sure missed a heap of fun, Casey," said McHale.

"Well, some of it didn't miss you," said Casey. "I'm blame sorry about that arm, Tom. It'll be a tough ride for you."

"I'm able for it, I reckon. I wish you'd run into them fellers."

"Never saw hair nor hide of them. Just as well, maybe. Now, Tom, this is Sheriff Dove. He wants you, and I think he wants Sandy. I told him that

you both had too much sense to make things hard for him."

"Far's I'm concerned I'm his meat," said McHale. "I'd have to come in, anyway, now. Sandy was a durn fool ever to hide out. I shouldn't have let him. Lucky for me I did, though."

"That's sense," said the sheriff. "You boys will find I'm all right to get on with. I haven't heard you say anything, McCrae?"

"I guess I don't need to say anything," said Sandy. "Casey came along with you, didn't he? That's good enough for me."

"I'm right obliged to him, too," said Dove. "He's sure saved me a lot of trouble. Lemme see that arm of yours, McHale. I savvy a little about them things. Anyway, I'll fix up some splints for it till you can get hold of a regular medicine man."

CHAPTER XXXII.

"And so you're going to marry this Casey Dunne," said old Jim Hess. He and Clyde sat on the veranda at Chakchak, and they had been discussing the ranch, its owner, and the events that had led up to his absence.

"Yes, Uncle Jim, I'm going to marry him."

"Well," said the big railway man, "making allowance for your natural partiality, his stock seems to be worth about par. I'll know better when I've had a look at him. I tell you one thing, I'm glad he isn't a foreigner. I never liked those fellows who tagged about after you. This country can produce as good men as you'll find. The others weren't my sort. All right in their way, perhaps, but they seemed to go too much on family and ancestry. That's good enough, too, but it seems to me that the ancestors of some of them must have been a blamed sight better men than they were. After all, a girl doesn't marry the ancestor. Dunne seems to have hoed his own row. That's what I did. I'm prepared to like him. Only I don't want you to make any mistake."

"There's no mistake, Uncle Jim," she said, patting his big hand. "Casey's a *man*. You *will* like him. Look, away out there where the dust is rising! Aren't those men on horseback? Yes, they are. It must be Casey coming home." Her pleasure was apparent in her voice.

The dust cloud resolved itself into four mounted men and three pack animals. They moved slowly, at a walk almost, the dust puffing up from the hoofs drifting over and enveloping them.

"Which is your Casey Dunne?" asked Hess.

Clyde stared with troubled eyes.

"I—I don't see him. There's Tom McHale, and the sheriff, and Sandy McCrae, and the old Indian. Why, Tom McHale has been hurt. His arm is in a sling. How slowly they ride! It's—it's like a funeral. Surely nothing can have happened. Oh, surely——" She caught her breath sharply, her eyes dilating. "Look!" she cried. "The last pack horse!"

The load on the last horse was a shapeless thing, not compact and built up like a pack, but hanging low on either side, shrouded by a canvas. From under this cover a hand and arm dangled, swinging to and fro with each motion of the animal.

Clyde felt a great fear, cold as the clutch of a dead hand itself, close on her heart, driving the young blood from her cheeks. "It can't be!" she said to herself. "Oh—it *can't* be."

Hess swore beneath his breath. If it were Casey Dunne lying across that pack horse—— He put a huge protective arm around Clyde's shoulders, as if to shield her from the evil they both feared.

But she slipped from beneath his arm and fled down the steps toward the party who would have passed in the direction of the stables without halting. The sheriff, seeing her, pulled up. She caught McHale's hardened paw in both her hands, searching his eyes for the truth. But McHale's face, though weary and lined with pain, and, moreover, rendered decidedly unprepossess-

ing by a growth of stubble, contained no signs of disaster.

"Where's Casey, Tom?"

"Casey?" McHale replied. "Why, he hiked on ahead to git a medicine man to fix up this arm of mine. Arm's done busted. He ought to be here most any time now."

To Clyde it was as if the sun had shot through a lowering, ominous cloud. She was faint with the joy of relief. "Thank God! Thank God!" she murmured.

"You seem to be upset about something, ma'am," said the sheriff gently. "Has anything went wrong?"

Hess answered for her. "What have you got on that last pack horse, sheriff?"

Jim Dove looked around and muttered an oath. "If that ain't plumb careless of me! I thought I had him all covered up. Rope must have slipped. That's Jake Betts, holdup and bad man, that's been callin' himself Dade around here. There's five hundred reward for him, and to collect the money I had to pack him in. I sure didn't allow to scare any women by lettin' an arm hang loose. And the little lady thought it was Dunne? Dunne's all safe and rugged. We thought he'd be here ahead of us."

Hess followed the sheriff to the stable and introduced himself, going directly to the point, as was his custom.

"Sheriff," he said, "I've just come, and naturally I don't know all that has happened, but there are two or three things I want you to know. In the first place, my niece, Miss Burnaby, is going to marry this man Dunne. And, in the second place, I'm now running this irrigation company and the railway that owns it, and so far as any prosecutions are concerned I won't have anything to do with them. Does that make any difference to you?"

"Some," said the sheriff. "It lets young McCrae out, I reckon."

"How about McHale?"

"That's a killin'. You got nothin' to do with that. Anyway, he's got a good defense."

"I'll sign his bail bond to any amount."

"I reckon there won't be no trouble about that," said the sheriff. "I know a man when I see him. McHale's all right. You won't find me makin' things hard for anybody around here, Mr. Hess."

In half an hour Casey rode up, bringing with him a man of medicine in the person of Doctor Billy Swift. And Billy Swift, whose chronic grievance was that Coldstream was altogether too healthy for a physician to live in, greeted his patients with enthusiasm and got busy at once.

Hess, strolling up from a confidential talk with Sheriff Dove, ran into Clyde and Casey snugly ensconced in a corner of the veranda, where thick hop vines shaded them from the public gaze.

"Excuse *me!*" said Hess, with little originality, but much embarrassment.

"Not at all," Casey replied, under the impression that he was carrying off matters very nonchalantly. Clyde laughed at both of them.

"We don't mind you, Uncle Jim, do we, Casey?"

"Look here," said Hess, "if this is the young man who has been raising Cain around here, and destroying my property before I owned it, suppose you introduce me?"

The two men shook hands, gripping hard, measuring each other with their eyes. And Clyde was tactful enough to leave them to develop their acquaintance alone.

"I want to thank you for your wire to Clyde," said Casey. "You can guess what it meant to all of us here."

"I've a fair notion," said Hess. "Of course, I only know what Clyde has told me, but I can see that you people have been up against a hard proposition. After this I hope you won't have much to kick at. We won't take advantage of that clause in the old railway charter—at least not enough to interfere with men who are actually using water now. But I want you to be satisfied with enough to irrigate, used economically."

"That's all we ever wanted."

"I'm glad to hear it. Now I've fixed up this matter of young McCrae's. That's settled. No more trouble about it. As to your man, McHale, I'm told that his trial will be a mere matter of form. Wade will look after that. Now, about Clyde."

"Yes," said Casey.

"She's her own mistress—you understand that. You have a good property here—not as much money as she has, but enough to get along on if she hadn't anything. That's all right. I suppose her money's no drawback, eh? Don't look mad about it, young man. You're fond of her, of course. I understand you made what you've got yourself?"

"Every cent. I've been out for myself since I was about fifteen. This is what I've got to show for it."

"And it's a good little stake," said Hess heartily. "I made my own pile, too. That's what I like. Now, I'm going to ask you a personal question: What sort of a life have you behind you? You understand me. There must be no comeback where Clyde is concerned. I want a straight answer."

"You'll get it. I've always been too busy to be foolish. My habits are about average—possibly better than average. I'm absolutely healthy. I've not had a day's sickness—bar accidents—since I grew up. There's absolutely no reason why I shouldn't marry Clyde."

"That's the boy!" said old Jim Hess, with satisfaction, gripping his hand again. "Your stock's par with me, remember, and I want you to consider me your friend, even if I am to be a relation by marriage."

Shortly afterward Sheila and Farwell arrived on hard-ridden horses.

"She hustled me right over here," said the latter. "Didn't even give me time to shave. I told her McHale and Sandy were all right, but she had to come to see for herself."

"Seeing that Sandy has eaten six fried eggs with bacon and bread buns to match, I imagine he may be regarded as convalescent," laughed Casey. "Tom has the tobacco trust half broken already."

Sandy McCrae squirmed uneasily in his sister's embrace, finding it embarrassing.

"That's plenty, that's plenty!" he growled. "You'd think I was a sole survivor or something. Say, what are you trying to do—choke me? There, you've kissed me three times already. Ouch! Darn it, don't hug me. My side's sore. Try that hold on Farwell. He looks as if he wouldn't mind."

Casey laughed. Sheila and Farwell reddened. A smothered chuckle from McHale showed that he was enjoying himself. He grinned over Sandy's shoulder.

"Howdy, Miss Sheila? Brothers don't know their own luck. Wisht I had a sister about your size."

"I'll adopt you right now!" she declared, and proceeded to give practical proof of it, somewhat to his confusion.

"You're an awful bluff, Tom," she accused him. "Really, I believe you're bashful with girls. I never suspected it before."

"It's just want of practice," grinned McHale. "Some day when I have time I'm going out to get me a girl like you. There was one down at——"

But Clyde's appearance interrupted McHale's reminiscences. She and Sheila, arms about each other, strolled away to exchange confidences. Casey and Farwell followed.

"We ain't in it," said McHale.

"Well, who wants to be?" said Sandy.

"A few weeks ago," McHale mused, "them two girls warmed up to each other about as much as two wet sticks of wood; and them two sports would have locked horns at the bat of an eye. Look at 'em now! What done it?"

"Does your arm hurt you much?" Sandy asked.

"Sortin' out the hand done it," McHale continued, unheeding. "Each girl finds out that the other ain't organizin' to be hostile. And the men find out that they're playin' different systems; likewise, that each has a good point or two."

"She sure must have been a hard

trip for you down from the hills," Sandy commented with much sarcasm.

"Love," said Mr. McHale sentimentally, "is a durn funny thing."

