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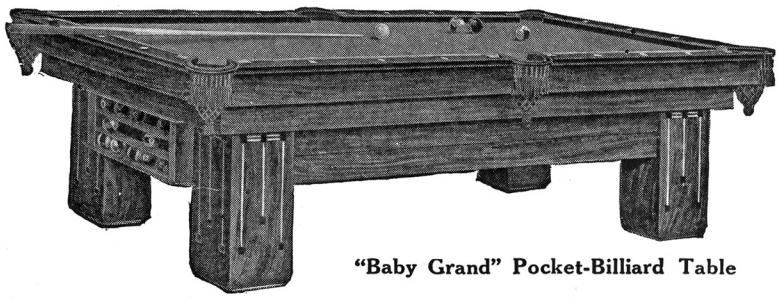

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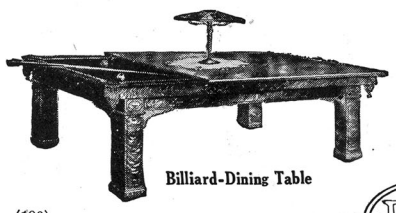

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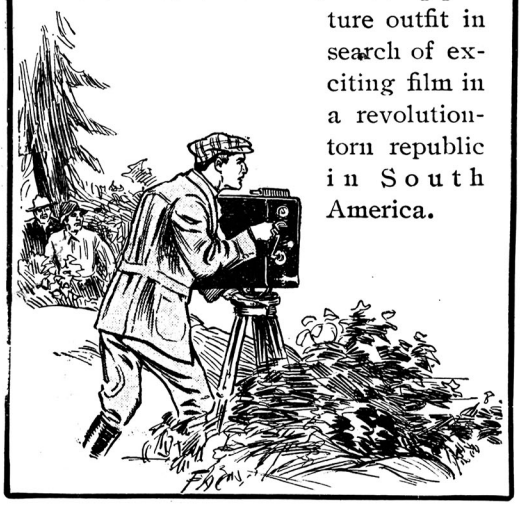

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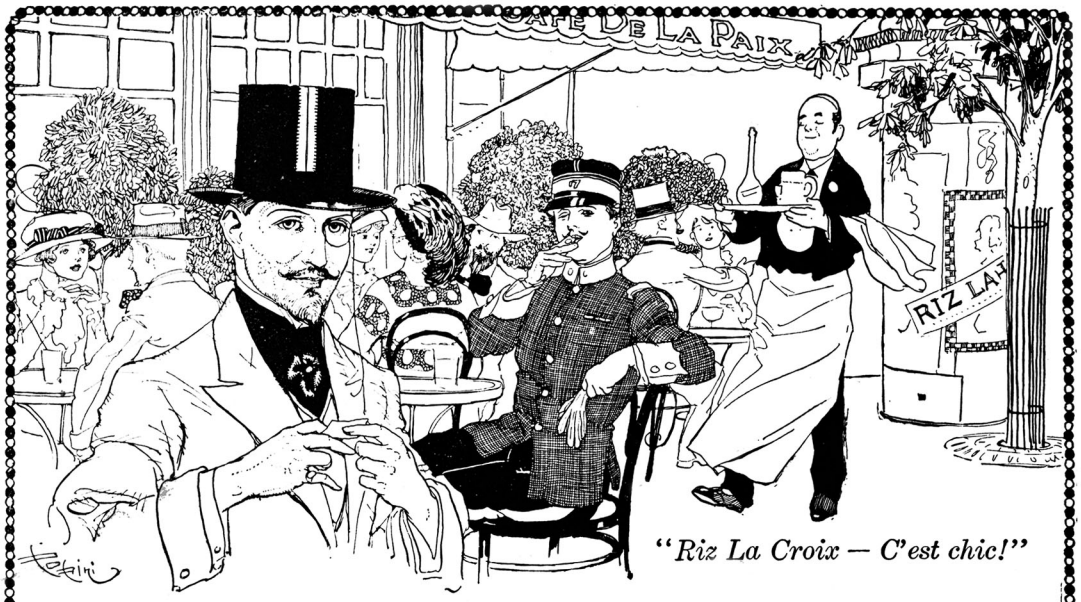

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TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

CONTENTS

FEBRUARY 15, 1914

COVER DESIGN. . . . **Griswold Tyng**

AMBASSADORS TO ALBANIA. A Complete Novel, . **Francis Whitlock** . . **1**
Crane, one of Jubez Cooper's "Lost Legioners," is dispatched to the Balkans in quest of a dozen pink lizards that sing!

THE MATING IMPULSE. A Short Story, . . **Edwin Balmer** . . **57**
How an American girl became the most militant of militant suffragists, and why.

THE FALL OF THE PLAY. A Short Story, . . **Peter B. Kyne** . . . **74**
Being a big surprise for the Butterfly Kid and Faro Dan.

PICKED FOR SERVICE. A Short Story, . . **Robert J. Pearsall** . **87**
The transformation of a coward into a brave man.

PENNDRAGON SMITH'S CREATION. A Short Story, . **Theodore Goodridge Roberts** **96**
Demonstrating that a novelist may become a true prophet, and may be astonished at his own powers.

CAUGHT IN THE NET. Editorials, ... **The Editor** . . . **103**

WHEN THE RED HILLS THREATEN. A Serial Story, . **Vingie E. Roe** . . . **107**
After fighting death together, Lois le Moyne and Angus McConnell come to know the full meaning of life.

CEPHAS THE PALADIN. A Short Story, . . **Albert Payson Terhune** . **134**
It is difficult to make a hero out of a pig, but here it is.

THE MAID OF PARANITO MINE. A Short Story, . **W. L. George** . . . **141**
Fresh from the school of mines, Jack Marston goes upon his first prospect to assay a fabulously rich mine in wildest Mexico.

AULD CHARLIE DARWIN'S LAW. A Short Story, . **Robert Welles Ritchie** . **149**
A tale of cats in the middle of the Pacific, as told by an old Scotch engineer.

THE FIGHT ON STANDING STONE. A Serial Story, . **Francis Lynde** . . . **156**
Wall Street maneuvers on the railroad job in the mountains.

BOWMAN'S CODE. A Short Story, ... **Mayn Clew Garnett** . **180**
A strange old fisherman of the Bahama Cays shows his rare quality.

IN THE TULE TANGLE. A Two-part Story, . . **Herbert Coolidge** . . **188**
Two cowmen go hunting for wild cattle on the desert side of the San Jacinto Mountains and find themselves hunting men.

MEMORIES OF TEXAS. Verse, ... **George Steunenberg** . **218**

BABES IN THE WOOD. . . . . . **George Sterling** . . **219**
A Story of the Dawn of Humanity.
II—The Pool of Pitch.

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XXXI. FEBRUARY 15, 1914. No. 3.

Ambassadors to Albania

By Francis Whitlock

Author of "Stokeyne of the Lost Legion," "The Time That Was," Etc.

We have had some astonishing stories of the Lost Legion in the POPULAR, but none more astonishing than this, in which one of the adventurers in Mr. Jabez Cooper's famous "Legion" is dispatched to the Balkans *in quest of a dozen pink lizards that sing!* Dip into this unique novel and you will find that it will hold your interest.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

A JOB FOR THE LOST LEGION.

SIR WALTER SCOTT discovered in romance a gold mine which enabled him to pay off the mortgages on his ancestral estates, and to acquire a comfortable competence as a protection against an old age of penury, but in the profitable working of that auriferous deposit the canny Scotchman had nothing on Jabez Cooper, esquire. The introduction of steam, the improvement in firearms, the multiplicity of modern inventions which aid in conserving energy, annihilating space, and eliminating distance, are commonly credited with having contributed to the euthanasia of Romance, with the upper-case R; but the semi-annual trial balance which Mr. Cooper was studying afforded convincing documentary evidence that it is still a very lively corpse.

In fact, Mr. Cooper had been sufficiently shrewd to perceive in it profitable possibilities when others considered it so moribund as to be valueless for future exploitation. Applying modern methods of business, he had cornered the market and acquired such a practical monopoly in the product that he was becoming a trifle apprehensive of attack by militant muckrakers and troublesome trust busters. All of the factors which are conventionally accused of being accessories before the fact in accelerating the alleged decease of Romance had been skillfully employed by Mr. Cooper to revivify it, and turn it into a paying proposition when it was apparently tottering toward the tomb.

Watchful agents in far corners of the world made use of the cable and wireless to appraise him of tempting opportunities in the local adventure market; ocean greyhounds and swift express trains often enabled his emissaries to

take advantage of that psychological moment which, grasped opportunely, leads to success, and for which they would have been too late, had they depended upon the caprices of the winds, and the employment of post horses for transportation. Machine guns, magazine rifles, and automatic pistols had more than once played an important part in the development of his plots to the desired happy ending which enabled him to make entries on the right side of the profit-and-loss account, and, not to be caught napping and crushed by the wheels of modern progress, the capitalist was even now financing a private school of aviation in which his employees were privileged to flirt with death at his expense and their own risk as a recreation when they were not doing it professionally for their mutual profit.

Now, in spite of all the labor-saving machinery which has ever been invented, and the great combinations which have restrained trade and thrown thousands out of employment by destroying competition, the human element still plays a tremendous part in all production. To-day, at Grand Rapids, a log which was yesterday a monarch of the forest primeval, floats up to one end of a factory; to-morrow it emerges at the other end as a complete dining-room suite in golden-oak finish, and next week the installment-house philanthropists will deliver it to the Newlyweds' flat. An innocent and unsuspecting shoat strolls up the chute in Chicago, and almost before his death squeal has ceased to echo through the stockyards, one portion of him is sold in infinitesimally thin slices by a delicatessen dealer in New York, another is being devoured by a whaling crew in the Arctic Ocean, and the remainder is being issued as rations to Uncle Sam's khaki-clad boys under the equator.

The great business combinations and wonderful mechanical inventions which make such things possible have overcome tremendous obstacles. They have strangled competition, eliminated waste, simplified selling methods, and systematized transportation; but, while they have minimized the necessity for the employment of crude labor, no machine or system devised by man can ever be entirely independent of human direction.

For crude labor in his enterprises, Mr. Cooper had no place; no man who was not an expert in his line was on his pay roll, and the services of specialists come high. It was a peculiar organization for the twentieth century. At the minimum rate any surety company in the business would have given bond for the personal honesty and integrity of its members; but the most reckless wildcat life or accident-insurance company would have refused to write policies on them at threefold "extra-hazardous" rates. A liberal-minded actuary would have figured the life expectancy of any one of them at not more than six months from any given date, and yet they were as merry and light-hearted as men who do not habitually carry their lives in their hands by day, and sleep beneath a Damocletian sword at night. Indifference to danger is quickly learned by custom and familiarity. The raw rookie who falls flat at the first volley, and requires the persuasive touch of a file closer's boot to remind him that "Charge!" means to go forward, will, after a week of campaigning, voluntarily risk his skin in foraging for a chicken to supplement his rations.

Mr. Cooper paid liberally—for success. The generous rewards were always figured on a contingent basis; but it was not mere money which held his peculiar organization together. Just as surely as a prospective purchaser of steel rails applied to the Steel Trust for quotations, or a would-be marketer of securities carried his wares to Wall Street, did those with propositions at which conservative capital would not even glance coyly submit them to the critical consideration of Jabez Cooper. And, no matter how great the physical risks involved in those schemes, he was never deterred from accepting them if success promised pecuniary reward at all commensurate with the perils. Perhaps that indifference to the element of

danger was bred by the fact that Mr. Cooper never met it personally, and, while he never underestimated it in figuring the price which he demanded for coöperation, he scrupulously ignored it in arranging terms with his employees.

And, so great is the diversity in human nature, no one of those employees ever gave it a second thought when accepting his commissions; for in the expeditions which those commissions implied they saw only the possibilities for indulging at another's expense in such pleasures as their spirits craved; for they were of the temperament which revels in adventure as the slave of opium finds his heart's desire in the product of the poppy. Followers of the out trails, brothers of the ancient order of the wandering foot, advance agents of civilization, feeders of the flame of the lamp of adventure; they were content to live for the day with little thought of provision for the future, provided only that the day was a full one—and filled with such things as the ordinary citizen would walk several blocks out of his way to avoid meeting.

There was a smile of gratification on Mr. Cooper's face when he finished the examination of the trial balance. He ran over rapidly in his mind the available human material on hand, as he turned to the summary of the propositions which were tabulated on his waiting list. Several of them—such as the proposed capture of a band of Borneo head-hunters for exhibition on the Midway of the Panama Exposition, and the recovery of the long-buried art treasures of Herculaneum by driving a tunnel from a convenient wine cellar in Torre del Greco without the formality of obtaining the consent of the Italian government—were alluring; for they promised large financial rewards. But Syllable Simpkins, the only one of his retainers whom he would have trusted to bag the Borneans, was occupied in tracing an Austrian archduke who had eloped to the seclusion of the upper Amazon for a morganatic honeymoon with a ballet dancer; and Doleful Dick Redgreave. his trusted expert in subterranean investigations, had disappeared into the middle of darkest Mexico in the company of a plausible half-breed, who had convinced Mr. Cooper that he had located the long-lost treasure of the Aztecs. There were, of course, several of the trouble hunters of the Lost Legion on waiting orders; but among them was no one fitted for either of those particular tasks, and he was obliged to check them off for future consideration.

He was rather pleased than otherwise, therefore, when his first visitors of the day proved to be two ladies: Mrs. A. Tennyson Buckintender and her charming daughter, Opal Violette. He anticipated nothing more serious than a predatory raid in behalf of the Home for Hysterical Suffragettes, or a touch for a contribution to aid in the Propogation of Turkey Trotting and Tangoing in Heathen Countries, and in his softer moods the capitalist was philanthropical. He was accordingly very much surprised when Mrs. A. Tennyson Buckintender, after a most formal greeting, demanded abruptly if he could find some one willing to undertake a delicate and, perhaps, hazardous mission to Scutari in her behalf.

"Scutari, my dear madam, is rather a bone of contention at the present moment, and casual visitors are very apt to be unpleasantly mangled by the teeth of the contenders," he answered guardedly.

He had been quite prepared to respond generously to a touch for the worthy causes which the well-known social leader patronized; but he never mixed philanthropy and business, and when he found it was the latter which was responsible for the visit, he lost his geniality, and became frigidly alert. As an abstract theory, Mr. Cooper was willing to admit that it might be more blessed to give than to receive, and when he made donations he was entirely satisfied to trust in Providence for such benefactions as might accrue in return; but when he was about to receive he relied solely upon Jabez Cooper to see that he got all that was coming to him.

"I understand that perfectly, and that is why I have applied to you," admitted Mrs. Buckintender. "I am prepared to

pay a reward which will be quite commensurate with the risk involved; but I positively must have at least a dozen of those singing pink lizards!"

Now, in his long years of service as patron of the Lost Legion, the capitalist had listened to so many weird stories that it was difficult to shake his placid equanimity; but Mrs. Buckintender had succeeded in imparting a visible tremor to it. On several occasions, when a shortage in the lamb crop had made things quiet in Wall Street, his waggish friends among the brokers had attempted to put something over in the way of a joke. Once he had been prepared to finance an expedition to capture a sky-blue elephant with a crimson trunk, which one of their messengers described with convincing vividness, and it was only when his visitor emitted a howl, and tried to knock a plug hat with a red flannel band around it off a pea-green monkey which, he asserted, was perched on the capitalist's desk, that he discovered the alcoholic paternity of the pachyderm and broke off negotiations. Accordingly, he looked with quick suspicion at Mrs. Buckintender; for A. Tennyson, although he was known only vaguely as "Mrs. Buckintender's husband" in the social coterie which she graced at Newport and the other sacred precincts of the Four Hundred, was a striking figure in the financial district below the police dead line of the metropolis. She was so entirely serious that he would have been completely reassured, but for a twinkle in the large blue eyes, and a suspicious twitching about the corners of the pretty mouth of Opal Violette.

"Madam, I very rarely do business with a woman, and I never make exceptions to my strict business rules," he answered, with a curtness which was almost brusque. "By reward I understand that you imply future payment, and I never undertake anything without a preliminary retaining fee sufficiently large to cover contingent expenses."

Greatly to Mr. Cooper's surprise, his visitor drew a morocco-bound check book from her jeweled mesh bag, and, after requesting the Astorbocker Trust Company to pay to the order of Jabez Cooper, she skipped the intervening line, signed "Marie Antoinette Buckintender" beneath it, and laid the result on the desk.

"You may fill in the blank space, if you think that you can carry this thing through for me," she said carelessly.

Mr. Cooper's little finger crooked, and his face beamed like the sun coming from behind clouds. Before A. Tennyson struck a ten-thousand barrel gusher on the old farm, when he was drilling for water, she had been merely Mary Ann; but the politer version—as a result of that gusher and several subsequent lucky investments—represented real money.

"That will be quite satisfactory," he answered genially. "And now, madam, I am quite ready to enter into details. I can assure you that anything you tell me will be treated as strictly confidential."

"I assumed as much; but even if you were indiscreet, the gossip of the vulgar business world would hardly penetrate to my particular social sphere," she said superiorily. "I doubt if you are aware of it, Mr. Cooper; but the Duke of Deuceace is coming over to America next summer with the English polo team, and, of course, he will be my guest while in this country. I may say that when we rented Cold Deck House, the duke's London residence, for the season last year, his grace's attentions to my daughter were extremely marked."

"But wasn't that included in the rent, mamma?" asked Opal Violette demurely. "Goodness knows that we paid enough for the old barn!"

"Nonsense, my dear; the carved escutcheon over the state entrance more than compensated for the lack of baths, and the smoking fireplaces, which are so charmingly characteristic of that dear old English comfort of which Americans know so little," corrected her mother severely. "But, to continue, Mr. Cooper: the duke is one of the least undesirable matrimonial possibilities in the English peerage. Compara-

tively few of his ancestors were idiotic or insane, and not more than six of his near relatives are at the present time confined in inebriate asylums. The debts which he has contracted would seem trivial to a mere marquis, and he is really not more than half as much of a fool as he looks. So you can see that it is extremely important that the amusement which I provide for him while he is my guest shall impress him more than any which may be devised by my social rivals with marriageable daughters. I know that Genevieve Pilemup is having a half dozen chimpanzees taught the bunny hug, the banana peel, and other society dances, so that they may mingle with the guests and perform at the private cabaret at the dinner which she expects to give in his honor, and that that horrid, pushing Mrs. Booster-Root is having her pug-nosed daughter, Christobel Anemone, treated by Professor Bunion so that she can appear as a barefoot Apache dancer; so I simply *must* have those singing pink lizards. I understand that they sing in syncopated time, and with jeweled collars they will make absolutely unique souvenirs at the very exclusive dinner with which I shall inaugurate his grace's visit—and Gene Pilemup and Mrs. Booster-Root will be positively green with envy."

"But, mamma, unless the duke has forgotten the formula of that embalming fluid which he concocts from Irish whisky, Maraschino, lime juice, Worcestershire sauce, anisette, absinth, and Holland gin, and labels an 'America Cocktail,' he will not believe that they are real lizards!" objected Opal Violette. "You remember what a time we had ridding the gardens of Cold Deck House of the mongooses he had imported to kill the English cobras which he discovered there the week following his discovery of the cocktail?"

"Certainly, my dear; that is why I insist upon the *singing* lizards which are to be found only in Scutari," assented Mrs. Buckintender calmly. "Mere pink lizards he might regard as the unreal figments of the imagination commonly conjured up by the British nobility as a result of their aristocratic indulgence in strong drink; but pink lizards singing ragtime will be so distinctively American that he will be convinced."

"Pardon me, ladies; but my time is limited, and, as you have reminded me, I am not concerned with the career of the reptiles after they are admitted to the charmed and exclusive circle which you adorn," said Mr. Cooper, interrupting further discussion. "Madam, if you will kindly tell me why you believe such creatures exist, and where you think they can be found, I shall immediately set about my part of the business; which is to produce one dozen of the vocalizing reptiles, to be delivered serviceably sound at your residence."

Mrs. Buckintender cleared her throat, and Opal Violette demurely lowered her eyes.

"I have the information through Bobby Winslow—you may know his father, O. Kensington Winslow," she said interrogatively.

"Know old Obadiah—why, certainly," answered Mr. Cooper, chuckling. "He held up the Carpet Sweeper Trust until they gave him ten millions for his old rattletrap invention and the shack where he made——"

"Exactly, and having sold out, he had no tiresome business for his son to continue," interrupted Mrs. Buckintender. "But, as he had always been a liberal contributor to campaign funds, he succeeded in having him enter the diplomatic service as sixth secretary of embassy to the Court of St. James. There is no reason why I should conceal the fact that he became enamored of my daughter"—Opal Violette blushed very prettily—"but her marriage to a sixth secretary was out of the question; it would not have been described as 'a matrimonial alliance' in the society papers. However, when the rumors of the Balkan war became rife, Bobby heard that Albania was to be made a separate and independent state, and his father had sufficient influence at Washington to obtain the promise that Bobby would be made the first American ambassador if he succeeded in mastering the language of the coun-

try. It looked rather hopeless, as Bobby invariably spelled cat with a 'k' when writing his own; but he started at once for Scutari, and arrived there just in time to send back one most enthusiastic letter to Opal before the Montenegrins invested the city and cut off further communications. In that letter he described the beautiful house which he had engaged for the future embassy; the residence of a former Turkish governor. I was not particularly impressed by that; for I have occupied several European palaces; but when he dilated on the cunning pink lizards which disported themselves on the walls of the old harem garden, and warbled love ditties in ragtime, as they basked in the warm Albanian sunshine, I immediately grasped the possibilities of which I spoke to you. Kindly spare no expense in obtaining them for me, Mr. Cooper. I believe that is all."

A few minutes later, as Mr. Cooper held his pen irresolutely poised above the blank check, Miss Opal Violette timidly reëntered the office alone on the ostensible search for a forgotten handkerchief.

"What is it, my dear?" asked Mr. Cooper encouragingly, as she looked at him furtively from the corners of her big blue eyes.

"I just don't care if he does spell cat with a 'k'; he's a nice, clean American, and I like him better than any moth-eaten old duke!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Cooper, who are you going to send to get those nasty lizards?"

"I haven't definitely decided," replied the capitalist evasively. "Some husky and reliable young fellow upon whom I can absolutely depend, and if you would like to intrust a billet-doux to him I believe that I can guarantee its safe delivery."

Opal Violette blushed.

"I was just going to say that I have already sent a messenger of my own with a little note," she admitted. "I thought that, perhaps, they might meet and travel together."

"Meet where?" asked Mr. Cooper, eying her sharply with his keen eyes.

"Why, I know very little of such things; but I suppose at Brindisi," she answered innocently. "My man sailed yesterday; but I am to communicate with him by cable at the Hotel Torino there if I think of anything further which I wish to say before he sails for Albania."

"What's his name?"

Miss Opal Violette hesitated a moment.

"Wh-why, it's Humperdunk H. Hennipeker, and I think the middle initial stands for Himpiquince," she answered, as she suddenly discovered the lost handkerchief tucked safely away in her sleeve.

Mr. Cooper grunted, and there was no irresolution in his touch as he seized his pen and attacked the check after her departure. He chuckled as he looked at the final result.

"I think there are just about as many Humperdunk Himpiquince Hennipekers in this world as there are pink lizards singing ragtime in the sunshine of Albania—just about," he said grimly. "But if A. Tennyson B. is trying to put another sky-blue elephant with a crimson-trunk proposition over on me, I reckon the crimp that this little check will put in his bank roll will teach him not to monkey with my kind of a buzz saw!"

CHAPTER II.

TRAVELING COMPANIONS.

Brindisi, as a result of the Italian campaign in Tripoli, and the closely following Balkan war, has awakened to something of its ancient activity and importance. For a half century its name has loomed largely on railway folders and steamship schedules; for it is the last European port of call for the mail boats to the Fart East via the Suez; but the millions of travelers who landed or embarked there saw no more of the ancient city than they could glimpse in a hasty passage between the docks and the railway station. With the outbreak of the Tripolitan war, however, it became a great military base; first a bivouac of the Italian troops waiting their turn to embark on the transports

for Africa, and the motley collection of camp followers, which always attaches itself to an army.

Then, as success followed the Italian arms, the returning transports were laden with prisoners of war; men of all the picturesque tribes and varied races from which the Turkish army is recruited; Bedouins and Tuaregs from the Libyan Desert, blackamoors from Ethiopia, and representatives of all the Moslem peoples who had flocked to the green banner of the prophet when the Sheik ul Islam had preached the jihad against the Christian invaders of Turkey's last remaining African colony. Tarbooshes and turbans were as common on the broad, sunny streets as the cock's plumes of the sturdy little Bersagliere, and the tricolored cockades of the tall Carabinieri, and the erstwhile drowsy cafés became busy centers of rude gayety and ceaseless activity. It was a babel of tongues, the temporary meeting place of East and West, the market to which adventurers brought strange wares, and, incidentally, a perfect hotbed of espionage; for all of Europe watched jealously and apprehensively the result of the awakening in modern Italy of the old Roman thirst for foreign conquest.

And then, just when the conquest of Tripoli became an accomplished fact, and Brindisi prepared to resume its rudely interrupted sleep, Nicholas, of Montenegro—that tiny kingdom which nestles in the Black Mountains just across the narrow Adriatic, attacked the Sick Man of the East, and the town became the base of operations of another army; ununiformed, undisciplined, and unorganized; a horde of those mysterious and curious adventurers who come to the surface only in troubled waters. Soldiers of fortune with little but their lives to sell, and offering them at bargain prices; spies with stolen military secrets to dispose of or seeking furtively to add to their stock in trade; unacknowledged agents of the great manufacturers of war material; newspaper correspondents, contrabandists, and those strange types of both sexes who profit by the sudden necessities of war preparations as the carrion crows fatten upon its gruesome results.

And of all the curious contrasts presented in that human scrap heap, none was stranger than that between the two individuals who faced each other across a little marble-topped table in the café of the Hotel Torino some three weeks after the visit of Mrs. A. Tennyson Buckintender to the office of Jabez Cooper. Both were Americans; but with their common nationality all similarity ceased. Charley Crane, the Legioner to whom Mr. Cooper had intrusted the delicate mission of capturing the reptilian songsters, was very evidently a professional adventurer and trouble hunter, while H. H. Hennipeker, hired by the generous pin-money allowance of Miss Opal Violette to carry her particular message to Garcia, was just as obviously an amateur and a novice.

Crane was athletic of figure, keen of eye, and shrewd of face. Absolute self-confidence was stamped on every line of his tanned and weather-beaten face, determination in the aggressive set of his shoulders; and an unflinching courage shone from the sharp, grayish-blue eyes. Unlike any other man in the café in dress or appearance, he still seemed to fit perfectly into the environment; so perfectly that in that strange company he was not in the least conspicuous.

Hennipeker, on the other hand, was as conspicuous in that assemblage of desperation, degeneracy, and deceit as Crane would have been at a suffragette pink tea. Slightly built, boyish of face, and dressed with a care which approached foppishness, he was the center of attraction for all of the feminine eyes in the café, and, perhaps because of that, the unconscious recipient of many masculine stares which were distinctly malevolent.

Crane, accustomed by long practice to reading signs which a less observant person would have missed, grinned significantly after a careless glance at the occupants of the adjoining tables.

"Young man, I reckon I could make a pretty good guess as to the way you

have been killing time while waiting for me here, and I expect it's fortunate that I didn't waste any time in coming," he said. "That black-eyed señorita at the corner table isn't doing a thing but——"

"All in the line of business, my dear fellow, I can assure you!" protested Hennipeker, laughing as he rolled a cigarette. "She's a perfect gold mine of geographical and other information. She knows the whole Balkan peninsula better than I know my pocket, and last night at supper she gave me no end of useful tips about Scutari. She seems to be personally acquainted with every one in the town, and to know all the high officers of the Montenegrin army which is investing it."

"And that Venetian blonde across the room; has she also been contributing to your knowledge of topography—and other things?" asked Crane.

Hennipeker shrugged his shoulders as he lighted his cigarette.

"The fair Carmela!" he answered, glancing toward her through the blue cloud which came from his lips. "No, she is not what you would call a peripatetic Baedeker. She lunched with me yesterday, and I discovered that her beauty is only exceeded by her capacity to consume vintage champagne. We had that table at the end of the pergola, and——"

"Did you do your share of the drinking?" demanded the Legioner sharply.

Hennipeker laughed and shook his head.

"I should have counted four rows of columns in the pergola before the antipasta was finished if I had," he said. "A friendly geranium tree at my elbow received most of my share while Carmela was gazing soulfully out over the harbor. She is a very curious young woman."

"Yes; very curious," assented Crane dryly. "When I was in Lisbon, engaged in digging up the crown jewels which Manuel buried just before his flight, her curiosity led her to worm the secrets of the contemplated counter revolution from the Conde da Fayal, the royalist leader. That was at a supper where vintage champagne flowed like water. She was known as Carmencita then—and at daybreak the following morning the conde and a half dozen of his fellow conspirators were stood up against a convenient convent wall and shot by the republican troops. The black-eyed one——"

"Mademoiselle Delphine, the celebrated Parisian dancer, now appearing nightly at the Salone Margherita, in Brindisi," suggested Hennipeker.

"Was known as Lady Douglas, an eccentric Englishwoman of large wealth, who entertained lavishly in Tokyo when I was out there negotiating with the Japanese government for the secret delivery of submarines just before the attack on the Russian fleet at Port Arthur," continued the Legioner, in a low tone. "She employed the most beautiful geisha girls in the capital to amuse her guests, among whom were many of the staff officers of the Japanese army and navy, and it was not even suspected that she understood their language perfectly until it was discovered that the gossip of the officers with the geishas was always quickly reported to St. Petersburg. She escaped to the French flagship at Yokohama between daylight and dark. Neither of those charming ladies is in Brindisi for her health, and I trust that you were not bamboozled into verbal indiscretions."

Hennipeker laughed.

"My dear fellow, I know too much of the charming sex to be easily taken in," he protested. "Of course, I know nothing of your mission to Scutari; Miss Buckintender's cable simply informed me that you were going there, and suggested that I wait and join forces with you. I think that I had the ladies pretty well sized up, and I thought it might be well to invent an excuse for your appearance on the scene. as well as for my own presence. I told them in the strictest confidence that I was going to Albania on the off chance that in the confusion I might get an opportunity to peek into a harem garden —and I made such hot-tamale love to both of them that I reckon they think I'm just that kind of a Don Juan. I let my imagination out to the limit when

I told them about the friend I was waiting for; an enthusiastic naturalist, who collected all sorts of things all over the world, and who was especially anxious to locate some pink singing lizards. I guess that will hold them both for a while!"

Crane looked at him fixedly as he rolled and lighted a fresh cigarette. Without the slightest trace of embarrassment, Hennipeker met the stare with a smile of inquiry.

"I think that was doing pretty well for an amateur, don't you?" he asked. "Of course, I appreciate, from the hints you have let fall about your past, that you are an old hand at this sort of a game. The harem-garden stunt and the pink-lizard business sounded pretty good to me."

"Yes—for an amateur," admitted Crane critically. "It might have been more convincing if you had mentioned that the lizards sang ragtime."

Hennipeker laughed.

"Come to think of it—that's just exactly what I did," he answered. "I thought that it would lend verisimilitude by adding a touch of local color. I'm sorry that I didn't make the lizards red, white, and blue, instead of pink; that would have clinched it."

As he spoke, he reached for his glass of vermuth on the table; but his wrist was suddenly caught in a grasp of steel, and he found himself looking into a pair of grayish-blue eyes with a dangerous glint in their depths.

"My young friend, Mr. Jabez Cooper may have sent me over here on a fool's errand; but that's in the line of business, and he'll make good if I do my part of the work," said Crane grimly. "But if any little shrimp about your size and complexion tries to string me, you can take it from me that I'll wring his neck. Now, what about this pink-lizard stuff?"

Hennipeker looked steadily into the threatening eyes without wavering, and quietly pressed the lighted end of his cigarette against the back of the hand which imprisoned his wrist. With a muttered oath Crane jerked his hand away, and raised it to his lips.

Hennipeker smiled and took a sip of the vermuth before speaking.

"That's better!" he said approvingly. "See here, Mr. Crane; on the business of Miss Opal Violette Buckintender I started for Scutari, and I intend to go there. At her suggestion I have waited here on the chance that we might be traveling companions. If I unintentionally give you just cause of offense, you will find me entirely willing to apologize; I'm man enough for that—and, in spite of my shrimplike size and my complexion, I'm too much of a man to submit to having my neck wrung without as strenuous a protest as I am able to put up, and you can take it from me that any man who lays a hand on me is apt to get as good as he sends; or a little better. Now I don't know, and I don't care what you are going to Scutari for; but if we are going there together, it will make things easier if you understand that I won't stand for any bullying. If you're peeved about my having invented the pink lizards to amuse those ladies, I'll take it all back, and I'll present you to them so that you can tell them that I was lying to them."

"I never bother with women if I can avoid it," answered the Legioner. There was a suggestion of surliness in his tone; but a new-born respect in his eyes as he looked at his companion.

Hennipeker smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"You are a wise man; but you miss a lot of fun," he said. "I hardly believe that they need your assurance that I was lying, however. I purposely made the story grotesque. They think I am lying about the harem garden and the pink lizards, and they will reach the same conclusion about my announcement of Scutari as our destination. I didn't worry particularly about the ladies; but I wasn't the least bit stuck on their masculine steadies. That beetle-browed ruffian with Mademoiselle Delphine looks as if he would murder you for a chocolate drop, and the gentleman who is assuaging the thirst of the fair Carmela with champagne cocktails never calloused his hands with

honest toil, or his shifty eyes and the cut of his nostrils do him injustice."

A little of admiration and a great deal of bewilderment mingled with the new-born respect in the eyes which looked at the boyish face so curiously.

"Yes, as you said a little while ago, I am an old hand at this sort of a game," said the Legioner slowly and thoughtfully. "Reckoned in dollars and cents, it isn't a profitable one; but a man lives while he lives, and at the end of it usually has a swiftly merciful death. As luck would have it, I have happened to be around when the things which make history have come off. I have seen a dictator drive from the opera to his palace at midnight, his carriage surrounded by a bodyguard of dragoons, who had difficulty in clearing a way through the enthusiastic populace which gathered to cheer him, and awakened in the morning to see his corpse swinging from a lamp-post in front of the palace gate, with the meanest beggar spitting at it as he passed. I saw the King and Crown Prince of Portugal shot like rabid dogs in the streets of Lisbon; I saw Abdul-Hamid dragged from his palace to captivity, and Manuel fly before the victorious republicans.

"Business of one sort and another has sent me to the far corners of the world, where things were happening, and looking about this café, there is hardly a face which I cannot place; for most of them have been familiar to me as I watched the development of one or another conspiracy. Your 'beetle-browed ruffian' is a Russian; an agent of the Third Section, who has sent scores of men and women to the gallows, and hundreds to the Siberian mines by his treachery. The table companion of the Venetian blonde tried to slip a knife into me when I was making my get-away with the Portuguese crown jewels under my arm. That red-bearded chap near the door is one of the most skillful agents of the German secret service; the dapper little chap drinking with him was an officer in the French artillery corps, and escaped from Devil's Island, where he had been sent for abstracting the blue prints of the Toulon fortifications, and delivering them to a baby-faced girl with whom he was infatuated. She was working for England then; but she has apparently sold her services to another master; for she is listening to the instructions of Meyrowiz, the chief of the Austrian secret service, at that table in the alcove. They are all familiar to me. You are the only stranger—and, if you hadn't given me convincing proof that you knew your business, I should say that you were most decidedly a fish out of water." He looked significantly at the little blister on the back of his hand.

Hennipeker smiled and looked about the crowded café, studying the curious faces as frankly as if they were on exhibition behind the footlights.

"I think I am paying you rather a compliment when I say that you, too, seem to be a little out of your natural element," he answered. "If I believed that you were made of the same clay as this bunch, I should prefer to take my chances on traveling alone to Scutari."

Crane nodded. "There isn't a man among 'em who isn't for sale to the highest bidder, and there is none of them who would stay bought if it was to his interest to flop," he agreed. "As for the women——" The shrug of his shoulders was sufficiently eloquent. "I'm sorry that you have mixed yourself up with them, Hennipeker," he continued. "If we are to be traveling companions, there can be none of that. Does that go?"

"My dear fellow, I can assure you that I always put business before pleasure," replied Hennipeker evasively. "I confess that I am something of a lady's man, and in this particular instance I happen to be traveling upon a lady's business. I gather that you are employed by a certain Jabez Cooper, whom I believe to be a fat man devoid of sentiment; so I can quite appreciate your point of view. It will avoid argument if we do not intrude upon each other's private affairs; I suggest that we let it go as it lays: you are traveling to Scutari to collect pink lizards; I am trav-

eling in the interest of Miss Opal Violette Buckintender. The really important thing is that we should get there."

"And it is equally important that, having arrived there, we should be able to get out again," amended the more experienced adventurer. "I haven't had much experience with the Turks; but they are terribly sudden. I assume that your business requires you to return?"

Hennipeker shrugged his shoulders.

"I really hadn't thought that far ahead," he admitted. "If I like the place, and it agrees with me, I may remain indefinitely."

Crane shook his head hopelessly.

"I give it up!" he exclaimed. "I have believed that the age of miracles was passed; but finding a chap like you in this sort of a deal has got the loaves-and-fishes business beaten to a frazzle!"

"The age of miracles will never pass so long as there is a pretty girl left in the world," said Hennipeker laughingly. "Have you ever seen Miss Opal Violette Buckintender?" The Legioner shook his head. "Then I can understand that you are a little puzzled," continued the younger man. "She is rather accustomed to having her own way. Her father has the reputation of being a tough proposition to handle in Wall Street; but she winds him about her little finger. Her mother is a ruthless dictator in the social world; but the girl manages her in the family circle. I have known her ever since she was a child, and she has always made me do whatever she wished; so it seemed entirely natural that she should call upon me to attend to this little matter for her. That's the matter in a nutshell, and, as we were both sent over here to go to Scutari, I think we had better be on our way."

CHAPTER III.

A SUICIDAL AMUSEMENT.

In time of peace—and even in ordinary war times—the two Americans minding their own private business could have proceeded about it quietly without attracting attention; but in Brindisi both Crane and Hennipeker appreciated that every movement was watched by sharp and curious eyes. The Balkan States, at first united in interest only by the common necessity of driving the Crescent farther from their frontiers, had met with such quick and unexpectedly easy success that the greed for territorial expansion had grown with every league of their advance. The united arms had been so powerful that ultimate victory was assured, and already the allies were scheming for individual advantages; each growing so jealous of the others that the alliance might at any moment be shattered. It was a condition which all of the great powers watched with interest, and, as a consequence, their secret emissaries were busily employed in espionage and in the malodorous work of underground diplomacy.

Europe had no wish to see the victorious allies united in a great Slav empire, and secretly stimulated the jealousy and cupidity of Bulgaria, Servia, Montenegro, and Greece to a wrangle over the division of the spoils of victory which would make such a consolidation impossible. It was a rich harvest time for those mysterious denizens of the political underworld of conspiracy and intrigues, and the cheap restaurants and cafés of Brussels and Geneva, where they forgather in periods of stagnation, were deserted. Masquerading as war correspondents, commercial travelers, music-hall artists, or in any guise which offered an excuse for their coming, they infested every Balkan capital, and swarmed in every important border town.

No one of them in Brindisi for a moment believed that the two Americans had met there on their own affairs, and, as it was no small part of their duty to spy upon each other and every one suspected of being employed in their own trade, their curious attentions threatened to be embarrassing to the adventurers who could hope to gain entrance to the beleaguered capital only by secrecy and stealth. Liars by profession, they believed no man capable of telling the truth, and in the fantastic

confidences which Hennipeker had made to Mademoiselle Delphine and the fair Carmela, while basking in their smiles, those sophisticated young women had read only a clumsy and amateurish effort to hide their real business under a mass of prevarication.

"And that's our winning card," concluded Hennipeker, after he and Crane had discussed their plans for the immediate future for a half hour. "They won't believe that I was telling the truth as to our proposed destination. I can't see why they should be unduly interested in us, or try to bother us; but that will help some if they do."

"You can take it from me that they will bother us, unless we can give them the slip," said the Legioner uneasily. "They don't overlook a bet, and it so happens that I have run up against some of the worst of them when my bones would have made good picking. Blasowitz, the cavalier of your fair friend, Carmela, would have bagged a cool million if I hadn't hit him with a knuckle-duster before he could knife me in Lisbon. Platzof, the Russian friend of Mademoiselle Delphine, lost a fortune in rewards when I managed to get Gorski, the famous revolutionist, across the border into Germany under his nose. He would give something to catch me on Russian territory now. There are others, my boy; for I have been working for Jabez Cooper for more years than I care to remember, and there is always something resembling real money in sight in any of his little commissions."

Hennipeker grinned as he replaced his empty glass on the table.

"By Jove, old man; wouldn't it be a joke on them if they trailed us to Scutari, and then, after our missions were accomplished, and they had slit our throats to gather in the resulting treasure, they should be greeted on opening the mysterious casket by a ragtime chorus from the throats of a dozen pink lizards!" he exclaimed.

An exclamatory retort which would have caused the recording angel to debit Charles Crane with one round oath rose to the Legioner's lips; but he checked it and, leaning on the table, looked earnestly at his companion's boyish face.

"My young friend, I have no desire to dampen youthful enthusiasm, nor to pose as a prophet of evil; but this is not child's play," he said sternly. "I have had only one experience in the Turkish empire. A few years since I was sent into Armenia to trace a wonderful prayer rug which had been stolen from the mosque of St. Sophia. I was accompanied by a local guide; a young Greek, who spoke the language and looked on the whole expedition as a lark. At the very end of our search, in spite of signs which a blind man could have read, he fell by the wayside; he lingered in a village to play the fool because of a pair of black eyes, while I pushed on alone another day's journey to get what we had come so far to find. Two days later I returned with the rug, to find that village such a place as I fear to dream of. Abdul Hamid's bashi-bazouks had gone through it. I found my gay Lothario. The Kurds had made fine sport of him. Stripped of every rag of clothing, they had spread-eagled him in the arched entrance of the inn yard, and then, with their whips, they had flayed him alive. There are Kurdish bashi-bazouks in Scutari, Hennipeker, and Mademoiselle Delphine would betray you into their hands as quickly as that other black-eyed girl delivered my little Greek."

For the first time the younger adventurer betrayed a suspicion of uneasiness.

"They—they stripped him; the bashi-bazouks?" he stammered.

"Yes, and they flayed him; which I imagine was rather more uncomfortable," answered the Legioner quietly. "This isn't altogether a nice game at best, my young friend. I have no desire to force your confidence; I'll accept your harem-garden excuse as quickly as you take my pink lizards, if you like; but if there is anything else; if you happen to be going to Scutari simply to deliver a little note, or anything like that, I'll attend to the matter for you, and save you the trouble. If

not—well, I'm willing to take as many chances as the next man; but I never knew anything but disaster to come from mixing up with women in this sort of a game."

Hennipeker had quickly recovered himself, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"I am going to Scutari if I can possibly get there; I should not feel justified in intrusting what I have to do to any one else," he said quietly. "Have you made any definite plan?"

Crane shook his head.