It was a merry party that sat down to the best supper Feng could prepare on short notice. Wade was in great form. He outdid himself, keeping up a rapid fire of jokes and conversation. The sheriff, infected by his example, uncovered a vein of unsuspected humor. McHale, who referred to himself as "a temp'rary southpaw," contributed his quota. Sandy was silent and dour, as usual. Jim Hess said little; but he beamed on everybody, enjoying their happiness.

When Sheila insisted that she must go, Casey saddled Dolly for Clyde and Shiner for himself. He rode with Sheila, temporarily relinquishing Clyde to Farwell. A couple of hundred yards behind the others, just free of their dust, they jogged easily side by side.

"Our rides together are about over, Casey," she said, with a little sigh.

"How is that?"

"You know as well as I do. The blessed proprieties are butting in here nowadays; and, besides, we both belong to other people. Dick wants to be married soon. Of course, I'll have to go where he goes. Thank goodness, he hasn't got any people to be my people, and to pass judgment on me."

"I'll be sorry to lose you, Sheila; and I think you'll be sorry to go."

"Yes. I'll miss the rolling country, and the hills to the west, and the long days outdoors. Oh, heavens, how I'll miss them! And yet it's worth while, Casey!"

"I'm awfully glad, for your sake, that you think so much of him, old girl. He's a fine chap—when you get to know him. But I'll miss you. How long is it since we had our first ride together?"

"Seven years—no, eight. I was riding a bad pinto. Dad traded him afterward. You wouldn't let me go home alone. Remember?"

"Of course. Awful brute for a girl to ride!"

"He never set me afoot," she said proudly. "But you'll be leaving here, too, Casey."

"I don't think so."

"Oh, yes, you will. Clyde's money——"

"Hang her money! Don't throw that up to me."

"Nonsense! Don't be so touchy. I wish *I* had it. You'll go where there are people and things happening. You'll keep the ranch, but Tom will look after it."

"No, no."

"Yes, yes. You won't be idle—you're not that kind—but you'll find other interests, and the money may be a stepping-stone. She's a dear girl, Casey. Be good to her."

"I couldn't be anything else. You needn't tell me I'm not worthy of her; I know it."

"You're worthy of any girl," she said firmly. "Not a bit of hot air, either, old boy. I almost fell in love with you myself."

"By George!" he exclaimed, "there were times when I wondered how much I thought of you."

She laughed, well pleased. "We know the difference now, don't we? What a mistake it would have been! I'm glad we kept these thoughts to ourselves—glad we never played at being in love. Now we can talk without fear of misunderstanding. Somehow, now, the years here seem like a dream to me. Yes, I know they've been busy years, crowded with work for both of us; but just now they don't seem real. We seem—I seem—to be standing at the boundary of a new life. All that is over was just preparation for it—the long days in the sun and the wind, the quiet nights beneath the stars, the big, lonely, brown land, and the hazy blue of the hills. The girl that lived among them seems like a little, dead sister. And yet I love these things. Wherever I go, whatever happens to me, I shall think of them always."

"That's absolutely true. They are in your heart—a part of you. I understand. The little boy that lay on a lake shore years ago and watched the old stone hookers wallowing through the

long swells, doesn't seem to be Casey Dunne. And yet I can smell the wet sand and the clean lake breezes now. These are the things that keep our hearts young. You were born in the West, Sheila, and I in the East; but the roots of our beings fed on the clean things of the earth that mothered us some thousands of miles apart, and the taste will never be forgotten. In the years to come we will think of the years here as to-night we think of our childhood."

She held out her hand. Gauntlet met gauntlet in the hard grip of comradeship.

"Good-by, Casey. It's not likely we'll ever talk of these things again. I'm glad you've been a part of my life."

"Good luck to you always, Sheila."

"They've left us behind," she said. "Come on! One last good run, Casey!"

Clyde and Farwell, riding decorously at an easy jog trot, heard the thunder of hoofs behind them, and turned to see the bay and the buckskin sweep past, encouraged by voice and heel.

"She'll kill herself some day," Farwell ejaculated, and he scolded her roundly when they rode up to where she and Casey had finally halted their blown steeds.

"Listen to him!" cried Sheila, in derision. "As if I didn't savvy a horse! All right, my lord, I won't do it again till next time. And now, Casey, you and Clyde must not come any farther. It will be dark before you get back."

"If you want to be rid of us——" he suggested.

"You've been sorry for yourself for the last hour, and you needn't deny it," she retorted.

Clyde and Casey rode slowly homeward through the falling dusk. For the first time since his return they were really alone together. She made him tell her all that had occurred, down to the minutest detail.

"But now there will be no more trouble of any kind," she predicted.

"Thanks to you."

"Thanks to Uncle Jim."

"Both of you. He's a big man—a nation builder—but if his niece hadn't had the good taste to fall in love with me his interest would have been less personal. He wouldn't have got around to a little matter like this for months. Anyway, we bracket you together. Do you know that some of the kids are being taught to pray for you?"

"Not really?"

"Fact. Doctor Swift told me. 'God bless pa, and ma, and Mister Jim Hess, and Miss Burnaby.' That's the formula. Swift predicts that the next batch of christenings will include a 'Yim Hiss' Swanson and a 'Clyde Burnaby' Brulé. Such is fame! Think you can stand the dizzy popularity?"

"Lovely!" cried Clyde. "I'll order silver mugs to-morrow, and start a savings account for each baby."

"Go slow!" he laughed. "You'll have 'em all named after you at that rate."

"I'll get the mugs and a spoon, anyway. I never was so flattered before. I've just begun to *live* since I came out here. Why, Casey, my life was absolutely empty."

"What a shame! We'll see that it doesn't occur again. Which opens an interesting question: When are you going to marry me?"

"Why—I hadn't thought. I suppose we should think of it."

"Well, it's usual, under the circumstances."

"Next June? I think I should like to be a June bride."

"See here, young lady," said Casey severely, "what sort of a gold brick is this? Are you aware that we are in the fag end of July?"

"It's really not a long engagement. A year soon passes."

"And the years soon pass. I'm not going to be defrauded of a year's happiness. I'll stand for any time in September, but not a day later."

"September! But, my dearest boy, that's only a few weeks."

"That's why I said September."

She laughed happily. "Very well, September. But I'll have a thousand things to do. I'll have to go back with Uncle Jim."

"What's the use? Stay here. Kitty Wade will stay, too. I'll coax her."

"But I've all sorts of things to buy?"

"Order 'em by mail."

"My trousseau *by mail!*" she exclaimed, in horror. "It would be sacrilege."

"Oh, well, suit yourself," said Casey, with a sigh of resignation. "Thank the Lord it only happens once."

She laughed. "And then there's our honeymoon to plan. Where shall we spend it?"

"It's up to you. Wherever you say."

"You've never been to Europe?"

"No. But I'd rather do my honeymooning where I can ask for what I want with some chance of getting it."

"But I speak French, German, and Italian—not fluently, but well enough to get along on."

"And I talk United States, Chinook, and some Cree—we ought to get along almost anywhere," he laughed. "Let's leave this Europe business open. Now here's a really serious question: When our honeymoon is over—what?"

"I don't understand."

"Where shall we live? I can sell out here, if you like."

"But you wouldn't like?"

"I'd hate to," he admitted.

"I know. So should I. We'll live here, at Chakchak. It shall be our home."

"Would you be contented? It's lonely at times. The winters are long. You'd miss your friends and your old life."

"I ran away from both. I love your country because it's yours. It shall be mine, too. Look!" Away in the distance a tiny point of light twinkled. "There are the lights of Chakchak—our home lights, dear!"

Her hand sought his in the darkness, met, and clasped it. A star shot in a blazing trail across the velvet blackness of the sky. The first breath of the night breeze, cold from the mountain passes, brushed their cheeks. Save for the distant light the world was dark, the land lonely, silent, devoid of life. The great spaces infolded them, wrapped them in silence as in a vast robe. But the old, sweet song was in their hearts as they rode slowly forward—to the Light!

THE END.

ROY NORTON'S new novel, "The Mediator," a story of the new West, will be published serially in the POPULAR. We hope to give you the opening chapters in the first February number, on sale two weeks hence, January 7th.

WHERE THE HIGHBROWS BROWSE

IN the office of Brand Whitlock, the mayor of Toledo, Ohio, there is a well-sustained atmosphere of culture, not to mention a subtle suggestion of literature and high art. Brand is a great reader of what the chosen few call the classics. Although he writes for newspapers and magazines, he reads very few periodicals, and the men who work for him have a contempt for anything that was penned later than the time of Confucius.

J. P. Coakley, who at one time "covered" the mayor's office for a Toledo newspaper, had the Chicago *Examiner* delivered to him at the mayor's office every day. The time arrived when for six consecutive mornings he could not find his paper. Finally, in desperation, he went up to Henry Frisch, the guardian spirit of the office, and asked if the paper had been left for him.

"Certainly, yes," replied Frisch, elevating his Teutonic nose.

"Well, where is it?" asked Coakley angrily.

"I've been throwing it into the waste-paper basket."

"What for?"

"Why," said Frisch contemptuously, "'tain't literature."

Caught

By William Hamilton Osborne

Author of "The Running Fight," "Moonshine," Etc.

There wasn't a buyer at the Stock Exchange who would have touched West Virginia Coal with a ten-foot pole—but Maurice got a tip straight from the feed-box and plunged. The result was a very astonishing one, but it was none the less satisfactory

FLOMERFELT flicked the ashes from the end of his cigar. With unflinching, supercilious gaze, he surveyed the haggard figure at the other end of the long mahogany table.

"You must remember, my good friend," he said, "that the burden of proof here lies on you, not me."

The other man rose unsteadily to his feet. His hair was a bit disheveled; his eyes were bloodshot.

"Burden of proof nothing!" he cried, clenching his right hand and frantically pounding the table. "I tell you, it was here in this very room—it was *you* I told—told to sell, not buy——"

A quiet smile played about the thin lips of Flomerfelt.

"You told me to buy, not sell," he said.

"I told you to sell!" screamed the other man.

"You told me to buy," reiterated Flomerfelt.

"You lie, and I can prove it!" yelled the other man.

Flomerfelt's smile widened. "*How* can you prove it?" he returned. "The burden is on you."

His haggard customer stared at him in baffled speechlessness. Then something leaped into his eyes that had not been there before. He dropped his hand into his coat pocket and produced a gun.

"I'll get you yet, Flomerfelt!" he snarled through set teeth.

Flomerfelt rose and looked his man steadily in the eye.

"Not with that gun, Norton," he said carelessly. "You won't get me, and you won't get yourself. You haven't got the nerve." Like a flash his demeanor changed. His right forefinger shot out into the air. "Will you get out," he cried sternly, "or shall I have them throw you out? Put that gun away, and go!"

The other man, once more speechless, stared as if fascinated by the hypnotic glance of Flomerfelt. Slowly he dropped the weapon into his coat pocket. The fire died out in his eyes. He seized his hat and drew it down over his face; then he turned abjectly and shambled sheepishly toward the farther door.

Flomerfelt's forefinger remained poised in the air until the spring lock clicked behind the departing customer. Then he dropped once more into his chair, and took some six or seven swift nervous puffs upon his perfecto. His lips trembled slightly, but his eyes were as firm, as unflinching, as cold as ever. He waited for a moment to pull himself together, and then he touched the button on his desk. Another door opened, and a stealthy figure entered.

"That you, Welch?" asked Flomerfelt, without looking up.

"Yes, Mr. Flomerfelt," said Welch.

Welch was a colorless individual with close-cropped hair and a lean face. He seemed out of place. He did not match the mahogany, the luxurious surroundings that formed such an excellent setting for Flomerfelt himself. But Welch was made for use, not ornament.

He was the one agency in Flomerfelt's well-managed business establishment that customers did not see. Welch's place was in the background.

"Welch," continued Flomerfelt, "Norton has just been here."

Welch rubbed his lean hands together and cackled sympathetically.

"You polished him off good and proper, I hope, Mr. Flomerfelt?"

Flomerfelt's lips were still trembling a bit, but he controlled them instantly.

"I'd have him watched, Welch, for a week; see where he goes, and who he asks for money. There may be some juice left even in a lemon rind like Norton. Enough of him," went on Flomerfelt, swinging about in his revolving chair and looking his confidential man in the face. "Who else is outside?"

Welch consulted a little memorandum that he carried in his hand. "Graham's there," he said, "and Fink and Bayley——"

"Trading?" asked Flomerfelt.

Welch shook his head. "Soreheads," he answered. "They're waiting to see you."

"I'm out of town for a week," remarked Flomerfelt. "Is there anybody else?"

"Yes," returned Welch, "there is another man—Maurice."

Flomerfelt pricked up his ears at the name.

"Maurice?" he said. "He must be a new one. I don't know Maurice."

Welch laid a card in front of his employer. "He *is* a new one," he returned. "Frederic J. Maurice."

Flomerfelt glanced at the card. "Nothing but his name upon it," he mused. "How does he look?"

Welch shaded his mouth with his hand. "He looks good, Mr. Flomerfelt," he said.

"All right," said Flomerfelt. "Have Manning show him in."

In another moment Mr. Frederic J. Maurice had entered. He was a well-set-up man of thirty-five, dressed in excellent taste, clear-skinned, clear-eyed, and with an air of solidity that sat well upon him.

"Hardly worth while bothering *you*, Mr. Flomerfelt," he said, his voice taking on a tone of respect as he bowed. "My transaction is a very small one. I merely wanted to buy a hundred shares of West Virginia coal."

"Outright?" queried Flomerfelt.

"Hardly," returned the other man. "On margin naturally." He waved his hand deprecatingly. "I could have done it just as well through your cashier," he said.

Flomerfelt glanced at the card again. "Mr. Maurice," he said, "nothing can be done just as well through a cashier. It has been my rule for thirty years to meet my clients face to face. Mr. Maurice," he went on, with the air of a man taking a deep personal interest in the matter at hand, "I am curious to know who recommended you to me."

"Nobody at all," answered Maurice quickly. "I—the house of Flomerfelt is so well known, and, besides, your advertisements in the conservative papers attracted me. I have a thousand dollars I can spare——"

"What broker have you dealt with heretofore?" asked Flomerfelt.

Maurice flushed a bit. "None," he answered, in an embarrassed sort of way. "I—the fact is, I have never speculated on the Street before. I—my wife and I—thought there was a chance just now; we thought of West Virginia coal."

Flomerfelt's lips tightened into an indulgent smile.

"The very fact," he said, "that you chose West Virginia coal is evidence of your unfamiliarity with the market. Tell me, Mr. Maurice," he said, "have you any particular reason for plunging on West Virginia coal?"

"None," answered his visitor, "except that I heard——"

"What you have heard and what the Street has heard, Mr. Maurice," said Flomerfelt, "are things widely at variance. There is not a buyer at the Stock Exchange to-day will touch West Virginia coal with a ten-foot pole." He seized a pad, and jotted down a list of names. "There, Mr. Maurice," he said, "are half a dozen stocks that you can safely buy."

Maurice looked at them doubtfully. "You're sure," he said, "that these are good?"

Flomerfelt shrugged his shoulders. "Don't rely on me," he answered. "There's no hurry. Make your own inquiries, and then come back to me."

"That's fair," returned Frederic J. Maurice. He pulled out a pocket check book, and drew a check for a thousand dollars to the order of Flomerfelt.

"I'll leave that here for margin," he remarked. "You can get it certified. I will want to place an order to-morrow morning before ten."

Flomerfelt rose. "Mr. Maurice," he said kindly, "you are, on your own confession, somewhat new at this game, and you must be careful, very, very careful. A slip of the tongue, the lapse of a minute, a mistake in a fraction, on the Stock Exchange, is sometimes fatal. Speculation accounts often spell very rapid dealing, but accuracy is the absolute essential. You have made up your mind to deal with this office. Very well. That means that you deal with me. Never give an order, Mr. Maurice, unless it be in writing, except to me in person. I do not make mistakes. If you call on the telephone, be sure that you get me—me, Flomerfelt—and no one else. I trust in nobody in my office save myself. Good day, sir. This door, if you please." Again Flomerfelt waited until he heard the spring lock click, and again he pressed the button on his desk. Once more Welch entered noiselessly.

"Welch," he said, tossing a scrap of paper to that individual, "I recommended these few leaders to Maurice."

Welch looked them over. "They're all good, Mr. Flomerfelt," he said. "He'll make good money on these in a month."

Flomerfelt handed Welch Maurice's check. "You were right about Maurice, Welch," he said approvingly. "He looks good to me. He insists on our getting his check certified before we take his order."

"Mighty few of them insist," said Welch.

"Get it certified," went on Flomerfelt, "and find out in your own way what his balance is in the bank he's drawing on, whether he's got any other bank accounts, and anything you can."

Two hours later Welch again crept across the softly carpeted room with his inevitable catlike tread.

"The Maurice check was right, sir," he said to Flomerfelt, "and I gave it to the cashier. I found out about Maurice." He squinted at the notes he was holding in his hand.

"Well?" said Flomerfelt.

"He has only a small balance left in the Pilgrim Trust, sir," said Welch, "but he has two fair-sized savings-bank accounts, and he is paying off the mortgage on his house."

"Humph!" grunted Flomerfelt. "Too solid, I'm afraid. A chap like that don't plunge. Sorry I wasted so much time on him this morning, Welch."

Welch held up his hand. "The time wasn't wasted, sir," he said, fumbling with his scraps of paper. "There's something that I haven't told you yet—about his occupation."

"Go to it, Welch!" said Flomerfelt. "What does he do?"

Welch's crafty smile deepened. "Frederic J. Maurice," went on Welch, reading from his notes, "is cashier in the conservative banking house of Ryder, Hurlingham & Co. He draws seven thousand five hundred dollars salary a year."

"Ryder, Hurlingham & Co.," mused Flomerfelt. "Private bankers. Conservative? I should think they were!"

"Now, sir," said Welch, appealing with his hand for silence, "I come to the point. Conservative is the word. Richard Ryder, sir, as you know, is the whole show in Ryder, Hurlingham & Co. What he says goes, sir, and he says a good deal. He has laid down rules and regulations a mile long, I am informed, and this rule tops them all: Any man in his employ caught speculating on the Street—no matter who he is, sir—will be fired the instant he is found out."

Flomerfelt looked at Welch sharply.

"No matter who he is?" he repeated, doubtful.

"Exactly," returned Welch.

"How do you know?" asked Flomerfelt.

Welch blinked his eyes. "I know, sir," he returned, "because the last cashier—the man whose place this Frederic J. Maurice succeeded to—was fired for speculating on the Street."

Flomerfelt sniffed with excitement. A glow of enthusiasm entered his steely eyes.

"You're quite sure of your information, Welch?" he asked.

"Quite sure, sir," returned Welch.

Flomerfelt rubbed his hands together. "Then, by George," he said, "we've got Maurice, and got him where we want him! Welch," he went on, "give me twenty customers a year like this chap Maurice, and I'll let all the rest of them whistle down the wind."

"Exactly, sir," said Welch.

He laughed noiselessly to himself, winked slyly at his employer, and once more stealthily crossed the room and left it.

It was two months later. Flomerfelt and Mr. Frederic J. Maurice sat vis-a-vis at Delmonico's, in Beaver Street, in the middle of the day.

"This," said Mr. Frederic J. Maurice, "is to be on me. Will you have a cocktail, Mr. Flomerfelt?"

Flomerfelt shook his head. "I never drink," he said, "until I'm through, and it seems I'm never through. If I took a cocktail now," he went on, "and should receive fifty or a hundred orders this afternoon, and should make a mistake in the fraction of a dollar, or slip up by a minute in one of those orders, my customer should be justified in saying what I should say—that it was due to the cocktail. But don't," he continued, "let me keep you from *your* cocktail, if you please."

Maurice laughed frankly. "My cocktail!" he exclaimed. "Small chance of my drinking cocktails in the middle of the day—or any other time. I've never told you, Flomerfelt," he went on, "just what my business is."

"True," murmured Flomerfelt carelessly.