"You can never make a definite plan when things are as upset and uncertain as they are now in this part of the world," he answered. "The Montenegrins are jealously guarding all of the passes from the north; the Greeks and Servians have blockaded every road from the east. The only possible chance seems to be to slip in from the coast."

"That's exactly what I planned to do," agreed Hennipeker. "Durazzo is the place I thought of landing at. There is a good road from there to Tyranna."

Crane smiled grimly.

"And nothing but goat paths, guarded by the fiercest brigands in Albania, between Tyranna and Scutari," he commented. "The Branjotti, who rule in Tyranna and own the whole surrounding territory, have never favored close and easy intercourse with the capital."

"But I understand that is changed now," said Hennipeker. "Essad Pasha, the commander of Scutari, is of the Branjotti, and the passes to Durazzo have been opened up. It seems to be that or nothing, in spite of the brigands, if we hope to reach Scutari."

Now, to sit at a café table and plan about getting from Tyranna to Scutari was one thing, but even getting across the Adriatic to the Albanian coast was quite another, as the Americans speedily discovered. On the steamers which ran regularly to Cattaro, the Austrian seaport of Dalmatia, or to Antivarri, the one gateway to Montenegro, it was possible to get passage by paying exorbitantly; but while there was undoubtedly communication between Brindisi and Albania, it was contraband in nature and necessarily carried on with the greatest secrecy. But it was just such obstacles that Crane, in his varied career, had learned to overcome, and at the end of a busy afternoon on the water front, he returned triumphant to the hotel.

Greatly to his surprise, and not a little to his chagrin, he found Hennipeker seated at a table in the garden with Mademoiselle Delphine and the golden-haired Carmela as companions. He hesitated, tempted to desert him for good and all; but Hennipeker had spied him, and called to him to join them. There was no escaping without unpardonable discourtesy, and with the best grace he could muster, he acknowledged the introductions.

Now, much as Crane knew to the discredit of the two women, he found them, on personal acquaintance, extremely interesting. Mademoiselle Delphine was thoroughly cosmopolitan and perfectly at ease, although she knew that Crane had recognized her as quickly as she did him. Carmela, whose classic beauty and appealing manner had tempted more than one man to his undoing, looked at him with eyes as innocent as a child's.

"Crane, these ladies were terribly exercised when they recognized you as the pink-lizard expert," explained Hennipeker, as the Legioner took his place at the table. "They have been trying to persuade me not to go traveling with you; they tell me that you are a terribly reckless person, and liable to lead me into all sorts of danger. How about it?"

"Danger is rather a comprehensive word," said the Legioner, looking frankly from one face to the other. "There would be more peril, of sorts, in the company of two such charmers. A broken head heals more quickly than a broken heart, and I'll wager that you will find me the safer companion."

Mademoiselle Delphine smiled most charmingly.

"Perhaps I have misjudged you—it is always so easy to be mistaken," she said, and there was a strange wistfulness in her voice, which made the Le-

gioner look at her curiously. "Oh, perhaps, you have reformed?"

"I doubt if it is possible for a leopard to change his spots—or a tigress her stripes," answered Crane.

A suggestion of a flush came to her face and her black eyes narrowed, but she shrugged her shoulders indifferently.

"Since monsieur has become a naturalist, his similes are of the jungle, with all of its crudeness and brutalities," she retorted. "A tigress has claws, as well as stripes."

Crane laughed, and looked inquiringly about the garden.

"One always counts upon that sort of thing, but they are less to be feared than the snapping of the jackals which so often bear the tigress company," he replied. "You are playing a long engagement in Brindisi, mademoiselle?"

"That always depends," she answered. "The public is fickle; it may tire of me any day—and then? Fortunately, there are always fresh fields, or we poor artistes could not live."

Carmela's pretty lips parted, but the laugh which came from them was mirthless.

"It's a rotten, vagrant life, *mon ami!*" she exclaimed bitterly. "Why didn't you strike just a little harder that time in Lisbon? It would have ended it all for me."

Crane shifted uneasily in his seat, for they were not playing the game as he knew it.

"I did the best I could," he said, with a grim smile. "Blasowitz must have a thick skull, for I hit him twice."

"Yes, he has a thick skull, a retentive memory, and a heavy hand," answered Carmela gravely. "He never forgets, Mr. Crane—and he was for six months in the hospital after that encounter. You are not remaining long here, I suppose. The night air is not healthful."

"And if you should be considering a trip in the Balkans, it is well to remember that the czar's agents wield a tremendous power in that troubled region," joined in Mademoiselle Delphine quietly.

Crane looked at them in blank amazement. Hennipeker had taken no part in the conversation, and there was a smile about his lips which suggested that he found considerable amusement in his companion's perplexity.

"See here, I can't dope out what you people have been up to; but I'll take it for granted that you ladies are trying to be friendly," said Crane slowly. "I'll meet you halfway, at any rate. I give you my word that the business I am traveling on would possess not the slightest interest for you—or your friends. They will lose nothing by letting me go about it in my own way; they can gain neither credit nor profit by wasting their time in spying upon me, and any one who interferes with me is liable to get hurt. Miss Carmela, we have no cause for a quarrel, and if Blasowitz bears malice for our encounter in Lisbon, you must remember that that encounter was not of my seeking. Mademoiselle Delphine, Platzof has a long string of successes to his credit; I understand that he has sent more of his fellow countrymen to the gallows and into exile than any other two of the secret agents of the Third Section. He shouldn't harbor resentment because I helped to rob him of a single victim. If he does——"

Delphine interrupted him with an angry gesture, and rose from the table.

"Monsieur, I have tried to be friendly!" she protested. "Platzof does harbor resentment; he would take a knouting to get you into his clutches, and when he destroys you he will make a clean sweep of it. For you I shall feel no sorrow; but——" Her eyes, which had been flashing, suddenly softened, and filled with tears, and, turning away, she hurriedly entered the hotel. Without a word, Carmela rose and followed her.

Crane turned irritably to his silent companion.

"Confound you; you *have* made a pretty mess of things!" he exclaimed.

Hennipeker looked up from his cigarette-making.

"But, my dear fellow, I had nothing whatever to do with it!" he protested.

"Everything was as pleasant as a spring morning until you succeeded in getting their goats. I seem to have made rather a hit with them."

"Confound you; that's just the trouble!" answered Crane. "My boy, neither of the ladies is old; I believe that Delphine is twenty-six and Carmela is a year younger; but you can't reckon their ages by the calendar. For years they have been the comrades of desperate men in desperate ventures, and what they don't know of the seamy side of conspiracy and intrigue isn't worth mentioning. It was unwise to mix up with either of them in any way; but to get both of them head over heels in love with you at the same time is suicidal!"

Hennipeker made no denial of the soft impeachment.

"I have found it amusing," he answered complacently. "By your own admission they are neither of them unsophisticated and innocent of worldly knowledge, and, if your estimate of their characters is correct, neither of them would have hesitated a moment before using my infatuation for the advantage of themselves and their accomplices if I had been carried away by their charms. However, it can't be of much importance, one way or the other; for I suppose that we leave this pleasant city before morning."

"*I* do," answered Crane curtly, with a decided emphasis upon the personal pronoun. "I have half a mind to leave you here to your philandering, you sentimental and conceited young monkey!"

Hennipeker laughed and shook his head vigorously.

"Not on your life!" he exclaimed. "Platzof and Blasowitz may have it in for you on old scores; but they will be looking for me on new ones within twenty-four hours, and I'd rather be on the other side of the Adriatic when they take up the trail. What have you arranged?"

"I have taken the only chance that offered—and it's none too good at that," answered the Legioner cautiously. "We'll be very much in evidence this evening. At midnight we slip quietly down to the water front, where I have arranged for a fishing boat to be in waiting for us. That will take us out to a little steamer—so blamed little that she's not much more than a launch—which has been engaged to carry an Albanian pilot to the *Harlan Castle,* a British tramp loaded with ammunition and other contraband, which is going to try to slip through the blockading Greek squadron, and get into Durazzo. Our luggage will consist of our clothes and what we can carry in our pockets, and you want to pray for smooth seas until we get on board that tramp steamer. A self-respecting junkman wouldn't be found dead with *La Bella Carlotta's* machinery in his possession, and her hull was used by Julius Cæsar to cross the Rubicon."

Hennipeker assented to the plan as eagerly as if the Legioner were proposing a cruise on a perfectly found yacht.

"Now that's something like it!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "I really commence to feel as if things might happen. All of this heavy-villain business around Brindisi is too much like cheap melodrama to be convincing; but sailing at midnight in a leaky steam launch to pick up a blockade runner is the real thing. I'll be on hand, old chap."

"You bet your life you will be; I'll attend to that part of it!" said the Legioner grimly. "If we ever get into a Moslem country you will find a lot of professional black chaperons to keep you out of the sort of trouble you have been getting into here; but I'm going to keep a fatherly eye on you from now until sailing time."

CHAPTER IV.

BLOCKADE RUNNING.

Crane's description of *La Bella Carlotta* had been rather flattering than otherwise. Only by a stretch of the imagination could she have been rated as seaworthy, and her antiquated engines suffered from asthma, locomotor ataxia, and a hopelessly chronic general debility. As for the crew, the less said

of them the better—an opinion in which they would have coincided unanimously had the coast guards or the water police been within hearing.

The only other passenger was one Haggini Ben Ali, an ancient mariner, who had learned every rock, shallow, and channel from Cattaro to the Gulf of Corinth, on the Dalmatian and Albanian coasts, during thirty years of smuggling, a knowledge which eminently fitted him for the proposed task of piloting the *Harlan Castle* and its contraband cargo to safe anchorage. In Brindisi Haggini had deemed it wise to sink his identity and conceal his calling, and he had boarded the launch, still arrayed in what he believed to be the complete disguise of a landlubber. A derby hat of ancient block, the discarded headgear of a foreign globe-trotter, replaced the customary flat baretta; his feet were incased in torturing patent leathers, with the most approved Neapolitan toothpick toes, and the intervening raiment was a fearful and wonderful assortment of garments purchased at the water-front shops.

Hennipeker smiled covertly as he surveyed the grotesque result; for it seemed but an echo of the condition which he regarded as a comic-opera setting of conspiracy and intrigue which he had left behind in Brindisi. The disguise was about as convincing as the false whiskers of the sleuth in a Bowery melodrama; for the gold rings in Haggini's ears proclaimed the Mediterranean sailorman, and the hawklike, cruel face betrayed an ancestry of Barbary corsairs. Crane had completed all of the arrangements with him, making a very substantial advance payment, with the promise of further reward, to be paid on the deck of the *Harlan Castle,* and their embarkation from the fishing boat was made without comment or parley.

Of the old contrabandist's honesty he entertained grave doubts; but within five minutes of their arrival he was satisfied of his ability in his peculiar trade. With the usual and customary shouting of orders, and clanging of the signal bell, the Italian skipper had started to get the craft in motion; but a sinewy hand, fastened in his collar, had jerked him away from the wheel, and a few terse words in the lingua franca silenced his clamor. Before they were fairly clear of the harbor, Haggini Ben Ali had assumed command, and one glance from his fierce eyes had sufficed to quiet the muttering of the sullen Italian cutthroats who comprised the crew.

Of his professional ability there could be no question, and during the ensuing forty-eight hours Hennipeker gained his first real insight of the serious part of the game into which he had entered so blithely as an amateur, and a slight conception of that strange freemasonry which makes adventurers of radically different race and color for the moment blood brothers.

A fresh *maistrale* kicked up the surface of the Adriatic into threatening waves, and the launch—which, in its best days, had never been fit for outside work—groaned audibly and trembled visibly as it pitched and rolled in the seaway. The decrepit engines wheezed and pounded, and more than once the frantic baling of all hands had to supplement the labors of the overworked bilge pump; for there were many points of similarity between a sieve and the antique planking of the hull.

The Italians alternately cursed and invoked the protection of the saints; but with serene indifference to blasphemy and prayer, old Haggini kept his post at the wheel, easing the laboring little craft through the exceptionally bad patches of water, as they rounded the Calabrian headlands, each capped with its Martello watchtower, taking advantage of every bit of shelter which the indentations of the rugged coast afforded, and always with his sharp eyes sweeping the horizon.

Crane, with the fatalism of his kind, accepted everything in the situation philosophically and without question. He had boarded the leaky craft with his eyes open, disregarding the tremendous odds against reaching any other destination than the locker of Davy

Jones, and, having accepted the risk, he trusted implicitly to his lucky star to pull him through.

Now the log of that cruise would be a story in itself; but it was simply a minor incident in the cronicles of the Lost Legion; so insignificant that only an item in the expense account commemorates it in the archives of Jabez Cooper. In the water-front cafés of Brindisi they still speculate over the mysterious disappearance of *La Bella Carlotta;* for neither the launch nor her crew were ever heard from after the night she stole so mysteriously out of the harbor; but before she disappeared from human ken she had served the purposes of the American adventurers, and without regret they left her, to clamber up the Jacob's ladder which banged against the rusted, battered plates of the *Harlan Castle.*

In these days of searchlights, wireless telegraphy, and long-range guns, blockade running with war contraband is a dangerous game, and those engaged in it are necessarily desperate men. The officers and crew of the *Harlan Castle* were quite up to the specifications, and Crane was instinctively on guard as he faced the commander, Captain Douglas, on reaching the deck. He was a hard-featured, evil-favored brute of a man; huge of stature, with tremendously long arms, and fists like hams at the ends of them.

"Who in blazes are you, and what in thunder are you doing on this ship?" he bellowed. "Haggini, do you think this is a blooming passenger packet; or your private yacht?"

The Albanian paid no attention to him; but suggestively held out his hand, palm upward, to the Legioner. Captain Douglas' brick-red face turned purple; but for the moment he was stunned to silence by the size of the reward which Crane slowly counted into that upturned palm from a bank roll which was not seriously crimped by the payment. Covetousness in a measure replaced the angry flicker in his eyes; but his manner lost none of its bullying quality as he repeated his demand for information with the added emphasis of profanity.

Crane had purposely delayed answering, and prolonged his business with Haggini until he saw that the launch had cast off, and gained a respectable offing from the ship, panting and wheezing as it wallowed toward the Calabrian coast.

"Captain, in answer to your kind inquiry, I would state that my name is Crane—Charles by baptism, and sometimes called 'Sandhill' by my intimate friends," he drawled. "This is my friend, Humperdunk Himpiquince Hennipeker, and we are both——"

With an oath, Captain Douglas jumped to the rail, and, grabbing a megaphone, sent profane and imperative commands to return alongside across the troubled surface of the water to the vanishing launch.

Crane smiled genially when the enraged mariner desisted from his hopeless task, and returned with a forbidding face and menacing gestures.

"I'll run the cursed little cockleshell down if she doesn't heave to!" he exclaimed. "I'll show you two roustabouts that you can't make game of me on my own quarter-deck. Mr. Hayward, put the helm hard over, and overhaul that infernal insult to a scrap heap that put these two blighters aboard!"

The officer on the bridge gave the necessary orders to the quartermaster; but the wheel had hardly stopped turning before Haggini—who had assumed charge as soon as his private business with Crane was finished—slipped down the companion ladder, and, with his hands in his pockets, strolled across the deck to rejoin his fellow travelers.

"What in blue blazes are you doing off of that bridge?" demanded the irate captain furiously. "Get back there before I boot you up, you Turkish swab! I'll show you who's master of this hooker!"

Haggini's answering grin displayed his strong yellow teeth, and, as one hand came from his pocket, the hilt of a very practical knife slipped from the sleeve to his palm.

"You have already shown me that," he said quietly, in the lingua franca. "That's why I left the bridge, and it's

why I shall very gladly leave this deck if you overtake the launch before you pile up on the Saracen Reef, which is dead ahead. Two torpedo boats passed us during the night, and they can't be more than fifteen miles to the north. I'm not anxious to be wrecked on the Calabrian coast, nor hankering to go to the Piræus as a prisoner of war. My bargain was made with your agents; it's your own responsibility that you're running on now—and inside of five minutes you'll hit the Saracen."

The captain wilted; he had no illusions as to what would happen to his master's certificate if anything happened to the ship, and with a grudging apology he asked the Albanian to resume charge.

"But there's nothing in the ship's articles or my instructions which ties my hands in dealing with you land rats!" he continued, after Haggini had again changed the vessel's course. "I expect you knew the chances you were taking when you came over the side."

Hennipeker, who was rolling a cigarette, nodded, and Crane grinned.

"Sure we did, captain," he answered. "It's within your rights to put us to work in the stokehold, or to clap us into irons; but I can't see that there's anything in that for you. You're on a semipiratical cruise; but you've got to keep your log straight, just the same—or take a chance of a run in with the board of trade. If you take official notice of our being on board, you've got to enter the circumstances in your log book. We have no desire to advertise the fact that we traveled with you; but we do want to get to Durazzo, and I'll make it worth your while to forget that we came on board. We'll slip off quietly when you come to anchor, and there will be no unpleasant questions to answer. What price two passages to the Albanian coast?"

"How much have you got on you?" demanded the captain gruffly.

"More than I intend to give up," answered Crane quietly. "I always pay liberally; I'll stand for ten times the ordinary passage rate; but that's the limit; if it isn't good enough—why, put us to work for the owners."

Captain Douglas hesitated. Illicit as was his voyage, he knew that he would be held to a strict accountability for its conduct by the British board of trade. At the slightest hint of irregularity, his log book would be overhauled, and his officers and crew questioned. As the master of the ship, he had legal right to do either of the things Crane had suggested; to put the intruders to work to earn their passage, or to clap them into irons, and hand them over to the authorities at the first port; but—as the Legioner had hinted—there was nothing for him in either of those procedures. With the crew he had signed on he would have been willing to take chances in any desperate measures; but that would have meant long division of the resulting spoils to insure their silence. Accordingly, although with evident reluctance, he accepted Crane's offer, and, following Haggini's example, extended a receptive palm.

The Legioner smiled and shook his head.

"There are too many slips betwixt cups and lips, captain," he said. "I'll pay when the anchor is down in Durazzo harbor. There's no use in arguing, or getting ugly about it," he continued sharply, as the Englishman started a violent protest. "I know just where we stand, and it's that—or nothing. I'll pay when we reach Durazzo, and guarantee to slip ashore so quietly that no one will know you carried passengers."

Humiliating as it was to knuckle under on his own deck, the captain's cupidity proved stronger than his pride, and, while his assent was profane and ungracious, it was none the less a complete surrender.

Hennipeker looked at his companion admiringly after the Englishman had climbed to the bridge.

"I'm glad you got away with it," he said. "I didn't relish the thought of the stokehold."

Crane glanced up at the burly figure of the captain.

"We're not on shore yet," he an-

swered. "The brute will do us a nasty turn if he gets the chance, and we'll stand watch and watch to see that he doesn't. The cabin steward will find you a bunk if you slip him a gold piece, and I'll stand the first trick."

Hennipeker raised no objection; for, of less toughened fiber than the older man, he was pretty well exhausted by the launch experience; but, in spite of forty-eight hours without sleep, Crane was alert and watchful. Captain Douglas, however, was too busily occupied with the navigation of his ship to find time to annoy them; although Haggini as pilot was in nominal command.

In the Balkan War the Greek army retrieved a measure of the reputation which it had lost in the previous farcical struggle against the Turks; but the navy did not cover itself with glory. Its two great objects were, first, to keep out of the way of the *Hamidieh,* the one small Turkish cruiser which had escaped destruction by the Italians, and, second, to earn easy prize money by the capture of unarmed merchantmen attempting to run contraband into the Turkish ports. At the moment the cruiser was located in the harbor at Malta, where she was repairing machinery which had been overtaxed in chasing the Greek battleships, and pretty much the whole fleet was at liberty to intercept the *Harlan Castle,* an exceptionally rich prize. The harbor fortifications of Durazzo mounted heavy guns, and fear of them prevented the Greeks from maintaining an effective blockade; but it was a sporting proposition to attempt to elude the rapacious mosquito fleet.

Haggini was entirely willing to take it on, however, and with a marvelous skill and a splendid audacity he navigated the unwieldy tramp as successfully as he had controlled the ramshackle launch. When darkness fell, he laid a direct course for Durazzo; running without lights, and with darkened portholes, in spite of the protests of Captain Douglas, and, as if warned by a subtle instinct, he managed to keep the ship always just beyond the arc of illumination of the rays of the searchlights on the decks of invisible enemies. It was not until they were on the edge of the three-mile limit that the first of those inquisitive lights picked them up, and Captain Douglas cursed vigorously as the discovery was followed by a warning shot across the ship's bow. A moment later the sea around them seemed alive with menacing craft, and every rivet in the tramp's plates stood revealed in the glare of the searchlights focused upon her; but Haggini stuck grimly at his post, as little disturbed by the threatening illumination as by the curses and objurgations of the enraged shipmaster.

"They won't try to sink us so long as they think there is a chance of capture," he said. "Give me five minutes more, captain, and then burn every Coston light you can find room for on both rails."

Now, whether the wily old Turk was correct in his surmise, or whether it was due to the notoriously wretched gunnery of the Greeks, the event justified his prediction. A furious cannonade followed the disregard of the first warning shots and the shouted demands for surrender; but, save for a hole through the jolly boat which hung from the davits over the stern, the *Harlan Castle* came through the iron hail unscathed. It was a curious bit of blockade running; for the clumsy old tramp wallowed along, surrounded by a half dozen boats, which could have made circles about her with their superior speed. Any one of them could have destroyed her; but the prize money would have gone to the bottom with her, and it was not until in the red-and-blue glare of the Costons she revealed her exact position to the artillerymen in the Durazzo forts that the Greeks permitted patriotism to rise above the temptation of personal profit.

And then it was too late; for the fire of the Turkish guns followed promptly the flaring of the signals from the *Harlan Castle's* deck. The destroyers were invisible; but, with the object of their attack located, the fortress gunners could fairly accurately guess their posi-

tions, even after they had dimmed their searchlights, and a perfect storm of shot and shell swept the sea on either side of the tramp, and quickly freed her from the annoying attentions of her pursuers. At daybreak the Legioner and Hennipeker again faced Captain Douglas on the deck, the anchor safely down under the protecting guns of the Turkish fortifications. Without comment, Crane stripped from a roll of English bank notes the amount which he had agreed to pay. The captain clutched it without thanks, his eyes greedily following the greater sum which Crane carefully replaced in his pocket.

"I want you to take care of that for me," said the Englishman, with a twisted smile, as he watched the Legioner button the pocket flap. "I expect that you'll be ready to leave this blasted port long before we are, and so glad to get back on board that you'll not be asking questions about where we're bound. And then it'll be cash on the nail, my bucko, all you've got, in advance."

Crane shrugged his shoulders. "You will be entirely welcome to all of the small change you manage to extract from me," he answered indifferently. "Haggini, can you take us ashore in your boat?"

Captain Douglas attempted to forestall the answer; but Crane's face suddenly lost its smile of indifference as he turned on him. "Just remember that I've finished with you, and it will simplify matters," he said sharply. "I can't understand why you have had it in for us from the moment we came on board; but that's your business, and I don't care. I may come on board again; but if I do I'll be brought over the side by force, and now what I want to do is to get ashore. How about it, Haggini?"

Hennipeker had strolled over to the rail, watching the shore boats, with their clamoring occupants, which already swarmed about the steamer, and there was a suggestion of uneasiness in his eyes as he rejoined the group. He was evidently relieved when Haggini nodded assent and led the way to the opposite side of the ship, where the pilot's boat lay at the foot of the Jacob's ladder. Five minutes later it had shoved off, with the two Americans beside the old Albanian in the stern.

"Crane, I don't know how they managed it; but they have beat us to it," said Hennipeker quietly. "I recognized two of our acquaintances in the boats on the other side of the ship. They were trying their best to get on board."

Crane looked at him with quick suspicion.

"Not the women?" he exclaimed, and alarm was so evident in his voice that Haggini looked at him in surprise.

"No, unfortunately; worse than that," answered Hennipeker, with a smirk which proved a strong temptation to Crane to pitch him overboard. "I could manage them, all right; but I'm not so sure about their bosom friends. Blasowitz and Platzof are here, Crane. We didn't fool them."

The Legioner gave an audible sigh of relief.

"Oh, that's all right!" he exclaimed indifferently. "I've handled those chaps before, and I reckon I can again if they get in the way. I was afraid it was the women. We won't waste any time in getting away from here, though; for they are bad medicine."

Old Haggini had pricked up his ears at the mention of the names, and he nodded toward a little felucca anchored among the fishing boats which they were passing.

"They came over in that—direct from Brindisi," he volunteered. "I know those men, gentlemen. You must be careful and watchful if they are your enemies. They came to me in Brindisi; but I would have no dealings with them."

Hennipeker was not familiar with the lingua franca, and, while Crane and Haggini talked earnestly together, he watched curiously the water front of the quaint little port. His companions were so absorbed that they hardly noticed when the boat ran alongside the quay, and he was the first to land. It was, perhaps, three minutes later that Crane set foot on shore, and his first exclamation expressed neither gratification nor approval.

Hennipeker had wasted none of those precious moments, and, glancing across the little square, the Legioner discovered him in soulful converse with a veiled figure on the little albergo balcony; a figure which was entirely familiar in spite of the swaddling garments of a Turkish woman. Every gesture betrayed her; for in her evident agitation she had forgotten her disguise—it was Platzof's confederate in conspiracy, Delphine!

CHAPTER V.

RUNNING THE GANTLET.

Crane had learned the virtue of self-control in a hard school, and, although he was boiling internally, he maintained a dignified silence when Hennipeker rejoined him, after Delphine, with a farewell wave of the hand, had disappeared from the balcony.

"Get it off your chest, old chap," said Hennipeker encouragingly, with a glance at Crane's angry eyes. "I suppose you think that I am responsible for this unexpected meeting?"

"I *know* you are!" answered the Legioner savagely. "I'm not insinuating that you framed it up; but there was no resisting your fatal gift of beauty. I'm only surprised that Carmela wasn't on hand to greet you, too."

Hennipeker lighted the cigarette which he had rolled as he listened to the arraignment.

"She's too busily engaged in doing the Sister Ann act," he explained placidly. "She was on the roof, watching the harbor to see that Platzof and Blasowitz didn't surprise them by a quick return. We're apparently in the deuce of a fix, old fellow; between the devil and the deep, blue sea."

Crane looked significantly toward the albergo which sheltered the young women, and nodded assent.

"I knew that the Adriatic was behind us; but I hardly expected to find the alternative in front," he said grimly. "We'll dodge that portion of our troubles as soon as I can get a couple of horses; for we'll hit the road for Tyranna."

"And in that case we shall run foul of the Servian advance guard before our horses are warmed up," answered Hennipeker cheerfully. "Tyranna is already captured, and the Servians will probably be in Durazzo within twenty-four hours. That's why Blasowitz and Platzof are here, Crane; they were not attracted by our little expedition. See here, old chap; there is no sense in letting your dislike for women cost you your skin. Platzof, as the czar's agent, will be a power when the Servians get here, and he won't overlook the chance to pay off his old grudge if he runs across you. That's the warning Delphine gave me just now. She suspected that we might be telling the truth, and really bound for Scutari; that's why she accompanied Platzof when he was ordered here; she thought she might get a chance to warn us. Blasowitz is in the Servian service, and he and Platzof are as thick as thieves. It will be decidedly unhealthy for us if we are in Durazzo when the Servians arrive; for they both have old scores to settle with you, and they are a trifle resentful about my little flirtations in Brindisi."

"Which is all the more reason for our speedy departure," agreed Crane readily. "Haggini is getting horses for us, and——"

"No, he is making distress signals from the doorway of that little café," interrupted Hennipeker.

Crane turned and verified the statement. A moment later they were in earnest consultation with the old smuggler across a marble-topped table. He quickly confirmed the news which Hennipeker had gathered, accepting for himself the impending defeat with Oriental fatalism.

"So you can see that it would be of no benefit to you to get you the horses," he continued. "You could never get through the Servian lines. I might succeed in hiding you here in Durazzo until things quiet down."

"What's your other suggestion, Haggini?" demanded Crane curtly; for it was apparent that the resourceful old reprobate held something in reserve.

"It is that you try San Giovanni di

Medua—if you are willing to pay the price," replied the Turk. "My felucca is always open for charter; it carried the others from Brindisi, and it can carry you away from here. I can run you down the coast to San Giovanni, and from there you may be able to reach Scutari. The Servians will hardly attack it; they are ambitious only for one seaport. But you must decide quickly; for I shall not risk my boat in this harbor, with Servian gunners in the fortress."

Crane drew his money from his pocket. It needed no argument to convince him that, with Platzof and Blazowitz in Durazzo, it would be impossible for them to bribe a passage through the Servian lines.

"How much, and how soon can we sail?" he asked abruptly.

Haggini named his price, and, as the Legioner counted it out on the table, he pushed back his chair.

"We sail at dusk," he said, when he had safely stowed the money away. "I can put you both on board at once; you will be safer there than in the city, and we shall slip out with the first land breeze after sunset."

Crane eagerly welcomed that suggestion; for through the open doorway Hennipeker had kept his eyes fixed on the albergo which sheltered the two women. As an extra precaution, he slipped his arm through his, and maintained his hold until they clambered to the deck of the felucca. A moment later, his vigilance relaxed, however, and, throwing himself on a transom in the tiny cabin, he forgot his troubles and dangers in a well-earned slumber.

But to Hennipeker the idle day in the harbor was anything but uninteresting. It was crowded with fishing boats, and the small coasting feluccas and their owners were apparently preparing them for flight before the Servian occupation. Veiled women, jealously guarded by hideous black eunuchs, were being transported to them for safety, and, with the loading of water and stores, everything was activity. Even the ugly old *Harlan Castle,* which swung at her moorings a quarter of a mile from the shore, was apparently preparing for flight; for, instead of discharging her cargo of contraband, she was filling her depleted bunkers with coal from lighters alongside.

Through Haggini's powerful binoculars he saw Platzof and Blasowitz return to the landing after a long visit on board of the tramp, and then, a few moments later, he saw them fairly run out of the albergo, where they had left their women companions. They were alone; but Hennipeker was uneasy when he saw that they were joined almost immediately by Haggini, and went with him to that same little café where they had made their bargain with the Turk. He was not reassured when they came out together after a long conference; for they were apparently upon the most friendly terms. He was half tempted to risk a trip on shore to investigate; but his fear of Crane's displeasure was even stronger than his curiosity, and, until the edge of the sun touched the surface of the Adriatic on the horizon, he contented himself with watching closely the doorway of the albergo.

It was dark before Haggini finally came on board; but once on the deck of his boat, there was no delay. Crane had awakened at the sound of his voice, which was hardly to be wondered at; for it was raised in anger as he drove forward two men who had come from shore with him; men who very evidently were not sailors; for they stumbled awkwardly over the coiled ropes in the darkness, and got in the way of the members of the crew who were hoisting the great lateen sails.

"What is the meaning of this, Haggini?" demanded Crane sharply. "I understood that this felucca was under charter to me, and I don't care to carry passengers."

"They're not passengers; they are prisoners," answered Haggini. "I had no choice; it was bring them along, or stay on shore as a prisoner myself. The Servians are already marching into Durazzo. Blasowitz is trying to play them false, and keep the *Harlan Castle* from falling into their hands. He and Plat-

zof tried to engage me to pilot her out, and I had to agree to do it. Here was the plan, gentlemen. I was to bring them out to the steamer in my boat, and they promised to tow the felucca out to sea. Once safe from the blockade, I was to deliver you two gentlemen over to them. They plan to sail for Odessa, and I guess you can imagine about what would happen to you when they reached a Russian port. They had already sent those two men to the boat; but as soon as it grew dark I took a chance and dropped away from the landing. I told that pair that I'd slit their throats if they raised an alarm, and if they make any trouble now I'll have them thrown overboard."

"You agreed to pilot the *Harlan Castle?*" asked Crane.

Haggini nodded assent as he glanced toward the steamer. Smoke was pouring from her funnels, and the clanking windlass was drawing the anchor cable through the hawsehole.

"I wasn't given much choice," he said grimly. "The Seryians would hang me if I fell into their hands, and Platzof insinuated that if I tried to get out of the harbor with this felucca, the steamer would run me down. There isn't another pilot in Durazzo who could take her out at night, and if she tries it in the daytime the Greeks will bag her. I suppose that Captain Douglas will try it, pilot or no pilot, for he is certain to lose his ship to the Servians at daylight if she is still in the harbor."

Haggini's guess was very evidently correct; for, as they skimmed past the tramp, her great anchor came above the surface. A shore boat was pulling away from her, and from her deck came an imperative command for the felucca to heave to. Haggini disregarded it, and held steadily on his course; but in the sheltered harbor the breeze was light, and more than once the sails flapped idly in a temporary dead calm. They were running without lights; but the darkness proved small protection; for, as the *Harlan Castle* gained steerage way, the searchlight on her bridge picked up the felucca's sails, and remained steadily focused upon them as she steered for the narrow, bottle-neck entrance of the harbor.

"Can you beat her to it?" asked Crane quietly when the erratic course of the steamer following in their wake convinced him that she was in relentless pursuit.

"Not unless the wind freshens," admitted Haggini ruefully. "There is deep water right to the shore in the harbor, so we have got to try it. After we pass the forts we can take the south channel, where they can't follow."

It wasn't a particularly encouraging prospect, and Crane turned to warn his companion to prepare for trouble; but Hennipeker had disappeared. Ignorant of the lingua franca, he had found no amusement in the conversation of Haggini and the Legioner; but through the darkness came his laugh from forward, suggesting that he found there more comfort in the situation than his companion had discovered aft.

It was a brutal pursuit; for skillfully as Haggini handled the graceful little felucca, which raced through the water with the slightest breath of wind, there was small chance of overcoming the unfair handicap which steam gave to the clumsy tramp. Captain Douglas was desperate; for, once outside of the harbor, the passage was an intricate one, and, since the outbreak of the Balkan War, the Turks had extinguished all of the lights by which he might have laid a course. Haggini was the only pilot capable of taking out a vessel of the size of the *Harlan Castle,* and he was determined to capture him at any cost. Platzof and Blasowitz stood beside him on the bridge, needlessly urging him to increased effort.

"I'm not worrying about the men you're after," he answered impatiently. "They'll have to take their chance; for I'll run the blasted felucca down. I know old Haggini; he's too tough a nut to drown, and I'll have him on board. I can attend to him, and I'll leave the others to you. Stand by that quarter boat, Mr. Hayward; we'll get her on the next tack!"

On the deck of the felucca, Haggini left the helm, cursing fluently and con-

scientiously the wind, which had failed absolutely when they were on the very edge of safety. The great bulk of the *Harlan Castle* bore down on the fragile craft with irresistible force, and, although the felucca's crew labored desperately with the clumsy sweeps, they were unable to win clear. There was a ripping and tearing of timber and cordage as the great steel prow struck her a glancing blow and passed on, her screw churning the water into white foam as the engines were reversed.

Haggini watched without protest as his crew launched and tumbled into the single boat. He had nothing to gain by accompanying them.

"There is room for you two gentlemen," he said quietly to Crane. "The felucca will go down within five minutes. They have lowered a boat from the *Harlan Castle,* and I shall wait for her; but you will be safer on shore than on a steamer controlled by Platzof."

Crane saw the wisdom of the suggestion, and called to Hennipeker, who clambered over the wreckage on the slanting deck to rejoin him. He was not alone; but Crane ignored his two companions, and started toward the boat.

"Hurry up, Hennipeker!" he said impatiently. "There is only room for two, and those chaps will be picked up by the ship's boat if they have any luck."

Hennipeker caught him by the arm and pulled him back as he was clambering over the rail to drop into the boat.

"If there is room for only two, we must remain," he said quietly. "Ladies first, old chap, and I have discovered a couple of old acquaintances masquerading here."

Now, fortunately for Crane's reputation for gallantry, he was not put to the test; for at the moment he recognized Carmela and Delphine, the waterlogged hull of the felucca careened, until the sails lay flat on the water, and the waiting boat shoved off and disappeared in the darkness. A few minutes later the *Harlan Castle's* boat drew close, and, with the choice between boarding her, and swimming for safety, they took the lesser of the two evils, old Haggini clambering aboard as the wreck of his fortunes sank beneath his feet.

There was a triumphant leer on Captain Douglas' face as they again reached the deck of the *Harlan Castle.* He stood between Platzof and Blasowitz, and as each of the survivors climbed over the rail from the Jacob's ladder, he was seized by a couple of burly sailors. They made no attempt at a resistance which would have been useless, and, as Haggini marched to the bridge, with the muzzle of the captain's revolver pressed firmly between his shoulder blades, the two Americans were deftly handcuffed and shackled to the foremast.

CHAPTER VI.

A "DESPERATE MUTINEER."

On the bridge of the *Harlan Castle* old Haggini gave low-voiced orders to the quartermaster at the wheel, as the ship crept slowly toward the open sea. Behind him, revolver in hand, stood Captain Douglas, reminding him from time to time that the first grazing of rock or shoal would be immediately followed by the pilot's death. Every light on the steamer was extinguished, save the small lamp in the binnacle, and on the deck faces could hardly be recognized; but there was no mistaking the identity of the voices to which Hennipeker and the Legioner listened, as the two women laughingly described to their masculine companions the reason for the failure of their escape in the felucca's boat. It was a heartless relation to which the victims listened; for both Carmela and Delphine seemed anxious to impress their confederates with the value of the service which they had rendered, and neither of them hesitated at a trifle of exaggeration.

"That's what comes of mixing up with petticoats, you sentimental young saphead!" muttered Crane to his companion in misfortune.

"No; the petticoat proposition was all right; it was when they took to trousers that I went wrong," answered Hennipeker contritely. "What's the

program, old chap? I couldn't understand your talk with Haggini."

"I reckon that we've got plenty of trouble ahead of us," answered Crane grimly. "If they succeed in running the blockade and reaching Odessa, they will hang me, and about the best you can expect is the Siberian salt mines, with a Cossack's knout tickling your back to make you work faster."

"My friend, you have a very accurate gift of prophecy," came a mocking voice from the darkness. Platzof had left his companions, and stood within a few feet of them. "I can assure you that you will be expeditiously hanged, and your sentimental disciple will contribute to the czar's revenue for the rest of his life. Gorski has proved most annoying in his Swiss refuge, and your efforts in his behalf have not been forgotten at St. Petersburg. In fact, Russia never forgets."

"No, and never learns anything from experience, Platzof," answered Crane defiantly. "You have been torturing, banishing, and hanging the brainiest men in the country for so long that the government is left to things like you, and a sweet mess you make of it. We are not in Odessa yet, and I can be quite happy without your company until we get there."

Platzof laughed as he drew his cigarette case from his pocket.

"To all intents and purposes you are on Russian territory now, my dear fellow," he said. "This ship is under charter to his imperial majesty, and I control it as his representative. I am as much of an autocrat on this deck as Nicholas is at Tsarko Selo, and——" He had struck a match as he spoke; but before he could raise it to his cigarette he was sent sprawling to the deck by a blow from the fist of Hayward, the first officer.

"If you try that again I'll pitch you overboard!" threatened Hayward, as the Russian scrambled to his feet. "You might as well advertise our position by burning a Coston from that chest you were sitting on."

From the bridge, Captain Douglas expressed a gruff approval of the officer's action, as Platzof made profane and forcible protest.

"Make 'em stow that chatter, too, Hayward!" he concluded, as Blasowitz and the two women crowded forward, all talking at once. "There are a half dozen Greek boats ahead of us."

"Aye, aye, sir; I'll use a belaying pin on the first man who speaks above a whisper!" answered Hayward grimly. He was a typical "bucko mate," selected especially for the handling of the tramp's nondescript crew of desperadoes, and Platzof quickly forgot his claim to autocracy, and shrank back into the darkness.

"I'll give you a friendly tip as payment for that punch, Hayward," said Crane, in a low voice. "Don't you ever take shore leave in a Russian port unless you want payment of another kind."

Hayward grunted assent. "I know the breed, and it's a bleeding shame to turn white men over to them, Mr. Crane. It was that or lose the ship, or even Captain Douglas would never have made such a bargain. If that brute gives me another chance, I'll—— Great Scott! We didn't get out a minute too soon!"

From the fortress at the harbor mouth a signal rocket announced the entrance of the Servian troops, and almost immediately a half dozen pencils of light shot skyward from the decks of the blockading ships to seaward.

"We're not in Odessa yet, Hayward!" exclaimed the Legioner hopefully. "There's a big chance that the *Harlan Castle* will go as a prize to the Piræus."

Hayward shook his head as he walked back from the rail. "Not the ghost of one, if those idiots keep their searchlights signaling on the clouds. It betrays their position without discovering ours, and the skipper is a wizard at dodging. Another mile, and we'll be on the high sea, where it's piracy to touch us."

"Hayward, I'd give a thousand pounds for one minute of freedom with the chance of getting at that chest of Coston signal lights," joined in Hennipeker abruptly, his voice above the

whisper which had been enjoined upon them. "I know where they are; in that chest lashed to the bridge companion-way stanchions. Let Crane set one off on one side, while I burn one on the other, and I'll wager that this voyage to Odessa would be interrupted."

Hayward jumped in front of him; his fist raised threateningly. "Are you trying to bribe me, you miserable little swab?"

Hennipeker made quick denial. "No, I was just thinking how easy it would be to wake those blockaders up if I could get the chance. Just a match to the fuse of one of those signals, and a blind man couldn't miss us. There are no protecting guns to run under now, and——"

"Shut up!" interrupted Hayward.

Hennipeker seemed to have gone mad; for he was jumping up and down, stamping on the deck, and noisily rattling the chain which secured him to the mast. He was fortunate enough to dodge the blow which the ship's officer sent at his head to emphasize his command, and before Hayward could strike again, Crane had stretched out his foot and tripped him. There was no further attempt to keep silence; for shouts and curses came from all sides, as the deck was suddenly illuminated by a red glare. Scrambling to his feet, Hayward made a rush to the port rail, to which Delphine was clinging with one hand as she held a flaming Coston above her head with the other; but before he could reach her and knock it into the sea, a blue flame to starboard revealed Carmela similarly occupied. She dodged a sailor who ran toward her, and, laughing hysterically, eluded a half dozen others long enough to toss her weird torch into the quarter boat, which hung outboard from the davits, before they caught her.

On the bridge, Captain Douglas had for the moment forgotten his watchfulness over Haggini; a fatal piece of forgetfulness for him; for, as he sprang toward the companion ladder, the Turk's dagger was buried between his shoulder blades. Vengeance for the ruthless destruction of the felucca gave strength to the blow, and the captain was dead before he struck the deck, to which he pitched headforemost, Haggini landing as lightly as a cat beside him, and snatching the revolver from the relaxed fingers before any of the crew could interfere. From the quarter boat a sailor tossed the still burning Coston into the sea; but the signal lights had served their purpose before they were extinguished, and the deck of the *Harlan Castle* was brilliantly lighted by the rays of the searchlights of the Greek warships which were racing toward her.

"Careful, Hayward; the jig is up, and you'll have to answer to the Greeks!" shouted Crane, as the mate swung Delphine's slender figure aloft, with the evident intention of hurling her into the sea.

Hayward hesitated a moment, and then lowered her to the deck. Carmela, half laughing, half crying, was struggling feebly in the grasp of a couple of muscular sailors, who looked at her in bewilderment as thick coils of blond hair fell about her shoulders. Blasowitz, shrieking Teutonic curses and maledictions, rushed toward her with outstretched hands; but, without waiting to ask whether he was bent upon exacting vengeance, or attempting a rescue, one of her captors stepped forward and checked the rush with a blow on the point of the jaw which dropped him at her feet, where he lay quivering and unconscious, his heels beating a queer, spasmodic tattoo on the deck.

In the shadow of the deck house, Platzof crouched in hiding. He was too old a hand at the game of conspiracy to repeat Blasowitz's error and attempt to wreak vengeance with his own hands at the risk of his own skin. Without the slightest compunction, he would have stabbed Crane as he stood helpless in his fetters, and with equal lack of hesitancy he would gladly have inflicted a lingering death upon the woman whose treachery had betrayed him; but, with the captain's revolver in one hand, a bloodstained dagger in the other, old Haggini had taken his stand in front of the mast to which the Americans were secured. Now that the fail-

ure of his original scheme was inevitable, he wished only for the speedy arrival of the Greeks; for he dreaded the moment when Crane and his companion might be turned loose on that deck, with only the ship's crew for his own protection.

Before the enraged Hayward could be brought to realize that the death of Captain Douglas had made him the commander of the ship, that promotion had ceased to be of value; for, left to his own discretion on the bridge, the second officer had signaled the engine room to stop at the first demand for surrender from a Greek destroyer, and a half dozen small boats, loaded to the gunwales with heavily armed sailors and marines, were rapidly approaching the ship. The naval lieutenant in command looked curiously at the confusing groups on his prize's deck as he stood on the rail.

"Who is in command of this ship?" he demanded sharply, in the lingua franca.

Hayward, still holding Delphine captive, stepped forward. "I suppose that I was until you came aboard," he answered sullenly. "It is the *Harlan Castle,* from Gibraltar to Odessa. We've had a bit of a mutiny, sir; but I can take care of that. The captain has been murdered. The papers are all in order, and if you will step into the captain's cabin with me I will show you that you have made a mistake."

The lieutenant smiled and twirled the ends of his black mustache, as he looked at Delphine.

"Is that one of the desperate mutineers?" he asked.

Hayward nodded; but after one glance at her he released her with surprising suddenness.

"Great Scott; a woman!" he exclaimed, as Delphine took advantage of her freedom to bring her disordered coiffure into a measure of smoothness.

"I'll not waste time in looking over the ship's papers, captain," continued the lieutenant dryly. "I'll just assume command, and I have brought about two hundred convincing arguments to back up that decision, so we won't argue about it. I'll confess to a trifle of curiosity, however. If it were not for that dead man lying there, I should suspect that I had boarded a floating opéra bouffe. Will somebody be good enough to explain?"

Platzof, reassured by the presence of the armed sailors who had followed the lieutenant on board, and formed in two lines on either side of the deck, came from his hiding place.

"I have with me credentials which will satisfy the admiral that it would be unwise to interfere with the unofficial portion of this little expedition," he said confidently. "Of course, I admit that the ship may possibly be condemned by a prize court; but neither the free passengers, nor the two prisoners, appear on the manifest, and I believe you will appreciate that it might give offense which Greece can hardly afford——"

The officer cut him short with a gesture.

"Are these the prisoners he has reference to?" he demanded of Hayward, as he glanced at the two Americans.

Hayward nodded, and at a curt command from the officer, unlocked their irons and released them.

"I've half a mind to put you there," said the Greek contemptuously to Platzof. "I know your breed, and I can guess about what has happened. We could have sent this old tub to the bottom last night; but we knew she was only running into the hands of the Servians in getting to Durazzo. Can you give me the rights of this mess?" He had spoken at the last to Crane, who was vigorously rubbing away the numbness of his arms, caused by the brutally tight handcuffs which had secured his wrists.

"I believe that Greece would have missed a prize worth several thousand pounds, and that your humble servant would have done an aërial turkey trot at the end of a rope in Odessa, if it hadn't been for the resourcefulness of these two masqueraders," he answered, Crane nodding toward the two women who had joined Hennipeker, and were

solicitously rubbing his arms. Then he briefly outlined the incidents of the last hour; emphasizing the fact that Haggini had acted as pilot under compulsion, and had rendered a real service to the Greeks in killing Captain Douglas, who would have cast the ship away rather than surrender. The officer, not entirely unaffected by the beauty of the women, and inclined to good-natured indulgence by the fact that the capture would augment his slender pay by a generous lump of prize money, nodded approvingly.

"Haggini, the admiral has promised to hang you if you fall into his hands, and I regret to say that he is strictly a man of his word," he said to the Turk. "I can't spare any of my men to take you on board the flagship; but I'll give you one of the ship's boats and a couple of these passengers to man it. Perhaps you can manage to find the flagship in the dark."

The Turk grinned his appreciation as the Greek sailors, with scant gentleness, tossed the protesting Platzof and the still dazed Blasowitz into the quarter boat, and, with the scantest of ceremonial farewells, he slid down one of the falls as soon as the boat touched the water, the revolver conveniently stowed in his sash, the dagger held between his teeth. The lieutenant graphically washed his hands of them as the boat disappeared into the darkness, old Haggini in the stern, and the two conspirators laboring clumsily at the oars.

"The easiest way is sometimes the best," he said, as he motioned to Hayward to precede him to the bridge. "I will place you two gentlemen on parole and recommend the ladies to your consideration until I have put our prize on the course for the Piræus."

Delphine looked at the Legioner defiantly as he crossed the deck toward them. "The tigress hasn't lost her stripes!" she said, ignoring the hand which he extended.

"Very fortunately for me; but I fear that her teeth have been drawn and her claws cut to harmlessness by this night's work, mademoiselle," he replied. "Unless Haggini slits Platzof's throat before they reach shore, you will have the Third Section to reckon with."

Delphine laughed contemptuously. "Platzof's death will be decreed as soon as I reach a telegraph wire—if I send a single code word to St. Petersburg. Had he succeeded in getting you to Odessa, it would have been another story; his disobedience of orders would have been justified by his success; but a failure never justifies anything. The Servians will hang Blasowitz if he falls into their clutches; for they must have discovered his treachery."

"And you will send that message?" asked Crane curiously.

Delphine hesitated, looking the Legioner squarely in the face. "Mr. Crane, would you believe me if I told you that I am weary of all this life of intrigue, mystery, and espionage which circumstances forced upon me? I know that you think that I am fitted for it by temperament and inclination; you have seen that I have practiced it successfully. The material rewards have not been small, and it has offered a power and a spice of adventure which few women ever know."

She had walked away from the others as she spoke, and Crane leaned on the ship's rail beside her. He glanced significantly at Hennipeker, who was talking earnestly with Carmela before answering.

"Delphine, I'll give you a fair answer, and it will go a little beyond your question," he said gravely. "I believe that you are weary of the life, and I can guess the reason for the weariness; but the old temptation will return. I know; for more than once I have dreamed of the vine-and-fig-tree proposition. Our young friend—for whose sake you double-crossed Platzof, and incidentally saved my life—is a charming young fellow; but I doubt if he would find you as interesting in a life of domesticity as——"

"Pardon me; but you are going just a little too far beyond my question!" interrupted Delphine sharply. "Platzof, nor no other man, has ever been anything to me. The chances of the game brought us together at times; but our

mutual interest was absolutely a business one. Make no mistake; I have lost nothing of interest with my superiors because I interfered with his police business. It is a part of my agreement that I shall never be mixed up in anything but the political-intelligence work. But even of that I have sickened. I knew that your friend was not lying in Brindisi; that he intended to go to Scutari. I am just as sure that you will not give that up because of this interruption. Mr. Crane, I intend to go with you."

"Hennipeker has invited you, I suppose?" suggested the Legioner banteringly. "My dear lady, from our experiences up to date in trying to reach the Albanian capital, I could hardly recommend the proposed journey as a rest cure for one who is wearied with adventure. I was perfectly frank with you in Brindisi; there is nothing political in our mission. Its possible rewards will be entirely personal, the risks will be by no means small."

"I have shown you how little I care for risk; I can assure you that I care even less for what you would consider the reward of your mission," she answered earnestly. "I will be frank with you, and try to make you understand. I am not in love with your friend; but I am fascinated by him. Tell me, Mr. Crane, what was your opinion of me as you heard me boasting of the part I had played when you were chained to the mast?"

"My dear lady, in view of your subsequent actions, I should much rather not," protested Crane. "It was not altogether complimentary."

"That is sufficient answer!" she exclaimed triumphantly. "That was the most difficult piece of acting I ever did, and if you will remember the details of what followed, you will understand why your friend fascinates me. I fooled you—and you are by no means unsophisticated. It deceived Blasowitz—a black-hearted rascal, who would not believe his own mother—I hoodwinked Platzof—a past master in treachery. But never for one second did it deceive your friend. He knew that we were sparring for time and watching for an opportunity. There had been no rehearsal, no suggestion of any such thing; but his talk with Hayward was meant for my ears, and he knew I would not fail him. And it has been just that from the first moment I met him in Brindisi. He knew me, the real me, from the moment he looked into my eyes. He knows that in spite of the life I have led I am a real woman, and a good woman; with him I have never needed to employ the defensive tactics that have been necessary to protect myself from the others. Can you understand what that means to me?"

"I can appreciate that it is considerable of a surprise after the bunch you have been traveling with," admitted Crane dryly. "There is just one thing which you seem to have omitted from your calculations, though. You were not alone, either in your clever deception or your subsequent act of reparation."

Delphine's eyes flashed as she glanced toward Carmela. "But I shall be alone with you on the journey to Scutari," she said. "I am tied to that woman no more closely than I was to Platzof; it is a chance companionship, and I shall sever it."

"My dear lady, there is even a looser bond between Hennipeker and myself. I suppose that we shall be sent to Athens when this ship reaches the Piræus, and there I expect that we shall part company. I am willing to accept all that you have told me as gospel truth; but we have learned the game under different masters. You have a couple of days at your disposal, and you can do your best—or your worst—with Hennipeker; but if you persuade him to accept you as a traveling companion, you can go it alone with him."

"You distrust me?" demanded Delphine sharply.

"If I do, there is nothing personal in it. I have missed death by an eyelash a hundred times, and I have seen a dozen men sacrifice themselves uselessly. I have followed one invariable rule which the others violated; I never mix a woman in my schemes."

Behind him Hennipeker chuckled derisively. He had strolled up quietly in time to hear the last of the argument.

"Isn't he a consistent misogynist?" he exclaimed.

Carmela placed an appealing hand on the Legioner's arm. "I hope not," she said, with her sweetest smile. "I have a very great favor to ask of him, and——" Crane turned quickly, determined to protect himself by keeping Hennipeker with him; but that young gentleman was already strolling aft, with his arm about Delphine's slender waist, and Carmela skillfully guided him toward the bow as she pleaded with him for permission to join the expedition to Scutari.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CORAL DEALER.

There was little of comfort in the surroundings of the two Americans after they reached the Grecian capital; for the improvised prison to which they were consigned with the officers and crew of the *Harlan Castle* was already overcrowded with Turkish soldiers and sailors who were neither cleanly in their habits, nor attractive in their personalities. On the long, dusty march from the Piræus the two women, escorted by the Greek lieutenant, had whirled past them in a carriage, laughing gayly, and apparently oblivious of the miserable plight of their quondam comrades; but Hennipeker had accepted their fickle desertion as philosophically as he took the discomforts of their imprisonment good-naturedly. Crane did not miss the opportunity to rub it in; but the younger man only smiled as he turned from the contemplation of the freakish-looking Greek soldiers who guarded them.

"I suppose that you are easier in your mind with that row of white-kilted sentries to protect you from feminine wiles and importunities; but we don't seem to be advancing rapidly on Scutari without the ladies," he retorted.

Crane looked at him suspiciously. "Have you got something up your sleeve?"

Hennipeker's smile changed to an irritating smirk as he rolled his cigarette.

"I have something in each of them; something which was used to the very best advantage during our little voyage," he answered complacently. "See here, old chap; it's poor business to bite off your nose to spite your face, and we are apt to be kept here indefinitely, unless you let the girls have their way. It's just the old lion-and-mouse story over again; we are in no immediate danger, but we are enmeshed in a net of red tape, and they can get us out if you will say the word."

"And that word is?"

"Simply a 'Yes' to their request to stick with us," answered Hennipeker, after lighting his cigarette. "Now wait a minute before you commence swearing at women in general, and Carmela and Delphine in particular. This is no more an ordinary proposition than they are ordinary young women. If they were timid little débutantes—like Miss Opal Violette Buckintender, for example—I might agree with your refusal to accept them as traveling companions; but I think they have demonstrated their ability to care for themselves. The *Harlan Castle* would probably have slipped through the blockading fleet, and we should be sailing merrily to what was coming to us in Odessa, if they hadn't set off those signal lights, so we owe them something in common gratitude."

"Not forgetting that we should have reached the shore in the felucca's boat if they hadn't butted in," argued Crane obstinately. "Just what is the proposition, Hennipeker—I see that you are standing in with them?"

"It's just this, old chap," answered Hennipeker, tacitly acknowledging the implication. "They will have us out of here before morning if you will promise not to desert them in Athens. If not, why, the American minister may arrange our release in a few days—or he may not."

A grim smile came to the Legioner's lips at the suggestion.

"It's one of the rules of the game as played by Jabez Cooper's boys that

American ministers and ambassadors are never called upon," he said dryly. "We don't want to overwork the diplomatic corps. Can't we compromise this thing, Hennipeker? Which one of those skirts are you stuck on?"

"Both of 'em," replied Hennipeker, laughing. "I couldn't bear to make a choice. It's both, or neither, on this deal, Crane; and it's surrender or cool our heels in this malodorous clink until the authorities get around to letting us out; which, the lieutenant told me, might be a matter of weeks. It's up to you; there is a steamer sailing for Cattaro at midnight, and you'll stand a lot better chance of sprinkling salt on the tails of those pink lizards in Scutari if you——"

"Oh, go to blazes!" interrupted Crane, making a swift pass which Hennipeker had anticipated and skillfully ducked. "Get busy and finish your frame-up; I see that I've got to stand for it, and I'll try to take my medicine without making faces."

Neither Hennipeker nor the Legioner ever discovered just how it was accomplished; for both Delphine and Carmela gave evasive answers, and were evidently embarrassed when questioned as to their methods; but they were quietly released from the prison, and hurried into a waiting carriage in time to catch the midnight steamer for Cattaro. It was, perhaps, significant that when the two women came on board on the nick of sailing time, they were most becomingly dressed in gowns which were hardly fitted for sea voyaging, and that they were manifestly uneasy until the steamer had cleared the harbor. They might have guessed if they had been able to look into a little private dining room at the Cafethene Hercules, where the military governor and the provost marshal of Athens waited impatiently at a table on which covers were laid for four; for those officials were in charge of prisoners of war.

Better than his word, Crane accepted the enforced companionship without visible objection, and, although he was loath to acknowledge it, even to himself, he found association with the two women on the new footing of friendliness anything but disagreeable. Both of them were women of the world in the broadest sense, and their peculiar calling had developed their natural adaptability so thoroughly that they would have made equally charming company for princes or peasants.

Delphine, acknowledged to be the most skillful of the many secret agents of the Russian political service, had played many rôles in many countries; but she was too valuable to her employers to be risked in small matters, and she had been used only in those important cases where she was brought in contact with the brainiest and most cultivated men of the political and social world. She was a remarkable linguist, and so natural an actress that she played her many diverse parts with convincing sincerity. The dancing girl of to-day, hail fellow well met with her fellow professionals, and merry boon companion of the gilded youth who worshiped at her shrine, was six months before one of the most charming and exclusive hostesses of Mayfair, entertaining royalty itself, and incidentally learning from a confiding and indiscreet under secretary of the foreign office every clause of the newly negotiated secret treaty between Japan and England.

Had she not been betrayed by the stupidity of her superiors, when she was playing her dangerous part in Tokyo, Port Arthur might still have been a Russian fortress, and Kuropatkin's disastrous campaign have had a glorious ending, and it was through infatuation for her when she dazzled Vienna as an Argentine heiress that the colonel at the head of the intelligence department of the general staff betrayed the mobilization plans of the Triple Alliance.

Carmela was, perhaps, less versatile; but such talents as she possessed and employed in the devious paths of underground diplomacy and political intrigue were masked by a singularly childlike and innocent face of surpassing beauty. She was a free lance in the game, and in her short career had served a dozen

different masters; always faithful to her employer of the moment, although her next commission might make him an enemy to be hoodwinked.

In the peculiar profession which they followed a cool head was requisite for success; a head which always ruled the heart, and never until they had met Hennipeker in Brindisi had either of them permitted sentiment to interfere with business. It was in the line of their trade that they had first made his acquaintance; for Delphine had been sent to Brindisi as the local eyes and ears of the Russian intelligence department in that hotbed of intrigue and espionage, and it was her business to discover the business of others. He was apparently an idler in a place which offered few attractions for sight-seers and tourists, and a newcomer might always be a menace; and, judging from his youthful, ingenuous face, that her task would be a simple one, she had set about discovering the real reason for his presence.

Now, in her varied experience, this very sophisticated young woman had dealt with so many sorts and conditions of men that she believed she had the entire sex classified and indexed in her mental card catalogue. So many of them had made love to her that, given the age, nationality, and social rank of the male biped, she had always been able to foresee the manner of campaign he would inaugurate against her heart, and invariably her head had won for her the victory.

Nothing in Hennipeker's attitude or manner toward her had paralleled her former experiences, however. Manifestly unaccustomed to such an environment as he entered at Brindisi, he was apparently oblivious to the threatening and tragic undercurrent beneath the surface, and treated the whole situation as a joke. He paid his devotions to her with an ardor which might have deceived a less experienced adventuress in the tender passion; but Delphine was too sensitive to miss the subtle raillery beneath his most fervent protestations, and the realization that he read the speciousness of her own efforts as if they were the printed word, piqued and aggravated her, until pretense grew to reality, and, as Crane had bluntly asserted, she had fallen a victim, instead of emerging from the tender contest a victor. It was merely a coincidence that she and Platzof were in Brindisi at the same time; for their lines of work were so distinct, that they rarely approached each other; but when Crane appeared on the scene, Delphine consented to a temporary alliance, and it was that which took her to Durazzo. Platzof and Blasowitz had been warned of the tremendously rich cargo of the *Harlan Castle,* and instructed to prevent the ship from escaping before the arrival of the Servians, and it was for that purpose that they boarded her on her arrival.

But Platzof disregarded instructions when he learned from Captain Douglas the identity of the two passengers who had just disembarked. His failure to capture Gorski, for which Crane was responsible, had lost him a tremendous financial reward, and delayed his promotion in the service, and he easily bribed Blasowitz to betray his employers, and join his conspiracy to capture the Legioner; Blasowitz stipulating that Hennipeker should also be so effectually disposed of that he would never again cross Carmela's path.

And it was that pretty piece of villainy which the two women had brought to naught at the cost of no small personal risk and sacrifice. In the life of political intrigue and conspiracy which they followed, no consideration was paid to sex, and both of them knew too much to be allowed to retire from the service. Neither of them apparently gave the slightest thought to that, and Hennipeker—who persisted in treating their whole expedition as more or less of a joke—apparently had no conception of it; but Crane appreciated it to the utmost, and, as he grew to like the women during the voyage, it worried him not a little.

They were sailing under the neutral flag of Austria, and, once clear of the Piræus, had nothing to fear from the Greeks or the *Hamidieh,* which was

again roving the Mediterranean; but he knew that if old Haggini had given Blasowitz and Platzof their liberty, they would be in danger as soon as they reached Dalmatia. No matter how completely official communication might be abolished, there was always a "grapevine" by which those experienced conspirators could send news, and the hue and cry against the two women would be raised to the uttermost confines of Europe.

It complicated a situation which, without them, would have been comparatively simple; for during his one day in the Athens military prison Crane had made good use of his time, and from one of the Turkish officers captured while carrying dispatches from Scutari, had obtained information which would have given him ready access to the besieged city from the Montenegrin side.

Communication between Cattaro and Cettinge was still uninterrupted, and four or five clear and unhampered days would have sufficed to reach the Albanian capital. Alone, he and Hennipeker might have slipped through Cattaro without attracting troublesome attention; but the companionship of the women would bring them under suspicion of the Austrian authorities, and excite a troublesome curiosity in the Montenegrins.

Hennipeker simply laughed when Crane voiced his worries to him.

"Why borrow trouble?" he protested. "Old Haggini had blood in his eye when he went over the side, and it's dollars to doughnuts that the kind of payment he exacted from that precious pair for the destruction of his felucca has placed them past the possibility of troubling us."

"We can't count on that," answered Crane seriously. "Haggini is no longer young; he is a Turk, and he is avaricious. He was faithful to our salt, and did the best he knew how to earn the money which we had paid him; but his contract with us ended when he left the *Harlan Castle*. Platzof and Blasowitz can always command a plentiful supply of cash. Haggini had satisfied his blood lust by killing Captain Douglas for running him down, and he would ransom his confederates for the value of the felucca. I know these people, Hennipeker, and I'm not reckoning Platzof and Blasowitz as dead men until some one shows me their heads on a silver charger."

Crane's deductions were absolutely correct, as they were destined soon to demonstrate; the two conspirators had bought their peace with old Haggini after a long night of galley-slave labor at the oars, which left them with raw, blistered hands, and aching backs.

At daylight they had discovered and joined the Turkish soldiers retreating along the shore from Durazzo to San Giovanni di Medua, and his protection assured them safe conduct to that port where—after they had settled his claims to the uttermost farthing—they were set at liberty.

Even in peaceful times it was an unimportant little town having small intercourse with the outside world, and—although Austrian territory was the last place in which they wished to set foot—Cattaro was the one foreign port to which they could obtain transportation.

And so, by a curious chain of coincidence, the tiny coasting steamer on which they embarked picked its way through the long, tortuous fiord which leads to the principal town of the Austrian province of Dalmatia, only an hour in advance of the Athens mail boat, which carried as passengers the strangely assorted quartet against whom they had vowed a bitter vengeance.

But for the moment Platzof was more concerned in saving his own credit than in exacting vengeance. He had failed signally in his management of the mission intrusted to him, and he fully realized the importance of having his own story of the misadventure the first to reach headquarters. Austria, fearful of permitting any Slav nation to acquire a Mediterranean port which would surely be transformed into a Russian naval base, was jealously watching the victorious campaign of the Balkan allies, and foreigners were not

welcome in Cattaro, where troops were rapidly mobilizing for possible action against Montenegro.

From long experience the two adventurers were adepts in disguise, however, and as the little steamer was overcrowded with refugees from Durazzo they had little difficulty in slipping ashore in the confusion; for the Austrian secret-service agents were far more suspicious of the presence of spies among the passengers of the steamer from the Grecian port, which was just coming to her anchorage.

Once past the customhouse, Platzof knew that they were reasonably safe from discovery or interference, and they made their way to the Café Wien, which at that early hour was crowded with officers and civilians taking their morning coffee.

A casual observer might have suspected that Platzof had brought a headache with him from the sea; for while they waited for the filling of their order, he passed his left hand continuously over his forehead; desisting only when a prosperous and placid-looking shopkeeper at another table vigorously massaged his eyelids with the knuckles of his middle fingers.

No sign of recognition passed between them in the café; but a half hour later Platzof haggled over a counter about the price of a coral necklace with that same shopkeeper, bargaining and arguing until the shop was emptied of other customers. Then, while Blasowitz momentarily blocked the doorway before stepping out to lose himself in the crowded street, the Russian slipped through a doorway which was unexpectedly revealed by the noiseless moving aside of an apparently fixed show case.

It was an innocent business message which Imperialli, the coral dealer, filed at the telegraph office as a result of Platzof's labors with the code book in the little secret room behind the shop. It was directed to a well-known wholesale dealer in Naples, and ostensibly it was a rush order for an assorted lot of jewelry. It passed the censor's keen eyes without arousing suspicion—and within three hours the Russian ambassador in Rome was studying Platzof's version of the events which led to the capture of the *Harlan Castle.*

Crane had predicted accurately the effect of such a report as Platzof would make; for, no matter how high in favor Delphine might stand with the political intelligence department, the Third Section is the real power behind the Russian throne, and in its estimation the escape of the Legioner was a far more serious matter than the loss of the contraband cargo. The czar lived in constant fear of the activities of the Terrorist group directed by Gorski, and would have given his richest province for his head.

Consequently, at St. Petersburg, Delphine was condemned unheard; for she had made no report to her superiors, and Platzof's telegram specifically accused her of aiding in Crane's escape. Warnings against her were scattered broadcast to the secret agents throughout Europe, and one of the first to be delivered was an ostensible acknowledgment of order addressed to Imperialli, the coral dealer of Cattaro.

Curiously enough, Delphine herself was in the shop when the *facteur* entered with that message. Behind the counter Imperialli was massaging his eyelids with the knuckles of his middle fingers; for the woman who faced him across the tray of trinkets which he had brought out for her inspection had slowly stroked her forehead with an ungloved left hand. Now, that massage must have been wonderfully efficacious in sharpening the shopkeeper's vision; for on the little finger of that hand he saw something which made him suddenly alert, and then humbly subservient; a simple little ring of silver, set with tiny lapis-lazuli chips, arranged in a peculiar pattern.

Hennipeker had accompanied her into the shop, and he watched curiously as Delphine placed her hand over the telegraphic message which the *facteur* had left on the counter beside the tray. Imperialli quickly stretched out his hand to take it from her; but he withdrew it even more quickly as almost

imperceptibly she raised the finger which bore the talisman. A subtle instinct had warned her that the message which had been delivered so opportunely vitally concerned her, and she looked at Imperialli defiantly as, suddenly white of face and tremulous, he shrank back against the wall, piteous supplication and abject fear mingled in his heavy-lidded eyes.

Without apology she tore open the envelope and glanced at the contents of the message, and then held out her hand imperatively, turning the ring until the curious pattern of the setting was distinctly visible. Imperialli glanced apprehensively at the show case which concealed the entrance to the secret cubby-hole, where Platzof was in hiding, and laid a significant finger on his trembling lips. A moment later he again rubbed his eyes; but this time with the tips of his fingers, and that innocent gesture caused Delphine's hand to go quickly to the bosom of her dress, where it concealed the message, and remained to clutch the butt of an automatic pistol.

"I am desolated that I have not at the moment the bracelet which madame desires," said Imperialli glibly, regaining his self-control at the cost of no small effort. "I believe that I can obtain it, however, and if madame will do me the favor to permit me to wait upon her at her hotel, I shall do my best to bring it there."

Delphine glanced warily about the little shop; not an item of its furnishing or arrangement escaping her.

"Very well; but you must make haste and be sure that there is no mistake," she answered. "I am dining at the Café d'Italia, and you may bring it there; for it is probable that I shall sail for Brindisi this evening."

Imperialli bowed low; but although it lacked a half hour of his regular closing time, it was apparent that he wished to transact no more business that day; for no sooner had Delphine and Hennipeker left the shop than he closed the heavy shutters, and locked the door. Secure from the observation of prying eyes from without, he swung the show case aside, and Platzof stepped from behind it, yawning and rubbing his eyes. Imperialli watched him furtively; but he gave no sign that he had overheard.

"Blasowitz not back yet?" he asked carelessly.

"No," answered Imperialli; "but there is no reason for worrying about his safety. A traitor to Servia would be persona grata in Cattaro just now."

Platzof was suddenly awake, and his evil eyes narrowed to slits. "That's a poor philosophy, Imperialli! A traitor is never safe, and he always pays in the end. Give me that message!"

"What message?" demanded the storekeeper, with a very transparent assumption of innocence.

"You are a poor specimen of a conspirator to be given such an important post!" said Platzof derisively. "I want the message which was contained in this envelope, and I want it right now!"

He leaned over to pick up the envelope which Delphine had dropped to the floor; but even as his fingers touched it he fell forward on his face; for with the lithe spring of a panther, Imperialli had landed on his back and dealt him a savage blow on the head with a blackjack.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN GRAVE DANGER.

On landing at Cattaro that morning, Crane soon discovered that he had his work cut out for him; for he met that passive form of opposition to their proposed progress inland which is always more difficult to overcome than an active prohibition. It was ostensibly an open and free port, for Austria was technically at peace with the world; but it was in reality a great military base, where troops were mobilizing for a possible invasion of Montenegro, and every foreigner arriving was subjected to jealous scrutiny.

The daily automobile diligence service to Cettinge was still maintained; but at the booking office he was most politely informed that every seat was taken for days in advance, although he

saw the car depart less than half filled for the long climb to the Montenegrin capital.

Not a horse nor mule was to be had for love or money; for the military authorities had commandeered the visible supply; and when he made inquiry as to the accommodations for pedestrians en route, he was warned that save for passengers in the diligence, the road for the first five miles was closed to civilians, as it lay within the zone of the new fortifications.

Now, underneath the courteous regret which the officials expressed with their lips, the Legioner was shrewd enough to read the blunt truth—that no foreigner would be permitted to pass the military cordon which had been drawn about the city. The warships of the powers were blockading the Montenegrin port of Antivari as a hint to Nicholas to restrain his ambition for conquest, and Austria was passively cutting off communication through Dalmatia to support the sea blockade.

When he met the others for luncheon at the Café d'Italia, Crane frankly related the difficulties which he had encountered.

"And you can discover no loophole to slip through?" asked Delphine, when he finished.

"Not a loophole through which four might walk abreast," answered Crane. "I think I might stand a chance of slipping through alone in the night."

"No; not the ghost of a chance," she said, as she glanced toward a table where a group of officers in picturesque uniforms of light blue and silver were breakfasting. "The Blue Hussars form the cavalry patrol, and that regiment is recruited from the Magyar gypsies, who see as well in the dark as the Austrians do in daylight. They would give you short shrift."

"Then it's a case of returning to Brindisi, and starting on another tack," said Crane grimly. "Those confounded, smiling liars at headquarters seemed quite enthusiastic when I suggested that, and informed me that there would be a steamer sailing to-night."

Delphine smiled, and leaned on the table, looking him squarely in the eyes.

"My friend, you are a great humbug!" she said quietly. "You have no more intention of returning to Brindisi than I have of going to the moon. Unless I prevent it, you will steal off and do some rash thing which will end in your capture and probable quiet execution."

"But, confound it, there must be a way through," he answered. "They have had sleuths trailing me all over the city, and they wouldn't be so encouraging about having us sail for Brindisi if they knew they had all the holes stopped up!"

Delphine nodded agreement. "In all the world's history there has never been a town so closely invested that there was not a way in and out; there has never been a prison so secure that prisoners have not escaped," she answered. "There is a way!"

Crane looked at her inquiringly. "It will save me a lot of time and trouble if you will point it out. Can you give me a hint?"

"Not yet; but I can find out before the day is over," said Delphine confidently. "Lady Douglas escaped from Tokyo to the French flagship in Yokohama in spite of a swarm of secret-service men who tried to intercept her; the Marquise de Rivigo carried the draft of the Anglo-Japanese treaty to the Continent under the noses of the Scotland Yard officers who had been warned to arrest her on sight. Señora Aguilar y Fernandez crossed half of Austria with a price on her head, and human bloodhounds on her trail; for in her hand bag was the complete plan of mobilization of the Triple Alliance. This little affair looks simpler than a dozen others I might mention."

"Except for the fact that in those flights you were aided by a very perfectly disciplined force of subordinates upon which you can no longer rely," suggested the Legioner. "You forget that you are not in the Russian service, and I'll wager that you won't find any of Jabez Cooper's employees scattered around to give you a helping hand."

"My friend, I shall always be in the Russian service," answered Delphine gravely. "Every Russian is; but there is a distinction between serving Russia and serving the House of Romanoff. I have left the czar's service; but I am still a Russian—and if there is a way I shall find it. If I were you, I should reserve passage for all of us on the Brindisi boat. Fortunately, we are dealing with the military authorities here; not with the secret service. The chances are that they will accept that as an evidence that you have given up—especially if you pay for the tickets—and it will give me a freer hand."

Crane hesitated a moment. "See here, my girl, I won't have you playing with fire to help me out," he said. "I can guess how——"

"But you must not guess—and you must forget all that you suspect from what you see!" she interrupted quickly. "I am not afraid of fire, my friend; I have kindled too many, and I make it a servant and not a master. Now go and take Carmela with you; I have some shopping to do, and Mr. Hennipeker can accompany me. We shall meet here for dinner—and I promise you that I shall have found a way to Cettinge."

Hennipeker accepted with alacrity the invitation to accompany her. It was a new world which he was living in; a world in which the atmosphere still suggested unreal melodrama in spite of the incidents of very real tragedy which he had witnessed. The others had accepted the running down of the felucca, the killing of Captain Douglas, the imprisonment at Athens, and the espionage at Cattaro as part of the day's work, and the dramatic element apparently made not the slightest appeal to their imaginations. But, watching Delphine and Crane during their short argument at the luncheon table, he had detected just a hint of some deeper currents in this sea of adventure than anything he had seen in sailing its surface; currents which even those experienced navigators through the perils of conspiracy and intrigue hesitated to speak of. And, confident as he was as to Delphine's feeling for him, he realized that it was no fondness for his company which had led her to select him as an escort. She had work to do; something which she preferred to carry out free from the observation of the sharp and experienced eyes of the Legioner and Carmela.

To be taken for a greenhorn was a trifle irritating, and a challenge to his pride, and Hennipeker determined to watch her so closely that in the end he would be able to surprise and confound her by an exhibition of his cleverness; but before the end of the first hour he was bored to exasperation in waiting for her to get down to the real business of the day.

All thought of their plight, and her promise to extricate them from it seemed to have been forgotten in her sudden realization of her many personal needs, and he accompanied her on a weary round of the Cattaro shops.

Delphine proved to be a most exacting and persistent shopper. In the end she usually made some small purchase; but even in the largest shops she never bought until in her inspection of the stock she had been waited upon by every one, from the lowest clerk to the proprietor. She laughed when he ventured a protest after they had left a great emporium which she had ransacked with the enthusiasm of a Sixth Avenue bargain hunter before buying a half dozen pairs of gloves which had been shown to her at the first counter.

"You mustn't get impatient, dear boy," she said soothingly. "We have half of the afternoon left, and you must remember that I haven't seen my trunks since I left Brindisi, and a woman needs such heaps and heaps of things that a man knows nothing about. I have quite a formidable list yet, so if you are tired of being my escort, you can wait for me at the café."

Hennipeker looked at her suspiciously; for there was a suggestion of triumph in her eyes; a triumph which renewed the challenge. And then, for the rest of the day, he followed meekly and without further protest, determined

that he would give her no excuse to make his dismissal absolute.

But it was not until he saw Imperialli draw back in fear when she apropriated the telegram that he realized that, through the weary afternoon, she had been earnestly working on her peculiar quest in every shop they visited.

Cattero was unknown territory to Delphine, and she had been finding her way about. In any of the great capitals of the world she could have found blindfolded such a man as she sought; in London the Algerian tobacco dealer in Rathbone Street would have given her a thousand pounds in bank notes if she had made a little sign with her fingers as she asked for a box of mild Strombolis; in Paris the famous old antique seller in the Rue St. Pierre would have furnished her an effective disguise and safe conduct through a crowd of watchful enemies, if she had asked for "a silver samovar of the Irkutsk model." In Tokyo the Chinese silk merchant, Sing Long, had suddenly decided to return to China on a visit after Lady Douglas said a quiet word while examining his stock, and that very night he departed for Yokohama, accompanied by his wife, whom the coolies carried in a curtained litter, because her tightly bound feet made her incapable of walking. It was that same night that the yellow-skinned secret-service men searched every corner of the foreign woman's great establishment, and watched every road and path which led from the capital to prevent her escape.

It was a mass of very complicated memoranda which Delphine had been compelled to commit to memory against future need; for such things were never written, and every secret agent had his own peculiar hailing sign. There was so much that was necessary that she had burdened her memory with nothing superfluous, and Cattaro had seemed far removed from her map of activities. But she knew that even in that small Dalmatian city there would be a resident secret-service agent, and, reasoning from her past experience, she had guessed that she would find him among the shopkeepers. Among them all, far and wide, there was a universal greeting which all knew; a gesture so natural that it would pass without comment in a crowd, to be answered by one equally innocent in appearance as a recognition.

And so Hennipeker, in his innocence, had marveled at Delphine's persistency in shopping in spite of the headache from which she evidently suffered; for in every shop she had employed her left hand to smooth the pain in her aching brow, while the fingers of the right appraised the texture of the goods which were offered for her inspection. It was by the merest chance that Platzof had obtained such a quick answer to his signal; for he, too, was ignorant of Cattaro; it was by great good fortune that Delphine had left the little coral shop among the last to be investigated; for so she arrived there in time to intercept the message which Platzof awaited. The young American's eyes were suddenly opened to the significance of it all, and when they reached the street he looked at her admiringly.

"By Jove, Delphine; you've got me going!" he admitted, as they strolled slowly toward the café, Delphine restraining the pace, and lingering to look in the shop windows. "I never tumbled to your game until you had won, and I don't believe that any one else even suspected——"

"You know nothing of it yet, and what you suspect you must forget!" she interrupted. "Not so fast—we must not raise the suspicion that we are hurrying from danger. We are probably watched."

Hennipeker laughed incredulously. "My dear, if you hadn't just demonstrated that you were a real dyed-in-the-wool conspirator, I should suspect that you were trying to throw a scare into me, and send me back to Brindisi. I don't see that we have much to fear when you can turn an able-bodied man like Imperialli green with fright by wiggling your little finger."

He glanced at her hand as he spoke; but the silver ring had disappeared from

it, and it was tremulous with appeal as she laid it on his arm.

"Please, please be serious," she said earnestly. "I know that we were in grave danger in that shop; Imperialli's fear was not altogether of me. I could only guess the nature of it then; but now I know. Don't turn or pay any attention; but I have recognized the man who is shadowing us. It is Blasowitz, and it's safe to assume that Platzof was in hiding there, and listening to every word which was said. Now listen and remember every word I say so long as it may be of service, and then I trust to your honor and fairness to forget it."

She laughed as she spoke, and more than one of the strolling officers whom they passed looked at her admiringly, and envied the young American her merry companionship.

"Platzof undoubtedly found Imperialli before we did, and the message I confiscated is the answer to one which he sent to St. Petersburg," she continued. "It is in a code with which I am unfamiliar, and you saw that Imperialli was unable to give me the key to it. That can mean only one thing; he could not get it without encountering Platzof, and that he did not dare to do while we were in the shop. He has promised to bring it to me at the café, and I want to keep Blasowitz following us until he has a chance to obtain it. If he thinks that he has us safely located, he will hurry back to notify Platzof, and that would make the odds two to one against Imperialli ever getting out of that shop alive with the code book."

"But, my dear girl, how can you be sure that Imperialli will not play fair with Platzof and false with you?" demanded Hennipeker. "He is a Russian agent, and, knowing that you are discredited in St. Petersburg, he will see that it is more to his advantage to serve a powerful officer of the Third Section than a cast-off agent of the political department."

"Dear boy, that is one of the things which you must take on faith," she replied evasively. "I know all about Imperialli, although I did not know that he was stationed in Cattaro. He is a Neapolitan, and friends of mine were instrumental in bringing him into the Russian secret service. He may fail in his attempt to get that code book; for Platzof is as resourceful as he is desperate; but it will not be for want of trying. Never mind the reasons for my confidence; but Imperialli will bring it to the café—or the czar will have to find another resident agent for Cattaro. It is not a child's game they are playing, and human life is cheap. It is held so lightly that any one of us may be the next to go. If I should be the next, you must give up this mad journey of yours, and return at once to America; for no power on earth can save you if you remain in Europe. I can't explain it to you; but I have taken a great chance; a greater one than I should have risked if I had known that Platzof had reached Cattaro ahead of us. If I live I can control the genie I have released from the magic bottle to aid us; but if I meet with accident, it will turn to rend you. I have no fear for myself; I have become hardened to risk."

"But why should you incur it?" asked Hennipeker abruptly. "You have told us that you are sick and tired of the trade you have followed. You are freed from it now, and at liberty to give——"

"Is this generous?" she interrupted passionately, forgetting the pretense of gayety which she had deemed so necessary. "I have asked no questions of you; the real object of your mission to Scutari you have never confided to me, and I have asked you nothing. I go because I wish to go—a woman's reason, if you wish to call it so."

"And I wish to go there for a woman's reason, too, Delphine," answered Hennipeker gravely. "I am trying to be generous, or fair, at least; and so I tell you this: I go there on behalf of an American girl; a girl who would be too square to permit me to take an unfair advantage; to let you run into danger under a misapprehension. She is——"

Delphine stamped her little foot and checked him with a gesture. "She does

not interest me; I do not wish to hear about her!" she exclaimed. "I suppose that you think she loves you; but what kind of a love is it that sits snugly and safely at home, and sends you to such dangers as this to satisfy a whim?"

"If you will let me tell you about her, I shall try to make you understand," persisted Hennipeker. "It is just this, Delphine; unless you do understand, I cannot accept the sacrifices which——"

"Sacrifices? Do you suppose that I am running my head into a noose for the sake of any namby-pamby little fool of an American girl—or for the love of a fool of a man who could lose his head about her?" she interrupted angrily. "I don't care a snap of my finger for any of you; I am thinking of my own skin, and I know that it is not safe with Platzof in Cattaro at the end of the St. Petersburg wire. Cettinge, Scutari, Hongkong, or Halifax—it is all one to me where I go, so long as it is away from here!"

"Then, my dear, I suggest that we return to the Café d'Italia, where you can have a comfortable dinner before taking the night boat to Brindisi," suggested Hennipeker. "Platzof and Imperialli have had time to settle their accounts one way or another."

There was a suggestion of teasing in his voice, and Delphine looked at him resentfully.

"Will you never be serious?" she asked, and it was very evident that she would have welcomed the confession that he had been joking.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE NET OF THE SECRET-SERVICE MEN.

The combination of an Italian proprietor, a French chef, and an Austrian maître-d'hôtel, worked culinary miracles at the Café d'Italia, and the wine list equaled the menu in excellence. Crane was a past master in the art of ordering a dinner, and none of the patrons at the other tables suspected that the merriment of the gay quartet in the farthest corner of the terrace covered a very grave apprehension and a real anxiety. The music of the Hungarian gypsy orchestra permitted a certain privacy of conversation even in that crowded restaurant, and, with a smiling face, Delphine related so much of the history of the afternoon as she deemed it necessary for the Legioner to know.

"If there is a possible way through the Austrian lines, Imperialli will know of it, and be able to give us passports," she continued. "We shall have to reckon with Platzof and Blasowitz, and I doubt if they will dare to do anything openly until we are out of Austrian territory. There are so many Austrian officers imprisoned in Russian fortresses as a result of the work of the Third Section, that Platzof would be effectually disposed of if he fell into the hands of the soldiers here."

"And have you no fear of them for yourself, Delphine?" asked Crane. "The betrayal of the mobilization plans caused the worst scandal the Austrian army has ever known. Platzof could buy his own safety by delivering you, and I doubt if you can absolutely trust Imperialli."

"Neither Platzof nor Imperialli know," she answered. "The real identity of the Señora Aguilar y Fernandez is known only to the chief of the division which I served. Imperialli I can absolutely rely upon—and here he comes!"