"Richard Ryder," continued Maurice, "is my old man——"

"Your father—stepfather?" queried Flomerfelt.

"No," returned Maurice. "My boss."

Flomerfelt stared at him. "You mean Richard Ryder, the crank?" he said.

"That's the man," returned Maurice.

Flomerfelt shivered. "I'm glad he's not my boss," he said.

"Fortunately," said Maurice, "I don't feel much of his crankiness myself. I'm not naturally prone to do most of the things he prohibits." His face whitened for a moment, and his muscles seemed to stiffen. He stretched his hand across the table, and laid it upon Flomerfelt's arm. "By the way," he said, in a low voice, looking carefully about him, "this is all confidential, our dealing—I mean on the Street—very confidential, of course." He laughed nervously. "It would never do for—the old man might have a fit if he knew that I was in the market. I don't suppose, Mr. Flomerfelt," he went on, "that there's the ghost of a show of Richard Ryder ever knowing it, do you?"

"Not in a thousand years," answered Flomerfelt. "Not unless you get drunk on cocktails and give yourself away." He waved his hand. "Mr. Maurice," he said, "we've done pretty well by you. I hope you feel that your connection with my house has paid?"

"It has paid," admitted Maurice. He thought for a few moments, and then he shook his head. "It hasn't paid so well, though, Flomerfelt, as though I had followed my own suggestion. I ought to have plunged on West Virginia coal."

"I admit your conclusion," returned Flomerfelt, "but deny your premises. When you came to me West Virginia coal was a fool's plunge. Its rise has been fool's luck. How did you happen on it?" he inquired.

"Superstition maybe," said Maurice. "My wife and I have been speculating on the Street for a couple of years."

He held up his hand. "Oh, not with money," he said; "simply in the papers, don't you see. Every morning she would select a certain stock to buy, and I would select another. We wouldn't buy, of course. We would see how we came out at night; and for two years steady, Mr. Flomerfelt, West Virginia coal was the best and safest buy we made; so naturally—well, as a matter of fact," he went on, "high as it is now, I'd like to buy it still."

"Not in a thousand years," said Flomerfelt.

Maurice tapped the table with his hand. "Yes," he said, "I've got so much faith in it that I'll give you an order to buy two hundred of it right away."

Flomerfelt shook his head. "Wait until to-morrow morning," he suggested. "You may change your mind."

"I'll wait till to-morrow morning," returned Maurice, "but I won't change my mind—not in a thousand years."

An hour later at his office Flomerfelt again called in his confidential man.

"It's about Maurice," he said.

"We can put on the screws, sir, whenever you like," said Welch. "We've got a half dozen bum stocks we're carrying, and we ought to unload them in a week. Why not unload some of them on Maurice?"

"How is his account?" asked Flomerfelt.

"He hasn't drawn, sir," returned Welch.

Flomerfelt slowly shook his head. "I'm not sure whether the time has come or not," he mused. "There may be possibilities in Maurice. He may bring other people in."

"Don't believe it, sir," said Welch. "He is very close-mouthed. Keeps himself to himself."

"I guess you're right," returned Flomerfelt; "but still the time has not yet come; besides, he wants to buy West Virginia coal."

Welch's face fell. "It's a good buy, sir," he said dejectedly. "I don't like it—his wanting to buy coal," he went on. "We've got to get rid of these stocks, sir, and Maurice is certainly the man."

Flomerfelt shrugged his shoulders. "We'll give him one more chance, Welch," he finally announced. "We'll take his order for West Virginia coal."

Flomerfelt took his order for West Virginia coal, and it was an order for three hundred shares—all that Maurice's account with Flomerfelt would stand.

Two days later Flomerfelt sent for him posthaste.

"I told you so!" he said. "West Virginia coal is falling off."

"It won't go far," said Maurice optimistically.

"Maybe you're right," answered Flomerfelt, "but you're down to rock bottom, friend Maurice. I've got to have more margin."

"I'm game," said Maurice.

Flomerfelt shook his head. "I have never known it to fail," he mused; "when my customers stop taking my advice they get trimmed. You *would* buy coal, you know. You took the bit in your teeth, and if you go over the precipice you can't blame me."

"I'm game," answered Maurice. "I've got money laid away. You can have it in a jiffy."

They got it in a jiffy. Next day they asked for more. West Virginia coal went down—down—down. On the third day something happened. At ten o'clock it bounded up ten points. At half past twelve it had gone up ten points more.

"Welch," said Flomerfelt, when that stage had been reached, "now is the time to put the screws on this man Maurice. Send him word to take his profits and sell out his coal; then we'll unload this other stuff upon him and make him take it, or we'll know the reason why."

The brokerage house of Flomerfelt got word in its quiet way to Frederic J. Maurice to sell out his West Virginia coal, but it got no word from Mr. Frederic J. Maurice. Mr. Maurice was as quiet as the grave. He issued no order either in writing or by word of mouth,

Flomerfelt, watching the market, found himself catching the infection.

"Welch," he said, "*I'm* going to buy West Virginia coal."

"You have some news?" asked Welch.

"Yes," returned Flomerfelt. "Buchanan's crowd is cornering the market. Somebody is getting squeezed. Coal will reach two hundred and ten by three o'clock. Watch out."

Welch watched out. So did Flomerfelt, but as yet he did not buy West Virginia coal. He was not sure. The rumors, though, kept coming in with steady persistence. Underground information, usually reliable, reached Flomerfelt during the course of the afternoon that even at two hundred West Virginia coal was still good buying.

At ten o'clock the next day it was selling at two-thirty-five; at eleven it was selling at two-fifty. At eleven-fifteen Welch tiptoed in and whispered into Flomerfelt's ear.

"It's bound for three-ten, sir!" he exclaimed.

"How do you know?" asked Flomerfelt. "Who told you?"

Welch placed a finger on his lips. "The same party, sir," he said.

"You're sure?" asked Flomerfelt.

"Positive," said Welch.

Again Welch glided out. Flomerfelt's telephone bell rang.

"Hello," said a voice. "This is Maurice talking—Frederic J. Maurice."

"Yes," said Flomerfelt; "and this is Flomerfelt."

"Mr. Flomerfelt himself?" asked Maurice.

"Yes," returned Flomerfelt. "Don't you recognize my voice?"

"I did from the start," said Maurice, "but I wanted to be sure. Mr. Flomerfelt," he went on, speaking in very clear, incisive tones, "please sell my West Virginia coal at once."

"What price?" queried Flomerfelt.

"At the market," answered Maurice. "You understand that, do you? Sell my West Virginia coal at the market, and sell it right away."

"I understand it," answered Flomerfelt. "I am to sell it at the market, and to sell it right away."

He sold it at the market—sold it right away—and sold it to himself. At eleven-twenty, therefore, he had bought West Virginia coal himself, for his own account, at two-sixty-one and one-half. No entry of the sale had yet been made.

At eleven-thirty something happened —something else—and with a crash. West Virginia coal dropped twenty points. By eleven-forty-five it dropped thirty more. At twelve o'clock it had dropped fifty more. After that it stood not on the order of its going, but went to smash, and all at once.

By one o'clock it was all over. The bulls had been slaughtered, and were being dragged out of the arena by the heels. The toreador shorts were hysterical with glee. Buchanan's bubble had been pricked; his pool was smashed to flinders.

Flomerfelt, considerably white in the gills, trembling with unwonted excitement, sent for Welch.

"Welch," he said, jotting down a few words on a piece of paper, "have Manning enter up this order."

"Whose order, sir?" asked Welch.

"Frederic J. Maurice," said Flomerfelt. "I took it this morning."

"Buy or sell?" asked Welch.

"*Buy!*" answered Flomerfelt. "And I bought three hundred shares for him at two-sixty-one and one-half."

Welch drew his left eyelid down over his left eye. "And as for you, sir?" he queried.

Flomerfelt's lips tightened over his teeth.

"As for me, Welch," he answered, lucky for me, I *sold*."

There was a smile of pleased assurance on Frederic J. Maurice's face when he swung into the presence of Flomerfelt.

"Well," he exclaimed jauntily, "I did it, didn't I?"

Flomerfelt grunted. "I should think you did!" he said angrily. "You not only did it, but you did yourself, and you did me, too. You ought to be

switched. I told you to keep away from West Virginia coal."

Maurice laughed. "Well, I got away, didn't I?" he said. "And just in the nick of time. I sold just before the break."

Flomerfelt stared at him. "You sold?" he queried. "Through what broker did you sell?"

Maurice stared at him, puzzled. "Of course," he said, "through you." A glow of deep satisfaction shone in his eyes. "Flomerfelt," he said, "I'm through. I've had my first plunge on the Street, and it's my last. I'm over sixty thousand dollars to the good——"

Flomerfelt stared at him in amazement. "Are you crazy, man?" he said.

Maurice laughed. "Almost," he answered. "I never made so much money in my life. But I'm through, Flomerfelt," he went on, "through for good and all. Give me your check. I'm going to take my profits, and then I'm going to quit."

Flomerfelt kept on staring at him. "Profits—check——" he returned. "You must be mad, Maurice; your losses must have broken down your mind—talk sense!"

"I am talking sense," answered Maurice. "You know it's sense. I'm going to take my profits and then quit."

"Profits!" retorted Flomerfelt. "You haven't any profits. You've got a loss, and it's for you to draw a check, not me."

It was Maurice's turn to stare. Flomerfelt pushed a button. In a moment a bookkeeper entered with a book and laid it open in front of Flomerfelt.

"There," said Flomerfelt to his customer, "there's an exact statement of your account with us—of our account with you." Something hard, metallic entered his voice. "We want a check from you, Maurice, and we want it right away."

Maurice turned pale. He placed his forefinger upon the last entry on the page.

"What does *that* mean?" he queried.

Flomerfelt adjusted his glasses and scanned the entry.

"Means just what it says," he returned. "That we bought West Virginia coal for you at two-sixty-one and one-half. That was just before the market broke."

"But," protested Maurice, "you didn't buy for me; you sold for me."

"Not in a thousand years," answered Flomerfelt. "Can't you read English? We bought, man—bought—not sold."