Crane looked critically at the Italian as he approached the table. He apologized profusely for interrupting them at their meal; but Crane pointed to the small coffee cups and liqueurs as a proof that they had finished, and motioned to the waiter to fetch another chair.

"I trust that you have found just what I wanted?" said Delphine.

Imperialli bowed and took a half dozen small packages from the leather sample case which he carried. One he placed in front of her and left unopened, when he passed the others about.

"I am sure that madame will be entirely satisfied," he said. "It required great effort; but I was successful."

Delphine dropped the packet into her lap, and beneath her napkin slipped the contents from the wrapping paper. Crane was ostentatiously holding to the light a glittering and barbaric piece of jewelry from one of the other boxes, and the curious eyes from the adjoining tables naturally focused upon it as he expatiated with rather unnecessary loudness upon its beauties. Delphine merely glanced at it, and, with a scornful shake of her head, devoted herself to the very profusely interleaved Baedeker which she drew from beneath the table. The contents of the cipher message she had committed so carefully to memory that she did not need to refer to it, and while the others bargained with Imperialli over the trinkets which were spread on the table, she made a rapid mental translation with the aid of the disguised guidebook. From long practice she had become an adept in deciphering code, and in a surprisingly short time she had mastered the message to the last word.

"I think your price is absurdly high for that bracelet, Imperialli," she said, as she dropped the code book carelessly back beneath the sheltering napkin in her lap. "We are at a disadvantage, however, and can't bargain; for we must positively leave Cattaro to-night. Let me see it again."

She reached out her hand, and, as if by a conjuring trick, the package in its original wrapping reappeared on the table. Imperialli was evidently greatly relieved when he had safely returned it to his sample case; but perturbation grew on his face as Delphine quietly told him what she wished as she turned the bracelet over and over in her hands.

"It is absolutely impossible, madame," he protested, when she finished. "Of course, there is a way; but it is not broad enough for four. One I could manage, at a great risk, to forward, possibly two; but I cannot perform miracles, and four is beyond the range of possibilities."

"Can you guarantee the safety of two?" she asked quietly.

"I can only promise to do my share. It will require cool heads and a certain skill in mountaineering. The only possible way is the old footpath. It was never good, and since the new military road was completed, it has been practically abandoned. As an additional precaution, the Austrians have destroyed the first bridge, and for that reason the path is left unguarded; for they consider it absolutely impassable. There is a way across that torrent that only the brigands know. One of you I can promise to smuggle out of town and place on that path; if you insist, I shall try to get two of you past the patrol; but that is the limit."

"And how soon?" Delphine's face had lost its mask of merriment, and there was a curious little catch in her voice as she asked the question.

"On the arrival of the Trieste steamer at about eleven-thirty," said Imperialli. "She stops here only long enough to land the mail and passengers, and then sails for Brindisi. You will all go to the landing stage and take small boats, ostensibly to board the steamer. The two who trust themselves to me will take a skiff which I shall have waiting there, and which will carry them to the shore almost at the foot of the old path, which is beyond the fortifications. The others will take one of the regular barcas and embark on the steamer. I have many things to do in the meantime, madame; but I shall meet you at the landing stage."

He gathered up the pieces of jewelry which the others had been looking over, and, as he repacked them in his case, Delphine gave Crane a rapid explanation.

"And so, you see, the gods fight for you!" she concluded bitterly. "I know that Imperialli is honest with me; it is beyond his power to give us all safe conduct, so you and Mr. Hennipeker will be freed of the association which has been forced upon you, and which you have found so hateful. Carmela and I will remain and give you the chance."

Crane was absolutely sincere in his belief that it was only common gallantry which prompted his vehement protest.

"Not by a jugful!" he exclaimed. "I'm not leaving you two girls to the tender mercies of Blasowitz and his side kicker for all the pink lizards that ever sang ragtime in Albania. You'll go with us, or we'll stay with you."

Delphine looked at him with a new interest in her eyes, and there was a wistful little smile about her pretty mouth as she shook her head. On the other side of the table, Carmela and Hennipeker were talking and laughing together. She hesitated for a moment before answering, and during that brief space the Legioner wondered what particular dish in the delicious dinner had disagreed with his cast-iron digestion; for he was conscious of an entirely unfamiliar internal sensation, which in his ignorance he attributed to the general region of his stomach.

"Thank you, my friend; but neither of those things would be wise," continued Delphine. "If I went with you it would simply increase your risk, and you could contribute nothing to my safety by remaining with us. I do not fear Blasowitz nor Platzof. In this great military camp they would be powerless to——"

The Legioner interrupted her by grasping her hand beneath the table, pressing the firmly clenched little fist with an intensity which made her wince.

"My girl; there's a nigger in the woodpile some place, and I'm going to drag him out!" he said grimly. "Did you have trouble with that youngster to-day?" Delphine's face flushed; but she looked fearlessly into his eyes. "I don't know much about women; my early education in that line was neglected, and I've never found time to take a correspondence course," continued Crane, without releasing his grip. "But I know human nature, and I reckon in the long run the sexes average to pretty much of a muchness. I've seen a man keep a grin on his face when he was pegged down, and having the soles of his feet massaged with bamboo rods, and biting a bullet clean in two to keep from crying out. You've been sitting here with a smile on your pretty lips as you suggest that we beat it alone; but under the table you were digging your finger nails into your palms, and I dope it out that that's your way of biting the bullet. Now, what is it? What's the answer?"

She disengaged her hand, and for a moment rested it open on the table, the deep imprint of her finger nails in the palm betraying how accurately the Legioner had guessed.

"My friend, the real knowledge of a real woman is not learned by study," she said. "I am just beginning to realize that a woman's long study of man is equally futile. I am sorry that I appreciate that only at this late day; but it can't be helped. You and Mr. Hennipeker must take the only chance which offers, and leave us here."

"Delphine, what is the translation of the cipher message?" he demanded so abruptly that she was startled into self-betrayal in spite of her assumed indifference.

"Nothing important—just routine police instructions to Platzof," she answered carelessly. "I guessed correctly; it was in answer to his report to St. Petersburg."

For the first time her eyes refused to meet his, and he leaned over until their faces were close together.

"And still there was enough in it to make you change your mind against your will," he said. "Enough to make you inflict physical torture upon yourself to dull the greater pain of sacrifice. There is no use, my girl; you are only wasting precious time; for I don't leave Cattaro until I know the truth. I can guess the main facts. That message warned you of danger to yourself; of danger which would involve us unless we parted company; now give me the details."

"And if I refuse?" she asked defiantly.

Crane settled himself back in his chair.

"This is a very comfortable café, and I have unlimited patience," he answered. "I'm going to forget all about pink lizards, and wait to watch developments."

Delphine, in one furtive look at his

face, saw enough to convince her that he would keep his word, and reluctantly she made a little gesture of surrender.

"You are right," she admitted frankly. "Platzof was warned in that telegram that we had sailed from Athens for Cattaro, and instructed to detain me here if possible until the arrival of the steamer from Trieste to-night. As a punishment for aiding in your escape, Russia has let it become known in Vienna that it was I who obtained the mobilization plans, and the secret-service men are coming on that steamer to arrest me. There is nothing you can do for me by remaining here. Italy offers no safe refuge; for it is a member of the Triple Alliance; there is small choice between an Italian and an Austrian fortress as a prison. I am trapped, and there is nothing to be gained by involving you. It is a risk I have run night and day for the past five years."

"And you have always escaped because a means of escape was kept ready for you," commented Crane dryly. "You'll escape this time, too, my girl. The pink lizards can wait; for you can laugh at Austria if you reach Cettinge, and you and Carmela will embark in that skiff."

"And you and your friend, who have been seen with us all day, would be shot at daybreak," she said quietly. "That isn't the way I play the game, my friend. They will only imprison us, and so long as one is alive, there is always a chance of escape; but they would execute men. You must be safely out of Cattaro before the steamer arrives. Imperialli is getting impatient, and time is short."

Crane glanced at the Italian, who was nervously shifting from one foot to the other, as he stood beside the table.

"Imperialli, why can't four people make a get-away as easily as two?" he asked.

The Italian glanced at Delphine, who signaled to him to answer.

"It is only because we have never anticipated the necessity for passing so large a party; it has been simply a means of communication for single messengers," he explained. "There are only two men who can guide a stranger across the chasm, and they can take but one at a time. Beyond that, horses are necessary to cross the part of the road which is exposed to the rifle fire of the patrols in the darkness, and there are only two horses available. One of those is usually ridden by the guide; but in this emergency madame can use it."

Delphine would have announced her intention of remaining; but Crane motioned to her to be silent.

"It would be easy to get four people to the foot of the path in a boat, would it not?" he asked quickly.

"No, not easy; but possible," answered Imperialli dubiously. "It would be a useless risk, however; for I can assure you that they could not win through without more preparation. If you could give me another day——"

"We can't give you another hour, Imperialli!" interrupted Crane curtly. "We can't even wait for the arrival of the Trieste steamer. You hustle along and make immediate preparations; for all four of us will try to get over that trail if you will get us to it. There is no use in arguing about it, Delphine; you can take your choice. We all go, or we all remain. I know that you would not go without us, and it's equally certain that we shall not go without you."

She hesitated for a moment; but when Imperialli ventured to voice objection, she quickly placed her hand on the table, and on her finger was the silver ring with the curious setting.

"You will kindly do exactly what Mr. Crane tells you to do!" she said quietly. "The responsibility is mine."

Without a word, Imperialli turned and hurried to the street.

Crane smiled grimly as he glanced at her hand, from which the ring had quickly disappeared.

"I thought so," he said significantly, and Delphine looked at him with a new uneasiness in her eyes.

"You must not admit, even to yourself, that you saw anything unusual," she protested. "Some knowledge is terribly dangerous."

"I'm just beginning to appreciate that," said Crane. "Not knowledge of that ring and its significance, though; for I carried it, or its counterpart, as my credentials when I was arranging the details of Gorski's escape from Russia."

The expression on Delphine's face was singularly childlike and innocent when she turned to him.

"Why, I wonder what knowledge could be more dangerous?" she asked demurely.

For a moment the Legioner forgot danger, conspiracy, Jabez Cooper, and all his works, as he looked into the eyes in which there was a twinkle of mischief.

"No, you don't wonder a little bit, confound you!" he exclaimed, and for the first time since they had seated themselves at that table Delphine's laugh was natural and sincere.

CHAPTER X.

A POSSIBLE WAY OF ESCAPE.

"In the bright lexicon of any man working for Jabez Cooper, there is no such word as impossible, Imperialli," said Crane decisively. The little party had been halted by the Italian just as they were about to step out from a narrow street which led to the broad quay facing the harbor. "In spite of the fact that Blasowitz broke into your shop and released Platzof, and notwithstanding their cleverness in appropriating the skiff in which you expected to ferry us to the foot of the old trail leading to Cettinge, we must still manage to arrive at that commencement so desirable, and pretty blame *muy pronto,* at that. I have it on the best of authority that trouble a-plenty for all of us is arriving on the Trieste steamer, and I wish to be conspicuous mainly by my absence when she drops anchor. Do you get me?"

"If wishes were boats, I might be able to get you there," retorted Imperialli doggedly. "Since this Balkan trouble started, the Austrians have not allowed a boat to leave the landing stage after dark except to carry passengers for Brindisi to the steamer, and to bring back those for Cattaro. Lately they have tightened up, and, although I am on the friendliest terms with the harbor boatmen, and they are all as avaricious as their ancestors, the Barbary pirates, I couldn't induce any of 'em to take the chance for love or money."

"Then we'll try force!" suggested the Legioner; but the Italian shook his head and pointed significantly to a tiny fire at which a dozen gray-coated Austrian soldiers were cooking their evening rations.

"That would be suicidal, as you can see for yourself," he said. "It is just our luck that they marched a company down here to guard the military stores which were unloaded from a transport too late to carry to the arsenal. There is no possible way to get a boat away from the landing until the steamer is signaled. She anchors about a quarter of a mile out, and they all leave together."

"Yes, I noticed the way they managed it when we arrived this morning, and that's just what I'm counting on," answered Crane. "There is a good stretch of water between the landing and the anchorage, and, fortunately, this is a dark night. Here is the scenario, gentlemen. There are only two oarsmen to each barca, and, after the fashion of the Mediterranean, they row standing up and facing the bow. Imperialli, I'll leave it to you to see that our boat carries no other passengers. You will take the tiller ropes, and edge her as far away from the rest of the fleet as you can. Hennipeker, you will have to tear yourself away from the ladies, who will sit in the stern, and occupy the thwart amidships. That will place you in the most favorable strategic position to land on the jugular of that bow oarsman when I give the word, and simultaneously I shall administer a sleeping potion to the gentleman officiating at stroke. Then, without the formality of hoisting the Jolly Roger, we shall take possession of the motive power, and Imperialli will lay a course

for the foot of the Cettinge trail. You will appreciate the necessity for preventing the slightest outcry."

Crane had confided nothing of the late developments to his companion. In the restaurant the conversation had necessarily been carried on in a low voice. On the opposite side of the table, Hennipeker had devoted himself to Carmela; but not so closely that he had failed to watch Crane and Delphine from the tail of his eye. The satirical smile on his lips, and the knowing, mocking wink with which he notified the Legioner of the deductions he had drawn from his furtive observation, had brought a flush of embarrassment to the weather-beaten face, and when Hennipeker proceeded to rub it in by ostentatiously walking ahead with Carmela when they started for the harbor, Crane had hesitated to invite a teasing raillery by calling him back for consultation. Consequently, the youngster still regarded their difficulties as more or less of a joke, and he listened incredulously to the Legioner's piratical proposition.

"You wish me to assassinate that unsuspecting boatman?" he asked, and then for the first time he realized that the proposal had been made in all seriousness; for Crane nodded a very positive assent.

"Yes, unless you can accomplish the desired result by stopping short of murder," he replied. "I shall use a knuckle-duster, and I trust for his own sake that my man has been blessed with a thick skull. I would suggest that you take off one of your socks and slip a handful of gravel into the toe of it."

Imperialli drew from his pocket the blackjack with which he had knocked out Platzof.

"This will save you the trouble," he said, as he offered it to Hennipeker. The youngster raised his hand; but it was in protest, and he stepped back without accepting the weapon.

"I don't want that beastly thing!" he exclaimed. "What kind of a joke are you trying to put over, Crane? I think this is going too far!"

"Young man, I was never in more deadly earnest in my life," answered the Legioner grimly. He was patient because he remembered that Hennipeker was ignorant of the real situation. "There is no time to go into details; for that steamer is pretty nearly due. You can take this as gospel, though. If we are in Cattaro when the passengers from that steamer land, we shall all be arrested. Nothing will be said about it in the papers; but these two ladies will spend the next few years in the seclusion of an Austrian fortress, Imperialli will undoubtedly be hanged, and you and I will be stood up against a convenient wall in front of a firing squad. Moral suasion with the Austrian officials has failed to gain us passage to Cettinge. The machinery of the Russian secret service on which we counted has slipped a cog. The only possible escape is in obtaining the temporary use of a boat to carry us to the foot of the old Cettinge trail; the only possible way to obtain it is by piracy. I'll admit that it is not a profession which I adopt from choice; but there is no alternative. You will be good enough to follow instructions to the letter, and knock that man out stiff."

The smile had left Hennipeker's lips, and he shrank back between the two women as Crane stepped forward and looked into his suddenly blanched face.

"Oh, I say, Crane; this is carrying the thing too far!" he protested. "I'd rather toss up the whole business than hit that poor wretch. The game isn't worth the candle. If I were attacked, I might——"

"I suppose that you might slap some one on the wrist and say, 'Now you stop!'" interrupted Crane savagely. "If you are going to lay down on the job, I'll cast Imperialli for your part; but if you value that delicate skin of yours I warn you to keep out of my way if we pull you out of this scrape!"

Hennipeker listened with hanging head, and even the women looked askance at him. Imperialli, who had no illusions as to what would happen to him if the Austrians discovered the real vocation which his shopkeeping masked, hastily volunteered to exchange places, and, with a scornful glance,

which cut like a whiplash, the Legioner turned his back on his countryman and extended his hand to the Italian.

"We'll do the dirty work, then," he said irritably. "I'm not proud of it myself, and I'd take a long chance in avoiding it, if I had only myself to think of; but we've got to pull these women through. You are sure that everything is fixed at the other end?"

"The guides will be waiting for us at the shore," replied Imperialli confidently. "After that——"

"Don't you worry about 'after that' if there is anything which looks like a trail leading out of Austrian territory," said Crane. "There's nothing more effective in stimulating activity than the knowledge that the old man with the scythe is traveling at your heels. It can't be more than ten miles to the Montenegrin frontier. I trust that you other young ladies have no objections to offer to the plan?"

He placed a venomous and withering emphasis on the "other"; but Hennipeker made no retort.

Crane's resentment was not lessened when he saw Delphine step quietly in front of him as if to shield him from the contemptuous glance which he shot at him.

"I think that we must admit the necessity," she said quietly.

Carmela made no verbal reply; but Crane grinned approvingly as she drew away from Hennipeker and stood beside Imperialli.

Now just what happened in the darkness after the little fleet put out to meet the approaching steamer, the Austrian officials were never able to find out, and the details are not entered in the official chronicles of the Lost Legion.

There was tremendous activity in the town, and on the water of the great harbor when "Barca 23" failed to draw up at the gangway, and launches circled about the steamer, and shot back and forth along the entire water front; but it was not until daylight that the missing boat was discovered floating idly toward the open sea; the only occupants the two men who formed the crew.

They were both unconscious, and when they were finally revived, they could give no coherent account of what had dazed them, nor of what had become of their passengers. They dimly remembered that one of the passengers had lost a hat overboard, and they had lingered behind the other boats to search for it.

Every house in Cattaro was ransacked, and in Imperialli's shop the half dozen ferret-faced men who had come from Trieste found things which interested them more than the coral, and made them extremely anxious to interview the proprietor; but he had disappeared as utterly as the ci-devant Señora Aguilar y Fernandez, whom they had hoped to find in the little Dalmatian town.

In silence the fugitives had landed from the boat some two miles beyond the fortress which guarded the southern end of the city, and, much to Imperialli's dismay, that silence had remained unbroken after he had whistled a peculiar call. Crane had turned the barca adrift with a vigorous shove, which carried it far from the shore, and Imperialli greeted him with troubled eyes as he rejoined him.

"The guides do not answer," he said, after repeating the call and listening attentively. "I can't understand; they have never failed me before. They have had ample warning; for I expected to employ them to-night on another matter."

"Imperialli, is this underground railway financed by the czar, or by the other party?" demanded Crane sharply.

"The secret-service fund foots the bills; but it is sometimes used for business of another kind," answered the Italian uneasily.

"So that the secret service and the men of the Third Section know all about it?" Imperialli nodded, and Crane took him by the arm and led him back to where they had landed. "Is this the skiff which was stolen from you?" he asked.

A boat was drawn half out of the water, and, after a hasty examination, Imperialli voiced a profane affirmative.

"Then Platzof has beaten us to it," said Crane quietly. "I reckon that he knew the air of Dalmatia would not agree with him. You should have hit him harder, Imperialli; for he has not only stolen your boat, but your guides and transportation as well."

The Italian's olive skin had turned a sickly green, and his knees wabbled.

"We are hopelessly trapped!" he exclaimed. "We shall be discovered at daylight, and we can't go on without guides and horses."

"Nonsense!" answered the Legioner. "We're not going to perch here to be picked up like a covey of sandpipers in the morning. Don't you go back on me, too; for I can't stand many more jolts to my faith in human nature. Your machinery has slipped another cog, that's all; and the czar and the nihilists having failed us, we'll pin our faith to the methods of Jabez Cooper, who gets terribly peeved if any of his employees hesitates so long as they can stand perpendicular, and have a punch left in 'em."

Imperialli shook his head hopelessly.

"My friend, you do not know what confronts you," he protested. "It would be impossible to cross that chasm in the daylight without the guides. Going down on this side there are places where you must hang on by an eyelash; climbing up on the other it is necessary to make some jumps at which a chamois would hesitate, and a misstep means death on the rocks below."

"Then you keep that information strictly under your hat!" commanded Crane. "That's just what I'm counting on—the fact that it's so dark that no one can appreciate the danger. I wouldn't take a chance at it in daylight, especially with the hazard that Blasowitz and Platzof might be rolling down rocks from the top. I swiped a rope from the barca, we'll take this one from your skiff, and I reckon I'm enough of a mountaineer to pull the bunch through. We'll acknowledge that we're licked when we're down and out; but I'm not taking the count yet."

In his past ventures, Crane had accomplished many things which at first blush had seemed impossible of achievement; he had extricated himself from situations which seemed hopeless, he had come unscathed through perils which would have engulfed a less resourceful and quick-witted man. He had been absolutely sincere when he told Delphine that he believed he had been successful only because he had resolutely refused all traffic with, or thought of, women in any of his ventures, and it was an ironical trick of fate that love for the very woman to whom he had made that boast of indifference was now stimulating him to superhuman effort. For, confidently as he expressed himself to restore the waning courage of Imperialli, the Legioner did not underestimate the difficulties in his own mind. If the Austrians were so sure that the trail was impassable that they did not bother to guard it, it must, indeed, be in bad condition; the fact that the brigands could negotiate it proved that there had been only a slight mistake; for they were as agile as goats. But, superhuman as the task might be, Crane went about it in a very human way, secretly exulting that a man's work to be done gave him an advantage over Hennipeker, who, in the pinch, had stood confessed a carpet knight.

But while his previous experience had eminently fitted him for the work which he was to attempt, a lack of training of another sort made it extremely difficult for him to understand Delphine's behavior. From the moment when Hennipeker had weakened in Cattaro, Carmela had acted in a way which appeared entirely natural to the simple-minded Legioner. Carmela had made no secret of her contempt for her whilom cavalier; in fact, she had accentuated it by ostentatious preference for Imperialli's companionship; but Delphine had just as markedly gone out of her way to shield and comfort the youngster, who had so unexpectedly shown the white feather.

Except when a curt command had been absolutely essential, Crane had ignored him since the embarkation, and Hennipeker seemed quite satisfied to

sink into oblivion. He had labored manfully at the oar as Imperialli steered the barca in the darkness; but after they reached the shore he volunteered nothing, and stood passively with the two women, upon whom Crane had enjoined silence. Carmela stepped forward with eager questions on her lips as Crane and Imperialli returned from the waterside; but Delphine remained standing by Hennipeker, tacitly giving him at least a moral support.

"Ladies, you followed me on the water as a pirate, and now I shall have to ask you to follow me on the land as a brigand," explained Crane. "Imperialli tells me that only a brigand can find his way over this trail, so the part is forced upon me. There are difficulties to be encountered; but there is no use in working our imaginations about the things in front of us when the trouble behind is a dead certainty. It would invite disaster to use a light, and the trail is so narrow that we must go in single file, so we shall fasten ourselves together with this rope to prevent any one being lost in the darkness. This way, if you please, Delphine!"

With deft and experienced fingers he knotted the rope about her waist, and then, with a sharp "You next!" he summoned Hennipeker.

Now, chagrined, disappointed, and disgusted as he had been, there still lingered in the Legioner's mind a hope that the youngster might seize the first opportunity to redeem himself. He was fair-minded enough to remember that many men whose bravery has enshrined them as heroes had known moments of panic. He had purposely selected this position in the line of march for him in the hope that it would call forth a protest, and, before he started to secure him, he emphasized the fact that it was the place of least risk by a half-muttered apology to Carmela for asking her to wait. Hennipeker, however, said no word, and stood absolutely passive as Crane fastened the knots with none too gentle hands. Next came Carmela, and at the end Imperialli.

"It's lucky that you're well nourished," he said, as he secured the last knot. "You're the anchor, and if there is any slipping, you dig in your heels and hold back all you know how. Now brace up, and don't lose your nerve by thinking of what's in front of you; for it's a dead-sure thing that the provost marshal will move this rope up until it rests under your chin if you are in Dalmatia at daybreak."

With a loop of the safety rope about his arm, Crane led the way, a simple enough piece of climbing in spite of the darkness for the first half mile; for that part of the trail had been cut through solid rock. Storms and earthquakes had partially choked it in places with débris from the mountains above; but they scrambled easily over those obstacles, and it was not until Crane's quick ears caught the muffled roar of a mountain torrent that he slackened the heartbreaking pace which he had set for his companions.

It was more than rest from physical exertion which made them breathe more freely, for far below them they saw the lights of Cattaro, and Imperialli pointed out that none of the launches which were darting about the harbor were following the course they had taken to the foot of the trail.

Crane left them to absorb what comfort they might from that discovery, and slipped away in the darkness. Guided by the sound of the rushing water, he advanced cautiously until the increased murmur warned him that he was close to the brink of the chasm which had inspired such terror in Imperialli, and then, dropping to his hands and knees, he went forward by inches; carefully testing the ground in front of him with exploring hands.

Confidently as he had expressed himself, his heart sank as he discovered the reality; for, once at the edge, he found that the Italian had in reality underestimated the difficulty. From the brink there was a sheer descent, and a rapid examination for a hundred feet in each direction failed to locate even a handhold on the smooth surface of the water-worn rock. By dropping pebbles, he satisfied himself that the gorge was but little wider at the top than at

the bottom, so the path down the three hundred feet to the water could only be a series of zigzags, its width in many places a matter of inches. It would be madness to attempt it in the dark, and he had just reluctantly concluded that, as the lesser of the two evils, he would have to wait until daybreak, when he was startled by the sound of a voice from the other side of the chasm. A moment later a light flashed, and in the illumination of a very modern kerosene lantern the Legioner saw a figure which might well have stepped out of a medieval picture.

He was a typical brigand of the Black Mountains, garbed in the white fustian kilt and jacket common to the inhabitants of Albania and Montenegro. About his waist a broad bandolier of leather was stuffed full of cartridges, and supported a miscellaneous collection of knives and pistols. His feet were protected by *opanki* of rawhide, his head swathed in a loosely wound turban of white cloth, and, as Crane watched him, he swung a grotesquely long rifle over his back.

Absolutely unsuspicious that he was under observation, he went deliberately about his preparations for descending into the chasm, and the Legioner chuckled as he saw him fasten one end of a very substantial rope ladder to a bowlder, and drop the other over the face of the cliff.

CHAPTER XI.

CROSSING THE CHASM.

"Imperialli, were you speaking from personal observation and experience, or from hearsay, when you told me about the difficulties of this trail, and the dangers of crossing that gorge?" demanded Crane.

It was a half hour after he had seen the brigand light his lantern, and he had returned in a rather disheveled condition to his companions, who were beginning to worry about his absence.

"I—er—I saw for myself," answered the Italian hesitatingly. "Of course, I was not foolhardy enough to attempt the crossing; but I walked to the edge, and my employees pointed out the paths by which they crossed. I expect that now you have seen it for yourself, you will agree with me that it is extremely hazardous."

"And, because of the danger, you paid proportionately for the service?" suggested the Legioner.

Imperialli nodded. "I doubt if you will think that I paid excessively after you have attempted the crossing," he replied. "There isn't money enough in the world to pay me for attempting it."

"My dear fellow, all of the money in the world wouldn't be of the slightest use to you if you tried to negotiate the path those land pirates pointed out to you," agreed Crane. "I'm something of a human fly myself; but you couldn't tempt me on it in broad daylight."

Imperialli leaned forward and placed a tremulous hand on his arm.

"You have given it up; there is no chance of escaping?" he exclaimed.

Crane's answering laugh was too derisive to be entirely reassuring.

"Imperialli, the easiest man to flim-flam is the professional bunko steerer," he answered. "If you had been engaged in legitimate business, you would have required more of a demonstration than the sight of the gorge; you would have asked one of those gentle brigands to show you just how he managed to get across. I happened to watch a private performance this evening, and I can assure you that the passage of that chasm is the least of our troubles. The beggars have a rope ladder stowed away on each side, and they don't take any chances in skipping from crag to crag. I saw Yussuf—he tells me he is one of your men—let it down on the other side, cross the stream at the bottom on the wreckage of the old bridge, and then shin up the one on this side. He wasn't taking any chances; he even carried a lantern. That made it a lot easier for me when I jumped on him and shoved the muzzle of my revolver into his face when he climbed over the edge. Then I relieved him of about a half a ton of murderous hardware, which I tossed over the bank, tied his

hands behind him with the scarf of his turban, and went into executive session."

Imperialli's comment, when he paused, was so forcible that the Legioner checked it with the reminder that there were ladies present.

"He's not a bad sort; he was only acting by tradition, and taking advantage of his opportunities," he continued. "They have their own code, these brigands, and he believed that he was faithful to his salt when he guided Platzof and Blasowitz across the gorge, and started them on the Cettinge Trail, with his side partner, Achmet, as a guide. Platzof sent him back with a letter addressed to the Austrian provost marshal, which I took the liberty of reading. The contents would have cooked your goose, my friend; Platzof has not forgotten the love tap which you gave him with your blackjack. Before I left him I tied Yussuf's feet as well as his hands, and I placed him so near the edge of the gorge that he'll slide over if he makes the slightest move. And now, as both of those rope ladders are in place, and the night is not growing younger, I would suggest that we get a move on. We can dispense with the rope."

Fumbling in the darkness, he unfastened the knots which he had taken so much trouble to make secure. Perhaps he found those on Delphine more complicated than the others; at any rate, they required far more time to cast loose; but while there was ample opportunity for her to have whispered a word of confidence or approval, she maintained an obstinate silence, although Crane had heard her whispering excitedly with Hennipeker but a moment before.

Now, simple as the Legioner—who was apparently without nerves—had considered the crossing of that gorge after he discovered the swindle which the mountaineers had practiced, it was sufficiently terrifying to the others. To swing over the edge of a precipice in the dark, with nothing but a fragile, swaying ladder of rope between one and a fall of unknown distance to sharp and jagged rocks below, was a terrifying business, and when Crane volunteered to escort Delphine, the brigand made violent protest against subjecting the ropes to a double weight. Trembling like an aspen leaf, Delphine volunteered to go first; but the Legioner drew her back.

"Imperialli, it's up to you!" he said, ignoring Hennipeker, who had again failed to grasp the opportunity to square himself. "That ladder is as safe as a church so long as this end is secure, and I'm going to stay here until the last, to see that there is no monkeying with it. Don't lose your head, never let go with one hand until you've got a sure grip with the other, and you'll make it all right. When you get to the bottom, stand by to help the girls as they come down, and wait there for me."

With a tragic air of "I, who am about to die, salute you!" the Italian stepped forward into the circle of light cast by the lantern. His face was ghastly, and Crane considerately hid it from the others by stepping in front of him.

"Delphine, will it be you, or Carmela next?" he asked quietly, hiding the ominous trembling of the ladder, which testified that Imperialli was making a nervously labored descent.

"Neither; Mr. Hennipeker will go before us," answered Delphine, and, with a look, she dared him to challenge her decision so successfully that the forcible protest died on the Legioner's lips. And then, for a moment, after a cry of relief from Imperialli signaled his safe arrival at the bottom, Crane felt vaguely ashamed of himself; for Hennipeker looked pitifully slight and immature to be censured for failing at a man's work as he slid over the edge of the cliff and disappeared in the darkness.

Carmela was the next to essay the descent, and it was well that Crane had taken the precaution to throw himself flat and steady her until her hands convulsively clasped the topmost rung; for panic seized her when the swaying ladder eluded her first attempt to locate it with her feet. He held her fast, chaffing her, and laughing at her until

she had regained a measure of self-control; but his face was white, and his lips trembled as he straightened up and faced Delphine.

"Don't be nervous; I shall not fail you," she said quietly.

Crane reached down and grasped her hand, which she permitted to lie loosely in his.

"Now I am sure of it," he said. "If I had found a clenched fist, I should have risked the double load, and carried you down in my arms. They are strong enough for that, Delphine; they are strong enough to work for you forever; to protect you always."

He would have given her physical demonstration, but she stepped back and eluded him.

"But I want you to show me that just because you are strong, you are merciful!" she protested. "From the moment I looked into your eyes in the restaurant this evening, I have had no fear; for I knew that I had at last met a man. There is no enigma in you to be solved, my friend; but there is much of the primitive savage to be softened. I know how you feel toward that poor boy; I heard your threat. There are dangers ahead of us; but I am so sure of you that I know we shall escape them. And then I want you to be merciful in your dealing with him. You must promise me that you will do nothing harsh; that you will give him a chance——"

"Confound it; is that wretched little shrimp always to be between us, Delphine?" he interrupted angrily. "There is so much of the primitive savage left in me that you are not going about this the right way to save him from the thrashing I promised him!"

Delphine stepped forward and looked up into his face. In her eyes was that which might well have puzzled a more experienced person than the Legioner; but he wasted none of the precious moments in trying to solve riddles, and slipped his arm about her.

"My dear, it is just because I wish to avoid all possibility of having 'that little shrimp' come between us that I beg of you to keep hands off," she said. "I shall never plead for mercy for any one who does that."

Crane found immediate use for his other arm, and it was not until Yussuf called his attention to the fact that the signal announcing Carmela's safe arrival at the foot of the ladder had been thrice repeated that he came back to the realization of the difficulties which still confronted them.

"Yussuf will follow you; tell Imperialli to keep an eye on him until I get down there!" he said curtly, as he led her toward the ladder.

He was sick at heart with apprehension as he thought of her swinging off alone into the darkness, and dared not trust himself to utter a word of caution; lest that word might grow to a panic-breeding outburst. The others he had trusted to the fortune of war with as little concern as he would have undertaken the descent himself. Delphine seemed to have lost all fear; but he imagined a dozen perils to which he had given no thought before. The ropes which had afforded the others safe passage might have been chafed to the parting point by the swaying; a sudden gust of wind might whip her about in mid-air, until her grasp on the ladder was wrenched loose; a falling stone might——

"But, my dear, I can assure you that none of the terrible things which you are imagining is going to happen!" exclaimed Delphine, breaking the chain of his gruesome, unuttered thoughts. "I haven't the slightest bit of fear."

Her voice was as steady as if she had been discussing the weather, and there was a charming smile on her lips as Crane assisted her to gain a foothold; but never in a career which had been by no means free from deceit and falsehood had she spoken or acted a greater lie.

To the Legioner the minutes were hours as he watched every movement of that rope, and it seemed an eternity before a shout from Imperialli, and a cry which was eloquent of relief from her own lips, announced that she had rejoined the others in safety. Crane, who had been lying at full length, and peer-

ing down into the darkness, jumped to his feet and loosened Yussuf's bonds.

"I'm sorry to have inconvenienced you; but I wished to free my mind from outside responsibilities!" he said gayly, as Yussuf stretched himself. "I expect I've punctured your easy graft; but the jig was up anyway. Now, my boy, you be good, and I'll pay as generously as the czar. You slide down that ladder and wait for me, and when we get to the top of the other one, I'll give you further instructions."

Yussuf apparently bore no grudge, and he grinned genially as he slid over the edge. A few moments later Crane followed, and, once at the bottom of the gorge, he permitted no time for anticipation to breed fear of the ascent. He was the first to make it, and then one by one he assisted the others to pass that last perilous step at the top; but while he had urged haste, it was necessarily a slow business, and the mountain tops reflected the rising sun as Yussuf effectually blocked pursuit by pulling up the ladder and returning it to its customary hiding place.

"Now, Yussuf, how about the daylight perils of the trail ahead of us, and of which you warned Signor Imperialli?" demanded Crane. "Are they real, or made of the same stuff as that imaginary path in the gorge?"

The brigand grinned as he looked at the Italian's flushed and angry face.

"We did not underestimate them in making our bargain," he admitted. "Of course, there are places where you might get a bad fall if you stubbed your toe; but the destruction of the old bridge made the only serious obstacle. Even the ladies will not find it too difficult. There will be little difficulty at the frontier; for to-day all Montenegro is in *festa*. Scutari has surrendered, and at noon the Montenegrins march in with Prince Daniello at their head. The customs guards will undoubtedly celebrate the victory by getting helplessly drunk."

Crane satisfied himself by a rapid cross-examination that the brigand's story was true, and that Scutari had in fact capitulated.

"And so, ladies and gentlemen, the sooner we reach Cettinge to join in the general rejoicing, the less fun we shall miss!" he exclaimed. "The sole remaining cause for anxiety is the continued existence of Platzof and Blasowitz, and I think we are quite equal to them. Yussuf, where did you leave the men who sent you back with that note?"

"About two miles from here; but they must be nearing Cettinge by now; for they were well mounted, and rode like fiends," answered the brigand. "I refused to let them have the horses until they paid me their full value." He grinned triumphantly as he drew a fat roll of Russian bank notes from his bandolier, and Imperialli leaned forward to look at them.

"'He who laughs last, laughs best!' friend Yussuf!" exclaimed the Italian, as he straightened up. "The tables have been nicely turned upon you. You cheated me most shamefully; but Platzof has evened things up. That money is rank counterfeit, of less value than blank paper."

The brigand looked at him incredulously; but when the Legioner and Delphine confirmed his statement, his face became distorted and black with anger. Instinctively his hand went to the bandolier, which had supported his weapons, and then, turning, he shouted a volley of curses at the man who had taken them from him.

Crane smiled as he extended his own revolver to him.

"That's worth a ton of such junk as I relieved you of, Yussuf," he said quietly. "Platzof would have drilled you full of holes with an automatic before you could have brought one of those old flintlocks into action. This is a double-action with a hair trigger."

The brigand seized the weapon with greedy hands and fondled it as a mother might her babe; he had never hoped to possess a tool so perfectly fitted to his needs.

"I shall walk first, and you who follow need fear nothing from those two swindlers," he said grimly, as he strode rapidly up the trail to Cettinge.

Platzof was congenitally crooked, and

long experience in the Third Section, and association with the provocative agents who swindled their employers and victims without the slightest qualms, had destroyed any redeeming qualities which he had ever possessed. He had fled in terror from Cattaro after Blasowitz had rescued him, for the blow which he had received had shaken his nerve, and he feared that Imperialli might follow up his treacherous attack by delivering him to the Austrian authorities. From the safety of Cettinge he had planned to wreak a fine vengeance; but he was overlooking nothing from which he might reap material reward, and it had seemed perfectly safe and simple to profit by the ignorance of the brigand who served him; for he knew that he was an outlaw who would not dare pursue him beyond his mountain fastness. But, unfortunately, he was foolish enough to have perpetrated the same swindle on old Haggini Ben Ali when he settled with him in San Giovanni di Medua, and that more sophisticated adventurer had discovered that he was tricked before the steamer which bore Platzof and Blasowitz cast anchor at Cattaro.

Haggini, knowing every path used by the smugglers and brigands, who were his most profitable customers, immediately thought of the abandoned trail from Cettinge as the easiest method of getting within knifing distance of the man who had cheated him, and the grass never grew under the old Albanian's feet while a feud remained unsettled, or a blood debt called for payment.

Traveling with a speed which would have been impossible for a foreigner, he reached the quaint little Montenegrin capital at the very hour the men he sought were flying terror-stricken from Cattaro; and, all unconscious of danger, the fugitives had encountered him at the frontier.

Haggini was as surprised by the unexpected meeting as the men he sought, which accounted for the fact that they wheeled their horses and rode back along the trail before he could unsling his rifle; but Haggini knew that there was but one exit possible for them, and, grim of face, he followed.

Now very much depends upon the point of view, and, in describing the primitive and long-neglected trail as a suitable promenade for a pleasure excursion, Yussuf had spoken from an experience of the roughest sort of mountaineering. In comparison with the goat paths of High Albania, it was a broad highway, with easy gradients; but to the unaccustomed feet of the little party of refugees it was so difficult that their guide soon outstripped them. On the face of the mountains it zigzagged back and forth, and oftentimes, after a tedious climb which seemed interminable, they realized that in a half hour of strenuous endeavor they were but a score of feet nearer the crest of the ridge which separated them from the safe refuge of Montenegro.

Far and ever farther below them Cattaro was always in sight, and on the opposite mountain face they could distinguish the Austrian cavalry patrols riding fours front on the modern military road, while they were forced to walk gingerly in single file on a path where a single misstep meant a plunge to certain death.

There was no mistaking the pathway; it was usually bordered by a sheer cliff on one side, and nothing but empty space on the other, so that the disappearance of Yussuf caused them no concern. In fact, to the Legioner it was a distinct relief; for he was confident that, with the brigand as an advance guard, they had nothing to apprehend from possible activities of Platzof and Blasowitz.

Crane found himself wondering at the nimbleness of hoof which would make it possible for even a mountain pony to maintain a footing on such a trail; for at the moment he was almost flattened against a rock in making an abrupt turn, with not even scenery beneath him, when he received a convincing proof that the path above was not secure for quadrupeds. There was first a warning cry, quickly followed by a scream for mercy; then a pistol shot, and a horse and rider whirled past him

in mid-air. In a flash they vanished; the man clinging with the convulsive death grip to the cantle of the saddle; but, as a photographic plate registers the smallest detail in a minute fraction of a second, the Legioner's retina reflected the evil face of Blasowitz, his mouth distorted in a sardonic grin, a small, round hole fairly in the middle of his low forehead.

For a moment Crane shielded his face from the shower of pebbles and broken stone which must have been dislodged as the frightened pony turned to make its desperate leap to death; but he had hardly lowered his hands when another figure shot past him; a human body, which whirled over and over in grotesque somersaults. Fleeing from the vengeance of Haggini, the two conspirators had encountered the wrath of Yussuf. Blasowitz had attempted to wheel his jaded pony, and died from the brigand's revolver before he knew that he had essayed the impossible. Platzof had slipped from his saddle, and, crouching low, ran back along the trail, escaping the bullets of Yussuf only to meet one from the rifle of Haggini, and his own impetus had hurled his lifeless body to be smashed into an unrecognizable mass on the rocks a thousand feet below.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HENNIPEKER MYSTERY.

Only a portion of Yussuf's information was accurate; the frontier guards were so hopelessly drunk that the refugees had no difficulty in passing into Montenegro; but there had been a hitch in the negotiations for the capitulation of Scutari. Without molestation they rode from the frontier to Cettinge, and there they learned that the entrance of the Montenegrin troops into the Albanian capital would not occur for a couple of days. The crown prince was to leave the following morning to head the victorious army, and until then it was impossible to obtain transportation to the front. Crane accepted the forced delay philosophically, anticipating an opportunity to settle many things with Delphine; but, greatly to his chagrin, that young woman displayed an irritating preference for the company of Hennipeker, and claimed him as her escort for another mysterious expedition to the shops.

The Legioner felt strangely out of it; for since Carmela had drawn away from Hennipeker in Cattaro, she and Imperialli had been devoted to one another, and now they calmly announced their betrothal and their intention of returning to Naples on the first available steamer. Patzof's tragic death, before he had opportunity to send another communication to St. Petersburg, made it possible for Imperialli to make his own report suit his needs, and that wily gentleman was assured of continuance in his profitable occupation of espionage. He knew that he could rely upon Delphine's silence, and Crane had grimly assured him that he would never again be commanded to assist her in the name of the Terrorists.

Chance for a passage on a Russian cruiser offered that same afternoon, and Crane looked forward gloomily to an embarrassing triangular dinner, with Hennipeker playing gooseberry. In that he was disappointed, however, for the youngster apparently possessed tact, even if he lacked courage, and, pleading fatigue and a headache, he excused himself and left the Legioner and Delphine to dine alone.

Now, the arrangements for the future which were concluded at that dinner have no interest, save for the high contracting parties; but Delphine proved such a charming companion that Crane wondered how he had ever found anything interesting in adventure without a feminine element in it, and firmly resolved that never again would he wander from the fireside which he contemplated arranging as soon as he reached America.

Now, a man who lies awake building air castles after one night of strenuous effort is apt to oversleep in the morning, and Crane was not awakened until the salvo of artillery announced the departure of Prince Daniello to bring to

a victorious ending the war which he had so gloriously commenced by firing the opening gun. He dressed hastily and went downstairs, to find Delphine sitting alone in the little garden of the hotel.

"I suppose you will scold me; but I have a confession to make," she said, as she watched him sip his coffee. "Of course, after your promise to me, I knew that there was no danger of your thrashing that poor youngster; but he was in a terribly embarrassing position. I have tried to make it easier all around by using a little influence which I had to obtain permission for him to travel with the prince's escort to Scutari. He left an hour ago."

There was no trace of annoyance on the Legioner's face, as he smiled across the table at her.

"You will have to try a lot harder than that to get my goat," he said, and, in spite of her championship, Delphine did not seem in the least displeased at his evident relief to be so easily rid of his former companion.

But, in spite of his anger with the youngster at having failed him in a critical moment, the Legioner's conscience was not entirely easy, as, two days later, he and Delphine rode together through the squalid, filthy streets of Scutari.

Always a fanatical and malodorous Moslem city, its condition after the long siege was horrible. Fatigue parties of Montenegrin soldiers were carrying bodies of the long-unburied dead to the lime pits, and the emaciated inhabitants fought in the reeking, black mud of the gutters for the scanty relief rations which the victors doled out under guard of bayonets, and not without a sauce of clubbed muskets. The town was pestilence-riddled, and, remembering the white, boyish face from which appealing eyes had looked at him, as the youngster swung over the brink of the gorge, he half regretted that then and there, he had not extended forgiveness, that they might have ridden shoulder to shoulder into this inferno.

"But you will probably find him safe and sound at Mr. Winslow's," said Delphine gently, again sympathetically reading his unvoiced thoughts. "He told me that his business lay there."

"And that's where mine is—if I really have any business in this beastly hole," answered Crane. As he gazed on the horrors about him, the utter triviality and absurdity of his mission occurred to him for the first time, and he laughed aloud.

Again Delphine guessed accurately what was passing in his mind, and she laid a reassuring hand upon his arm.

"That you were faithful justifies everything, and perhaps you have worked better than you knew," she said. "In the old days, before the siege, I knew Scutari well, and this is the house which Mr. Winslow took."

They dismounted before a great, rambling old structure, with tremendously thick walls, and once within the court, which was guarded by a massive door, it was difficult to realize the truth of the horrors through which they had ridden without. Water tinkled musically in a marble fountain, roses bloomed in profusion in carefully tended beds, and birds sang merrily in the massed shrubbery. From the doorway of an elaborately furnished salon a smiling young chap advanced to meet them, and Crane very curtly introduced himself.

"Mr. Winslow, have you seen or heard anything of a young chap named Hennipeker; Humperdunk Himpiquince Hennipeker?" he demanded abruptly.

Winslow smiled and shook his head.

"Americans are such a rarity in Scutari that I am sure I should have met him—if you are equally sure that anyone with such a name exists in the world," he said. "I can assure you that until you arrived, my wife was the only other American in this charming city. If you will kindly come in, I shall be pleased to present you to her."

He stepped aside, and Crane entered after Delphine.

It was a charming room and filled with treasures of bric-a-brac; but the Legioner had eyes only for the woman who stood in the middle of it.

Her slim, girlish figure was becomingly gowned; but of that, too, he was

oblivious, for the smiling face was that of Humperdunk H. Hennipeker!

"Are you going to thrash me, or forgive me?" she asked mischievously, as she extended her hands.

"I feel like kicking somebody—and I could do it, if I were in a room by myself," he answered. "I am so covered with confusion that I have nothing to say. Delphine, how long have you known of this swindle?"

Delphine laughed and laid her hand upon his arm.

"It's hardly fair to demand a public acknowledgment; but it was not until that night in Cattaro," she said, blushing. "At dinner I had looked for the first time into the eyes of a real man, and after that, no counterfeit could deceive me."

"And those pink lizards that I came for?"

The pretty face of Mrs. Robert Winslow, née Opal Violette Buckintender, became suddenly grave.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" she exclaimed. "You see, provisions became terribly scarce during the long siege, and that greedy husband of mine ate them all up!"

Mr. Jabez Cooper's rotund figure quivered with suppressed merriment when Crane entered his office to report.

"My dear young man, it makes all the difference in the world whether a man is laughing at, or with, you!" he exclaimed, chuckling. "Alf Buckintender is one of the funniest men I ever knew. That daughter of his convinced him that she would be a lot happier with young Winslow than as a duchess, and, after she framed up that pink-lizard stunt on Mrs. A. Tennyson, he has dropped in every day to see how you were getting on. I told him that you were perfectly reliable, and there was no cause for anxiety. They thought the girl was visiting one of her friends in Washington for the first two weeks, and when they found out, it was too late to head her off. Now even the old girl is coming around; for the duke married a circus rider, and old Obadiah Winslow has rolled up another ten millions by inventing a vacuum cleaner, and making the Carpet Sweeper Trust buy him out again. That makes it a cinch that the youngster will be the ambassador to Albania."

"She'll make good at the job, all right," remarked Crane, as he pocketed the check which Mr. Cooper had drawn while he talked.

"What's that? I said that Bobby Winslow would get the appointment," corrected Mr. Cooper.

"Sure; his name will be on the pay roll; but when it comes down to the real business of ambassadoring its Humperdunk H. Hennipeker that'll deliver the goods—and his middle name is Humbug," amended the Legioner.

Henry C. Rowland has a treat in store for you in the next POPULAR. It is about a quartet of down-and-out fellows who join a moving-picture company. Fun, romance, adventure; they are all in this story—a long novel, complete in the first March number, on sale two weeks hence, February 7th.

The Mating Impulse

By Edwin Balmer

Author of "The Peace Advocate," "Under the Orion," Etc.

A comedy of "The Cause"—which almost became a tragedy. How an American girl became the most militant of militant suffragists and narrowly escaped a chance for a hunger strike in an English prison

IT was the day in autumn which, in Scotland and England, opens the season for red grouse, the great game bird of the northern counties and the highlands of heather; and at five o'clock in the glorious, clear afternoon, the Northeastern's extra train from London, hurrying special parties of sportsmen to their Scotch shooting boxes, had gained the wooded hills of Durham and Northumberland.

Peace and tranquillity—almost somnolency—lay over the land. Gentle slopes of brown grain ripened in the sun; in meadows, red and white cattle grazed; a few farmers envied the passing sportsmen from gardens of late lettuce and greens. Beyond and all about were heavy woodlands, deep green with the sun on oak leaves, burnished with the copper of beeches and with the ground all dark with the shade of ancient, guarded trees. A lane through them showed an English gentleman's home unchanged in four hundred years; the towers of a Norman cathedral asked no more favors of the woods than it had eight centuries earlier, when Northumberland knight and esquire looked to the stone summits from the road upon which the train now ran. The sparkle of water sometimes shone as the land lowered to the right. There was the North Sea; and if it brought to the sportsmen disturbing thoughts of Germany beyond, it showed them also a British dreadnaught steaming off the coast on watch.

The newspapers brought reports of grouse in unusual numbers; coveys clouded the moors. As the train ran more silently, the eager yelp of the bird dogs in the forward vans came to the men in the reserved compartments. Servants entered to lift tea baskets down from the racks heavy with guns; they lit spirit lamps and arranged sandwiches. The English, upon the extra train for Scotland, sighed with deep content.

Andy Farnham, the American in Lord Morton's party, alone marred the universal satisfaction. He sat at his window—and the possession of a forward window seat in a compartment with seven Englishmen proved him a young man of no mean enterprise—disconsolate, discouraged. He was a tall, lithe-shouldered gentleman of some twenty-five tanned summers, with the firm hand of the racing motorist, the enviable poise of a man who has survived a pair of monoplanes, and with the abiding faith in his final fortunes which such repeated survival begets. Now, however, between depths of despondency, he opened the pages of an English quarterly review and read—in open disregard of his companions in the compartment—an article by a leading German authority entitled "The Psychology of the Suffragist Outbreaks."

Anon, the English disported themselves after their fashion.

"I say, Andrew, dear fellow, perk up! Some one will surely arrest her for you soon. Monte, how's this? Suppose the police chaps, who are after Miss Leigh, catch her; and then Andy, here, finding her, you see, should get

her to marry him—would you call that marriage by capture? Rather rare, what?"

"Oh, put it in *Punch*," Andy appealed and let a servant hand him tea.

He was in England, as his world knew, to find Roberta Leigh. She, as all the world was widely aware, had passed a very, very stirring summer in Britain burning and laying waste to win votes for women. Yet for more than a month, Andy had followed her trail vainly. Therefore, he now was abandoning the search; first, because it had begun to dawn upon him that, unless Roberta wished him to find her, the results of success in his search would be decidedly doubtful; and second, for some weeks the efforts of the London police, aided by the outraged local authorities of nine shocked shires and counties, had made any purely private pursuit of Miss Leigh seem superfluous. So, as he proceeded north, he contented himself with buying the papers to learn what the police were accomplishing; between times he read his review.

"Those observers who see in the feminist movement a weakening of the mating impulse in the woman," he repeatedly rehearsed one paragraph, "are grievously mistaken. Indeed, the feminist movement—particularly in its most violent manifestations on the part of the so-called militant suffragettes—is only a newer phase of the pseudo defiance of man by woman which, from the earliest times, has been employed by woman to attract man."

He looked up and, carefully putting his finger in the place at the paragraph, he stared out the car window as the train stopped. It was at only a little country station where a spur of track ran from the main line. Passengers were changing to a couple of stubby cars standing on that spur. Since he personally resolutely had abandoned the search for Roberta, he did not scrutinize the passengers closely. He merely made sure that there were only two girls in sight, and that the one, who might possibly be mistaken for Roberta, was not she; then he drew his head back within the window. His train started deliberately. He was glancing down to find his page in the pleasant quarterly review, when a pile of luggage on the platform appeared. On top of the pile stood a small, black, oblong, week-end box—half trunk, half hand bag—much pasted with customs labels and scratched with chalk, but quite definite and individual of size and shape. Andy saw it, and, with the startled cry of the incredulous, jumped to his feet, reckless of where the tea splashed.

"That's hers. Join you later, if I'm wrong," he condensed explanation, farewell, and promise to his hosts; and, as the train was still moving slowly, and the compartment was private and not locked, he opened the door and sprang down upon the end of the platform.

The train for Scotland kept on; the passengers for the stubby cars on the spur were settling themselves in their seats. Swiftly but thoroughly, Andy searched through each compartment. He was beginning to think he might have been impulsive in leaving his party when he returned to the pile of luggage. But there was no possible doubt of the week-end box. Its owner might not be present; but it was, or at least it had been, possessed by her for whom he—and the police also—searched.

"Who's with that?" he demanded of the luggage porter bearing it toward the train.

"Wot?" the man put it down with resigned reproach. "And now you clime it, sir?"

Andy assured that, so far from asserting possession, his whole desire was to discover the owner.

She, it appeared, had proceeded some twenty-four hours previously through this junction to the ancient and historic town of Stoketon to which definite designation, the porter fervently prayed, the stubby train safely and swiftly would convey the box and thereby spare a hitherto careful and completely competent porter from further blame for misunderstanding the direction of the index finger of a gentleman much under the influence of liquor the day

before, who appeared to claim the black box for his own, and was satisfied to take it with him twenty miles in the wrong direction. Simultaneously with the gentleman's sobering up and returning the box, female inquiry had come from Stoketon. No, nothing more alarming than the loss of luggage had been heard from Stoketon.

Apparently, Roberta was still there and would remain, as nothing yet had happened. Possibly the contents of the box were such that she could not proceed to the business of her visit without it. Andy watched, not without apprehension, as the porter dumped the box onto the luggage van. Nothing eventuated; and, as the stubby train was starting, he got into the nearest passenger compartment.

Two American girls shared the seats with him—one was the girl who, for a moment, he had believed might be Roberta when he saw her on the platform. But these were not of the caste of mind to be among Roberta's associates. An adventure was up for discussion between them; it was nothing more violent or destructive in character than a project to purchase certain extra items of dress at the price of returning to America second class or, perhaps, steerage. The girl, something like Roberta, and about her age of twenty-four, urged this. Andy groped absently on the seat beside him for his magazine. He had dropped it on the other train; so he contented himself, as he sat back, with rehearsing its most encouraging paragraphs.

The shadows of the long English twilight rose from the hills; the smoke of the evening fires lifted lazily from the chimney pots of a little town as the train stopped at Stoketon. Andy, stepping out at the station, stood staring about a moment, looking, listening, as if expectant. An old castle showed on a hill; in another quarter, a church from which chimes sounded softly. He looked from one of these to the other, and then glanced toward a third prominent structure, the nature of which he could not determine. He seemed expecting some sudden change in one of them. The moving off of the train recalled him. The girls who had shared the compartment with him had alighted there, too, and were instructing the porters where to take their luggage. The men moved off, leaving Roberta's black, week-end box on the platform alone.

Andy sat down and watched it; but concern over it had ceased. It was left on the platform, unclaimed and uncalled for, when the last porter lit the lamps and placed them on the switches and in the signal positions. Evidently the stubby train was to return that night; but not soon. The last porter closed the station and started away.

"Which are the inns to which ladies might go alone?" Andy asked the man. "Not very timid ladies," he particularized.

The first three hostelries suggested gave Andy only blanks; but at the fourth, which he reached when at last the twilight had gone into the soft autumn night, he studied the register of guests with greater care. Roberta's name did not appear; but another name was written by a hand which, though disguised, could have been hers. He sent up his card to Miss Constance Everett in room eighteen. She was stopping there, it appeared, with an English aunt, and she had gone to her room early with the aunt who had a headache.

Andy looked about as he waited. The place was perfect for the planning of catastrophe—an ancient inn with dim, paneled walls, ceiling beamed and smoked by sweet wood fires, a sleepy, unsuspicious guest house, affering always its old flagon of cherry cordial to greet each visitor, and holding other traditions unchanged to charm old ladies traveling.

Miss Everett did not respond to the knock on her door; her aunt also seemed asleep. Did the gentleman, who undoubtedly was a close friend, if not a connection, wish Miss Everett awakened?

"Please," Andy requested; but before the servant left the hall, he recalled caution. "No, do not disturb her; let no

one disturb her. Give me a room, please."

As he followed his guide, he noted carefully the position of room eighteen. He went down again, and, denying his need for supper, stepped out to smoke in the garden.

In the deepest shade of the old oaks, and where roses scented the air, in a dark angle at the rear of the garden under room eighteen, a rope hung down from an opened window—a rope knotted and looped for climbing. He pulled it; it was firmly, expertly secured. Roberta's business of the evening—which evidently did not require the contents of the black box—was on. Andy stood silent in the perfect peace and stillness of the night, and listened as he had when first he stood at the station; but now he was certain of immediate happenings. Yet still through the village of Stoketon, quiet and unsuspecting serenity continued to reign. Andy walked out to the road. The lights of the little town were beginning to twinkle one by one; the good people of Stoketon were going to bed. He snuffed out his cigar and returned to watch beside the rope in the rear of the garden.

A light figure—a girl's—leaped over the low palings; standing, panting, she listened a moment before she came farther. Andy, creeping back on the soft carpet of the thick turf, hid himself in the blackest shadow. The girl came on and reached the rope; she put her foot in a loop, and climbed up a yard or two; then stopped. He thought she had heard him as he stepped closer; but she had not. She descended to the ground and stood waiting for something; and a flash—a sudden yellow and crimson flame of fire—astonished the sky; a second after it, the low rumble of an explosion thudded the air. Andy, though he had been expecting it, startled and spun, surprised, trying to place the source of the flash and sound. But the girl only laughed.

"Roberta!" he hailed her cautiously.

Instinctively she seized the rope and started to climb it; then recognition of his voice seemed to register.

"Who's that?"

"Me—Andy."

"I know now. What do you want?"

He came closer—boldly. "You."

The beginnings of alarm were breaking out about them; there arose shouts and calls and frightened cries.

"What was that, Roberta?" he demanded.

"What was what?"

"Was that the cathedral or the castle?"

"Oh," she laughed. "Neither; the armory."

"The armory? I see; you mean the big building on—or rather which was on that hill?" He indicated the direction of the third structure seen from the station.

She nodded. "It seems to be catching now quite nicely."

Flames, indeed, were beginning to blaze after the darkness which had succeeded the first flash of fire; and the whole village, shocked and in outrage, stirred in tumult.

"Come; let's go with them and take it all in," Roberta suggested mischievously. "Meet me in front in a minute; I'd better go up to my room and down through the inn. I don't need your help, thanks."

She put her foot again in the loops, and climbed easily. Andy satisfied himself with holding the rope steady. She was almost at her window when she halted and stood in the loops.

"Foot caught? Can I help you?" he called.

"Hush!" She dropped a step.

Noise from within the inn, which had halted her, now reached Andy. Some one was knocking at her door—not doubtfully, but with the sharp raps of demand for admittance; a pause for reply; then men's voices and men's shoulders against the door; it came down with a crash, and the room was lit by dancing yellow lamps brandished in hand.

Roberta slid swiftly down the rope, and dropped to the grass. Andy caught her; her light hair was against his lips; he felt her breath, as she stood against him, gloriously excited, and she lifted

her head to look up to her window. Her tense, slender hands held to him tight; she let her lithe, active little figure lie inert another moment half held by him. As she whispered to him, she was exultant in the completeness of the success of her mission; but her breathing told him that his presence there added to her triumph; she was glad he had witnessed it. She admitted that without meaning to.

"It's never been like this before!"

The memory of the paragraph by the German psychologist further emboldened him. "Bobs, you—you don't care a thing about votes for women!"

"What? Of course I do!" She freed herself indignantly; but returned at once to him to feel his share in the effect of her adventure. "Listen to them, Andy; isn't it great to hear them! They can't believe that a girl would do it!"

"Those are only the local gallants." Andy cautioned as he listened. "The fellow who's followed you from London doesn't seem harassed by doubts."

"Andy, till you do it yourself, you've no possible basis of appreciating the perfect deliciousness of shocking them so. You couldn't appreciate it then; you'd have to be a woman with ten thousand generations of downtrodden, meek-made women behind you who wanted to smash things and never dared; you'd——"

"Come away," Andy begged. "They've seen your rope now."

Outcry from above confirmed him, so she let him guide her out of the garden and down the road, where they found a hiding place behind a hedge. They stopped while scared and horrified citizenry passed them. The armory on the hill was burning now with less flame and more smoke, rewarding local fire volunteers for their labors; but the clamor in pursuit of the perpetrators of the outrage increased.

"Are they always so close up on you?" Andy whispered respectfully, as officers, shouting descriptions of Roberta, stumbled past.

"Not always," she said modestly.

"What was your plan for the getaway?"

"Through my room, of course—but there's no use thinking about that now. They know me now and that I did it."

Andy listened. "Yes; they seem to feel pretty sure of you, too."

"Oh, they have before!" she boasted. "But I'm all right. You'd better leave me now," she ordered independently. "Awfully glad to have seen you." She offered her hand; he put his behind his back, trying to think what to say. The outcry about them continued.

A group of burghers, not actively in the woman hunt, went past.

"Reedy and 'is wife?" one repeated. "How about them? They was sleepin' there, you know. Since they was turned from their house, Higgins had let them there."

"What's that?" Roberta suddenly gasped. Her hand, held toward Andy, quickly clutched him, and clung with the instinctive twinge of dependence.

"Aye! Reedy? How about Reedy?" another voice lamented.

Roberta barely breathed. "Andy! They are saying that some one was sleeping in the armory—a man and woman. I was sure no one was there; no one was supposed to be there. But some one was!"

"They aren't sure of that; besides, if this Reedy and his wife were there, you don't know that they were hurt!" Andy as instantly felt the instinct to protect and reassure.

"Reedy and 'is wife; no word, eh?" the voice on the road hailed.

"Andy, if I killed them, it was murder! I thought once I heard some one moving inside; then I said I only imagined it; and I did it! Andy!" She was only woman now—all woman of the old, clinging, appealing, precatastrophic kind pleading to man for protection. "You've got to find out and help me! Andy, take me away from here—anywhere, any way!"

"Can you stay here a moment by yourself—very quiet, without being afraid?" The instant before the question would have been the essence of

lunacy. "Can I leave you—dear?" he ventured now, and she made no protest.

"I think so."

He held his arm about her to steady her for a moment; he could feel her trembling. Then, cautiously creeping out, he joined the others thronging to witness the smoking ruins of the armory. There men moved, carefully, searching the ground. Andy attentively listened to their remarks, and returned to the hiding place behind the hedge. Roberta—if the evidence of a wet handkerchief balled in her hand meant anything—had spent the interval crying.

"Cheer up; they've not found any evidence of any one being caught in the armory," he reported.

"Tell me the truth," she implored.

"Well, it seems that this old man, Reedy, and his wife sometimes had been sleeping there; but——"

"Then I did kill them!"

"I really don't think you did," he denied. "But if it will keep you a little more tractable, go on thinking so; for, whether or not you've killed them, from what I've heard you'd better get out of here as quick as you can."

"I'll do whatever you say." She clung to him as the hue and cry again came close. A recollection of herself the half hour before came to her. "Andy," she questioned in awe, "why am I this way now?"

"You're all right," he patted her. "Don't feel ashamed of yourself. You've really smashed up things mighty competently for a girl. But, Bobs, you can't expect to learn to smash sincerely or thoroughly all at once. You've got to have a few thousand generations of your sex behind you who really smashed to be entirely dependable at it. Then you wouldn't be so broken up about the idea of perhaps a little unintentional killing."

"Don't!" she begged, and pulled him farther back from the road as two officers approached, bundling an American girl between them. But Andy, recognizing the captive in the light of the lanterns, shook Roberta about sternly. "Quick! That isn't one of your people—one who was in this with you?"

"That girl?" Roberta managed. "No."

"Of course not; they think she's you. They've arrested her for you, do you hear? Now you stay here, Bobs, till I come back!"

He gained the road again, and followed the men having in custody his traveling companion of the afternoon whom, when he first saw her, he himself had mistaken for Roberta. She was somewhat frightened; but, as they paraded her before the citizenry, it was clear that she was more proud and pleased with her borrowed prominence. This lasted only a few moments, however; at the inn, where Roberta had stopped, this girl was identified as not Roberta, and released with apologies. So, as she was sinking sorrowfully back to obscurity, Andy approached her.

Fifty very fully occupied minutes later, he rejoined Roberta in her hiding place.

"Come with me now," he commanded. "I'm going to take you home. Never mind about any other clothes. Your things at the inn are in the hands of the police; your box at the station is now on the way, by that train which whistled ten minutes ago, to Southampton in the possession of a Miss Harriet Dale, a somewhat sporting schoolteacher from Ohio, I believe. Instead of going back steerage—as she was considering—she returns on the *Corinthian* to-morrow as you. With a little encouragement any one might take her for you, as you've seen. After the *Corinthian's* at sea, and there's no stop before New York, she'll furnish the encouragement. She will be taken for you; the wireless will announce the news to the shore; so all other search will cease till the *Corinthian's* in New York, and she again is identified as not you. But before that time, you and I—on the *Cumberland*, which sails from Glasgow in just eight hours—will have been safe and at large in the land of the free for some hours. I've figured it all out and arranged it. If we can stay unsuspected for a day, we're all right. There's an

automobile waiting for us outside the town. Come on!"

"You and I? How can we?" Roberta questioned.

"We must elope—or seem to be eloping. I've tried to think of something else, for your sake; but that is the only safe thing. It is the one subterfuge no one would associate with a suffragette."

The Royal Mail S. S. *Cumberland,* from Glasgow for New York, steamed down the Firth of Clyde in a soft, Scottish rain; outside, off the northern coast of Ireland, there was fog. Showers on that first day at sea sometimes thinned it to a mist; but throughout the second day the foghorn of the *Cumberland* blew its long blast every two minutes; and from ahead, abeam, and astern answering bellows from steam whistles warned the passing of other ships lost behind the thick fog curtains and enforced the need for half speed day and night, and less when vessels blundered in close.

Then the ships bound westward on the same course, and the passing vessels, eastbound, spread farther and farther apart, and were separated by a safer distance; but still on that steamship lane across the North Atlantic, fog shrouded the sea; as far ahead as the Grand Banks—so ships sent word by the wireless—the ocean was gray and greasy with fog. And, in the perverse manner which the elements have when men must count upon their fairness, the sea and sky were clear during those days and nights upon the course of steamers for New York out of the English Channel and steering from the south of Ireland. By the second night, therefore, the Southampton liner *Corinthian* had made up half of the advantage of the *Cumberland's* earlier start from the Scottish port. As the steamship lanes drew closer and closer together in mid-Atlantic, the two ships came within easy wireless communication.

So Mr. Andy Farnham read the following on the bulletin board as he came up from breakfast to go on deck on the third day at sea:

NEW BULLETIN FOR FIRST-CABIN PASSENGERS.

As previously announced, wireless communication has been established with R. M. S. *Corinthian* from Southampton. It will be of interest to know that the officers of the *Corinthian* definitely have identified the young woman, suspected since sailing of being Roberta Leigh, as being, indeed, the violent American suffragist who is wanted by the English police for criminal participation in the destruction of many public buildings in England, including the government armory at Stoketon. The intelligence has been sent by wireless to England. The crown officers have congratulated the captain of the *Corinthian* for his valuable service. The knowledge that she had been recognized has not been communicated to Miss Leigh; but she is being held under strict surveillance till she will be handed over to the proper representative of the crown at New York.

The *Corinthian* has found very favorable weather, and is now commanded to make all possible haste in order that Miss Leigh may be returned to England by the S. S. *Mauretania,* sailing Saturday from New York, and immediately be brought to answer for her crimes before an English court.

The last sentence more than counteracted for Mr. Farnham the pleasure following the perusal of the first paragraph. The bulletin was dated at midnight; now it was after eight o'clock. The blasts from the foghorn proclaimed the persistence of foul weather. He gave his place before the bulletin board to other passengers crowding in eager interest. He went into the writing room, and, after considering for a moment, scribbled curtly:

8:10 a. m.

You may, with caution, partially recover and come on deck. A.

Sealing this, he inscribed it to Miss Olive Carew at a number in the women's cabins, and sent it by a stewardess. Then, pulling down his cap, and turning up his collar and lighting a cigar, he stepped out on deck.

He had sensed from the vibration when he was below that the engines were turning over at not even half speed. The fog still shut off everything but two hundred yards of the gray, greasy waves; but it gave enough sight of these to show that the ship's progress was slow indeed. In the intervals between the deafening blasts of the great steam whistle overhead, the fog signals

of another ship sounded, now ahead, now—confusingly—abeam; now ahead again.

He walked forward on the dripping promenade. Though such daylight as there was had been established for two hours, the deck electrics still burned to give light to groups of pallid, ulstered passengers, rug-tucked into their steamer chairs, nibbling biscuit and sipping chicken bouillon for their breakfast. These chatted, with an exciting sense of adventure, of Roberta Leigh; others communicated details of some rescue during the night. As he turned to the opposite side of the ship, Andy saw a crowd about an old and battered seaboat hanging in the *Cumberland's* davits, which was clearly not an appendage of the liner. He pushed nearer, and smelled fish, and saw the name *Susan Daw* in battered paint upon the little boat's stern.

"That's what we stopped for early this morning," volunteered the relief wireless operator, just going off duty for the day.

"I didn't know we stopped."

"Yes; a trawler went to pieces out here a couple of days ago. They were blown out here right in the steamer lanes; the crew were in two boats; but no one saw them till we picked this one up. The other boat's somewhere out there yet; no ship's reported it. We made a circle, and have been going slower to look for it. I've reported picking this up and told about the other; so every other ship coming through here will be on the watch. That shows what wireless does. Those boats drifted right across the steamer lanes for five days, and no one found one, till we happened right across this, because there was no wireless on the trawler to call help."

"I slept right through the stop, I guess; mine's an inside cabin," Andy explained. "How long were we stopped?"

"Pretty long; and we spent some time searching for the other boat."

Andy waited a moment. "What news from the *Corinthian?*" he asked carelessly.

"She's about caught up with us now, and is going right on. She's under special orders to hurry, you know. They certainly mean to do things to that poor suffragette girl, Roberta Leigh. You know——"

Andy was favored with confidential communications picked up by the *Cumberland's* wireless. Not to show too great interest, he soon moved away. Roberta, if she was to respond to his instructions, soon would come on deck. Thus far, by keeping strictly to her cabin since he had brought her on shipboard, she had obeyed him; it had been a highly unusual experience.

Since she was six and he seven, and their parents had built big country places in Connecticut side by side, he and Roberta had been opponents, rivals, defiers of the daring of each other. As children they had secretly risked their necks on the same dangerous horses, jumped from the same high windows, climbed the same trees. What she lacked in strength, she made up for a time in superior lightness and agility; then slowly but surely the handicap of her skirts, which had to be let down, told against her. No further refinement of skill in her short strokes at golf made up his increasing advantage in the long drives; and she was confined still to tennis when he broke in at polo. Then motor racing and flying came to him; her only sufficient retort was taking to suffragettism as committed in England. He was more than half aware that it was his spring exploits with his last wrecked monoplane which had hurried her to England; but, till he had happened across those pleasing paragraphs in the quarterly review, he had not dared to think that she had acted in different spirit toward him than after he first greeted her over the garden gate:

"Hello! What's your name? Bobs? Huh! Girl tryin' to make out you're a boy!"

"What if I am a girl? Bet anything I can stump *you!*"

Was it just possible that, as his lost and lamented quarterly review claimed, her last acts had been in only false defiance of him—"the pseudo defiance of

man by woman which, from the earliest times, has been employed by woman to attract man."

He had believed that he had followed her to England with no feeling more akin to love than when, long before, he used to swim out after her to bring her back when she struck too far from the shore, and when she, not needing his help, swam easily back, teasing him. But this time she had needed his help; and since the incredible, unique, delicious moments of her clinging and appealing to him and his feeling her soft and weak and dependent in his arms, he was certain of very different sensations toward her. For those few moments, at least, she was changed toward him; then had followed their precipitate flight to Glasgow and their days of separation while she kept to her cabin on the ship. Had the change endured with her? He paced anxiously, impatiently, up and down awaiting her appearance.

A laugh of amusement, gently raillerous, brought him about. Roberta lay in a steamer chair, reclining comfortably in the Scotch plaid ulster he had bought for her at Glasgow, and with her wavy brown hair caught up under the tam-o'-shanter also there purchased by him. Her cheeks, in contrast with the pallid people in the distant chairs, were ruddy, and her laughing lips full and red.

"You're a convincing-looking invalid for having been confined to your cabin since we left Scotland," he greeted her instinctively in their old, accustomed manner, to which she had returned. He dropped into one of the empty chairs near her. "I suppose you were dressed when you got my note?"

"What note?"

"Why, my line ten minutes ago telling you that you could come on deck now."

"Thank you! I went to breakfast at seven in the main saloon—about half an hour before you were up, I fancy. I tramped about a while, and have been here since."

"I see. So you heard that my substitute for you has been really identified as you on board the *Corinthian?*"

"Nice of her to go through with it," Roberta granted; "but I hadn't heard—anything except that I hadn't hurt that Reedy man and his wife at all. They've both been found safe; so I only did what I had meant to do."

"You merely burned down the armory, you mean?"

"Yes—just property; so I saw no reason for keeping cooped up in that stuffy cabin any longer."

Andy angered. "What's the game, Roberta?"

"Game?" in surprise.

"You'd better go down and read a few of the last bulletins—or, still better, talk to the wireless operator and learn the more confidential preparations for your reception and entertainment upon your return to England—if you suppose that the British government is so relieved to find that you didn't burn Reedy and spouse that it's going to give you a vote of thanks for merely blowing up government property. I told you that you might come on deck, if you took care not to attract too much attention, because no one will be suspecting you while the *Corinthian* is still at sea. Our friend, the sporty schoolteacher, seems to have come through with an impersonation which had convinced the officers of the *Corinthian;* but she can't fool the reception committee at New York. Your face and figure, my dear girl, are easily the most familiar in all the U. S. A. this week. You must know how the newspapers hate to give space to a girl like you who's been such a quiet little body all summer. I'll bet there haven't been more than an average of eight different pictures of you in all poses run in each edition this week. Reporters may meet the *Corinthian* on the high seas, but I feel that probably no one will board the boat before it picks up its pilot; then two tugs from the less enterprising papers and four from the moving-picture concerns will greet our friend, your doubtful double, at quarantine. They'll know before they've taken a thousand feet of film of her that she isn't you. Then even the English will guess where you are. If the *Corinthian* could only

run out of gasoline, or blow a tire or crack a cylinder, and let us get in first, all right for us; but if the *Corinthian* goes on in ahead of us, you—dear girl—are elected to be the example to be made to discourage any more of this foreign-legion stuff in the ranks of the British suffragettes. The home secretary seems to feel that you are most eminently qualified to serve as a stopper for more of our sweet girl graduates crossing over and spending their senior vacations at pillage and arson. Rough of them, undoubtedly; but if the *Cumberland* comes in second, it's forcibly fed from a funnel for the rest of your natural youth, my dear."

"Why," Roberta returned resignedly, "do you repeat the 'if' so many times? Isn't the *Cumberland* now sure to come in second?"

"The *Corinthian's* caught up with us now. They're a little faster than this ship ordinarily, and at present they're under emphatic orders to make as fast a passage as possible. Even if I should give away our hand by offering to pay our captain for extra coal he'd burn to beat the *Corinthian* in, this ship couldn't do it."

"Exactly," Roberta accepted. "So why pretend that I think I'm escaping? And why say 'our' hand? It was entirely your idea that this ship was sure to get in before the *Corinthian*—not mine."

Andy fumed helplessly. He idly watched men working on the woodwork beside the wireless cabin. Before painting, they were sandpapering a strip, rasping coarse sandpaper, tacked on blocks, over the patch to be painted. The harsh, grating sound came with a short rasp, then longer, then shorter. Roberta looked about.

"I thought that was the wireless for a minute," she said.

"Sounds like it."

People passed, glancing at them curiously. "I'd better ask you," Roberta said, "what are our relations supposed to be since we've been on board? Your communication by note, evidently meant to be enigmatic if it fell into false hands, was enigmatic."

"There appeared to be a choice of two explanations only, considering the way we piled on board at the last minute at once and demanded widely separated cabins. Either we must be married and part at the gangplank, or else, according to original scenario, we were eloping, with papa's pursuit so close that we hadn't had time to drop in on the minister. I choose the latter."

"With the result?"

Andy confessed: "That yesterday the captain—most romantic of Scots—blushingly put forward his qualifications as legal wedlocker on the high seas."

"Ah!"

"So I told him the seas were too high for you; you'd got seasick and changed your mind."

Roberta looked away. "I told you if I stayed in my cabin, it must be on account of something else—even neuralgia. You know that I never get seasick; I hate people who get seasick."

She rose suddenly and walked away. He thought for an instant that she had used a different tone—not quite the same tone which had surprised him at Stoketon when she gave herself to his protection, but at least something like that tone. But, as he watched her walk away, he knew he must have imagined it. Her air of complete disregard of him had never piqued him more. He jumped up and caught step with her.

"Kindly do not assume that the *Corinthian* is certain to beat us in!"

"How are you going to prevent it?" she questioned practically.

He did not tell her, for the sufficient reason that he did not know; but that it must be done he now was certain; and there was little time to lose to learn the way to do it. He let her leave him and go within without protest. He paced round and round the deck.

"Fog's thinning." His friend, the relief wireless operator, stopped beside him at the rail.

Indeed, it was fog no longer; the cessation of the blasts of the siren overhead admitted it; only mist remained, and it was a swiftly melting mist which blew with the breeze and vanished un-

der the noon high sun. The horizon showed sharp, clear, as the pale blue of the sunny sky met the deep green of the sea in a line all about the circle of sight. One blotch only broke it—a spot of smoke on the very horizon edge, a spot which was quite abreast the *Cumberland,* and slowly, very slowly, but quite surely, was creeping ahead.

The operator went into the wireless station and returned.

"That's the smoke of the *Corinthian.* She's brought her good weather with her; and she's going right on to put that girl aboard the *Mauretania* to take her back to jail in England. Say, do you know, I'd like to do something for that girl? They're laying to give her altogether too much. Looking at it some ways, she's all right. I got a sister in the suffrage cause myself."

Andy looked swiftly about, and sized up the operator more carefully. "Why didn't you say so before?" he demanded.

The operator moved nearer and spoke cautiously: "I wasn't sure till to-day why it was you was so interested in what was coming in."

"So you feel sure now, do you?"

"Can't say that," the operator said conservatively. "But I've got a noodle, even if everything isn't as clear as it might be in it just now. But don't worry; nobody else is wise, and I ain't said nothing."

"On account of your sister?"

The operator looked at Andy's hands, which were in his pockets. "Partly," he said.

"Is it better for you to come to my cabin, or safer for me to go to yours?" Andy inquired. "Not that I've got a proposition yet; but—well, two heads are better than one."

The conference below decks, though of no short duration, brought to Andy little definite encouragement. During all the latter part of the afternoon, which remained clear and bright though the wind now was rising, he paced the deck thoughtful, alone. The smoke on the southern horizon which marked the position of the *Corinthian* crept steadily farther ahead.

Above the setting sun spread a flaming and crimson sky; and out from under it the smoke and then the hull of a steamer appeared. It was eastbound to England, and between the paths of the *Cumberland* and *Corinthian.* Twilight failed over the ocean before it met the *Cumberland;* its smoke smudge was lost in the blackness of night, its spars vanished save for a swaying masthead light, and its decks became lines of electric lights backed by the glow of cabin windows where passengers were dressing for dinner.

As Andy stood at the rail watching the other vessel pass, Roberta stopped at his side. "You look quite desperate in your planning for me," she rallied. "Tell me, what is the present program, per your arrangement? Am I to do a dive with you and swim for that boat, and double back to England?"

The relief wireless operator, halting, excused Andy from reply. "That's the *Wellington*—an old hooker, and slow, but still popular. First, second, and steerage always full. Economical's the word with her. Every ship's supposed to have two men for the wireless, since the *Titanic;* but they manage most of the time—as this trip—with one. They'd wake up their man to get help if anything happened to them; but from about ten p. m. to say five a. m., another ship in trouble would have a great time calling them."

Andy gazed long at the ship, the great idea dawning. "Excuse us," he said to Roberta. "My friend," he announced to the operator, "something tells me that you and I need only go again into executive session to get immediate results."

Roberta, watching for him to come into the dining saloon, waited in vain till the stewards ceased to serve. Likewise, after going to her chair on deck, she looked for him without result. There now was a good sea running—nothing to trouble a large ship, but quite enough to send most of the passengers below. The wind, blowing down from the Arctic Sea, was quite cold and damp, though the air still was clear. Roberta rose, with her coat but-

toned about her, and tramped the tipping, wind-swept decks.

The salt spray was flying; she felt its sting on her face, tasted it on her lips. She went to the forward rail and clung to it as the *Cumberland* rolled and rose and dipped and rolled again as it bore steadily into the darkness ahead. It had become so late that the stewards had turned out all the deck lights except the single yellow glows over the companionways; and these now were dimmer and failing, incrusted with salt. And no light or sign of any other ship showed about all the black horizon. The *Corinthian* never had been near enough for her lights to show at night; the *Wellington* long had been lost in the purple darkness astern. The skies clouded over; no glint came down from the stars. The *Cumberland* rolled on to America alone, only the wireless—the rasp of which could be heard from the cabin—told where they were to other ships. Roberta drew in deep breaths of delight at the desolateness of the ocean, the openness and freedom of the wide water. Suddenly, with a recollection, she shuddered.

"What is it?" Andy's voice surprised her. She felt his strong fingers steadying her arm.

"I don't want to be taken back to England to jail!" she confessed to him before she could prevent herself. "I believed I didn't mind; I thought it would be part of the fun. But tonight"—she hesitated as to how to express it—"feel that wind, breathe it! It's all open, all free! I want to feel it like that whenever I'd like to. I don't want to be locked up!"

"I don't want you to, either." His grasp on her tightened. "And you're not going to be. No one's going to take you back to jail in England or anywhere else. We're going to be landed without any one troubling us, just as I planned. Then you can go anywhere you want to."

"How are we going to get ashore before the *Corinthian* docks?"

He laughed confidently. "I will get you!"

"But how?" she repeated, with concern.

"Don't worry. You'll wake up as far ahead of the *Corinthian* as I ever meant you to be."

"I'm not thinking about myself. What are you planning to do? Nothing—dangerous, Andy! You know how nearly I hurt people."

"No, no," he reassured. "Nothing dangerous; something quite safe, serene, secure, Bobs. Merely——"

"What?"

"Expensive. That wireless operator is not so completely carried away by sympathy for you and suffrage for his sister as he seemed."

"What did you say?"

"I'll tell you to-morrow. I want to do it first; and it's getting along toward time. So you go in now; good night."

"Good night," she said. He had commanded; she had not meant to obey; but now, when she found herself doing it, she did not deter.

"Bobs!" he caught her gently.

"What?"

"A kiss, dear!"

"A kiss?"

He took it before arguing further. "That's all right," he justified, as he took another. "No one's about, Bobs! You kissed me that second time!"

"I did the first time, too!"

"Like that? Of course; but how could you have expected me to believe anything more than I was kissing you?"

"Andy!" She was held tight in his arms. "What do you and I mean?"

"I don't know except that we mean it together."

"What?"

"To get married, I guess; don't we?"

"We must."

The ship's bell struck fluidly; in a moment there was some sort of confusion and calling—apparently on account of changing watches—and men came by. Andy put Roberta reluctantly away.

"You must go in now. No; you can't help, dear. You might only hinder. Of course, I'll tell you all about it as soon as I can."

She stopped only for one more meet-

ing of their lips, and then, no longer wondering at her obedience, she disappeared down the nearest companionway. Andy moved in an ecstasy down the deck; if he had had doubts before of what he was about to do, they were unfelt in this incredible delight. He loved little Bobs; she loved him; they could be married if he carried through what already he had planned. He was reckless to, oblivious of the confusion on deck except as it threatened his plans. Then most of the men moving about and running back and forth from the bridge vanished below; they left the decks almost deserted, and gave him his opportunity to act. He crept up to the wireless cabin. The rasp of the current in sending a communication came to him clearly. He waited tensely till it ceased; then he opened the door and entered the cabin, swiftly shutting the door behind him and locking it. The relief wireless operator was alone within, seated before his instruments.

"All right?" Andy demanded of him.

"The *Corinthian's* in easy communication, of course—a little ahead of us, and twenty or thirty miles to the south."

"She's also within communication radius of the *Wellington?*"

"Sure; the *Wellington's* now about a hundred miles east of us. If we sent out a call as if it came from the *Wellington,* the *Corinthian* couldn't tell whether it came from us or the *Wellington.*"

"Good! And the *Wellington* wouldn't know we were impersonating them? The *Wellington's* operator has gone to bed now?"