"You sold," persisted Maurice. "Those were my orders to you—sell, not buy."

"Your orders!" echoed Flomerfelt. "Why, man, it was I that took your order. I—Flomerfelt."

Maurice nodded. "Over the telephone," he said; "and I told you to sell West Virginia coal at the market, you recall."

"I recall nothing of the kind," retorted Flomerfelt. "You told me to buy West Virginia coal. You gave the order over the phone, and I repeated it over the phone: Buy West Virginia coal at the market. Those were my instructions, and I followed them."

"You are mistaken," said Maurice.

Flomerfelt rose. His eyes narrowed. His glance ate into the younger man.

"Maurice," he said, "Flomerfelt doesn't make mistakes." He glared at his customer until Maurice's glance fell. Flomerfelt stretched out an accusing forefinger. "Maurice," he went on, "I took you for an honest man. I see now that you're like all the rest—the minute that you're nipped you take refuge in a lie. Tell me," he went on, in withering scorn, "where were you for the two hours that we tried to get you? That's what I want to know."

"You tried to get me?" faltered Maurice. "What for?"

Flomerfelt grunted. "For obvious reasons," he said. "To put up margin naturally. Why did you keep out of the way? That convicts you on the face of it."

Maurice shook his head. "I didn't keep out of the way," he answered. "I merely told the cigar man in our building that he needn't send up any further messages. I did that a half minute, maybe, after I had phoned to you to

sell. I was through, I tell you," he exclaimed. "I had made my little pile. I was going to quit."

Flomerfelt's mouth hardened. His countenance became sinister, vengeful. He thrust his face suddenly into Maurice's.

"What an infernal liar you are, Maurice!" he sneered. "You know just as well as we're standing here that you ordered me to buy."

"I ordered you to sell," answered Maurice, in quiet desperation.

Flomerfelt drew back. A sinister smile played about his lips.

"Prove it!" he exclaimed. "The burden is on you."

"On me?" faltered Maurice.

"On you," returned Flomerfelt. "You gave me an order by word of mouth over the telephone to buy certain stock. I delivered the order immediately, bought the stock, and had it entered on my books. Now you say you did not give the order. You can prove it. The burden is on you, not me."

Maurice started for the door. "This is an infernal swindle!" he exclaimed, as he placed his hand upon the knob. "Flomerfelt, you'll hear from me!"

"Hear from you!" retorted Flomerfelt. "Believe me, friend Maurice, you'll hear from me. I want your check—no, I don't want your check. I want *cash* for every dollar that stands against you on these books, and I'm going to have it, too!"

"You'll never get it," said Maurice.

"I won't, won't I?" exclaimed Flomerfelt. He crossed the floor and placed his back against the door. "My dear young friend," he said, "you may be a knave, but do you take me for a fool? I want what is due me, and I want it right away."

"Same here," responded his customer.

"Maurice," went on Flomerfelt, "you've got resources; you've got relatives; you've got church friends; you've got a paying job."

Maurice started. Flomerfelt noted the start, but gave no sign.

"You can raise what is due me," said Flomerfelt, "in forty-eight hours. I don't care how you do it—whether you mortgage all you've got—your wife and kids, for all I care—your friends, for all I care—*or your job.*"

Again Maurice started. Then he spoke in turn.

"I'll give you forty-eight hours to pay me what you owe me, Flomerfelt," he said; but there was no force behind the words. This was the utterance of an intimidated man.

"Maurice," went on Flomerfelt, looking his customer squarely in the eye, "you've got a wife and family to support. Your job supports them, doesn't it? Very well. Suppose you lose that job?"

Maurice winced. "But I'm not going to lose that job," he protested. "I give every satisfaction."

"True," returned Flomerfelt. "You give satisfaction until you cease giving satisfaction. Your job depends upon just one man—the man that pays your salary—that is Richard Ryder. The whole Street knows Richard Ryder and his rigmarole of rules and regulations. What's going to happen to a man, my friend Maurice, if Ryder catches him speculating on the Street?"

Flomerfelt waited for an answer, but without result. Maurice stood silent.

"*I'll* tell you," went on Flomerfelt: "His head goes off like that, and when once his head is off who will put it on again? Without Ryder's recommendation, how is that man going to get another job?"

Maurice spoke again, with the life all gone out of his voice. Still, there was some dogged persistence in it yet.

"I am not talking about my job, or my employer, or my friends," he said, "nor yet my wife and family. You owe me money, Flomerfelt; you know you owe me money. If you don't pay me what you owe me, then I'll take steps to collect it otherwise. I'll begin suit, and begin it right away."

Maurice was as good as his word. He started suit. He waited forty-eight hours to the minute, and at the beginning of the forty-ninth hour Flomer-

felt was served with a summons and complaint. Flomerfelt called in Welch.

"This will never do," he said to Welch.

Welch shrugged his shoulders. "He can never prove his claim," he answered.

"That's not the point," went on Flomerfelt. "It's the notoriety of the thing. Cæsar's wife should be above suspicion. I am Cæsar's wife," he added.

Again Welch shrugged his shoulders. "There's only one thing left, Mr. Flomerfelt," he said, "and that is to put on the screws."

Before putting on the screws, Flomerfelt sent once more for Maurice. Maurice declined to come, and referred Flomerfelt curtly to his counsel—Cowen, Covington & Brown.

Flomerfelt called on Cowen, Covington & Brown, and advised them of the futility of Maurice's claim. Cowen, Covington & Brown frigidly returned that they were acting under instructions; that they must proceed.

"All right," said Flomerfelt superciliously; "I'll give this chap Maurice the fight of his life." And he started thereupon to put on the screws.

A few days later Welch tiptoed into his presence with a letter.

"First blood for you, Mr. Flomerfelt," he whispered.

Flomerfelt took the letter and tore it open. It was a missive, hand-written upon heavy white note paper:

DEAR MR. FLOMERFELT: Can you make it convenient to call here on a matter of personal importance, and oblige, very truly yours, RICHARD RYDER.

After hours that afternoon, Flomerfelt entered the presence of Ryder. He saw him in his private room.

Ryder was a lean, bloodless individual, with gray side whiskers, with eyes of steel, and with a mouth that clipped off his sentences like the closing of a steel trap. He looked about him to be sure that all the doors were closed and that he could not be overheard.

"Mr. Flomerfelt," he said, placing his finger tips together, "I have sent for you upon a very disagreeable piece of business. I have heard indirectly—it matters not how"—he leaned over and scrutinized Flomerfelt's countenance with interest—"that one of my trusted men has been speculating on the Street—and, what is worse, has been speculating in West Virginia coal."

"Sorry to hear that, sir," returned Flomerfelt evenly. "West Virginia coal is a bad bet for anybody. But how," he added, "does all this concern me?"

"It concerns you only casually," returned Richard Ryder. "I understand, through sources unimportant in the present instance, that his speculations have been carried on through the house of Flomerfelt. His name," added Ryder, "is Frederic J. Maurice."

There was a momentary gleam of recognition in Flomerfelt's eyes—momentary, but deliberate—then his face became a blank.

"Well?" he said at length.

"It seems impossible," went on Richard Ryder, "to believe that the trusted cashier of the banking house of Ryder, Hurlingham & Co. should be sufficiently imprudent to speculate upon the Street. It seems almost impossible that he should deliberately violate the most important of my rules."

"Well?" said Flomerfelt again.

"What I want to know, sir," continued Richard Ryder, "and know from your own lips, is whether this is *true* about Maurice."

Flomerfelt became unusually grave. "You will understand, Mr. Ryder," he said solemnly, "that the house of Flomerfelt keeps the secrets of its customers, and keeps them well. However, in a case like this perhaps you are entitled to the information."

Ryder shook his head.

"Then it is true?" he queried.

"It is true," said Flomerfelt. "Mr. Frederic J. Maurice has been plunging on West Virginia coal." His voice lowered. "This information, Mr. Ryder," he went on, "is confidential. It is a personal favor from Flomerfelt to

Ryder, Hurlingham & Co. Some time I may ask a favor at your hands."

Richard Ryder smiled. His smile was hard. "You may, indeed," he answered, "*ask* a favor."

Flomerfelt edged forward. "I'm curious, Mr. Ryder," he exclaimed, "to know how you got a clew to Mr. Maurice's little infringement of your rules. There are no leaks," he repeated, "in the house of Flomerfelt."

Ryder nodded. "I received a letter," he returned, "from a man named Welch."

"Welch?" mused Flomerfelt. "Welch? I do not know him. Probably some erstwhile friend of your cashier, Maurice."

"Undoubtedly," assented Ryder. He pressed a button. Once more he leaned toward Flomerfelt. "You have no objection to meeting Maurice face to face?" he asked.

Flomerfelt smiled. "Not in the least," he answered, with the air of a slave driver lifting his whip. "In fact, I think I should prefer to meet him face to face."

A messenger entered. "Tell the cashier," said Richard Ryder, "to step here for a moment."

In another instant Maurice entered. He stood for a moment just within the door, staring at Flomerfelt. Then he looked at Ryder.

"You sent for me?" he said.

Ryder did not answer for a moment. He gazed steadily at Maurice's face.

"Sit down," he said at length.

Maurice sat down. An ominous silence settled down upon the room. It was broken at length by Richard Ryder.

"Mr. Maurice," he said, "I am informed by Mr. Flomerfelt that you have been speculating on the Street. Is it true or false?"

Maurice looked at Flomerfelt and then at his chief.

"It is true," he returned.

"I understand, furthermore," went on Ryder, in tones of doom, "that you have plunged on West Virginia coal. Is it true or false?"

Maurice glared at Flomerfelt. "True," he returned, in a low voice.

Ryder swung slowly about in his revolving chair, and gazed impersonally out of the window.

"Mr. Maurice," he said, "you are familiar with the rules of Ryder, Hurlingham & Co., are you not?"

"I am," said Maurice.

Ryder still gazed out of the window. "That is all," he said. "Good day."

Maurice rose and started for the door. Before he reached it, however, Ryder swung around upon him.

"One moment, Mr. Maurice," he exclaimed; "one other question: Did you win, or did you lose?"

"I won!" answered Maurice, with a ring of defiance in his tone.