"He certainly isn't at his station."

"Now's the time, then. Quick, man. The S. O. S.! Send it! We're the *Wellington,* in trouble This ship is now the *Wellington,* a hunder miles east of us; and you're sending out the S. O. S. call as the *Wellington's* sinking!"

The operator shook his head. "I can't."

"Can't! Why not?"

"I've been thinking it over."

"Well?"

"We can't call 'Wolf!' on the ocean. The wireless must always bring a ship to a ship in distress; no captain must doubt it a minute."

"Once won't do any harm," Andy argued recklessly. "We'll merely put the *Corinthian* back a hundred miles, and maybe bring back some other ship which gets the call. And think of the excitement we'll give the passengers on the *Corinthian* till they find the *Wellington* isn't sinking."

"Yes; and when they find it out?"

"No one can ever find that you did it," Andy returned impatiently. "We've gone all over this, man. No one can tell where a wireless message comes from. The *Corinthian* will think it comes from the *Wellington.* The *Wellington* won't know we've called since the operator's in bed. The *Corinthian* will call her, of course, and when there's no answer that makes sure the *Wellington's* in trouble. If the *Corinthian* calls us to go back to help the *Wellington,* too, we don't get the call; our installation's out of order for a few hours. Nothing could be simpler than that."

"Still, it's too much risk for five hundred."

"Oh, all right. I expected a raise. A thousand for you, then."

"No."

"Two."

"Not enough."

"Three."

"It might be found out here. The S. O. S. call is distinctive You can hear the sending outside. If it is, I'm fired, and don't get another job."

"All right; four, then."

The operator looked at Andy keenly. "How much higher will you go?" he asked frankly.

"Highbinder!" Andy accused him, and snatched pencil and pad. "S. O. S. *Wellington* sinking. S. O. S.," he scribbled

"Five thousand for four words; cash down!" He drew money from his pocket. "Five more if you're caught and fired. My word for that. That's all I had left on my letter of credit when I cashed it at Glasgow; but you know there's more where this came from."

The operator held his hand over his key and listened nervously. "Can they know about this now?" he asked. There seemed, indeed, to be already a movement on the bridge as if the officers had heard the scheme or suspected something. But Andy did not sense this, or was reckless of it. He pushed his money halfway across the table.

"I pay as you send. Ah, that's it! S. O. S. That's the stuff; there's a thousand. Is that *Wellington* you're spelling? Right; there's a thousand more. 'Sinking.' Now 'S. O. S.' Four thousand and a fifth for the repeat to clinch it. Sent? Good! Put it away; put it away. They're coming now!"

Indeed, the alarm, vague before, had become definite and loud. Men hammered on the locked door to the right of the wireless cabin and cried for entrance; and all about the noise of disturbance and haste increased.

"I told you they could hear it!" the operator gasped. He was bent over his table, his receivers to his ears, listening to the result of his message.

"You haven't done any harm," Andy steadied him. "And look here! Now you've done it, you've got to stand by what you did! You can't take back all that!" He pulled the operator away from his instruments as the beating on the door threatened the panels. "If you want excuse for not taking it back, just don't get that fixed for a few hours!" He seized a stool, and raised it to break some of the connections of the wireless apparatus. The wireless operator, opposing him in fright, tripped him, and Andy fell, his full weight crashing the heavy stool into the condensers and coils before him. The operator pressed down his key as he bent over the wreck in horror.

There came a yellow splutter, a loud crash of the powerful current, a blinding blue flash; then the smell of insulation burned, metal fused. And the door on the right to the deck burst open. Already Andy had unlocked the door on the other side; he pushed the wireless operator before him, and himself stumbled out upon the dark and slippery deck, where the spray from the sea flew in their faces.

The operator disappeared; Andy, left alone, slowly understood that some general alarm, which could not have been caused by his act in the wireless station, was spreading through the ship. Passengers, unsteady and in panic, were appearing on deck; and now the air was not salt with the smack of the sea; some strange, subtle, sickening scent changed it; and there came the cry in wild fright:

"Fire! Fire below! The ship's on fire!"

Men, women, and children, half dressed, or with overcoats over night robes, rushed out from crowded companionways. Sailors and stewards and stewardesses attempted to control these; there was no fire, they said; or it was not serious; it was now being put out. But more passengers in night robes overwhelmed them. Andy stood, dazed, as they crushed toward the wireless station and clamored:

"Fire! The ship's on fire! Call help! Call the *Corinthian.* We're burning up!"

The touch of some one, quite calm and controlled, made him look about. Roberta was beside him, still dressed as she had been; she had not gone to bed; she had heard the first reports of the fire.

"There was an accident in the stores. Oil got afire and scattered. It seems to be beyond control. Get people to dress. The stewards and ones like you and I can bring out their clothes. Of course, we've called help by wireless. The *Corinthian* can't be more than thirty miles away."

"We can't call it; it can't come! It's been called on an S. O. S. call to the *Wellington!*"

"What's happened to the *Wellington?*"

"Nothing."

"Then why is the *Corinthian* going to it?"

Andy told her.

"They must have our wireless repaired now," she said, as they moved

forward with the other passengers. "You couldn't have broken it badly."

But panic and terror of the passengers increased as they neared the wireless station. "There is no immediate danger. Everybody dress warmly!" Stewards and sailors attempted to command.

"What's the matter with the wireless?" the cries about the cabin announced the silence of the instruments.

"What ship is coming to us? Why don't we hear the wireless?"

In response a second officer showed himself at the door of the silent cabin. "The *Corinthian* is close to us!" he shouted. "Keep calm. She must soon come up!"

"When did you get her?" the shouts returned. "What's the matter with the wireless? Can't you call the *Corinthian?* Can't you call any ship?"

"We've called the *Corinthian;* she's coming now!" the officer lied loudly; but the people in panic sensed the lie.

"The wireless isn't working! They haven't called any ship! They can't use it! It's not working!"

The crazed crowds stumbling from the companionways heard and shouted it back over the ship. Denial of the danger below no longer was possible; the flames below were beginning to be felt; smoke seeped through the whole ship and hovered, a hot, steaming cloud, over the holds where the stores were blazing. Stewards and some of the men of the first cabin still moved about, attempting to quiet and reassure; but the seamen, in the details defined in the orders to abandon ship, were freeing the lifeboats, putting food and water in them; and officers directed with revolvers strapped over their uniforms and cartridges in the boxes on their belts.

The thud of pumps throwing sea water on the flames confused the vibrations of the screws; still, the shaking of the ship told that the engines were being forced their fastest.

Yet the sea about the *Cumberland* remained black and desolate. Rockets streaked into the sky from the *Cumberland's* forecastle, signaling desperately that the ship was in dire danger, confessing that the wireless had failed.

"They can't work the wireless!" Women screamed and swooned in the crush about the lifeboats. "They'll put us in boats, and we'll drift till we die. There's no ship called to us!"

Andy, blocking the crush off from Roberta, was borne with her against the side of the cabins. He smelled fresh paint, and felt the greasiness of it on his hands. They were where the painters had been working. He lost Roberta from beside him; she had stooped, and was feeling for something at their feet. She straightened, and he saw in her hands two bits of board—the blocks with sandpaper tacked to them which the painter had used and left there.

"Get me nearer the wireless cabin," she directed.

Not understanding, but obeying, he worked a way for her. He got past one of the sailors on guard outside the cabin. An officer appeared; Roberta spoke to him; he motioned her in curtly, and Andy followed.

The chief operator and the relief man were working feverishly over the wreck of the wireless apparatus; they stopped and tested their tangle of connections and coils, looked to each other, and tore out their own repairs. Outside the rockets again roared into the air; cries of terror increased. Roberta, crouching inside the wireless cabin out of sight from the deck, struck her sandpapered blocks together; a harsh, grating rasp resulted. The second officer half opened the door to the deck so it could be better heard, and himself seized the blocks.

"Rasp!" the sound grated, like the rough crackle of the current of the wireless in order. "Ras-sp!" A few of the passengers heard it; they cried to others, and more made it out.

"The wireless is working! We're getting help!"

Rockets still shot into the sky; but now, instead of increasing the panic, these aided to control it. The wireless was working and bringing ships to help the *Cumberland;* the rockets were ris-

ing to show the *Cumberland's* position as the rescue ships raced up.

In the wireless cabin, the second officer handed the blocks to another and nodded to him to keep them going.

"Some one ran in here half crazy just after the fire broke out, and did that." He motioned Andy toward the wrecked apparatus. "A strange thing; the *Wellington,* a hundred miles east, just then was in trouble, too, and calling for help. Our man here heard the *Corinthian* respond, and say she was starting back. He was going to respond for us, when that was done, and our own trouble came."

"Now where are we going?" Andy asked anxiously.

"There was no use in trying to catch the *Corinthian*—she's faster than we, and would be going her best on an S. O. S. call. Our only chance of getting help soon is from the *Elbe*—the German ship ahead. She was about sixty miles ahead of us, bound for New York. We are assuming that she also must have got the S. O. S. call from the *Wellington*—though our man heard only the *Corinthian* respond. So we're steering to run across the *Elbe* if she's coming back to the *Wellington.* If she is, we should see her lights now in half an hour."

"But if she didn't get the *Wellington's* call, and if she isn't coming back?"

The officer set his lips firmly. "Then I guess we can get the women first into the boats, and keep them adrift until most of them, anyway, are picked up." He looked to Roberta thankfully. "Since they think the wireless is going again, we can handle them more decently."

Andy stared out over the dark sea. To the south and astern, the *Corinthian,* which could have been alongside before now, was racing more than a hundred miles away to pursue a sound ship. He had sent it on that pursuit. Somewhere out ahead—if the German *Elbe* also had happened to hear his false S. O. S. calls and was responding to them—was the ship which they might meet in time to save the *Cumberland's* company. The rockets constantly exploded in the sky to attract it. Slowly, with terrible, heart-dragging counting of the minutes while the fire gained and gained again in spite of all the floods pumped into the hull, the half hour passed. Still the electricians worked over the wireless apparatus; only the rasping of sandpapered blocks still tricked the passengers that the wireless was working.

"Time's up!" the second officer shut his watch. "If we're going to meet the *Elbe,* we should see her lights now."

A cry from the point of the deck forward—light—a streaking flame in the sky ahead. The German liner *Elbe* was in sight! It answered the rockets of the *Cumberland.* The two ships raced on to each other.

The fast German mail steamer, *Elbe* —which every one knows was responding to an unexplained false call from the *Wellington*—took off the passengers from the burning *Cumberland;* and, as the crew of the *Cumberland* remained to fight the fire, the *Elbe* stood by till the *Corinthian* came back from its useless chase. As the *Corinthian* was a British ship of an allied line, it stayed with the *Cumberland,* and finally brought it into port after the fire had gutted the ship and burned out. Accordingly, the *Elbe,* with the *Cumberland's* passengers, reached New York on Saturday afternoon, while the *Corinthian* was still at sea.

The arrest at New York of Roberta Leigh for her high crimes committed in England therefore was postponed till the *Corinthian* docked. But this arrest was meant to be only postponed. The British government, thoroughly aroused to the need of decisive and drastic measures for the suppression of the suffragist outrages, were determined to show no quarter. The crown officers waited doggedly for the coming of the *Corinthian* on Monday.

Wherefore, on Sunday night, Mr. Andrew Farnham called on Miss Roberta Leigh at the quiet country place of one of her classmates up the Hudson.

"Bobs," he said, when he was alone

with her, "the Britishers are in for bitter disappointment when the *Corinthian* gets to quarantine to-morrow. They've been oiling up the thumbscrews in the tower and sharpening the spikes of the Iron Maiden for you. When they find they haven't got you, our recent acts of evasion will be kindergarten games compared to what may be required to keep you from being extradited. And, to confess the truth, dear, this having all but slaughtered a shipload of people has scared me. I don't know what I'd find myself doing if they got after you again. So, just to protect me, won't you marry me now? Come on; let's become woman and husband!"

Roberta kissed him and laughed. "You didn't really hurt any one. Everybody got off the *Cumberland,* and the *Corinthian* couldn't have put out the fire even if it had come right away. I didn't hurt anybody in England; and, as for their precious old property, I told my lawyer this morning to pay what was right for that."

"You did that? Why?"

"I didn't do those things for votes for women I'd never seen. I—I did them because you made me so mad, and I wanted to show you I didn't care a thing about you."

"Why?"

"Because I did—and thought you didn't really care for me."

"But now?"

"I know."

"Then give me another kiss, Bobs. I've loved you ever since I saw you over the garden gate and you dared me. Why did you do that?"

"Because I knew I was going to love you, I guess, and tried to deny it."

He held her close a long time, and their kisses no longer could be counted. "Dear, what a dangerous thing is the mating impulse!"

"Yes; if you try to deny it."

"Then we're stopping that right now, aren't we?"

"Right now!"

Wherefore upon the passenger list of the steamer for Brazil which sailed from New York next morning appeared the names of Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Farnham in the royal suite. By wireless, as they sailed out to sea, they heard of the horror of the British government at finding that the girl on the *Corinthian* was not Roberta Leigh, and that the very militant suffragette again had escaped.

But, in equal sense of outrage, the suffragist leaders in England received the news that Roberta Leigh had paid for all damage done by her in the name of the suffrage cause.

"We have long suspected," the chief starver for the suffrage cause was quoted in the newspapers, "the sincerity of the suffragist support from the young women of America. Miss Leigh has proved by this weak reparation that her acts here were performed without sense of conviction. It is such as she who seem to justify, to the thoughtless, the charge that there is nothing new in principle in our attitude toward men. Her traitorous repairing of damage which we supposed was done in good faith will certainly cause us to be more certain of the sincerity and conviction of other recruits in our ranks before intrusting them with important acts of destruction. The rumored marriage of Miss Leigh is, under the circumstances, perfectly comprehensible, and only a final evidence of her defection."

HE NEVER LOST A CASE

OLLIE JAMES, the big senator from Kentucky, has the champion murder record of all Congress—his prominence in this line being explained by the number of men he has defended on murder charges.

He was admitted to the bar when he was eighteen years of age. Since then, he has championed more than eighty men accused of murder. In this number was one batch of five men under the same indictment; and another batch of seven intrusted their lives to him.

Out of that whole number, he never has lost a case.

The Fall of the Play

By Peter B. Kyne

Author of "A Reasonable Profit," "Hamburger Steak—Without Onions," Etc.

A parable of the lamb and the coyote. An incident of the closed season for gamblers in the Far West

THE Last Frontier was fading; in a few minutes it would be gone. Yet there were those in the gambling houses of Kelcey's Wells who refused to believe that the end was really at hand. "Faro Dan" Simmons was one of these, and the "Butterfly Kid" was another.

There was something vaguely pathetic in the manner in which these two bowed to the mandate of the law that put the ban on gambling in Nevada forever. As the clock on the wall of the Sluice Box commenced striking the hour of midnight, when the new law went into effect, the Butterfly Kid spun his roulette wheel for the last time; as the clock struck the final twelfth knell that proclaimed the passing of the Last Frontier the little ivory ball clicked into the thirty pocket!

The Butterfly Kid stared at the ball a few seconds, then looked up with a queer smile on his face. He had been a telegraph operator once, and he knew the significance of that fateful number.

"That's good night," he said, and scooped in the bets.

He lifted the wheel off the spindle, carefully counted his bank roll, entered the amount on a little tab, placed the money in a canvas bag, spread the rubber cover over the table, and turned out the wall light behind the table, just as he had done every night for years. Then he sat down dejectedly at the table again and watched the crowd file out into the street or the saloon next door; where less sanguine gamesters were about to celebrate the passing of the old régime by carrying their gambling parphernalia into the middle of Main Street and burning it with due ceremony.

Faro Dan, having performed the obsequies at his table, carried a stool across the now deserted gambling hall and took a seat opposite the Butterfly Kid.

Ensued a silence. Then the Butterfly Kid sighed.

"Well, Dan," he remarked, "it's October first, nineteen hundred and ten. Five minutes ago it was a pleasure to gamble. Now it's a felony. Verily, man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble."

"He is," acquiesced Faro Dan heavily. "And the clock didn't strike a minute too soon. If this new era of peace on earth an' good will to men had been delayed as much as half an hour, I reckon that dog-gone Samuel's Cash Emporium would have busted the faro bank. Butterfly, that Abe Samuels' a fool for luck."

The Butterfly Kid started. He and Faro Dan were partners in the Sluice Box gambling hall, and the news which the latter now imparted was distinctly disconcerting.

"How much?" he queried.

"As much as two thousand dollars," Faro Dan replied. "Two thousand of our bank roll, and the law makin' it a felony to gamble with him in a belated endeavor to get it back, until this fool law's repealed. This antigamblin' law won't hold water, Butterfly. The boys won't stand for it."

"Don't delude yourself, Dan. Right up to the fifty-ninth second of the last

minute I had hope. I'm through. On the last spin of my wheel the ball rolled into the thirty pocket, and that's good night! The free range is gone, Dan. It's the closed season on gamblers in the Far West."

"I can't believe it," mourned Faro Dan. "Why, it ain't natural."

"It won't *seem* natural, I'll admit, and it's hard to teach old dogs new tricks. I suppose we'll have to tackle the legitimate now."

"Ain't this legitimate?" roared Faro Dan wrathfully. "Wasn't every game in this house on the level?"

"I'm sorry to say it was," his partner replied. "By rights we'd ought t' had a trained deck for Abe Samuels. We'd have been several thousand ahead of the game."

He sighed, counting it a heinous offense on the part of Faro Dan that he had found no means of throttling Abe Samuels' luck before the lid went on. Faro Dan realized this, and by way of a subtle defense sought refuge in a parable.

"Butterfly," he said plaintively, "did you ever know many sheep?"

"Herds of 'em. They was mostly black. Why? Was you inquiring about some o' your relations that's been missin'? Or was you thinkin' of goin' into the sheep business?"

"I come from a cow county, Butterfly. Don't get gay. But I knew a sheep onct that reminded me of some men I've knowed. I was dealing in Ouray, Colorado, at the time, and a feller come in with some dust that he claimed he'd found over on the Lake Fork o' the Gunnison. So I engineered him out of town, and we went to Lake City horseback, and then down the cañon. We found the gold all right, but it fizzled out in about a week. It was just a little pocket off'n a quartz vein too low grade to work at a profit——"

"Dan," said the Butterfly Kid passionately, "if you're a-goin' to tell me about a dog-goned sheep, tell me, and don't keep me in suspense. That Abe Samuels business again to-night has shore upset me."

"I'm a-comin' to the sheep. We was stayin' with a rancher that had a rock farm on about two square feet o' ground, where he kept some cattle. He was a sort of a jack-leg butcher, and used to kill every week for the Lake City market. Well, naturally, there was always a dozen coyotes and a wolf or two hangin' around the ranch, on account o' the slaughterhouse. They'd be around all night, an' the dogs used to chase 'em away at sunrise. In addition to his regular dawgs this feller owned two shepherd pups and a seven-month-old spring lamb——"

The Butterfly Kid arose and bowed elaborately.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Lamb," he said, and sat down again. Faro Dan continued:

"——that was great pals with these shepherd pups. They was absolutely inseparable. Well, every morning as soon as these pups and the lamb was let loose, away they'd go a-runnin' for the coyotes settin' around on the ridge back o' the slaughterhouse, gettin' a breakfast on the smell. This dog-gone lamb could outrun the pups, and he'd be a-leadin' the chase maybe a hundred yards, head down, an' runnin' stiff-legged, for all the world like he was a-contemplatin' the round-up of a coyote, and a-chewin' of his year right off."

Having proceeded thus far in his narrative, Faro Dan paused with a note of finality in his tones, and bit into his chewing tobacco.

"Well, go on," urged the Butterfly Kid. "Don't be a-settin' there like a white chip on a dead card. What's the rest of the fool yarn?"

"Why, there ain't no rest, Butterfly," Faro Dan replied gently, "only I've often wondered what that fool lamb would 'a' done if he'd grabbed the coyote. Me an' you've been tryin' to shear this here lamb, Abe Samuels, quite a spell now, and if we figger that we're a pair o' shepherd pups, you can't kick if he's outrun us. On the other hand, if you want to be the coyote in this here parable, you're shore goin' to feel mean to have to admit that this here lamb had chewed your year."

"I admit it," replied the Butterfly Kid, "and I'm ashamed of it."

Ensued another silence, broken presently by Faro Dan. "Butterfly," he said, "you've got a reputation in Kelcey's Wells for bein' a square gambler."

"I think so," replied the Butterfly Kid indifferently.

"Ne'rtheless an' ag'in," pursued Faro Dan, "you got a good workin' knowledge o' how to make a trained deck perform."

"I admit I was irresponsible, more or less, in my youth, Dan, but that ain't no reason why you should throw my dead past in my face."

"I wouldn't, Butterfly, if it wasn't for this here Samuels person. He's got away with large gobs of our money, and I feel hurt. Now, listen, Butterfly. Abe Samuels ain't nothing superhuman. He can be broke. We know he's a money-maker in business an' out of it, and if me and you're to quit gamblin' and tackle the legitimate—by which I take it you mean we shall enter the sordid ranks o' barter an' trade—our professional pride would be hurt if we left Kelcey's Wells without puttin' a dent in Samuels' Cash Emporium. Me, I want that feller's bank roll, and I never knew the feller whose bank roll I couldn't get if he played with me long enough."

"So you ain't had enough o' that man, eh?" the Butterfly Kid queried scornfully. "Dan, you discourage me. Maybe Abe Samuels ain't superhuman, but his luck's the closest thing to a miracle I ever see since I become a gay gambolier. I don't want no more of *him*."

"Butterfly," pleaded Faro Dan, "I know he's lucky. But you know as well as I do, Butterfly, that there ain't no such thing as luck in a cold deck with you dealin' the cards. Upon such occasions luck gives way to a mortal certainty, and we emerge with a bank roll as big as a skinned horse."

"Dan," the Butterfly Kid demanded, "what you got on your mind?"

"A game of stud poker behind closed doors—that's what I got on my mind. This antigamblin' law has put our gamblin' house out of business. We ain't partners no longer, so far as the public knows. Nobody'll think anything of it if we sit in the same stud-poker game. And I tell you that Abe Samuels has just naturally got to have a place to gamble in. He's lucky. He feels lucky, and he knows he's lucky, but all the same he's a spring lamb! He don't know the danger he's a-runnin' into, and, like all o' these plungers that're playing in lucky, he'll get to forcing his hand, and pretty soon there'll be a new face whinin' around the devil."

A slow smile crept over the handsome, unhealthy features of the Butterfly Kid. He had suddenly glimpsed a golden opportunity.

"Will Abe Samuels *play* stud poker?" he queried.

"I never knew him to play it. But I'll tell you what he did do once. He was comin' in from Windy Gap in the auto stage one clear, starry night, with the president of the Blue Bird Mine, and he bet the miner they'd count nine fallin' stars between Windy Gap and Kelcey's Wells."

"How much did he bet him?"

"One thousand bucks. And he won it! They counted ten fallin' stars! I tell you, Butterfly, that Abe is a wonder. He'd take an old Turkish towel and sell it for tripe."

The Butterfly Kid shuddered. "I'm afraid of him just the same," he replied, "but he's worth a try-out, and we have the bank roll to do it with. We'll trim Abe Samuels and get out of this gamblin' life forever."

"We won't have no trouble in buyin' into something legitimate if we get Abe's roll. Now, listen to me, Butterfly. To-morrow we'll let it be known that we've severed our business relations and parted. I'll go down to San Francisco for a week or two, and you follow in a few days. Then I'll come back and buy that dead-an'-alive saloon at the end of Main Street. With no gamblin' we can buy it for a song. I'll hop in and take charge; just put on a white apron and tend bar myself. Then you'll just naturally drift back to town and engage rooms at the Palace Hotel, and

it won't be long until the right people know they can get action at stud poker by givin' a certain signal on your door. Me, bein' an old gambler, I'll be quick to find it out, and drop around. I'll do a little moderate playin', and introduce Abe. Then we'll do things to him."

"Suppose somebody suspects something, Dan? I lit out of Panamint City ten years ago in considerable of a hurry because——"

"I'll take the fall of the play," Faro Dan assured him. "I've got a reputation of bein' a square gambler in this camp, and I'm proud of it, but that Abe Samuels is too darned lucky! I've just naturally got to backslide once and grab a piece of get-away money."

"Let us go home and sleep," the Butterfly Kid answered. "Nevada is now chemically pure, and we're out of business. So why linger? I'm tired."

Together Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid took up their assets and departed into the night.

Abraham Samuels, the fortunate gentleman whose marvelous ability to beat Faro Dan Simmons at his own game was responsible for the conspiracy already outlined, was the "sole proprietor" of Samuels' Cash Emporium, the most pretentious general merchandise store in the booming new camp of Kelcey's Wells. Mr. Samuels' advent into camp had first been heralded six months previous by a vast cloud of alkali dust on the desert south of town. Upon closer approach it had been observed that the dust was kicked up by no less than fifty mules, in ten-mule divisions, each division attached to a freight wagon and a trailer, the whole loaded with the stock in trade of Samuels' Cash Emporium, so shortly to make its appearance in Kelcey's Wells. Mr. Samuels sat on the seat of the first wagon, and from this vantage point at the head of his caravan smiled benignly upon Kelcey's Wells. Before he had been in camp an hour, he had visited the townsite company, purchased a lot on Main Street, and set up a huge tent, into which he had his stock carried. Within a month he had freighted in lumber enough to build a store, and moved in.

There was no doubt that Abe Samuels knew his business. He had the fine art of merchandising down to an exact science, he had the goods the new camp needed, and philanthropy with him was not what one might term a besetting sin. He did a tremendous business at tremendous prices, and, like a wise man, he did it for cash!

From six in the morning until eight at night Samuels' Cash Emporium catered to the wants of Kelcey's Wells. At that hour Mr. Samuels closed his place of business, ate his dinner, and, after dinner, dropped in at the Sluice Box for a little mild mental relaxation. Gambling was the sole amusement, and the principal industry of Kelcey's Wells. Mining was a secondary consideration. The platting and sale of city lots on the desert adjacent to the town, however—land where the chuckwalla, the lean coyote, and the jack rabbit still held undisputed sway—was, by some, considered the second principal industry of the camp.

Mr. Samuels liked to gamble—for two reasons. In the first place, it soothed his nerves after a long, hard day in his Cash Emporium, and in the second place, by some devil's devising, his marvelous luck had become the talk of the camp. He was simply unbeatable—this despite the fact that of faro, his favorite game, he knew almost nothing. If Abe Samuels guessed that the queen coppered was worth a twenty-dollar bet, forthwith Faro Dan would proceed to emphasize the correctness of Mr. Samuels' judgment by shoving across to the aforesaid Samuels sundry stacks of blue chips. He had an uncanny habit of losing thousands of little bets, and winning hundreds of large ones, and in the grand average he commenced to figure on Faro Dan as the obliging gentleman who paid him a large salary nightly—all of which, as we have already learned, was most annoying to Faro Dan and his partner, the Butterfly Kid.

"As lucky as Abe Samuels" grew to be the simile by which good fortune was measured in Kelcey's Wells long before that fateful night when by legislative

action Nevada's wool was sheared, and the last stand of the old-time Western gambler closed against him.

During that first week in October, when gambling was only a tender memory, Abe Samuels felt that, after all, the anarchists might be right in their propaganda for the overthrow of law and order. Making money was a disease with Mr. Samuels. Retaining it was a sacred duty. How badly he missed his nightly raids on Faro Dan's finances will, perhaps, never be known, but that he did miss them no employee in his emporium would attempt to deny. He grew fretful, and peevish, and hard to please, until he discovered that Faro Dan had returned to Kelcey's Wells, and was engaged in the comparatively harmless task of superintending the destinies of a thirst bureau; whereupon Mr. Samuels descended upon Faro Dan, shook dice with him for the drinks, stuck him four times in succession, and departed satisfied.

By dint of tridaily visits to Faro Dan's place of business, Mr. Samuels discovered that his luck was still running as strong as ever. At first the mere fact that he could triumph over Faro Dan even in such insignificant gambling as that entailed in casting dice for a convivial drink, pleased him, and permitted him to sleep nights, but by degrees the thought that such a lucky person as himself should be denied the nocturnal task of going home with his neighbor's money threatened to drive him into a frenzy, and in desperation he besought Faro Dan to attempt an evasion of the law behind closed doors.

But Faro Dan was obdurate. "I'm a plain business man now, Abe," he informed Mr. Samuels. "I've quit professional gamblin'. It's agin' public policy, and I aim to conform to the law. Of course, I don't bar a little friendly game o' poker once in a while between friends, but that's for pleasure and not for profit."

"What kind of a game do you play?" Abe demanded eagerly. "Penny ante, ten-cent limit."

Faro Dan leaned over his bar. "See here, Abe," he said, "if you're anxious for a little entertainment, come along with me to-night. My old side-kicker, the Butterfly Kid, is back in town. Can't seem to get the old place out of his blood. He's invited me down to his room at the Palace Hotel to-night for a little game of stud poker. We'll have a couple of the boys, and you can come along if you went to and feel disposed to lift the roof off the house."

"Stud poker!" Mr. Samuels' eyes flashed in anticipation. "I learned that old woman's game in school. I'll come with you, Dan."

"You must have gone to a good school, Abe. You're the first man I ever met who knew stud poker. Bring the bank roll with you, if you want action. I'll back my judgment against your luck any day in the year."

Shortly after Abe Samuels departed for his Cash Emporium, the Butterfly Kid received a note from Faro Dan, informing him that he was to have the pleasure of Abe Samuels' company that evening; whereupon the Butterfiy Kid spent an hour arranging a pack of cards to his entire satisfaction.

After dinner Mr. James Kane, proprietor of the Palace Hotel, accompanied by one Silver City Harry, who had gleaned untold wealth as the proprietor of a string of Nevada dance halls, presented themselves in the rooms of the Butterfly Kid. Shortly thereafter Faro Dan, accompanied by Abe Samuels, arrived, and the evening's entertainment commenced.

The game was strong—of that sturdy nature approved and patronized by gentlemen to whom money comes quickly, and in vast quantities, departing in the same brisk manner, and without regret on the part of the losers. Blue chips were five dollars, and browns were a hundred. As a preliminary, Mr. Samuels purchased one stack of blues and one of browns, for which he handed the Butterfly Kid, who was banking the game, the sum of eleven hundred dollars.

The Butterfly Kid won the first deal on the cut, and dealt to Abe Samuels, who sat on his left. Mr. Kane, Silver City Harry, and Faro Dan next re-

ceived their hole cards in the order named. Faro Dan, it will be observed, sat on the Butterfly Kid's right, which position, during a deal by the latter, enabled Faro Dan to take the fall of the play. In other words, he had the last say. He could meet all previous bets and demand a show-down, he could pass, or he could meet all previous bets and raise them.

The scheme was simplicity itself. The Butterfly Kid, dealing the fatal hand from the trained deck which he had in his side pocket, and which he would substitute for the cards in play at the right moment, would deal Mr. Samuels a good hand; in fact, an excellent hand, and considerably better than any stud poker player—even players as lucky as Abe Samuels—has a reasonable right to expect. To himself he would deal a slightly poorer hand, and *do all the betting and raising,* while Faro Dan, sitting tight, with the best hand on the board, would *meet all bets and raises as they came, and boost them for the benefit of Mr. Samuels.*

Kane and Silver City Harry, being known as "man-eaters" when shady work at cards was discovered, were dealt poor hands, in order that they might stay out of the fight, and thus escape the holocaust. Having lost nothing themselves, they would not be inclined to champion Mr. Samuels' case in the event of a riot. He was known to be sinfully rich, and lucky beyond the dreams of average; hence he had the sympathy of no man, and Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid were crafty enough to recognize this.

For hours the game proceeded with the monotonous regularity of any honestly conducted poker game, patronized by men who know it. The trained deck still reposed in the Butterfly Kid's pocket, and Abe Samuels' luck never faltered. With devilish regularity he swept his mucilaginous fingers through his opponents' chips, and the pile before him had, by midnight, assumed the proportions of a national debt. Faro Dan had speaker's sore throat from saying, "That's good," to Abe Samuels.

Along about one o'clock, Faro Dan's preliminary stake having been exhausted, he complained bitterly of the penny-ante tactics of the assembled gentlemen, and suggested that the empyrean be the limit. Mr. Samuels, calm in that faith that comes of unalterable and unchanging good fortune, seconded the motion, and Faro Dan bought five stacks of browns. They cost him ten thousand dollars, and there was never the quiver of an eyelash as he counted out the money in bills of large denomination and passed them over to the Butterfly Kid. It is worthy of notice here that the Butterfly Kid was about to deal.

There was a slight crimp in the upper half of the deck which the Butterfly Kid passed to Faro Dan, and, like a dutiful partner, Faro Dan cut the cards at the crimp. The Butterfly Kid dealt the hole cards, and Faro Dan, cautiously lifting the corner of his hole card, and discovering it to be the trey of spades, knew that the deal was right!

Everybody stayed for twenty-five dollars, the ante being "three calls fives" in blues, and the second card was turned.

Abe Samuels caught a red ace, and promptly bet a brown chip. Faro Dan caught a trey of clubs—as he had anticipated—and, with pained and dejected mien, reluctantly bet a brown chip. The Butterfly Kid stayed on a blue queen, although he ranted and raved about hi hard luck, thus drawing upon himself the attention of the triumphant Mr. Samuels who, at that moment, felt luckier than he had ever felt before. Mr. Kane caught a queen, decided that the game was not to his liking, and subsided. Silver City Harry showed a ten-spot in sight, and also quit. Thus the final issue was left to Abe Samuels and the two gamblers.

Again the Butterfly Kid dealt the cards. Faro Dan was observed to have received a queen. Inasmuch as the Butterfly Kid had one queen in sight and Kane had quit on a queen, the receipt of the third queen by Faro Dan aroused no enthusiasm, and all eyes instantly shifted to the card which the Butterfly Kid was about to turn up. It proved

to be a queen, and he promptly bet five brown chips! Samuels stayed, as did likewise Faro Dan.

Some sixth sense warned all but Faro Dan that the battle would be fought out between the Butterfly Kid and Abe Samuels, and interest in Faro Dan's activities was at a low ebb. In consequence of this, Mr. Simmons cautiously poked his second card in sight—the trey of clubs—halfway under his hole card, thus covering the top spot. Then he permitted his queen to slide gently over the bottom spot on the trey, which, curiously enough, made it appear to the casual observer *that he had an ace of clubs!*

When five cards had been dealt, Abe Samuels had two aces and two jacks in sight; the Butterfly Kid sported two queens and two eights in front of him, while Faro Dan sat calmly back with one queen, two red treys, and his things-are-not-what-they-seem ace of clubs showing. On the face of the hands thus far, little remained for Mr. Samuels to do except collect the money, and once more demonstrate the fact that he was a favored child of fortune. The Butterfly Kid's bitter blustering at his ill luck was music to Samuels' ears, and completely distracted him from seriously considering the miscellaneous assortment held by Faro Dan.

He bet high. Faro Dan, after some consideration, decided to stay, and the Butterfly Kid raised the bet one stack of twenty browns—a thousand dollars! Abe was serious, but confident. He promptly met the raise, and lifted it two stacks of browns, which was all the money he had; whereupon Faro Dan quietly shoved all of his chips to the center of the table, saw all bets, and raised Abe Samuels three thousand dollars!

"Play to them, you lucky man," he growled, "and if you can't talk, make signs."

Samuels turned pasty-colored—he always did when he saw a big bet with victory in sight—but his small black eyes never lifted from the pile of chips in the center of the table. He licked his lips and pondered.

"What is this?" he demanded thickly. "Table stakes?"

"Not necessarily," replied Faro Dan. "I'll take your check if it's agreeable to the Butterfly. He has an interest in the pot."

"Abe's check is good enough for me," that accommodating individual responded promptly, and prepared to meet Faro Dan's three-thousand-dollar raise.

Samuels coughed propitiously. "I'm sorry, boys," he explained, "but I bought a piece o' Reno real estate last month, and yesterday I made my regular monthly clean-up of the Emporium bills to save the cash discount, so my bank account's shaved down pretty low." He appeared unhappy, and gazed entreatingly at Faro Dan.

"I could borrow at the bank," he suggested.

"The bank don't open until ten to-morrow," the Butterfly Kid remarked coldly.

"Well, then, is my I O U good?"

"Yes; but a long time ago I quit tryin' to collect on poker I O U's. Bein' gamblin' debts, they ain't good in law, so unless you've got the collateral or can borrow the money to-night, it kinder looks like you'd have to drop out o' the game. You're lucky, Abe, but there's such a thing as pressin' your luck too far."

Faro Dan clinched the matter. "I hate to do anything disagreeable myself," he said, "but, personally, my rigid rule in gamblin' is cash, check, bullion, or approved security. Friendship ceases when the roof is off."

Samuels was in a quandary. Under the rules of the game, he had to meet Faro Dan's raise or call for a showdown. But it was too tremendous a pot, and his hand was too good, to back down now. He realized that his opponents were old, professional gamblers, who were used to taking longer chances than any mere laymen; that they were trying to outgame him. And he would not be outgamed, for, on the cards in sight, he knew he had them beaten!

"Is Samuels' Cash Emporium good

for that raise?" he queried, with a tremor of suppressed excitement in his tones.

"What do you value her at?" The Butterfly Kid was very cautious.

"I have about seven thousand dollars' worth of stock on hand, and twice that much on the way. And you boys know the trade I'm doing. Counting good will and fixtures, that Emporium of mine is easily worth ten thousand dollars, but, not to whittle too fine a point, I'll set a price of five thousand on it, call Dan's three-thousand-dollar bet, and drag down two thousand out of the pot for get-away money—in case I lose." He smiled archly at the Butterfly Kid and Faro Dan, as if that remote contingency was absolutely unthinkable.

"That's agreeable to me, Dan. How about you?"

Faro Dan nodded silently, but with reserve, as if to say: "Oh, well, I'll be sporty and take a chance," although, in the depths of his wicked heart, he knew full well he was doing nothing of the sort; that the unfortunate Samuels had merely set a ridiculously low price upon his store in his anxiety to rake in what he considered a cinch pot. He glanced cautiously across at the Butterfly Kid, and detected an approving gleam in that worthy's pale-blue eyes that seemed to say:

"Cinch him, Daniel. Here's where we quit gambling for good, and get into a legitimate, ready-made business."

Faro Dan spoke. "Butterfly, will you get Abe some paper and a pen and ink, so he can make out a bill o' sale for the Emporium before we proceed further with the obsequies."

"Certainly, Dan." The Butterfly Kid kicked back his chair, went into his bedroom, and returned with the desired articles.

Samuels was trembling a little as he wrote out the bill of sale in blank and signed it. Kane and Silver City Harry appended their signatures as witnesses, Samuels blotted it, and the document went to join the heap of chips in the center of the table. Then he drew down his two thousand dollars change, the Butterfly Kid shoved across his three thousand dollars, and all was over but the shouting.

"Show your hand," ordered the Butterfly Kid, and turned up his hole card, disclosing three eights and a pair of queens.

Abe, smiling with pity, turned his hole card, and spread three jacks and a pair of aces. "Thank you, kindly, gentlemen," he said, and reached for the pot.

Faro Dan spoke—softly, purringly. "May I crave your indulgence one moment, Abe?" He turned up his hole card and spread his hand. "It does appear to me you're a mite precipitous. I got two pair—o' treys—four of a kind—an' dog-goned hard to beat! I'd shore be obliged if you was to keep them itchy fingers o' yourn out'n the sugar bowl." Saying which, Faro Dan reached forth a white, facile hand and garnered the pot to his bosom.

"Take a long look an' satisfy yourself, Abe," the Butterfly warned bitterly. "As for me, I'm goin' downstairs and hire a large man to kick me." Simulating rage and disgust, he tore the cards in half, hurled them to the floor, and rushed out of the room, cursing horribly. Once in the clear, his first care was to get rid of the extra deck of cards in his pocket!

It was fully a minute before Abe Samuels could pull himself together. Then he gave a long, shuddering sigh, like a calf with its throat cut, and sat down, staring at absolute ruin. Presently he wet his lips slowly and spoke:

"I—I—I thought you had an ace. It was a trey. You—you had the spots covered. That's hardly fair, Dan."

"Merely a little psychological study, Abe. The card was dealt in plain sight, and it was up to you to keep track of it. Them stunts is allowable, an', besides, you said you'd learned stud poker in school."

"You have no kick comin', Abe," boomed Mr. Kane.

" 'Nother new face whinin' around the devil," observed Silver City Harry cruelly. Faro Dan turned on him, and there was a hard light in the gambler's

stern eyes. Trimming the purse-proud sucker was an old game to him, although of late years he had gambled on the principle that honesty is the best policy, or, at any rate, the safest; while he felt no shame for the means he and the Butterfly Kid had employed, nevertheless he felt a deep respect for Abe's courage, and experienced a transient regret that Abe should suffer so.

"Cut that, Harry," he snarled. "None o' that talk to Abe."

"Thank you, Dan," replied the abject Abe. "It's all my own fault."

Faro Dan handed him the bill of sale. "You might fill in my name on that. Hand me over your chips, and I'll cash 'em for you, and collect from the Butterfly when he gets through kickin' himself."

Like a man in a trance, Abe complied. Then he put on his hat and went out. Like Humpty Dumpty he had had a great fall, and the wounds to his pride and pocketbook were raw and bleeding.

Presently the Butterfly Kid returned, and Faro Dan pointed significantly to his pile of chips. "I'll trade them for some long green, Butterfly." So the Butterfly cashed Faro Dan's chips, and in addition laid six thousand dollars in the center of the table.

"Dan," he said, "I'll give you six thousand dollars for Simmons' Cash Emporium. It's a ready-made business, and while I don't know a thing about it, I can learn. I want to get into the legitimate. Take a thousand-dollar profit on your bargain, Dan, and fork over that bill o' sale.

"Butterfly," Faro Dan retorted, helping himself to three thousand, and shoving the remainder back to the Butterfly Kid, "me an' you was partners since the first tent was pitched in Kelcey's Wells, an' I allers found you fair, an' square, an' aboveboard. If you're willin' to take a chance we'll just split this here Emporium two ways. We'll leg it together an' take our chances."

They clasped hands.

"Amen," said Silver City Harry, "and very neatly done. Lucky for you, Butterfly, you counted *me* out o' that pot. If that Abe Samuels had the nerve of a sheep he'd have collected spite o' Dan's four of a kind."

"How?" Faro Dan demanded virtuously.

"With six of a kind," Silver City Harry answered significantly. "I've seen it done."

"Speakin' of guns, in a quiet, orderly camp like Kelcey's Wells, is a sure sign o' bad luck, Harry." The Butterfly's hand had stolen quietly into his bosom, and Silver City Harry's mentality was not put to a severe strain to guess the contents of the leather holster under the Butterfly's left armpit.

"Good night," answered Silver City Harry, and departed hastily. Mr. Kane alone remained with the partners.

"Speakin' as one business man to the other," he remarked heavily, "if I had a bill o' sale to that Cash Emporium, I'd put it in an envelope, clamp a special-delivery stamp on it, and mail it to the county seat. There's nothin' like havin' a val'able document on record in case of emergencies."

"Abe's no squealer." This from the Butterfly Kid.

"Regular sheep." This from Faro Dan.

"Good night, boys." This from Mr. Kane.

After Kane left, the Butterfly Kid produced an envelope. "Kane's advice is good," he stated, "and it's best to be on the safe side. And we'll get out articles o' copartnership first thing in the mornin', and have them recorded, too. We're business men now, Dan, an' we've got to do things accordin' to Hoyle."

Faro Dan assented, and the bill of sale was mailed that night by special delivery to the county recorder at Tonopah, after which Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid sought their respective beds, and slept the sleep of the conscience-free and the happy.

At nine o'clock next morning, when they came downtown to have a look at their property, they found Abe Samuels still in charge. He had had the Emporium swept out, as usual, and his

clerks were busy removing the fine alkali dust from the canned goods.

"Well, Abe, you old gambling gladiator, how's trade?" demanded Faro Dan.

"I'll give you ten thousand cash for that bill of sale, Dan," Samuels replied. "I don't want to give up this business."

"Sorry, Abe, but if it's worth ten thousand to you, it's worth more to us. The Butterfly's bought a half interest with me, and now that it's unlawful to run a gamblin' house in Nevada, me an' the Butterfly's got a notion that we can win out in the devious paths o' commercial activity."

"Is that final?" Abe demanded.

"Absolutely," the Butterfly replied.

Abe heaved a sigh, and produced a bunch of keys. "Come into the office and I'll give you the combination to the safe," he said huskily. "I hope you'll retain all the old help. Good boys, every one of 'em, and you'll find them a big aid while you're learning the business. And if I was you, boys, I wouldn't change the name of the store; just add your name over the old sign:

"'Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid: Successors to Samuels' Cash Emporium.' It's no use," he added, "losing the advertising prestige of the name I've been six months working up."

"Dan," said the Butterfly Kid, unable to conceal his intense admiration of Abe's sporty attitude, "I've shore got to take off my sombrero to this here gamblin' wreck, Abe Samuels. Abe, your advice is appreciated a heap, an' if you've got any more on the same lines, tie into us. We're a-listenin' an' anxious to learn."

"Well, there isn't any use crying over spilled milk," Abe answered. "If I can give you a little solid advice in your new venture, I'll be glad to do so. I'd do business with the local bank, if I were you. Kelcey's Wells is a new camp, but the bank's solid, and mighty accomodating in case you need some quick money to take advantage of a bargain. If I were you——"

"We aim to do things right," Faro Dan interrupted. "The Butterfly suggested we orter draw up some sort of a partnership agreement——"

"Exactly. I have some printed blanks in the office, Dan, and all you have to do is to fill 'em in with your names, and get a copy recorded. Then give an announcement to the Kelcey's Wells *Daily Argus*——"

"Then we don't have to hire no lawyer?" queried Faro Dan.

"Boys"—Abe paused before them, and raised an admonitory finger—"leave lawyers and the law alone. It's bad luck to monkey with 'em. Just to show you I'm not nursing hard feelings against you two boys, I'll draw up that partnership agreement for you myself."

"I call that white." This from the Butterfly Kid.

Faro Dan nodded approvingly, and Abe proceeded to initiate them into the mysteries of a business man's life. When the partnership papers had been drawn up, signed, and deposited in the mail, addressed to the county recorder, Abe took his successors in business over to the First National Bank of Kelcey's Wells, introduced them to the president and the cashier, and bespoke for Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid the same kindly financial consideration which he, himself, had been wont to enjoy. From the bank they visited the office of the *Argus*, where, at Abe's suggestion, they contracted for a full-page announcement to be run for one week. After that the trio went to breakfast at the Palace Hotel, where Faro Dan ordered ham and eggs, and champagne for three.

After breakfast they returned to the Emporium, where Abe introduced them to their employees, shook hands all around, picked up a suit case, and departed for the automobile stage that was to bear him out of Kelcey's Wells to other and more virgin fields. Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid saw him off, and waved good-by until the auto disappeared into the desert dust.

"There goes one white hombre," declared Faro Dan admiringly. "If there ain't a ring-tailed sport, you can have my share of the Emporium."

"You're shoutin', Daniel. Skinnin'

Abe Samuels is the last piece o' dirty work I'll ever pull. From now on I'm a reputable business man. The legitimate for me, Dan."

"Let that bet go double, Butterfly. And now let's get back to our neglected business."

For three days business was excellent, and the embryo business men quite wore themselves out weighing sugar, wrestling with sacks of flour and beans, and measuring miners for boots and overalls. The ex-gamblers were deliriously happy. They had banked their joint capital in the First National Bank of Kelcey's Wells, and took turns going to the bank with their daily deposit. On the fourth day, however, just after Faro Dan had returned from the bank, a lank stranger wandered in, sprayed his immediate vicinity impartially with tobacco juice, and announced his desire to hold speech with both proprietors of the Emporium. Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid hastened to learn his pleasure.

It developed, however, that there was no pleasure connected with the visit of the lank stranger. Waiving the formality of shaking Faro Dan's proffered hand, he drew a legal-looking document from his inside coat pocket, and proceeded to read to the successors to Samuels' Cash Emporium a formal writ of attachment issued at the request of comparative strangers to Faro Dan and Butterfly Kid.

Faro Dan decided that it was all a mistake. He smiled. "You've got into the wrong corral, ain't you, pardner?" he queried.

"Hardly," the stranger replied. "I'm the sheriff of this county, and I'm here to serve this writ of attachment on Daniel P. Simmons and Ernest J. Coates, alias respectively Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid."

"But we don't owe a cent in this world," protested the Butterfly Kid. "I never owed a bill I didn't pay, and neither did Dan," which statement, by the way, was incapable of impeachment.

"I don't know a thing about it, boys. All I know is that I'm here to close up and put the sheriff's lock on this here Emporium. You will all have to vamoose. My deputy will remain in charge, to see that no goods disappear out the back way. When I've locked the doors I'll paste this writ on the premises, and you can read it. You'll know as much about this case then as I do now."

For one awful moment Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid gazed at each other. The same thought popped into the agile brain of each:

"This Emporium didn't cost us anything. Let them attach it. We shall not worry, for we have money in bank ——"

"Swindled!" hissed the Butterfly Kid.

"Not yet," half sobbed the optimistic Daniel, and darted for the door. In a twinkling the Butterfly was at his heels, and side by side they raced up Main Street and, panting, reached the counter of the First National Bank of Kelcey's Wells. While Faro Dan grabbed for a pen and a counter check, the Butterfly Kid stuck his head in through the window of the bookkeeper's cage, and whispered hoarsely:

"What's our balance?"

The bookkeeper informed him, he communicated the glad tidings to Faro Dan, who drew a check for the amount, payable to cash, and thrust it in at the paying teller, who glanced at it languidly and shoved it back to Faro Dan.

"I'm sorry, gentlemen, but your bank account has been attached," he informed them. "We were served with a writ about ten minutes ago, and until you adjust your difficulties with your creditors we cannot honor any more of your firm checks."

The Butterfly Kid was the first to recover from his knock-out blow. His first coherent thought was that he needed strong drink, for he had a faint, gone feeling in the geometrical center of his being. He took poor Faro Dan gently by the arm, and, without a word, the pair departed from the bank, and headed for the bar of the Palace Hotel. As they passed through the hotel lobby the clerk hailed them.

"I have a letter here addressed to both

you boys," he said, and flipped it toward them. Faro Dan caught it and tore it open. This is what he read:

RENO, Nev., Oct. 21, 1910.

To Faro Dan and The Butterfly Kid.

GREETINGS: Brethren, if my luck holds good, and I have no doubt it will, by the time this letter reaches you I shall be far, far away and it will be useless to pursue me.

I believe I informed you, Faro Dan, that I had studied stud poker in school. That was quite true. It was an exclusive school, and I paid dearly for my education, but eventually I learned a thing or two about the game. I am the inventor of that little old cold hand you framed on me the other night. I was watching you closely, Butterfly, and when you substituted that cold deck I caught you at it. When you gave it to Dan to cut, Butterfly, you crimped it just a *little* too much. Dan is artist enough to have found a less noticeable crimp in the deck with those sensitive fingers of his. Of course I smelled a rat, but for reasons which will appear later, I concluded to say nothing, but let Faro Dan breeze right along and take the fall of the play. How well he took it is probably now a matter of history in Kelcey's Wells. The sheriff was to leave this letter with the hotel clerk *after* he had attached your bank account!

Frankly, I didn't intend to quit the camp so soon, but as there is no doubt that it is petering out, like every boom mining camp, I concluded I might as well take advantage of my golden opportunity to unload at a profit. So I bet the Emporium and lost it, as I knew I should, for I was not deceived by dear Faro Dan's disguised hand. I merely strung you two boys along until you were the new owners of record, and had succeeded to all of the assets of my business—*in addition to its liabilities!* You should stick to plain short-card work, boys. It's straighter than business in a great many ways. You didn't know, did you, that in succeeding to an established business, unless your bill of sale expressly stipulates that you are not responsible for the previous owner's debts, his creditors can swoop down on you?

Ah, me, that such thing should be! But they are. And you permitted me to draw up your articles of copartnership, and induce you to mail them to the county seat to be recorded and made an official, unalterable document! You will recall that I objected to a lawyer and seemed anxious to help you out all I could. Well, the next time you get a lawyer. He will tell you many things you do not know. You two had a good hand, but you played it like two bear cubs, and as a result, right now you are the most pitiful pair of male bipeds in the fair State of Nevada—for I can conceive of nothing more pitiful than two ruined gamblers. The next time you two Reubens trim a sucker and catch him playing the part of a dead-game sport, keep your hand on your pocketbooks. It's a sign of bad luck!

For fear that you may not fully understand the fall of the play, I will state that from Tonopah I wired all of my creditors that you two had succeeded to my business, together with all assets and liabilities. I further informed them that while my dealings with you had always been eminently satisfactory, still I knew that you were a pair of crooked tinhorns at heart, and that nothing but prompt action on their part would save their accounts. I suggested that they assign to my largest creditor and let him act for all. This was done immediately, and you, my dear boys, are now sewed up tighter than two drums.

I cannot say that I am sorry. You resorted to crooked means to get my bank roll, and I have resorted to perfectly legal means to get yours. I owe considerable money. The law will now proceed to take the Emporium away from you and give it to my creditors. Also, that same cruel law will grab every cent you have in bank and apply it on my indebtedness. When they have finished with you they will have come out about ninety cents on the dollar, and will consider themselves lucky. So shall I.

In the meantime, with that two thousand dollar drag down from our little game I shall take an ocean voyage for the good of my health, before embarking once more in the grandest little sporting game on earth —buying and selling goods! I have enjoyed my brief sojourn in Kelcey's Wells. I made money every day I was in business and most of the nights. I am grateful to you both for your donations.

Wishing you all the joy and luck in the world, I am yours for a legitimate deal,

ABE SAMUELS.

Twice Faro Dan and the Butterfly Kid read this remarkable communication; then, in absolute silence, they proceeded to the hotel bar and steadied their twitching nerves. Presently, however, Faro Dan fell to humming an old tune:

"A Spanish cavalier,
Went out to rope a steer,
Along with his paper cigarro!
'Caramba!' says he,
'To-morrow you will be,
Mucha bueno carne por mio!'"

"Yours for a legitimate deal, Abe Samuels! Honest, Butterfly, I'm glad I'm a gambler!"

But the Butterfly Kid disregarded this dissertation. "Daniel," he queried plaintively, "did you ever know many sheep?"

"Well," Dan replied soberly, "I did

know a spring lamb onct, but he grew up into a right smart he-goat. Ever know any coyotes?"

"No, Daniel. But I was well acquainted with a pair of shepherd pups."

Ensued another silence; then, suddenly, the Butterfly Kid reached into his inside vest pocket and produced a roll of bills. He counted them out on the bar.

"Well," he said brightly, "it might have been worse. You see, Daniel, when the ball rolls into the thirty pocket the last time I ever spin a roulette wheel, it's time to quit right then. When she rolls into the thirty pocket, that means good night! And I'm too old a gambler not to have a hole card! I was leery of this Abe person, and before we tackled him I went south with two thousand bucks for a road stake. Here's your half, Shep, old doggie. You've been outrun by a lamb, and I ain't got the heart to be unkind to you. Barkeep! Wine!"

When their glasses were filled they held them aloft for a moment, squinting at them in the light; then:

"How," said Faro Dan.

The Butterfly Kid, however, had other plans. In such a predicament he was too game to drink to himself.

"To Abe Samuels," he said. "A good gambler and a dead-game sport. May his tribe increase!"

"Parlay that bet," said Faro Dan.

THE SCOTCH IN ANDREW CARNEGIE

ANDREW CARNEGIE started in with a one-horse blast furnace outfit and built up the greatest steel business in the world. Shrewdness, that peculiar trait prominent in so many of his countrymen, played the important part of that great achievement. Later, he sold out his business to the Steel Trust for the sum of three hundred million dollars, stipulating that one hundred million should be cash and two hundred million in first mortgage five per cent bonds; that the bonds should be guaranteed against any future State or national tax. Again that shrewd foresight. Now comes the so-called income tax, but instead of Mr. Carnegie contributing on the income of those two-hundred-million-dollar bonds, the government will have to look to the United States Steel Corporation.

The old ironmaster uses the same methods in his present vocation of giving away money as he did in the early days of accumulation. He makes sure that each contribution is going to serve a proper cause, whether it be ten dollars or ten millions.

Some time ago a delegation from a small church in a Pennsylvania town, where Carnegie once lived, called upon the philanthropist.

"Mr. Carnegie," said the chairman, "we have come to ask your help in the purchase of a pipe organ. We need it badly, and, knowing that you once attended our church, thought possibly you would be interested."

"How much do you want?" asked Carnegie.

"Well," answered the chairman, "we have figured on twenty thousand dollars."

"Go back and raise ten thousand dollars, and I'll talk with you," commanded the old fellow.

A month or so later the delegation returned, and, with a twinkle in his eye, the chairman explained that the ten thousand dollars was in hand.

"Well," said Carnegie, "that's enough for any organ. I'll not contribute a cent."

Two or three weeks later, however, the chairman received Carnegie's check for fifty thousand dollars toward building a new church.

Picked for Service

By Robert J. Pearsall

Author of "Comrades in Hate," "Clerk of Company D.," Etc.

There is a helpful note in this story of army life that we would like to emphasize: the certain transformation of a coward into a brave man, not by pointing out to him his cowardice, but by a simple belief in and insistence upon his manliness. It is a forceful illustration of the value of influence, of what Shakespeare means when he says that "thoughts are things." A reverse picture of the proverb about "giving a dog a bad name."

TWO men left Malabang, and were immediately swallowed by the jungle. It was midnight, and the darkness was so intense that they might have gone blind, and not known it—this in spite of the fact that the surface of the earth was bathed in tropical starlight. They were practically below the surface, so dense was the matted vegetation over their heads. They started west; but, as they dared not strike a match to consult the compass, they could not be sure of continuing long in that direction. That did not matter so much, as they could set their course in the morning; the main thing was to get away unobserved by the natives. This they thought they had accomplished.

By the sound, the two men were very different. Both moved cautiously, but the movements of the one, whether he walked upright or crept on hands and knees, or lay prone and dragged himself along, were full of assurance, while the clumsy imitations of the other were plainly rendered more clumsy by fear. A twig snapped, and the tremor that went through his body was rendered audible by the crackling of another twig, and the shiver of the neck-deep grass. A *gecko* rasped out its almost human call a few rods away, and a sound that was half gasp and half whimper came from him. His movements had more than a hesitant quality; they were reluctant; it was plain that had it not been for the leadership of the other man, he would have stayed where he was, or retreated. Fear was in his very breathing; it was short, irregular, full of catches and involuntary inspirations.

But the other man did not seem aware of this. He went on, very steadily, without the slightest word of encouragement. When he stopped, waited for his companion to catch up with him, and then whispered a suggestion that he take the lead for a while, it was merely a suggestion, not a command, nor did he preface nor follow it with any advice. He waited until the other had overcome his irresolution and crept ahead, and then followed, quite as though that were the natural order. They did not make as good time as before, and they made more noise; he must have noticed this, but he said nothing.

So they traveled until daybreak, first one leading, then the other. Toward the last their caution relaxed a little; but even then they did not cover more than two miles an hour. The jungle was absolutely trackless; it did not seem that man had pased that way before. In many places the underbrush was so dense that they were forced to climb over it instead of through it. Then,

often, the interlaced branches over which they crawled would give way, and they would fall through them into the only less dense growth of smooth stems and thorny reeds and vines, and be half smothered by the time they had struggled out of the trap.

Once the man who happened to be leading at the time slipped over the edge of a cliff; he caught himself in time, but cried aloud in his fright, and clung struggling until the other had caught his wrists and pulled him up. But, although the outcry was the least desirable thing that could have happened, he did not receive a reprimand. "Good work!" he was told. "Lucky you were ahead; I don't believe I could have saved myself."

The sun rose at last. In the thicket it was not a sunrise, but a slow and uncertain withdrawal of darkness. Indistinct as the light was, it was enough to reveal the fugitives to themselves, and to each other, so they could take stock of the damage of the night's travel.

By their uniform, both were infantrymen. They were equipped in light marching order, rifle, haversack, and canteen. The older of the two wore three stripes on his sleeve, indicating his sergeantcy. To judge by his furrowed and weather-beaten face, and by the depth of his eyes, had he been dressed for parade, he would also have worn service stripes. He was neither tall nor short, stout nor thin, nor was he heavily muscled; but at the end of the six hours' struggle he walked erectly and with no apparent weariness. His face and hands were bloodied in a dozen places, and his khaki clothes were filled with rents and covered with dry, brown spots, like rust; but the only thing he seemed concerned about was his feet. These he bared, examined, sprinkled with a white powder, and then reclad with a fresh pair of socks from his haversack. "There's a lot of bunk in the field manual," he remarked, as he began the operation, "but this is one thing they teach us that's certainly good dope." He seemed quite sure that his companion was going to follow his example, and presently he did so.

This man was a private, and by his face he was at least ten years younger than the sergeant, a mere stripling, in fact. He was slender, but finely built, and his features were good; but the muscles about his jaw were slack, and his eyes were shallow, the eyes of a man who has not yet discovered himself. There was a whipped and cowed look in them, very similar to the look of a domesticated dog that has been cast among huskies. When he regarded the older man, this similarity was increased by a certain perplexity, and a timid and ineffectual sort of resentment.

Presently he spoke, and his voice matched his face; it was a whine of complaint made into words.

"I don't see whatever made you pick me for this, sergeant."

"Call me Nichols, now we're man to man, Sedley," replied the other. "Well, why shouldn't I have picked you?"

The answer came readily enough to Sedley's mind; but even his somewhat dormant self-respect was not yet dormant enough to permit him to put it into words. "Oh, I don't know," he said. "Fact is, I don't know anything about anything. I've been kept in the dark. Seems to me——"

"Right you are," replied Nichols. "You ought to know, and you will. There was no time to tell you before leaving, and, of course, we couldn't talk last night. All you know is that the gugus have gone on the tear. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"Well, here's the rest of it. Of course it'll spread like a prairie fire; the Malanaos have been sulking a long time. It won't take long for it to reach Ilguan. There's only fifty men there, and there's precious few amigos in that neighborhood, and it's up to us to put them on guard."

"Oh!" said Sedley weakly.

This was a little worse than he had imagined; Ilguan was over a hundred miles distant. If he had known this, he told himself, they would never have got him out of camp. He would have gone

absent without leave first. It may be added that Sergeant Nichols had realized that fact, and that that was the real reason why Sedley had not been told.

"Then there's something else," went on Nichols. "A white man and woman on a ranch, name Shaw, daughter visiting him from Manila. They're just to the north of Ilguan, on the same river, the Liguason; they came up from Davao. No place for either of them; but the fool civilians will rush in where there's a chance to make money, and their womenfolks follow them. It's up to us to corral them on the way, and take them into Ilguan. And, of course, our chance of doing it depends on our reaching them before the news of the trouble reaches the natives around their ranch. Now you see what's depending on us; and why shouldn't I pick the best man I could think of for the job?"

Sedley looked quickly for the ridicule behind the words, but found none. Still, he was so sure that it was there that he winced. "The best man?" he repeated.

"Sure," said Nichols lightly. "That's the way I sized you up. And it seems I was right; half the men would have been all in by this time, but you're only getting into your stride. If I can only keep up with you—after all, it's the young blood that counts."

Nichols started to munch some hardtack, and Sedley did the same; but while he ate he glanced sideways at Nichols, half inclined to think that the sergeant had gone insane, or, at least, had lost his memory. Sedley's own memory was perfect, and it changed Nichols' matter-of-fact words into absurdities.

His life for the past five months had been one long record of cowardice. Coming to Malabang as an inexperienced and wholly untempered youth, fresh from a very quiet, Middle West home, timid of manner and quiet of tongue, he had passed but poorly through the first hazing that a company of soldiers always gives a newcomer. With an understanding as limited as his vocabulary, he had endured insults without comprehending them; and when he gradually came to comprehend them, he found he had lost the power to resent them—if he had ever had it. Then one day a man had struck him, and he had whined and threatened, but had not fought.

That had fixed his status. He was a coward, every one agreed—and he himself knew it. He was afraid of the others, physically afraid; their roughness terrified him, and, since it was not faced, terrified him increasingly. His eyes grew daily more doglike, and his walk more a shamble, and, of course, the abuse increased. Admitting himself to be a worm he was, very properly, trampled upon, until what little vertebrate instinct he had possessed in the beginning had seemingly been crushed out of him.

Consequently, when Nichols, being given his choice of two hundred men, had selected Sedley to accompany him on his mission, it had caused great amazement; and none had been more amazed than Sedley. The only possible explanation was that Nichols had wished to hog the glory, if any glory should accrue, and knew that with Coward Sedley as a companion, he would be able to do it. That was what Sedley himself believed, and, during the torturing labor of the night that had passed, he had grown to hate Nichols as deeply as he was able to hate. That was not pleasant, because he had really liked Nichols before. Nichols had slept in the next bunk to him, and he was almost the only man who had not at some time abused or derided him. He had even seemed to pity him, at times.

There was no pity in Nichols' eyes now, however; but only a very frank and open regard. "Seems pretty hard to have to start on again, doesn't it?" he remarked. "But, of course——" He took a sip from his canteen, and the two got to their feet simultaneously, it seemed, although Nichols was really the first to make a move.

By now they were well into the foothills of the Sugut range. The vegetation was less dense here, and they were enabled to make better time. But there

were very steep cliffs to be mounted, and sometimes long detours to be made around unsurmountable ones. The necessity or nonnecessity of these detours and their direction were often matters of discussion, but it was invariably discussion on an equal basis, although it might have been noticed that Sergeant Nichols usually guided it, adroitly leading the other to his own opinion. That, however, was never hard to do.

It was nearly noon when they received the first warning that they were being trailed. They had reached a high table-land, and were again in the midst of smothering brake, when Nichols suddenly stopped and held up his hand. He said nothing; but Sedley halted instantly, and they stood listening. The sound of crackling bushes behind them continued for just a moment, and then there was silence. But that moment was enough; indeed, the fact that it was only a moment, that the sound ceased abruptly when they stopped, made the circumstance the more ominous. It might be merely a heavy animal, although it had not sounded like one, or it might be a hunting party, but the chances were more than even that it was a party of ladrones, who had picked up their trail, and were following it on the chance of catching them unawares.

Both men grew pale. It is altogether probable that the fear of death was as strong in Nichols as in Sedley; and certainly he understood the danger as well. But with Nichols the fear passed instantly, or, at any rate, the outward seeming of it did. His voice, when he spoke, was quite steady.

"Did you hear it?" he asked.

"Yes," quavered Sedley.

Nichols did not appear to notice his agitation. "Well," he said, "it doesn't matter. There's only one thing to do, anyway—keep going." They had both been carrying their rifles slung across their backs; Nichols reached up, removed his, examined the cartridges, and started on again, carrying it at the balance in his hand. He had plainly taken it for granted that Sedley would do the same, and Sedley did; but his hands shook. As he caught up with Nichols he whispered something about an ambush; but Nichols did not hear him, or, if he did, did not answer.

By now, the clothes of both men were dripping with sweat. The sun did not reach them, except at rare intervals; but neither did the wind, and they very easily grew breathless. Physically, Sedley was in no worse, nor even in as bad shape, as Nichols; he was at that age when the muscles recuperate quickly, and he had less weight to carry. Still, when he took the lead, which Nichols quietly assumed that he would do regularly, the pace fell off. But Nichols never spoke of this, nor seemed to notice it. Only, when it came his turn, he pressed on a little harder for the delay.

Several times they stopped short and listened; but they heard no further sound to indicate that they were being followed. That meant nothing, however, even to Sedley. There are no craftier trailers than the Malanaos in the world. Having betrayed themselves once, they would be very careful not to do it again.

At noon the two men rested for an hour, and then started on again, feeling rather the worse for the rest. Before nightfall both were staggering as they walked, or, rather, their walking was a perpetual staggering or lurching forward, the feet being thrown out alternately in time to catch the falling body. The last three hours was practically all down grade, or they could not have continued. They were descending into the valley of the Siassi.

Toward nightfall they came to a bare patch of ground, about two hundred yards across, and, it seeming safer than the brush, decided to spend the night in the middle of it. They ate greedily of corned beef and the eternal hard-tack, and then prepared to get what rest they could during the night.

They had slept none the night before, and they were dog tired. Every nerve and fiber in them demanded complete rest. Had they not had reason to believe they were in danger, that might have been possible; but, as it was, one

at least must stay awake. They drew straws for the first watch; Nichols won, or, rather, lost. Sedley collapsed on the ground, and in an instant was sleeping soundly. Nichols sat beside him, hugging his rifle, keeping himself awake by pure will.

Four hours passed. For all that happened, he, too, might as well have been asleep. Then, as agreed, he woke Sedley. That was a hard task; Nichols had to drag him half upright before he would speak coherently. As soon as he did, however, Nichols let go of him, stretched himself on the ground, and apparently lapsed into unconsciousness. Really, however, he was watching Sedley through half-closed eyelids.

It was no great wonder that Sedley went into a funk. When he had gone asleep it had been light, now it was dark, not the pitch dark of the night before—that would have been a protection—but a vague, shadowy, starlit darkness that seemed to breed fears like maggots. The jungle, pressing close upon him, seemed filled with danger. Every rustling leaf was a threat, every stir of wild life seemed to presage the whir of a thrown bolo. Sedley had read much of the ferocity of the natives, and had heard more, and all the stories crowded upon his memory, and were enlarged and ensanguined by his imagination. The inborn physical fear that had made him a butt of ridicule among his companions, the nervous shrinking of the flesh from the very thought of violence, came upon him, standing there, and set him quaking. He almost cried out; he did turn to Nichols with an appeal on his lips. But Nichols was apparently sleeping as trustfully as though a regiment were standing guard over him.

Sedley moaned aloud, but he did not speak. After a few moments his trembling passed. Then he squatted on the ground as Nichols had done, as tired men on guard have done since the cave days, knees drawn up, elbows clasped around them, weapon, whether club or rifle, caught between upper leg and arm, and leaning against the shoulder. At times he nodded, but as he did so, the prone form of Nichols came within his range of vision, and each time his head went up again. It was a long four hours, but he lasted it.

He aroused Nichols, and they divided the remaining four hours of rest they had allotted themselves into two hours each, and then, daylight coming, started on again.

By three o'clock they had reached the Siassi River. Also, apparently, they had nearly reached the limit of their endurance. The day had been exceptionally hot, even for the tropics, and their energy had seeped from them with their sweat. As they descended into the valley the underbrush had grown more dense, and there had been whole miles in which every foot of ground gained had been achieved at the expense of a struggle. Nichols had set a hard pace, and Sedley had seemed less inclined today to slacken speed when he assumed the lead. Toward the last their faces had assumed the patient, pained expression of men who are figuring just one move ahead, and then another, like a distance runner on the last laps.

The Siassi, at the point where they struck it, was a narrow stream, but very swift, and apparently deep. It could not have been forded, and it would have been both difficult and dangerous to swim, even had they been fresh, especially dangerous since the roar of rapids came to them from about three hundred yards below. But both river banks were lined with giant caripapa trees. In several places these were so interlaced as to form practicable bridges.

They rested a few minutes, and then Nichols climbed one of these trees and began to work his way out along a branch. Halfway across, he stopped and looked back. Sedley was not following. Instead, he had slumped to the ground, half sitting, half lying, his back against a tree trunk, and was staring after Nichols. There was a hopeless expression on his face. Nichols saw his lips move, and read the words: "I can't go any farther."

Nichols glanced quickly away from him, and crept on a few feet farther. Then something went wrong. He lost

his balance, tried to recover it, failed, caught at a twig, which broke, and then fell. It was remarkable, however, that he dropped his rifle so that it remained securely balanced between two branches, and that his haversack caught on a knot, was torn from his shoulder, and remained suspended.

He hit the water with a great splash, and went under. He came up again, but apparently could not swim. He struggled mightily, and his head popped to the surface at intervals, but that was all. The current carried him straight for the falls.

As he fell, Sedley had leaped to his feet. He started to run downstream with the drifting man, keeping pace with him. He had forgotten his exhaustion, forgotten everything in his terror of being left alone. His face was quite blank of any plan for rescue.

Suddenly Nichols' arm shot out of the water, pointing at the tree branches under which he was being whirled. Then he disappeared again, drawn down into the current.

An idea flashed into Sedley's frightened eyes. He increased his pace to a sprint. As he ran he tore off his shirt, glancing as he did so from the low-hanging branches to the water.

He ran at about double the speed of the current, so that when he had covered two hundred yards he was half that distance ahead of Nichols. He looked back, and then sprang into the crotch of a tree. With surprising nimbleness, he crawled out on a branch. Stopping at a point which seemed to be directly in Nichols' path, he shouted to attract his attention, and then worked himself to a prone position, his chest resting on the branch, his legs entwined in the foliage, and his feet clamped in the crotch of another near-by branch. He lowered the shirt, holding it by one sleeve, and waited.

As Nichols approached, he seemed to acquire some little control over his movements. He steered himself slightly to the right, and gripped the shirt. For a moment it seemed doubtful whether the garment would hold; but it did. Sedley squirmed slowly along the branch, dragging Nichols with him. Nichols' feet touched the bottom; he steadied himself against the current, slowly won his way to the shore, and climbed the bank.

Apparently, Sedley had saved Nichols' life; but, if he expected any effusive praise, he was disappointed. "That was good work," Nichols said slowly. "But, of course, I knew you'd do it, as soon as I felt myself falling. Beats all how much there is in us, even when we think we're all down and out. I don't mind saying I was about all in when I started to climb that tree; but I forgot it quick enough when I struck the water. And you—but, then, you're younger."

They made their way upstream and crossed, this time without any mishap, and with Sedley following close on Nichols' heels.

They hiked on about two hours longer. Their exhaustion was very real, and both their bodies drooped wearily, but there was a certain unaccustomed rigidity about Sedley's neck muscles, and that night, when they came to select their camping place, there was more self-assertion in his voice and manner than he had ever displayed before.

This time he took the first watch, and the darkness came on slowly, and he felt little terror of it. But when Nichols woke him for his second guard it was different; he had slept just long enough to relax his nerves, and his newfound courage was gone. Twice during the two hours he whimpered aloud, and, at last, overcome by his fears, he called Nichols a quarter of an hour too soon. But Nichols said nothing.

In spite of their best efforts, they made poorer time the next day. They were trying to do too much, going beyond their powers of recuperation. Incidentally, they were becoming very footsore. Bloodstains had begun to show themselves on the outside of one of Nichols' shoes. But when Sedley noticed it and exclaimed, Nichols made light of it. "That's nothing," he said; "yours probably hurt as much as mine. Anyway, all I've got to do is to take one step at a time, and I can always

do that. And there'll be plenty of rest at Ilguan."

"Do you think we'll get there to-morrow?"

"Got to, if we're to do any good. The native runners'll cover the distance in that time. Of course, we have the handicap of having to stop at the rancheria; that takes us out of our way a bit; but a white man ought to be good for that much over a gugu, any day."

Sedley did not reply, but his head went back a little, and his pace, which had begun to lag, increased.

Shortly afterward, Nichols took the lead, which was lucky. Had Sedley been in advance, it is not likely things would have turned out as they did.

They were following the bed of a dried-up creek. The banks were, of course, thickly wooded, and the overhanging brush forced them to walk most of the time in a half-stooping posture, but the footing was good. Although it led a little to the north of their course, they figured they were gaining time by using it, and they were certainly economizing energy.

Nichols was plodding on, head bent, body bent, eyes on the ground; but his ears must have been very alert, or he would never have caught the faint snapping of a twig to the front. Sedley, who was only a pace behind, did not hear it. When Nichols yelled, "Look out!" and threw himself flat, face forward, Sedley, slow to respond to the unexpected, only stopped and stood still, with a gaping mouth. And he still continued to retain that attitude and that expression when the encounter was over.

A bolo flitted through the air exactly where Nichols' neck had been an instant before, clipped a branch off a bush behind him, and buried its point in a tree trunk. Nichols' rifle spoke, and a brown body plunged out of the underbrush into the trail, within ten feet of him, and then reeled and fell, with a red stream spouting from its forehead. Two more followed, but they came fighting. Nichols had been rising when he fired the first shot; he was on his feet now. He plunged down and forward, getting within the bolo swing of the first man; and the muzzle of his rifle caught the Malanao in the groin, sending him spinning to one side. The third man was right on him, the bolo was already falling when Nichols pressed the trigger; but the shock of the bullet whirled the brown man sideways, and the knife snipped a patch of cloth from the shoulder of the sergeant's shirt. Instantly Nichols turned to the second man, but he had leaped into the bushes, and was gone. The whole affair had lasted considerably less than a minute.

Nichols was panting; Sedley was trembling. Nichols glanced at him. Suddenly Sedley's white face began to flush, and the abject terror in his eyes was replaced by as abject shame.

He started to stammer: "I didn't—I wish——"

But Nichols interrupted him. "Good boy," he said, and Sedley stared at him. Then Nichols bent over the body of the second man he had shot. "He's finished, and so's the other, I know. And I reckon the one that got away won't bother us any. Lucky you kept your head; there's not many that would."

"But I didn't," Sedley cried. As the shame in his eyes was new to him, so was the sudden angry self-disdain in his voice. "I didn't do anything. I was scared."

"Pshaw! Don't tell me that. If you'd been scared, you'd have run. And what could you have done? One was enough. You'd only have been in the way. You did just what was right."

Nichols had shoved two more shells into the magazine of his rifle. Now he turned abruptly away and started up the creek bed. "That's over," he called back, "and we're lucky. But we can't afford to waste time."

Sedley made no reply. He was following him, his head down, his shoulders shaking. He tried to keep his sobbing silent, but failed. The sound of it must have reached his leader; but Nicholds did not look back.

They could not be at all sure of it, but they figured when they went into camp that night that they were nearly to the

Liguason River. When they reached it, they had only to follow its course southwest until they struck the rancheria, and thence still southwest to Ilguan. The distance between the ranch and the garrison was some fifteen miles, but a trail connected the two, and it could be covered in four hours at the most.

At midnight, Sedley was on watch. He was sitting on the ground, his body hunched forward, vigilant enough, but with a certain indefinable air of dejection. Ever since his encounter with the Malanaos, that dejection had been his. He had kept his eyes fixed on the ground or on vacancy, he had never once looked squarely into Sergeant Nichols' face; and when he had spoken it had been in listless tones of self-loathing. His manner was that of a man who has caught a true vision of himself, and who hates the remembrance of it.

That, in effect, was what had happened. The episode of the rescue from the river had caused him to see himself through Sergeant Nichols' eyes, as a hero. He had caught at the concept, and clung to it, although he knew it to be false; it was the first time in his life he had ever really credited himself with manlike attributes. Then had come the attack of the Malanaos, and the revelation of his absolute cowardice; and the contrast between what for the moment he had fancied himself to be, and what he was, had shamed him in his own eyes until he hated himself. He was hating himself now as he sat there, hating himself with a hatred that at times rose stronger than the inborn fear that was its cause.

Suddenly he twitched and sat upright. For an instant he was intensely alert, his head half turned and bent sideways. Then, with hardly a sound, he lowered himself until he lay at full length in the grass. Only his head was raised; he peered intently toward the end of the little clearing.

For a full minute there was nothing but the padding sound of bare feet, mingled with a heavier crunch that suggested leather. Then came a shadowy impression of movement, and, quite suddenly, the outline of a single man passed between Sedley's eyes and the white bank of a certain flowered shrub.

It was followed by another and another, ten half-naked Malanaos. The next figure was larger and clothed, plainly a white man, and the next wore skirts, a white woman. Then came five more natives. That was all. The procession passed on into the jungle.

It was a full minute before the meaning of what he had seen came to Sedley. Then it flashed upon him, the revolt already under way, the rancheria attacked, Shaw and his daughter prisoners. That half of their mission a failure, unless—— But Ilguan remained to be warned. One of them might trail the war party, the other travel alone to Ilguan. But if he roused Nichols he would have to explain, and the Malanaos were already almost out of hearing. Another moment, and there would be no following them until morning. Besides, Nichols would probably insist on taking the chance—and of a sudden a white light flooded Sedley's brain, and he wanted to do it himself.

He wanted to do it, and yet he had never known fear as he knew it then. He trembled so violently that it made a rustling sound in the grass. His breath came in gasps, and now and then, when he expelled it, he groaned faintly. But he began to crawl forward on his hands and knees. Presently he reached the brush, and got to his feet. His legs were shaking under him, but without a moment's hesitation, or a backward look, he started after the Malanaos.

Nichols, of course, when he awoke, knew only that Sedley was gone. Nor when, four hours later, he reached the rancheria and found it burned and deserted, did that fact mean anything to him in connection with Sedley's disappearance. So, when he gained Ilguan, finding the garrison still safe, but unwarned and unprepared for trouble, he had no choice but to report Sedley as deserting en route, and as a deserter he was placed on the rolls of the company.

Until daylight Sedley followed the

Malanaos by the sound, moving very cautiously himself. When light came he dropped farther behind, as a matter of prudence, but he clung on their trail with the tenacity of a man who has only one idea under heaven.

Had it not been for this singleness of purpose that amounted at the time to a monomania, it would have been impossible for him to have kept up with them. Before the day was over he was stumbling along like a drunken man. From time to time he fell, but he always fell forward. Sometimes he would rise immediately, sometimes he would stay down for minutes; but he never stopped moving, he was always struggling forward, on his feet, or on all fours. Once, in falling, he struck his forehead against a rock, and cut a great gash across it; now and then he would raise his hand and brush the blood away from his eyes, but that was all the attention he paid to his hurt. His hands were bleeding, too, and great blood-bordered rents appeared in his clothing, but he did not regard those things at all. In his eyes, wide open and staring, was the shining vision of an ideal.

In the middle of the afternoon the Malanaos stopped. Sedley lay at a distance and listened to their jabbering until dark. Then he crept up, very cautiously, and peered out at them through a screen of bushes.

They were encamped in a very narrow clearing. One man walked up and down after the manner of a sentry on post, the rest lay on the ground. Points of light partly illuminated their faces; there are no Filipinos so savage but that they know the cigarette. Two of the recumbent ones were not so occupied; this, and a difference in the outlines of their figures, identified the prisoners.

Sedley lay quiet for hours. The sentries had been changed twice when he began to creep forward.

So cautiously did he move that it sometimes took him minutes to cover the length of his body. He crawled like a snake, full length and face downward. His rifle was carried balanced on his back; his haversack and canteen would have dragged on the ground, so he had discarded them. Every few feet he stopped and moved some bit of wood or hindering rock to one side, lifting it up and setting it down with the most infinite care. At that, his movements were not absolutely noiseless, and had the sentry looked directly at him he might have seen the dark blotch of his body against the ground; but Sedley got within ten feet of the Malanao before he was observed.

Then it is doubtful if he was actually observed. A twig snapped, and at the moment Sedley leaped up and swung his rifle. The Malanao had started to turn his head, and he received the blow fair on his forehead. He did not utter a sound. Sedley caught him as he fell, and lowered him to the ground. Not one of the sleeping men stirred.

Instantly, Sedley was on his knees by the side of the white man, opening a pocketknife. As it chanced, Shaw was a very level-headed man, and woke silently. His daughter, it appeared, was already awake; she had witnessed the encounter, and was quiet and alert. Sedley cut the ropes that bound them, calming whatever nervousness they might have felt by the cool assurance of his own movements, and set them an example of silence as he stole away before them into the brake. The two whom he had rescued could not see his face, but they followed him confidently.

They reached Ilguan two days later, stealing in just before the expected, and, because expected, unsuccessful attack by the natives. Sedley took his part in that affair, and then collapsed and spent the next week in the sick bay. When he came out, he was much praised, two of the men, who had known him before, marveling secretly the while, less at his conduct than at the changed look in his eyes. He received that praise calmly, and a little indifferently. It was only Sergeant Nichols' words that brought the tears to his eyes. "It was a brave thing to do, Sedley," he said, and if there was any change in his comradely regard it was only the passing triumph of a purpose achieved. "A brave thing —but what else could you have done?"

Penndragon Smith's Creation

By Theodore Goodridge Roberts

Author of "The Black Fox of Trinity Bay," "Johnny Shark," Etc.

That a writer of stories may also be a true prophet has been demonstrated time and again. Here is one more instance told by Roberts of a novelist who was so keen a student of life that his books were in fact prophecies

THE Royal Mail steam packet *Southern Cross,* northward bound from Rio de Janeiro to the Lesser and the Greater Antilles, lay inside the reef off Pernambuco for half a day. Mr. Penndragon Smith went ashore without loss of time. He had a passion for foreign ports, and for hot ones particularly. It was many years since he had last been in Pernambuco. He was now fifty years of age, married, and the father of three children. At the time of his last visit to Pernambuco he had been twenty-four and single.

Penndragon ascended the water stairs and crossed the cobblestoned square to the doorway of a ship chandler's establishment that had been familiar to him in the old days as a place of cool drinks and companionship. A fat man with a gray beard confronted him the moment he had crossed the threshold. The light in the long store was dim. The air of the place was redolent of the commodities supplied by the chandler to ships and shipmasters—of new rope and canvas, of paint and tar, of coffee, rum, and tobacco, to name only the more odoriferous.

Penndragon Smith sniffed with relish, as if the breath of youth, or a wind from Araby, the Blest, had assailed his nostrils. Then he bent his long back, stuck a glass in his left eye, and gazed at the fat man with the gray beard.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Here you are, Jim; and I suppose you have been here ever since. I thought your Aunt Sally was going to set you up as a planter?"

"I beg your pardon, sir—but who the devil are you?" returned the chandler.

"My name is Smith—Penndragon Smith."

"Heavens! Man, you're older! Lay it there, Penn. What'll you drink?"

They moved toward the rear of the long store, and sat down at a small table. A very dark young man in white linen brought them two long glasses a-clink with ice. Penndragon and the ship chandler drank to old times and new. Many questions were quickly asked and answered.

"Aunt Sally refused to send me so much as a five-pound note," said the chandler. "Yes, I've been right here ever since we last met, which was twenty-six years ago. I married old Da Matos' daughter; the old man died ten years ago and left me the whole business. You would think it a dull life; but I have not been unhappy."