Flomerfelt laughed a disagreeable laugh. "He lost!" he said.

Richard Ryder pricked up his ears. "Well, which of you is right?" he demanded. "Did he win or lose?"

"I won," said Maurice, "by rights. I bought West Virginia coal all the way up to the breaking point, and then I sold."

Flomerfelt laughed again. "And then he *bought*," he retorted. "He kept on buying. You'll understand, Mr. Ryder," he went on, "that West Virginia coal was *his* hobby, not mine. I told him to keep away. But even then he could have made a strike if he had sold, instead of buying, when West Virginia coal passed two hundred and sixty."

"It was then that I *did* sell," said Maurice.

"It was then you kept on buying," answered Flomerfelt.

"What does this mean?" queried Ryder, puzzled. "You say you sold, and he says he bought."

"I did sell," responded Maurice. "At least, I gave him the order to sell."

"In writing?" queried Ryder.

"No; over the telephone," went on Maurice.

"Exactly," interposed Flomerfelt. "I did get his order over the telephone, but it was an order to buy, not sell."

Again Ryder shook his head. "Foolish of both of you," he mused. "Put

everything in writing—that's my motto—everything. Tell me about this," he went on. "When did you give this order, Mr. Maurice, to Mr. Flomerfelt?"

"Last Thursday," answered Maurice, "at eleven-thirty. I told him to sell West Virginia coal at the market price."

Flomerfelt pulled out a little memorandum book. "Eleven-thirty Thursday a. m. last," he said. "O. K. Buy West Virginia coal at the market. That is the message as I got it."

"Strange," said Ryder, looking intently at Maurice, and speaking very slowly; "and did any one else hear this telephone message?"

A peculiar smiled played about the twitching lips of Frederic J. Maurice.

"Oh, yes," he said; "there were two other people heard me give it. Each man held a receiver to his ear." He opened the door, and another man entered. "Norton was one of the two men," he exclaimed.

Flomerfelt rose to his feet. "Norton!" he sneered. "Why, I know Norton like a book! He's the most notorious liar in the Street. Look at him, Mr. Ryder—two of a kind—Norton and Maurice. So this is the kind of evidence, Maurice, that you're going to offer on the trial?"

"Yes," answered Maurice; "but it's only part of it. I said that *two* men beside myself heard you get the order from me to sell West Virginia coal—*two* men. Norton is only *one*."

"And where is the other?" sneered Flomerfelt. "Fetch him in. Let us look him over."

Richard Ryder held up his hand. "He is fetched, Mr. Flomerfelt," he said. "*I* am the other man."

Flomerfelt staggered back. "You!" he exclaimed, aghast.

"I," returned Richard Ryder calmly. "I heard Maurice tell you to sell coal over the phone, and I heard you repeat his order over the phone. Three of us sat in the same room, Mr. Flomerfelt, at the same time."

"This—this is a conspiracy!" stammered Flomerfelt.

"No," answered Ryder, smiling, "a conspiracy is never a conspiracy unless it fails. This one is going to succeed, Flomerfelt. My only regret is that I didn't give you more rope, and let you go on and perjure yourself in a court of law. Flomerfelt," he went on, "for thirty-five years I've been waiting for a chance to get you and to get you right. Thirty-five years ago I plunged—my last excursion on the Street. I, too, was a salaried man. I, too, was fearful of my employer's wrath. I, too, gave you an order over the telephone to sell, and you bought instead. I, too, was the subject of your blackmail, Flomerfelt, and my indiscretion and your knavery cost me five years—five solid years of business life. It took me that time to get back where I had started. You don't remember me. I was small fry in those days, but not too small for your net, Flomerfelt; but I have never forgotten. I simply sat down and waited for my time to come, and it came. It came the night that my cashier, Maurice, brought his friend, Norton, to see me at my club. What you had done to me you did to Norton. What you did to Norton you tried to do to me again, for it was not my cashier, Maurice, who was speculating—it was not he who infringed my rules, Flomerfelt. It was Richard Ryder—I—myself."

He laughed shrilly, triumphantly, almost hysterically. Flomerfelt stared.

"And yet," went on Ryder, "I didn't speculate. I happened to know the truth about West Virginia coal. I knew exactly what would happen. You, Flomerfelt, depended merely upon rumors—upon rumors that I furnished for your particular benefit; so when I bought I didn't risk a cent. I knew. I bet upon a certainty, and when I sold," he said, "I sold through Maurice here, just as I had bought, and the evidence of that sale is in this room. I've got you, Flomerfelt," he went on; "I've got you where I want you, and you've got to pay."

Flomerfelt seemed to shrivel for a moment, and then he drew himself together.

"If that's all you've got to say," he said, "I suppose now you want me to draw Maurice a check?"

He slumped down into a chair, drew out his check book, and seized a pen.

"Yes," said Richard Ryder slowly, "you can draw Maurice a check, and when you've done that you can draw a check for Norton."

"Not on your life!" answered Flomerfelt belligerently.

"And when you've done that," went on Richard Ryder, "you can draw me a check, with thirty-five years' interest added to it, if you please."

"Humph!" grunted Flomerfelt. "You're outlawed by the statute of limitations."

Richard Ryder touched a button, and Maurice opened the door. Eleven men stepped in—eleven men of ordinary appearance. Some of them unshaved, some of them with shabby clothes, all of them dejected.

As they filed in, Flomerfelt sprang to his feet, and stared at them in amazement. Again Richard Ryder smiled.

"Gentlemen," he said, "sit down."

The eleven men obeyed. Richard Ryder opened his desk, and took out a typewritten document.

"Flomerfelt," he said, "Mr. Maurice, Mr. Norton, and myself have embodied in an affidavit, which I shall read to you if you care to hear it, the facts relating to your dealings with Maurice. These facts, when proven, will wipe you out of Wall Street, will convict you of larceny, and send you behind the bars. If I press this button twice, Flomerfelt, two plain-clothes men will enter. This complaint will be presented to a magistrate, you will be incarcerated in the Tombs, and be released on not less than sixty thousand dollars bail. Your conviction is as certain as death." He turned toward the eleven men, and waved his hand. "The same trick, Flomerfelt," he said, "that you played upon Maurice, Norton, and myself you have played upon other customers of yours. I have rounded up a few—all that I could find. They are here with us this afternoon. Each man has in his waistcoat pocket a statement of the exact amount you owe him, with interest added at the rate of six per cent. Will you make checks for us all, Mr. Flomerfelt, or," he added ominously, "shall I press the button twice?"

Flomerfelt started toward the door; then he came back. He sank once more into his seat, once more seized his check book and a pen, and drew thirteen other checks.

Ryder stepped to Norton and handed him his check.

"Hold up your right hand, Norton," he exclaimed. Norton obeyed. "Norton," said Ryder, "you do solemnly swear that you will never buy or sell a share of stock on margin for the rest of your natural life, so help you God?"

"I do," said Norton as he pocketed his check.

Ryder stepped to the first of the eleven shabby men who had entered the room. When he had finished with them all, he turned to Flomerfelt.

"Flomerfelt," he said, picking up the affidavits and thrusting them into his desk, "we'll hold this little matter in abeyance until these checks are paid."

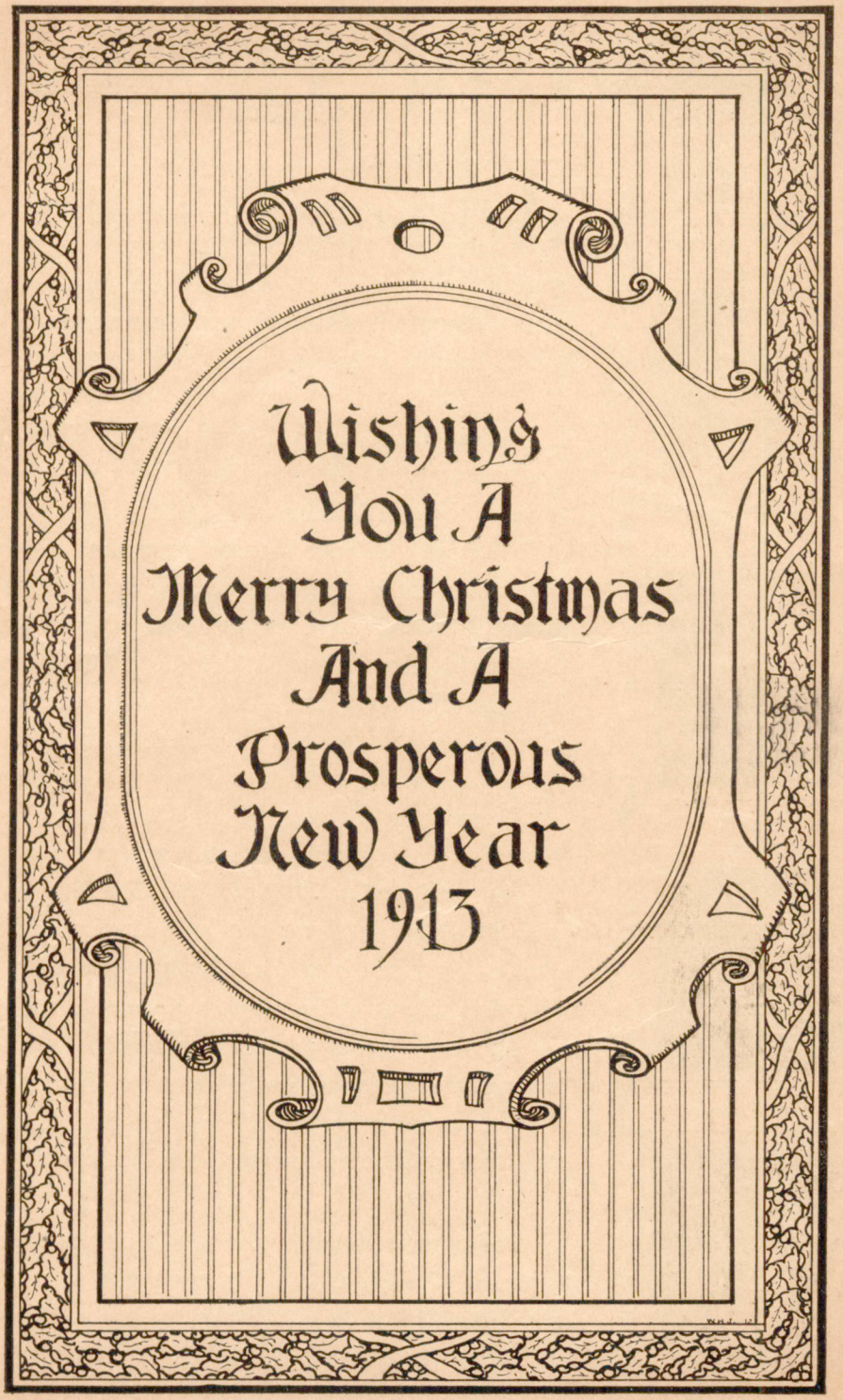
"And when they're paid," snarled Flomerfelt, as he started for the door, "every mother's son of you will be guilty of compounding a felony."

"Not a bit of it," replied Richard Ryder. "Every mother's son of us will swear that you drew these checks voluntarily and of your own sweet will."

He turned to the others and held out his hands toward them. They nodded as one man.

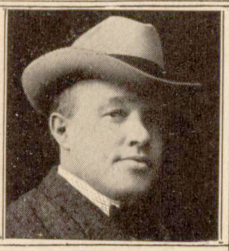
"Of his own sweet will," they murmured genially.

This is the tenth New Year greeting from the POPULAR. We hope and believe that the magazine will help make it a good year for you. With all good wishes to the POPULAR family.


Wishing
You A
Merry Christmas
And A
Prosperous
New Year
1913

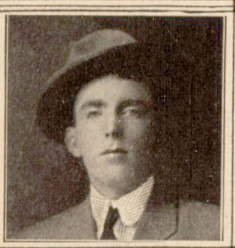
RICHARD WASHBURN CHILD

JACK LONDON



HOLMAN F. DAY

BERTON BRALEY



ROBERT V. CARR

The Popular

THERE have been good years in the past. If you have been a reader of THE POPULAR for any length of time you remember a splendid succession of short stories and novels, many of which have become famous since, but which had their first appearance in THE POPULAR.

There was "Tono Bungay," H. G. Wells' greatest novel; there was Zane Grey's "Heritage of the Desert;" there was "The Blue Wall," "The Boule Cabinet"—there were half a dozen novels or more by Ralph D. Paine and Francis Lynde, which have since been published by Scribner's; there was "The Red Lane," by Holman F. Day, and the greatest success that Oppenheim ever wrote, "The Malefactor."

There was "Norroy," by George Bronson-Howard; there were wonderful stories by Rupert Hughes and Arthur Stringer and Hesketh Pritchard and Peter B. Kyne and Jack London and Rex Beach—there's a long list. Look over the lists of Harper's, Century, Doubleday, Page; Little, Brown & Co.—any good publisher—you will find them among the most successful books. Taking THE POPULAR in retrospect seems a résumé of the best fiction that has been published in recent years.

It seems as if the future could not surpass or even equal such a past. It seems like boasting to say that 1913 is to be the best year yet. It seems as if we were scarce justified in hoping to get out twenty-four numbers better than any twenty-four in

for 1913

the past. Yet this is what we are confident of doing. Our plans have been laid far enough ahead for us to speak now definitely for the year. And we are confident that 1913 is to put the magazine on a higher plane than ever—that you are going to like it a little better than ever before—that it is going to mean just a little more to you as a publication, and that you are going to talk about it more to your friends.

If we were not sure of this we would not set aside these pages to give you this promise with our New Year's greeting. We don't have to do it but we are so certain about the coming year that we want to tell you a little something about it in advance.

* *

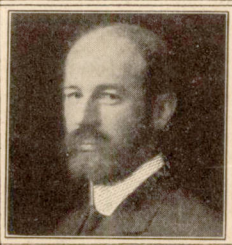
TWENTY-FOUR GREAT NOVELS

ONE in each issue for the coming year. It would be a large order for any one. Few publishers' lists show anything like it. They must all be good enough to sell largely between cloth covers for a dollar and a half. Furthermore they must all be novels that you will like, your kind, THE POPULAR kind. They must all be of the class that we can guarantee as being up to standard.

Some of them are already written and in our safe, some of them are in process of construction, some of them are planned out. To get them we

RUPERT HUGHES

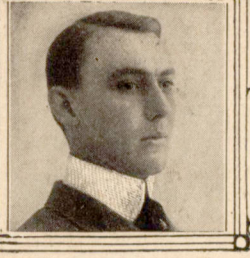
CHARLES E. VAN LOAN



DANE COOLIDGE

GEORGE BRONSON-HOWARD

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM



HENRY C. ROWLAND

A. M. CHISHOLM

ELMORE ELLIOTT PEAKE

JAMES B. CONNOLLY

ROY NORTON

have gone over a list of all the best-known writers and we have seen to it that the novel you were to get was the best that its author could write. Here are a few of those who have already written one or more of this series of twenty-four novels:

Henry C. Rowland	**Ralph D. Paine**
Peter B. Kyne	**Francis Lynde**
W. B. M. Ferguson	**Bertrand W. Sinclair**
B. M. Bower	**George Bronson-Howard**
Herman Whitaker	**Holman F. Day**
Fred R. Bechdolt	**Edwin Balmer**

THE BEST SHORT STORIES OF THE YEAR

IN short stories as well as longer we have a record to beat. There have been some in the past that you remember well, such as A. M. Chisholm's "A Dozen Eggs," Peter B. Kyne's "On Irish Hill." There are others coming just as good, just as distinctive and refreshing, perhaps more of the very highest type than ever.

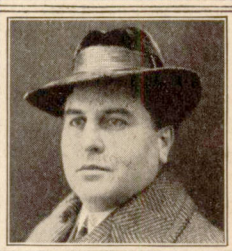
Short-story writing is an art that has grown to prominence in the last twenty years or so. Ten people are writing short stories now where one was ten years ago, and yet the task of finding the truly memorable short story seems almost as hard as ever. We have performed this task more than once, however, and you are going to get the

for 1913

proof in the coming issues of the magazine. We won't tell you about the stories but we will mention a few of the authors:

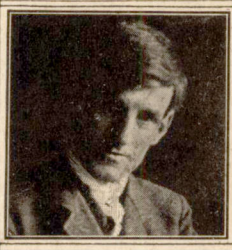
Richard Washburn Child
J. Kenilworth Egerton
Robert V. Carr
Lincoln Colcord
Howard Fitzalan
Morgan Robertson
Charles E. Van Loan
Rupert Hughes
Arthur B. Reeve
Francis Whitlock
James B. Connolly
Emerson Hough
Roy Norton
Clarence Cullen
Robert Welles Ritchie

CHARLES R. BARNES

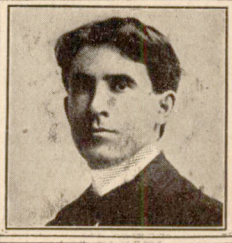


CLARENCE L. CULLEN

FREDERICK NIVEN



HERMAN WHITAKER



ZANE GREY

SERIALS

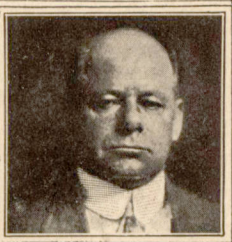
DURING the coming year we don't intend to overload the magazine with serial features. We don't intend to run a mediocre serial just because we feel that the magazine needs one. But when we get a novel of unusual length, too long for the ordinary book, and too good to allow you to miss, we are going to run it in big installments so that you will get it all within a very few issues.

If you never read a single serial during 1913 you will be getting more than your fifteen cents' worth with each issue of the magazine—but if you don't read them you will be missing some things, delightful, worth while and important, which it is impossible to give you in any other form. Just

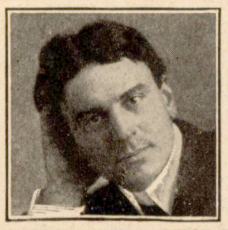
RALPH D. PAINE

STANLEY CLISBY ARTHUR

W. B. M. FERGUSON



MORGAN ROBERTSON



ARTHUR STRINGER

to mention a few more of those who are helping to make 1913 the biggest year yet:

Henry Milner Rideout — **Louis Joseph Vance**
George Randolph Chester — **Zane Grey**
Stewart Edward White — **Jack London**
E. Phillips Oppenheim — **A. M. Chisholm**

SOMETHING WELL WORTH DOING

THE photographs you notice on these pages were not put there solely for decorative purposes. They are there just to show you the faces of a few of those from whom you will hear during the next year. They are all in THE POPULAR for 1913. This year we have brought more money, more experience, more energy, and, we hope, a greater knowledge to the task of maintaining THE POPULAR as the best and most thoroughly representative American fiction magazine.

We think it a worthy undertaking. It is better than muckraking, better than sensation hunting. We feel that each coming number will have its own message and that you will be glad to receive it. After all, literature is the key to life. It is the reflection in a great and glorious mirror of our imperfect and cloudy actions. If we can help you to find the key, if we can give you a gleam of life as it is as a splendid whole, we are doing well. We know that we have your good wishes in the attempt.

A Chat With You

CHRISTMAS, 1912

WE are celebrating the anniversary of a birthday. Ten thousand little spruce trees gleam with tinsel and candlelight, and bear, in the cold of winter, all manner of strange gift fruit. Homes and shop windows and places of business wreathe themselves in green, and shine with white and scarlet berries. The morning brings a different feeling, our salutation is a strange and warmer greeting. No longer are we hard and practical; we give and receive in new and unwonted fashion. Surely, if you have any one to forgive, you forgive him now.

THERE are other birthdays to celebrate, but none like this. None bring such a change in daily life, such new gladness in the air. None are so universally made memorable, so observed in the spirit as well as in the outward form. We recognize to-morrow, Christmas, as the greatest of all holidays. We know that the first Christmas marked the birth of the soul of humanity. Before it, there were great states, but no conception of the essential brotherhood and unity of all mankind. That first Christmas marked the dawn of a day that has not yet reached its noon. No matter what our religious belief may be, we know that the being at whose birth we now rejoice, wrought the greatest change in all history, gave a new trend to the destinies of our race, shaped us to a finer mold.

HIS birth was of the most humble. Of all the thousand races who paid tribute to the Cæsars, his was the least considered. Of all his race, his station was the lowest. He was born in obscurity, cradled in a manger. "Three wise men," they say, offered him gifts—but what did the Jewish priest or Roman official think of their wisdom? He was brought up to be a carpenter in a time when daily industry was less favorably regarded than since. When he talked, those who listened to him were the least respected and lowest in station—poor tradespeople, tax collectors, fishermen, outcasts, perhaps a few of better education, but none of the powerful, fortunate, or influential.

WHAT he taught was the strangest doctrine! a new philosophy, a new scheme of things. The Hebrew God was jealous, visiting the sins of the father on the children to the third and fourth generation. The gods of the Ro-

A CHAT WITH YOU—*Continued*

man were abstractions, his religion was dead, and he himself was an enlightened materialist, wise, selfish, and merciless. His empire, the whole peaceful world, was the proof that physical force was the real god, that the slave and the barbarian were of one flesh, the Roman of another, that the sword would overcome all philosophies, and that the legion's gleaming front was the strongest argument. Into this hard world came the founder of Christianity, unheralded, unfriended. What he did was to urge the forgiveness of sins, the high virtues of tolerance, to show the vision of a morality and kindness above the scope of any law to enforce. He held up for those who heard him an ideal such as no one before him had conceived. The revolution he preached was spiritual, not physical. For this he suffered the pangs of an ignominious and cruel death, and was afterward buried by a few of his followers. No one in Rome knew that he died, or that he had ever lived.

The books that have been written about him and his teachings fill vast libraries. The simple record of his brief life and what he said is short and soon read. It has proved itself to be not easily forgotten. From it has come all of our happier, more beautiful civilization of to-day, all our notions of kindliness, all our finest and most unselfish aspirations. From birth all through life there is no day that is not made better for us by the fruit of that seed. The Roman eagles have fallen, the Roman trumpets are silent, the Roman wall crumbles to decay. All that was great on that first Christmas Day is now forgotten, and of no account. And what was least considered then is now the highest. Irrespective of all religions, do we not, most of us, to-day, join the "wise men," and with some spirit offering, go once more to Bethlehem? We have seen the star in the East. We know from what small beginnings the greatest thing of all has grown—and surely with an impulse of gratitude we remember, once again, our greatest hero. Two years ago to-day we talked about Christmas and its meaning. Perhaps you remember it, and perhaps you will forgive this second little Christmas sermon.

Thermozine

A NEW DISCOVERY WITH ALMOST MIRACULOUS POWERS FOR THE HEALING OF INFLAMED AND SUPPURATING SORES OF THE SKIN.

Severe Burns, Boils, Carbuncles, Ringworm, Eczemas, yield almost instantly to this wonderful application.

Produces healing in one-half the time of other remedies.

Thermozine can be painted on the skin at a temperature of 200 degrees without injuring the skin.

This high degree of heat makes this application in a class by itself in treating cases where heat applications are required.

It is the only application that can be painted on the skin above 140 degrees, at which point germ life dies.

Thermozine is a perfect dressing for an open wound because it destroys infection and makes an airtight covering that prevents the wound from injury while it stimulates the healing process.

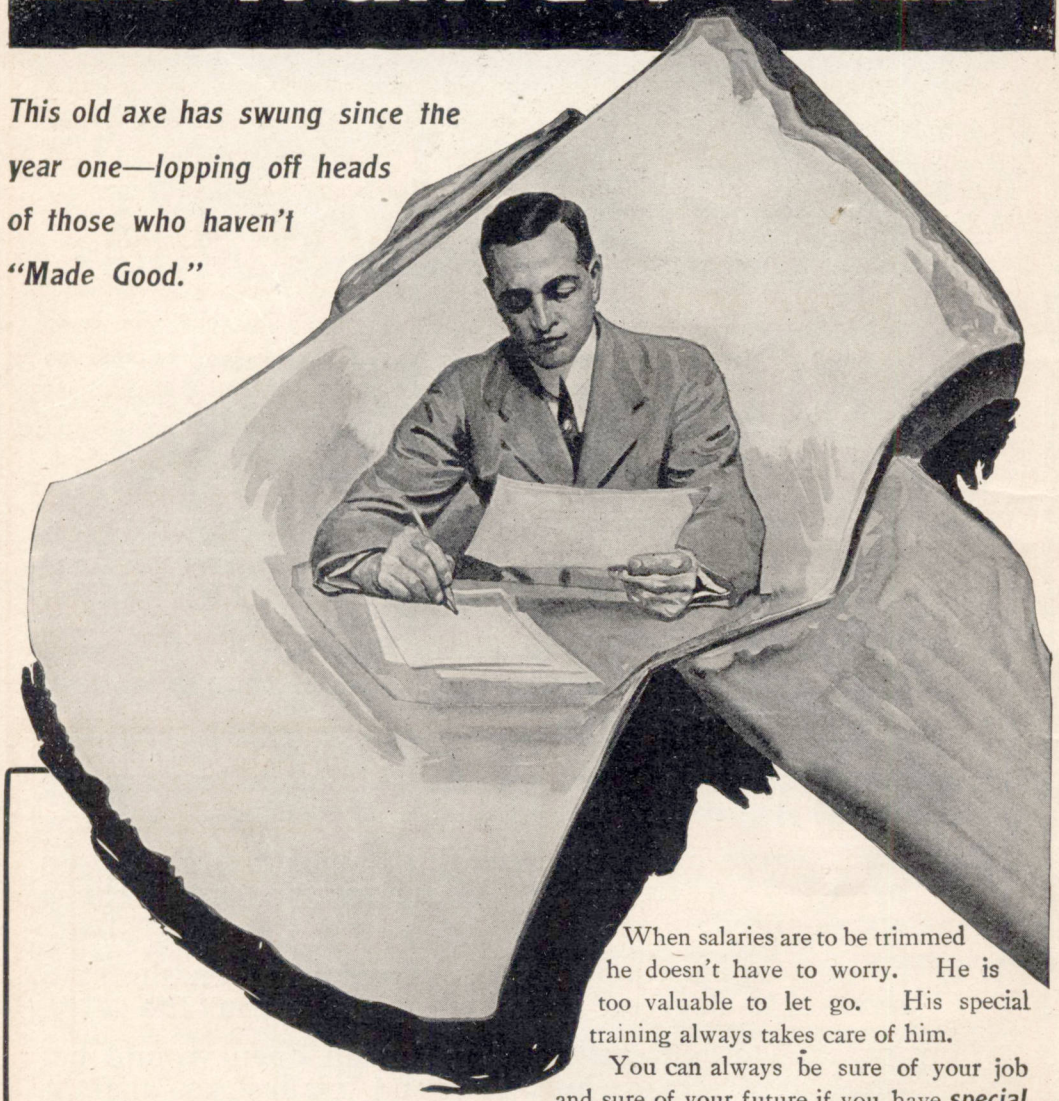
A new hope for those suffering from chronic sores.

$1.00 FOR QUARTER-POUND CAN, WITH ACCESSORIES

PASTEUR CHEMICAL COMPANY
98 Beekman Street, New York City

The Trained Man

This old axe has swung since the year one—lopping off heads of those who haven't "Made Good."



The Man who holds his job when others "get the axe" is the man who can use his head as well as his hands. When promotions are to be made, he is the first on the list. When salaries are to be trimmed he doesn't have to worry. He is too valuable to let go. His special training always takes care of him.

You can always be sure of your job and sure of your future if you have ***special training*** such as the International Correspondence Schools can impart to you in your ***spare time.*** Perhaps you want to advance still further in your present position. Possibly you have a liking for some other line of work. One thing ***is*** sure—

Dodges the Axe

you want to ***earn more***—don't you? Then mark and mail the attached coupon and learn how the I. C. S. can help you, regardless of your age, address, occupation, limited schooling, small salary, lack of spare time, or any other seeming obstacle.

RAISES YOUR SALARY

For twenty-one years the business of the I. C. S. has been to raise salaries of poorly-paid but ambitious men. That the I. C. S. ***does*** raise salaries is shown by the 400 or more ***VOLUNTARY*** letters received every month telling of salaries raised and positions bettered ***as the direct result of I. C. S. help.***

When you consider that it costs you nothing to mark the coupon to learn ***how*** the I. C. S. can help you, and that doing so places you under no obligation, is there any reason why you shouldn't mark it ***NOW?*** If your doubt is stronger than your ambition you will imagine a hundred-and-one objections. The I. C. S. has already overcome each and every one of these same objections for thousands of men who have since had their salaries raised and their positions bettered through I. C. S. training imparted ***at home and in spare time.***

BETTERS YOUR POSITION

You don't have to leave home, stop work, or lock yourself in your room every night. An I. C. S. training imposes no financial hardship, for the I. C. S. arranges its easy terms to suit ***you.*** So long as you can ***read and write*** that is all the schooling you need. Marking the coupon costs nothing and involves no obligation. Then since it is all so easy, and the I. C. S. way is so perfectly adapted to meet ***your*** particular needs, mark and mail the attached coupon ***NOW.***

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Box 821 SCRANTON, PA.
Explain, without further obligation on my part, how I can qualify for the position before which I mark X.

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Structural Engineer	Salesman
Concrete Construction	Commercial Illustrating
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Mechanical Draftsman	Commercial Law
Refrigeration Engineer	Teacher
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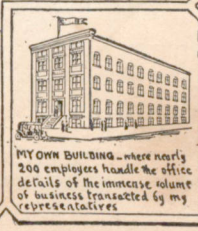

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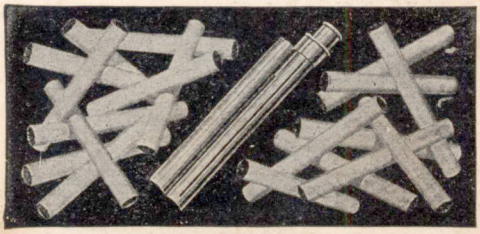

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