Penndragon Smith nodded.

"I see that they still come in to shake dice for the drinks," he said.

The chandler turned a little in his chair and glanced toward a long table, at which eight men were seated.

"Yes, they still come in," he said. "The custom lives; but the men you knew are all dead or gone away. A devil of a lot happens in twenty-six years. I have learned shopkeeping and contentment and forgotten ambition; and you have become a famous fictioneer.

I've read a dozen of your books and hundreds of your yarns in the magazines. Blunt, of the *Walrus*, died of yellow fever somewhere along the coast. Jones, the coffee planter, died of drink. Young Henley, of the Cable Company, came in for a fortune twenty years ago and went home. He married the widow of a jam-making knight. Stark is growing cocoa in one of the islands now. Who were the other steadies? Old Woodhouse, of the match factory. The factory went smash, and Woodhouse faded away between sunset and dawn. It was quite a shock to some of us—touched Matos on the funny bone for five hundred pounds, English.

"Who is the boy with the tow head and gray eyes?" asked Penndragon.

"That's a new one," replied the chandler; "but I see his finish already. Name of Mannville; supposed to be learning the inmost secrets of the sugar cane from Jerry Darling. That is Jerry behind the red nose. Owns fine place ten miles back—poor Jones' old place—and is making a mess of it. Mannville is from my old school. Likable youngster—son of a widow—eighty pounds a year, sent quarterly. You know the kind. He would be better off if his mother didn't send him a cent—and so would she. Plenty of pluck, but no common sense. Hits it up. His own worst enemy. You know the kind. Good heart, but no head. All breeding and no ballast. Learns nothing about sugar cane from Jerry except the flavor of rum. He is riding to a fall."

"Sorry to hear it," said Penndragon Smith. "I like his looks."

"His looks won't save him, Penn. In fiction it would be an easy trick to make a man of him. Life is logical. It plays the game, from the cradle to the grave. It pays decent attention to the signs in the sky and the writing on the wall. A lame horse runs lame; a crank ship goes over in a gale; the leopard's spots don't come out in the wash. As to fiction—but you know more about fiction than I do, Penn. I know a devilish lot about life, however—about man life. I study it in this old shop. It comes in to me from the seven seas, the bush, the plantations, and the street."

"You may be a student of life, Jim; but so am I," returned Penndragon Smith. "You say you have read my books; but it is quite evident that you missed one of them. Twenty-four years ago—the year before I married—I wrote a story about a young Englishman, a public-school boy, who made a mess of things and landed in a ship chandler's establishment in this very town. He worked for twenty shillings a week. He was ashamed of his job. He talked of buying a place in the country and growing coffee. He banked on getting around an ancient maiden aunt of his to the tune of three or four thousand pounds. But he didn't, mind you—in the story. His aunt left her money to a curate who was in no way related to her. My hero felt very sick for a month or so, then began to take an interest in his employer's business. His salary was raised. He forgot what a superior young man he was, and made a fortunate deal in a damaged cargo of piano-players. He became interested in his employer's daughter. At the age of twenty-six he had been plump. At the age of thirty-three—the year of his marriage—he was fat. He grew a beard to add dignity to a somewhat retiring chin. He became a ship chandler—and nothing else. He was happy."

"Did you really write all that, Penn?" asked the merchant.

"I did. I'll send you a copy of the book. When you were only plump I saw you fat. I gave you a beard years before you let it grow. I did you out of Aunt Sally's money and the coffee plantation. I married you to the daughter of old Matos before she had inspired a glow in your heart. To-day I learn that I wrote the truth—as well as an interesting story."

"You are a good guesser. And do you think you'll make a book of Bobby Mannville?"

"He may suggest a story of some kind. I like his looks."

Penndragon Smith sailed away from

Pernambuco six hours after his egoistical conversation with the ship chandler.

II.

Six months passed, as six months will, even in Pernambuco. The sun arose hot as fire behind Mr. Jerry Darling's boiling house; and Mr. Robert Mannville, standing half dressed on the gallery of the bungalow, greeted it with a wave of the hand. Young Mannville had already bathed, shaved, and breakfasted. He had breakfasted in his pajamas at an unusual hour. He had completed his toilet by the time his pony was at the foot of the gallery steps. He wore yellow riding boots, breeches and jacket of white drill, and a white helmet. In the hip pocket of his breeches reposed a letter from his mother, and a check for twenty pounds. As young Mannville mounted his pony, Jerry Darling protruded his head from a window. The planter's nose was a shade redder than it had been six months before.

"Bobby, it's my painful duty to remind you of the fact that you are a danged young fool, that you'll come to no good if you carry on as you are carrying, and that you had better drag that check from your pocket and salt it away in the toe of an old sock," said the planter.

"Right you are, Jerry," returned the other. "See you later, I suppose."

"I'll be with you before you've done much damage to that check," said the planter.

Robert Mannville rode toward the city at a brisk pace. Many dangers threatened him; but, being young and of a peculiarly joyous disposition, he saw only the least of these. A crumpled rose leaf lay beneath the pigskin of his saddle, a cloud no larger than his hand marred the pure azure of his outlook—the rose leaf and the cloud of borrowed money left long unpaid. The sum was modest; and to a sane onlooker the debt would have appeared as the least of the dangers menacing the young man's future.

"That is rather a fag," reflected the young man. "I must give him a few pounds on account, I suppose. Confound it! I could have scraped along without the money. It was a mistake—but the only serious one I have made, I honestly think. I'm not living like a plaster saint, I'll admit; but, on the other hand, I'm not injuring myself or any one else. In six months or so I'll tackle this science of cane culture seriously. Then I'll cut out the high jinks and get a job as manager. It will be easy sailing after that, and I'll soon own a little place of my own. That dull old dog, Jimmy Barnes, thinks I'll come a cropper—thinks I am becoming a confirmed consumer of strong waters, like Jerry Darling. Rot! I can drop that whenever I want to, as easy as snapping my fingers."

Robert cashed his check at the Planters' London Bank. His friend, the cashier, grinned as he passed out the little milreis notes. Jerry Darling turned up at the club before noon, in time to be entertained to an elaborate meal. At four o'clock in the afternoon the plantation student and the planter meandered into Jimmy Barnes' store. Five of the "steadies" were already seated at the long table. Darling joined them; but the ship chandler stepped out of the partitioned corner that served him for an office and grabbed young Mannville by the shoulder.

"Come in here," he said. "I want to talk to you."

"Wait a minute," returned Robert. "I'll be delighted to talk to you; but just now I'm dry. By George, you look excited!"

The chandler gave an order to the brown young man who attended to the convivial end of the business, then pulled Robert Mannville into the office and thrust him into a chair. He took up a yellow-covered magazine from his desk.

"Something in here that will interest you," he said.

Robert swore. He would have bolted from the office but for the chandler's detaining hand.

"I don't want to hear about any of those silly cures!" he exclaimed. "I

don't need a cure any more than you do; and I consider it confounded cheeky of you to suggest it."

"Keep cool," returned the other. "And here is your poison," he added, as the brown waiter entered with a tray and glasses.

Mannville sank back in his chair and sipped at his glass. Jimmy Barnes closed the door after the waiter's departure, then passed the open magazine to Mannville.

"Read that, my boy," he said. "Read it, and digest it."

"Don't be a fool! I'm busy to-day —and I'll be busier to-morrow."

"Read that story, you young ass, or I'll tie you into your chair, and read it to you."

Mannville sighed and began to read. He flushed darkly at the first page and scowled up at the watchful merchant.

"This is a bit too thick!" he cried. "You wrote this, I suppose? Then you are a blackguard!"

"If I had written that, Bobby, I wouldn't be selling anchors and yams to shipmasters, and drinks to young fools like you. My name is not Penndragon Smith, as you know."

"Penndragon Smith! Sorry, Barnes, but I didn't notice the name. But what thé devil does Penndragon Smith know about me—and the old school—and the mater—and the eighty pounds—and the debt—and Jerry?"

"Read on, my boy; and when you have finished the story I'll tell you."

Mannville obeyed. He read the story to the end, then the note at the foot of the last page which said that this was the first of a series of stories all dealing with the same character. He looked up at the ship chandler with a pale face and bright eyes. Then he swore.

Barnes turned and drew a book from a drawer of his desk.

"I will tell you something about Penndragon Smith," he said. "He was here twenty-six years ago, writing verses and little stories for some of the American magazines. Lived in Pernambuco about ten weeks, in the hotel next door. He was one of the boys. I was clerking in this very shop for old Da Matos; but I was expecting money from home and intended to be a coffee planter. Six months ago, in walked Penndragon Smith. I didn't know him, until he told me his name. He saw you —and you were going strong at the time, Bobby—and he was interested in you. He asked three or four questions about you, which I answered. He left town six hours later, and has never come back; but he sent me this book, which he wrote twenty-five years ago. Here's the date. It's my life, that's what it is—written by Penndragon Smith twenty-five years before I had lived it."

"A fluke," said Mannville.

"Very likely. Let us consider this yarn about Richard Morris. Dick Morris for Bobby Mannville, you see. I told him that your mother is a widow, and the name of your school—and about the eighty pounds. He fluked the rest of it—about the way you feel, and all that. He has Jerry painted like a portrait. Now about this debt of thirty pounds? I never heard of that. What about it, Bobby?"

"Rotten fluke," said Mannville.

"So? And has this fellow Rogers met you on the street lately and been nasty about the money—which should have been returned to him two months ago? And have you put him off for a little while by paying five pounds as extra interest?"

"Nothing in it."

"Have you shelled out thirty-five shillings for a lottery ticket yet?"

"No."

"Then the sooner you do it the better. Get out and get busy."

"Rot! I may be a bit of an idiot, but I'm not such a chump as to throw away my money on that fake lottery."

"You are a model young man, I know; but let me tell you, Bobby, that in a climate like this it is safer and wiser to chuck your money into the gutter than to pour it down your throat in the form of rum punches. Go out and buy that ticket."

"See here, Barnes, I've had about enough of this."

"In that case, here's your hat."

Robert Mannville went slowly out of the office and over to the long table like a man in two minds. He sat at the table for twenty minutes, then suddenly got to his feet and went swiftly from the store, deaf to the protests of Jerry Darling and the others.

The ship chandler wrote several business letters, then nodded in the chair before his desk. Even in that cool store the windless heat was overpowering. The revelers paid their score to the dark young man and departed. Barnes was brought back from his uncomfortable nap by a hand on his shoulder. He opened his eyes upon the pale, strained face of young Mannville.

"What's happened to you?" he asked, sitting up sharply.

"I ran across Jacobs—the man I owe the money to—in front of the club," replied Mannville. "He abused me like a fishwife, the cad! I couldn't shut him up—until I passed him over a fiver."

"As it was written," murmured the ship chandler.

"Is the number of that lottery ticket mentioned in that story?" asked Mannville.

Barnes shook his head.

"So you took a flyer, did you, Bobby?"

"Yes. As soon as I got rid of Jacobs I took a thirty-five-shilling shot. No harm in helping your friend Penndragon along a bit if he fancies himself as a prophet."

III.

Three weeks passed before Barnes saw young Mannville again. The student of cane culture was decidedly the worse for wear.

"Now don't preach!" he cried. "A fellow has to loosen up now and then—and I haven't let my feet drift once since the last time I saw you. So don't look so shocked, please."

"What is the inspiration of to-day's looseness?" asked the chandler. "Has your widowed mother scraped together a few more pounds for you?"

"Don't be rude, Jim. Poor old Jerry has gone all to pieces, and I have had to run the place. No joke, I can tell you; for I don't know much more about canes than I do about nursing. Jerry is in bad shape. I came in to town to-day to do some business for him. If he doesn't buck up soon the owners will have to put a new man in charge."

"I thought Jerry owned the place."

"Not he. A couple of cousins of his own it—maiden ladies who live in London, he tells me."

"Where are you heading for now?"

"For my horse. I've got to get back to Jerry and the sweating canes, worse luck! Can't leave them stranded on a lee shore, you know."

Barnes returned to his shop, scratching his prematurely gray beard.

"Wonderful!" he murmured. "He has a sense of responsibility, after all—with four swizzles under his belt. Perhaps he will make good. Penndragon Smith evidently thinks that he will. Of course he will, if Penndragon thinks so. Penn is a wizard!"

The ship chandler's hope for young Mannville's reformation, even his belief in Penndragon Smith's abilities as a prophet, were somewhat shaken four hours later by the arrival of Mr. Mannville at the long table at the back of the shop. Mannville had not gone home to Jerry and the canes. He had clouded that glimmer of a sense of responsibility with rum swizzles. His silly feet were drifting—and so was his silly head.

Three weeks went by before Robert Mannville showed himself again to the ship chandler. Mr. Barnes was engaged in reading a new number of the yellow-covered magazine when Mannville entered the office from the dusky store. He slipped the magazine beneath the litter of papers on his desk.

"Take a chair, Bobby," he said. "How goes it?"

"There is the devil to pay!" exclaimed Mannville, with a queer mingling of weariness and excitement in his voice. "To begin with, Jerry is all in, and I have had to take him to the English hospital. As soon as they get him

on his legs he is going home. His people have money."

"That's not so bad," said the chandler. "What next?"

"The owners have put me in charge! I've got the job!"

"Good for you, Bobby!"

"But I don't know enough about cultivation and business to run an estate of that size. Jerry is a joker. It's all his doing. It seems that he wrote home six or seven weeks ago, asking for a release, and recommending me for the position. He admitted it last night. He thinks it a devil of a joke—and so it is. I can't do it. I don't know enough."

"You can do it, my boy, if you think so hard enough and try hard enough. You can hold the job down if you stick right to it with both hands and both feet. Penndragon Smith says so."

About twelve days after this conversation, a brown boy dismounted from a mule before the ship chandler's door and handed a note to Mr. Barnes. The note was from Robert Mannville.

"I drew a winner for one hundred pounds, that day I played the lottery," wrote Mannville. "And I am still on top of this job. I take off my hat to Penndragon Smith. What next?"

Barnes stood staring at the note long after the brown boy had ridden away. The small square of paper shook in his trembling hand.

"This is rather terrifying," he murmured. "What will he write next, I wonder? I wish he had not worked me into that second story. I am afraid he is shaping for some romantic scenes—and one of my girls. And yet—well, if Bobby makes good. But it is terrifying. I think I had better keep the stories dark, from now on, and let the young man ride his own line."

IV.

Mr. Penndragon Smith was in the middle of his morning's work. His straight mustache and heavy eyebrows showed a few white lines that had not been there at the time of his last meeting with Jim Barnes, of Pernambuco; but his long back was as straight as ever and his eyes as clear.

He heard the door open softly, but he did not turn from his work. A card was laid on the table at his elbow. He glanced at it, then sat back in his chair and sighed.

"A stranger," he said. "Has an autograph album, I suppose. What does he look like, Sarah?"

"A young gentleman, sir," replied the servant. "His hair is like tow, sir, and his face as red as a brick. A tropical gentleman, I should say."

Penndragon sighed.

"Show him in, Sarah," he said.

The visitor advanced eagerly and extended a brown hand.

"I've come a long way to see you, sir," said the visitor. "I simply had to see you—and thank you."

The writer glanced at the card on the table.

"Please sit down, Mr. Mannville," he said. "Have a cigarette—or a cigar."

"You don't know me! You don't remember me!" exclaimed the young man with the sunburned face.

"I—I must admit that I don't seem to," stammered Penndragon.

"Robert Mannville. Bobby Mannville, of Pernambuco."

"Ah! Pernambuco! I used to know Pernambuco like a book. That was twenty, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-one years ago. You were not alive thirty-one years ago. But you remind me of some one."

"Of Richard Morris, sir."

"Richard Morris! Of course! But he is a creation of my own—a character in fiction."

"But I am Richard Morris. Richard Morris is Robert Mannville. Jim Barnes pointed me out to you, five years ago, and told you that I was going to the dogs—riding for a fall. And you wrote those stories about me—and they were true. What you wrote, I did. You were right about the lottery ticket; you were right about my success as a sugar planter. When you created the character of Richard Mor-

ris, you made a man of Robert Mannville."

"Amazing!" cried Penndragon Smith. "Tell me all about it."

The young man told him all about it.

"I owe it all to you, sir," he concluded.

"I am very glad, Mr. Mannville; but, of course, I can't take any credit for your success," said the writer. "But about that lottery ticket. What an amazing fluke!"

"Not a fluke, sir," returned the visitor. "You don't fluke."

"Astonishing! Most interesting! And you are happily married to one of Mr. Barnes' daughters."

"Married?" queried the other. "No, sir, I'm not married. There was nothing in the stories about getting married."

"How many of them did you read?"

"I read the first, and Barnes told me the chief points in the second and the third."

"There were ten stories in all; and I married you to one of Jim's daughters. Perhaps he hasn't any daughters?"

"He has two daughters. By George! He used to take me around to his house every time he saw me—after I knocked off the swizzles and bought the plantation. By George!"

"If he had shown you the rest of the stories you would have married one of Jim's daughters."

"No. At least, I don't think so. Neither of them inspired any—any feeling of that kind in me. But—well, I'm glad Jim didn't show me the rest of the stories."

Penndragon Smith smiled. Then he went over to the young man and shook him warmly by the hand.

"I wish I could take the credit for you to myself; but you have only yourself to thank for your clear eye, your steady hand, and your hundreds of acres of splendid canes," he said. "All you got from me was the suggestion. When I saw you that day, in Jim's store, I knew that you would win through. Will you lunch with me? You must."

"Delighted, sir."

"Then walk through that window and sit down in that chair in the shade. Take the cigarettes with you. I have still half an hour's work to do before lunch."

The young man obeyed. The writer returned to his table and took up his pen. The door opened, and his younger daughter entered—Caroline, the unmarried one. Her face and form were as attractive as her character—and that is saying a great deal. Her father leaned back in his chair and dropped his pen.

"Do you remember some stories of mine about a youngster called Richard Morris?" he asked.

"Of course I do," she answered. "They are good stories; and Dick Morris is the most charming of your pen-and-ink boys."

"He is a man now," said Penndragon. "He is out there. You can see the top of his tow head. His name is Robert Mannville. Warn your mother that I've asked him to stay to lunch, like a good girl—and tell cook."

"Dick Morris?" repeated the girl. "Why, I have loved him for five years—better than Sir Dinadan, better than Frank Leigh, better than Sir Nigel Loring. But what has that young man to do with Dick? And who is he?"

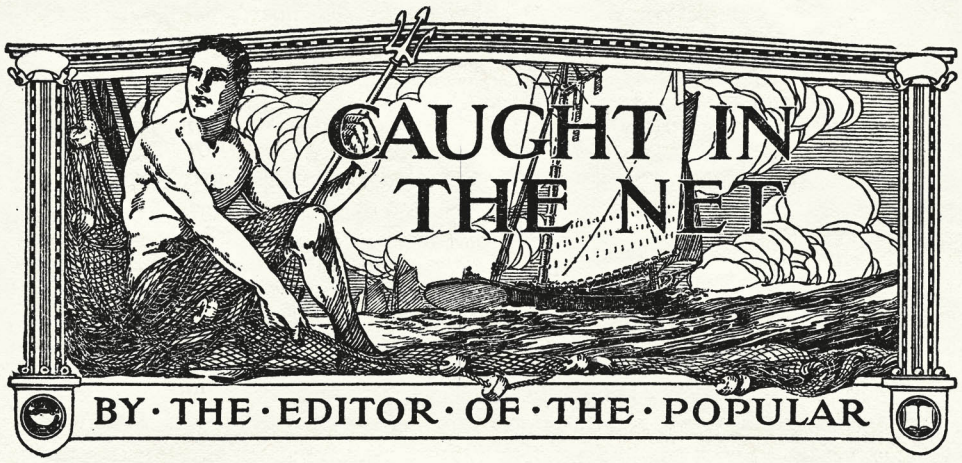
"He will tell you. I'm afraid I have done a foolish thing. I can almost find it in my heart to regret the fact that Jim Barnes is a gentleman and continues to behave as one. If he had shown the other stories to that young man, all would now be well."

"What *do* you mean, father? Who is that young man in the garden?"

"He will tell you, never fear. He came a long way to tell me."

"What *do* you mean? Please be sensible."

"Your old father is a wonderful person, my dear. He is the only one of his kind. It is ridiculous to consider him as a mere writer of fiction. His powers were greater than he himself was aware of—until to-day. The creatures of his imagination are beginning to issue from the jungle and call him father."



THE TRENTON IDEA

FOR a long time there was more or less feeling of antagonism between town and country. Even the seven-dollar ribbon clerk in the village store attempted to make funny remarks about "hayseeds" and "rubes." And in turn the farmers felt suspicious of town people, and scornful of town ways.

Often the boundary line of the corporate limits of a town marked a more distinctly alien feeling between those inside and out, than had they been of different nationalities. There are counties in which for years it was practically impossible to elect any man who lived in the county seat to office.

But happily all this is passing, a feeling of fellowship and coöperation taking its place.

One of the first towns to take definite steps to eliminate the dividing line between town and county was Trenton, Missouri. The plan of this county-seat town has attracted a great deal of attention and it has come to be called the "Trenton Idea."

The idea was simplicity itself, it was the spirit in which it was carried out that made progress. A member of the Commercial Club arose one night, and made a notably short speech:

"What helps Grundy County helps Trenton; what helps Trenton helps Grundy County. Why aren't there farmers in this club?"

The suggestion was acted on at once. The club began at once to cultivate a spirit of oneness between town and county. Farmers were invited to join the Trenton Commercial Club. They joined. They have obliterated the town line; and now five hundred farmers are regular members of the Trenton Commercial Club.

AMERICA'S ARMY OF BAD COOKS

MORE wealth is thrown out of the kitchen doors of the United States each year than is represented in the United States Steel Corporation. Housekeeping, once the pride of the American woman, has become the most wasteful branch of business. The nation is producing lots of typewriters, stenographers, shop girls, and factory girls, but not cooks.

Few cities in the North or West show more than six per cent—one in

sixteen—of the household servants to be American born. In the South it is different, but that is owing to the great number of negroes. All over the land there is a plea for cooks, maids, upstair girls, downstair girls.

In New York, Boston, Baltimore, and at other ports, every incoming steamship is met by heads of families eager to grab up an immigrant girl for household service.

The majority of these immigrant girls have been farm workers, and know nothing of English and nothing of housework. Most of them never saw a gas stove or the common kitchen range. They are rough, heavy-handed, and generally unsuited for the tasks to which they are assigned, yet they command from fifteen to twenty-five dollars a month wages, raw as they are. They have to be taught to cook and taught English. When they have learned a trifle of one or the other, they demand and get more money. To-day the American home is at the mercy of this incompetent horde.

Through the American girls' abhorrence of housework and the subservience of the American housekeeper to the immigrant servant, the waste in housekeeping has become incalculable. It is evidenced in a hundred ways. No department of life offers a bigger field for the real economist.

But more important than the money involved is the matter of general health and stability. Bad cooking does not conduce to general well-being. Probably the greatest enemy the American people have to face to-day is made up of its army of bad cooks.

THE OTHER SORT

A GOOD deal of poetry has been written in praise of "divine discontent." But most of it is not that sort. The average Monday variety of discontent is born of a hankering for what belongs to the other fellow. Two-thirds of the time we have not earned it, and do not particularly care for the thing itself, but want it because the other fellow has it. The dull boy in school is discontented because the bright one goes up into the fifth reader and he remains in the fourth class; not because he cares a spotted bean for the fifth reader, but he wanted the bright boy to be held back in the fourth. Millions of woman admire pretty calico, and could be perfectly happy in a new calico dress if the rest would wear it, too. There are men who really love their jobs and naturally would wish for nothing better than a comfortable cottage, with three good meals a day, and an easy-chair on the porch at evening. But the other fellow has a big house and an automobile, so it makes him discontented.

Discontent, which stirs us to make the best of ourselves, to seize every new opportunity, to fight a bad condition that may be remedied, is an excellent thing. But discontent that merely breeds dislike for the really good things that are ours, that spoils the pleasure we might take with what comes our way, that makes us envious, merely irritates sores that cannot heal, and grows into a morose, hopeless, bitter attitude toward life and our fellow men, is so far from being a divine discontent that it may be directly accredited to the very opposite agency.

JIM TURNER AND THE PRICE OF BEEF

THERE is one farmer—there may be a thousand others—who is helping keep down the price of beef. "Keep down" is the wrong expression—I mean he is swinging on to one of the ropes of the beef balloon, trying to keep it near enough to the earth for the consumer to get into the shank of the basket.

This man is Jim Turner of Darien, Wisconsin. Turner is not opposed to the

price of beef. He likes that, for he is not a philanthropist; and is farming for Jim Turner. That, of course, is the way every farmer has to farm; and yet here is the beauty of really good farming. It not only enriches Jim Turner, but helps the few million John Smiths and Bill Joneses who have to eat.

So Jim Turner is helping keep the price of beef within sight of the hungry consumer—although, of course, Jim's eye is on his own bank account and not the consumers'.

Here is how:

One of the prime causes of the scarcity of cattle is the increase in the price of milk. Dairying is becoming profitable everywhere. Wisconsin is a great dairy State. Almost every farmer keeps from ten to fifty cows, and sells the milk. That means, with most of them, that they do not want the calves. The young calves are sold for veal. And, of course, every pound of veal that goes on the market means a loss of ten pounds of beef. The farmers realize very little for the young calves—from three to five dollars.

Now, Turner, living in the heart of this rich dairy country, got it into his head to raise calves, and he is doing it in a small way very profitably.

As there are hundreds of calves for sale he has his pick—and he picks those of Holstein blood. He looks for the white feet and tail; and the calves are not only from good milk cows, but many of them have the markings of almost pure-bred Holsteins. Of course they are not pure-blooded, or he could not get them for three and five dollars a head. But many of them are half or three-quarters.

He keeps four cows merely to furnish milk for the young calves. Some of the calves he buys when they are less than a week old. Most of them are about two weeks.

Those under two weeks he feeds milk; at two weeks he begins to mix in gruel made from calf meal, and gradually reduces the milk until the calf can live entirely on feed. Ground barley is one of the important later foods.

Turner usually buys about forty calves a year. The steers are raised for beef; but the best of the heifers are sold for milk cows. Last year he sold forty-two two-year-olds at an average of fifty dollars a head—and more than half of that twenty-one hundred dollars was clear profit.

The work of raising the calves is not arduous, as farm work goes, and it does not require enough time to seriously interfere with his regular farm work. And the returns are very satisfactory to Turner—and the consumers of beef.

THE CAMPUS COP

THERE is one policeman in a college town—the "campus cop"—who, alone and unaided, has worked out the new penology, has mastered the science of punishment and penalty and probation and uplift, with never a squint at the master pedagogues and their learned books on how to make faulty men good. Twenty-one years spent in the night life of students have taught him his lore, and made him wise in the human heart.

He makes men believe in themselves. He tells the offender—the "drunk," the thief, the liar—he didn't mean it, that he couldn't have meant it, because the act was too low and dirty for a decent man to think through and then go and do. He tells the lad he is glad he has done it, because now he has got it out of his system. This man hates prison, hates courts, and all the ticketing and labeling of weakness. He believes in the man-to-man interview, the confession, the laborious penance under wise oversight, and then the fresh start.

A student, earning seven dollars and fifty cents a week, had stolen over one

hundred dollars' worth of books from the rooms of his classmates. The officer shamed the boy into a confession by telling him what it meant to steal books from other boys, equally poor and hard-working. He went to the college authorities and had them raise the boy's wages to nine dollars a week. He then watched over the boy till he had paid back the one hundred dollars from his increased wages. Another boy had stolen money to take his girl in style to a football game in the rival college town.

"And you call that love, and expect luck to come of it," said the policeman, "to tie up petty thieving with your love, and think that good will come of it. Tell her you can't afford to take her. She'll stand by you."

"I know the boys better than you," he says to the students, "I know them day and night, and you only know them evenings."

He knows human nature, and still he believes in it. The thing he doesn't believe in is public humiliation.

ATTENTION!

THERE must be no let-up in the swift pace set by the last administration in two crusades. The vigorous successful prosecution of the men who sell girls into the life of shame must be continued. The work done under Mr. Wickersham has been admirable. The present temper of the public will not permit any slackening in that brave, effective campaign.

Of equal value has been the crusade of Mr. Hitchcock against the get-rich swindlers. He has lessened the volume of their wrongdoing. Because of him, they are to-day operating less noisily and therefore less effectively.

The jailing of them must continue. When Judge Mayer pronounced sentence on Julian Hawthorne, the man who sold for money the love letters of his father and his mother, and who latterly has falsely described mines, he said of Hawthorne and another framer of lies: "I wish on account of their age that I could suspend all the indictments."

But when have these men shown mercy? When have they ever suspended their fraudulent activities for age or poverty? They rob the toil-worn and the obscure. They break the spirit of humble people.

"EXOTICS"

WEARIED by late hours and idle days, these folks have followed the climate south.

They wish to be wherever life is soft, and the air full of leisure and sunshine. So they have brought their weariness and their ennui to Palm Beach. They have escaped the biting rigors of February winds, the ice-coated streets, and wind-swept avenues of their Northern home. One thing they have not escaped, and that is themselves. They still have within them the same emptiness and uselessness, as when they lolled away the afternoon in club and boudoir, and danced the evening into morning by the aid of champagne and costly music.

Still they greet each day with a yawn, and idle through the hours with futile talk and lavish expenditure on strange foods, and on games of chance with princely stakes.

When the Red Hills Threaten

By Vingie E. Roe

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CRUCIFIX IN THE FOREST.

OUTSIDE Fort lu Cerne, Lois le Moyne, once branded thief and worse, ever a mystery, had shot, stumbling, her skirt aflame, into the open arms of crowded scores of savages, for sake of that people who had repudiated her.

They caught her, sending up their cry of delight to high heaven at sight of her youth and beauty, for such a sacrifice must indeed be pleasing to the Great Spirit—in whose name the sons of men commit so many crimes. They beat out the fire on her garments, and bound her hands behind her with a deerskin thong.

They surged around her, yelling, pressing forward, thrusting their painted visages in her face, gibing, leering, splitting the golden day with their hideous triumph.

She stood among them with her strong shoulders back, and her head erect. She lifted her disdainful eyes above their heads, and looked deep in the arching blue of the sky, and with a quick perception that sent a thrill to her heart she saw that its hue was changed. It was deep and tender, soft and far in its illimitable reaches of space, no longer brassy and hard as it had been these many weeks. To the north the queer copper haze was fading above the hills. With the irony of fate, the signs of the scourge were passing.

The deep heart of that far-off sky seemed, in that moment, to fill the soul of the girl with a quiet peace, to answer the weary questions which had worn her with their ceaseless iteration, to say that this was Life and its purpose, its fulfillment and its end, this saving by its sacrifice of a tattered fragment of a people who had never been her own, even less than they had been McConnel's.

At last the sweet words of prayer came simply to her lips, their exalted solace to her spirit.

She clasped the fingers of her bound hands, forgot the yelling demons leaping about her, and sent her strange soul, unsorry and unafraid, to the feet of her Maker.

"Father, forgive——" she whispered.

But there the words died on her parted lips, the weary calmness of her eyes changed to wonder.

Faint and far on the morning air there came to her ears the sound of distant singing. Soft and faint and inimitably sweet, like the music of that other world to which she was drawing so near, it drifted down to her, stilling the beating of her heart, hushing the soul of her with its holy wonder. Angels singing beyond the veil of the world!

Surely her sacrifice was good. For once the high head of this girl bowed in humility, the fiery eyes filled with humble tears.

She strained her hearing for that silver strain, rising and falling like a shimmering billow of silken sound blown by the wind of heaven.

Nearer it came, slowly nearer, rising in its unmatched beauty, falling in solemn cadence. It lifted in increasing volume, rising over the roof of the forest, and suddenly Lois le Moyne lifted her bowed head, while the look of holy awe on her face changed to comprehension.

She recognized the cadence of that strain.

This story began in the first January POPULAR.

It was a Latin chant for the dying, and none but Father Tenau had ever sung it in the wilderness.

Absorbed as she had been with the business of her soul, she had paid no heed to that concourse of surging demons which pressed close around her, their naked skins brushing her bound arms, the smell of their war paint in her nostrils. Now with her own descent from heaven to earth, she was conscious of them. In every attitude they stood around her, like a molten sea of action arrested at its height. Some rigid and straight in their bronze strength, some bent in act of leaping, some leaning as they peered in her face, they stood as they had been stayed, and every ear was bent to that sound in the forest. A swift and utter silence had fallen. Only the eaten edges of the burned opening in the stockade, still crackling with their flames, gave forth a voice in the stillness. On the outer edge of the mass of warriors the squaws hovered among the trees.

Nearer and nearer came that silver song. It resolved its floating glory to the opening in the dark wall of the forest before the great gate where the settlement trail went into the wilderness, pouring forth as from some huge cathedral aisle, and presently there was a motion in the vast press of human forms that encompassed the girl, a wave that started far ahead and swept like a wave of the sea, past her and beyond, as that great concourse of savages fell upon their faces on the sun-cracked earth, leaving of all their number she alone upright in their midst, her head still up, her hands bound behind her.

Out of the green mouth of the forest aisle there came a small procession, a band of dark-robed monks, walking two and two, their rosaries in their hands, and at their head the good father himself, the sun on his bare head, and borne aloft in his hands, swaying with his step, the sacred symbol of redemption, the crucifix.

The mystery of that year beyond the Red Hills now laid its hand upon the Blackfeet. They fell before him in superstitious reverence.

The sad eyes of the priest, sweeping the sudden scene before him, the barred entrance of the post, the signs of battle, the burning wall of the stockade, the prostrate hordes of savages, and the tall girl standing bound in their midst, took in its import, and his mind leaped back to twenty years before when this same thing had happened.

He knew the Blackfeet and their ways—ah, who might know them better!

So plainly in that instant he saw again, looking from the past, the lovely face of the little Sister Felice, whose spotless life had bought the safety of this same post of Fort lu Cerne!

Now again a young girl had been its price. The gentle lips of the father twitched, to tighten with grim sternness.

His voice, strong and thrilling though he was an old man, boomed out across the groveling mass.

"Tilligamok!" he cried. "Chief of warriors, Tilligamok!"

From close at Lois' side the gigantic form of the chief arose, towering in its majesty. He faced the priest in silence.

"Tilligamok has done a great wrong," thundered the voice of Father Tenau. "He has followed the words of Mishwa to destruction. The Great Spirit wants no sacrifice by fire. He sends at this moment His priests to bid the Blackfeet flee before His wrath, else more than the sickness will punish all the tribe. Go, Tilligamok! Gather all the warriors and the women and children, the ponies and the tepees, and go quick to your land beyond the Red Hills. The sickness shall leave the camps of the Blackfeet as the red light leaves the heavens. It is even now dying in the north. Look! Is it not true?"

The priest waved the tall symbol toward the north. The chief, raising his awe-struck face, gazed after the motion. Of a truth, the copper hue, so long staining the canopy of the sky, was fading, even as Lois had noticed an hour back.

Fear and conviction played across the features of the Indian.

He gave a short command.

From all around they began, those painted savages, to creep to their feet, hastening as the movement spread among them, and pressing in eager haste, like startled cattle, toward the shelter of the forest. They pushed and hurried and swayed, silent, and in some uncanny awe, and presently the girl stood alone beside the burning wall, the last of that vast mass to face the father as he came across the open space that had been a field of battle so short a time before.

With quick hands Father Tenau himself unbound her. Then he pushed her through the opening, marshaled his brown brothers after her inside the post, and, turning his back upon them, took up his position outside the open way, facing the forest where that horde of wild creatures moved in the obeying of his command, with the crucifix still raised before him and the sun on his pale face.

For a tense and silent hour, while Fort lu Cerne held its breath, this splendid old fighter of the wilderness stood so, forcing those savages to his will by the sheer force of his presence and his unknown power over them.

Not until they had started through the forest with all their great camp, the ponies with rolled tepees dragging the sick and wounded, the squaws with their bundles and papooses, the warriors swarming in awed and sullen obedience, not until the last far sound of their myriad-noised going had vanished in the dead green heart of the great woods, did Father Tenau turn to his people inside the palisade, his worn and tired, tortured people, pale-faced, weary, hopeless, decimated by the sickness, torn by the warring elements of life and death, ridden by trouble and disaster.

The women fell at his feet with tears, kissing his hands and the hem of his garment, giving way to the tremulous passion of reaction, weeping in the very weakness of safety, while the men pressed around in that relief from danger which tightens the lips upon the words of speech.

And after the father, they thought of Lois le Moyne, the girl who had tried to save them. She was not to be seen, and they went to search for her. In every nook some one looked and called, and presently they found her.

Behind the church she stood by that shrunken mound, her hands clenched and her bosom heaving.

When they rushed to her with outstretched hands, sincere in their contrition and their humility, she struck the outstretched hands with swift fierceness, and, turning her back, faced the logs of the church with tear-blind eyes, and why she did not know.

They stood helplessly and looked upon her, feeling the old barrier between them and her, misunderstanding still, misunderstood. And then the good father himself came around the corner of the church. He saw the situation, and again his long-earned knowledge, his perception, and his tact stood him in hand.

He laid a gentle hand on the girl's quivering arm.

"Go," he told his people swiftly. "Make ready to march out of Fort lu Cerne at once. Take only the barest burden of necessary food. Those who are under the illness, yet like to live, put into slings and carry. Those who are far gone—unconscious—leave to the mercy of God. Arm each man and woman. We will take the long trail to Henriette within the hour."

The gentle eyes were firm, yet a sadness that was very old wept in their depths. Father Tenau had seen so many tragedies of the forest and the posts.

None knew better than he the unstable Blackfeet.

He had dominated them once by sheer personal force. Whether or not he might do it again when the medicine men had had time to talk to Tilligamok, he did not know.

Therefore would he get his people as far away as he could before a possible return of the enemy.

With awed faces they fled at his command to gather their loved ones, their arms, and their equipments. And Fa-

ther Tenau turned for one hasty moment to Lois.

"My daughter," he said; "my daughter."

She did not speak, but her heart leaped at the tender word.

The old priest stood for a space, letting her gain her lost control. Then he turned away to the hurrying post.

"Come, Lois," he said; "there is much to do." And with instant obedience the girl turned and followed him.

There a stern task awaited the good father. It needed but scant time for that remnant of the populace of Fort lu Cerne to be ready for the trail. Already France Thebau, Palo le Roc, and Henri Corlier were distributing to all rifles and ammunition; already Maren, and Marie, and weak Marcel were marshaling the women into order, while others of the men made slings of blankets warped between long poles for the carrying of the sick. Haste bustled in every quarter, but capable, well-ordered haste, that soon brought all things into readiness. It was past noon, but Father Tenau allowed no time for a meal. They must go without food that day until night found them some distance away from desolate Lu Cerne. If the Indians should return, the inevitable sack of the post would keep them some hours at least.

So, within the hour, stood ready a long column, formed in marching order down the main way of the settlement, its men white-faced and gaunt, its women weeping over its graves, with the factor going here and there thinking of the last things, apportioning the strongest to carry the slings, evening the burdens, adding to his own a bit here and a bit there from some weaker member until with even his great strength he all but staggered under the load.

At length, with the factor behind his people, that he might be the last to march out of fallen Lu Cerne, Father Tenau at the column's head, and his silent monks marching at each side, bearing much of its burden, the word was given, and that little band moved forward, as pathetic a thing as ever crept back to the ways of civilization from the merciless hands of the unconquered wilderness.

Palo le Roc unbarred the big gate, standing aside as the line passed out, and his grave eyes fell with anguish on the face of Tessa looking up from her sling with his new-born babe on her breast. Truly life was demanding much of this people of the far places.

As the head of the column entered the aisle of the forest, Father Tenau lifted his old voice in song. It was a brave chant of hope and victory, and the brown brothers took it up along the line. It drowned the weeping of the women, and lifted the heads of the men, and it was their best protection.

Slowly they passed the portals of the post, two by two, and among those last to step beneath its giant beam were Marcel Roque, the bravery of her heart already shining on her face, and Lois le Moyne carrying in her arms the child.

Last of the line was McConnel, some time factor of Fort lu Cerne, grim and slow, who turned back at the very last, and swept his eyes across the deserted settlement with a pathos in their depths which touched the heart of Palo le Roc so that he moved ahead that none might witness that farewell.

As the factor reached out to swing shut the useless great gate, with its bravely studded breast, there was a sudden, sharp report of a rifle from the edge of the forest, and the man spun round, flung up the outstretched hand, and dropped heavily.

At that shot every head turned, every tight-drawn nerve jumped with fear, but swiftest of all the girl, Lois, had whirled and seen it all. The blood drained out of her cheeks, leaving them wan and white, and a strange expression settled in her eyes. Without a word, she handed the child to Marcel, stepped out of the line, and bent above him—McConnel. Under her hand the heart still beat in his breast. A stentorian command from Father Tenau kept the wavering line in formation while he came hurrying back along it.

Lois straightened up and faced him.

The priest knelt, examined the body, and rose firmly to his feet. He looked into the face of the girl, and saw a thing which set his own. Here he wasted no persuasion.

"My daughter," he said sternly, "get into line—move on!" he cried ahead.

But Lois did not move.

She stood above McConnel, and, strangely enough, her eyes went to the face of Pierre Vernaise beside the litter of little Jaqua just turned into the trail.

"I command you, Lois le Moyne," said Father Tenau grimly, "to get into that column, in the name of Holy Church." Then she looked into his poor face, drawn with pity and stern resolve, and made her answer.

"No, father," she said; "I will not."

And every soul that heard the words knew that they were final, that she had defied the church as she had ever defied life, that still to the very end she was beyond the law.

And Father Tenau knew it. He wasted no more time. Ever the serving of the many in his hard creed of kindness.

So he lifted the crucifix once more, and over her bowed head pronounced a benediction. Then he gave his final command and walked sadly forward as the column wound into the opening. As the last turn hid the end, Marcel, blinded by her tears, looked back.

There by the post of the great gate she stood, the only conscious living being left behind, since France Thebau had quietly stuck his knife into the half-dead Blackfoot he found in the fringe of the woods whence had come that shot, the tall girl with her lifted face where warred the complex feelings of her nature, alone in the wilderness, and at her feet the man whom she had ruined even as he had ruined her, while beyond her spread the echoing desolation of the deserted settlement, whose people were gone like the chaff in the wind, whose doors stood open with none to enter, and whose dead lay unburied with naught between them and the pitiless sky but the slender hands of this lone young girl.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE COMPELLING POWER.

Thus destruction set its seal upon the once flourishing post of Fort lu Cerne.

When Lois turned from the forest way, where the last faint echo of the marching singers' chant had died in the distance, and looked back across it, she met a sight that would have cowed a weaker spirit.

Smoke still ascended from the ruins of the three burned cabins and from the blackened opening in the wall. On every side sudden, unspeakable loneliness yawned from the open doors and windows, the signs of hasty flight lay everywhere. She alone of all human things remained, defying the wilderness and all it stood for, once again casting as a challenge to fate that life she so little valued, and behind it all lay that unconscious thing within her, forcing her irresistibly to each step in the strange weaving of her destiny, compelling her to a service which galled her very soul.

With a certain touch, she turned upon its face the unconscious form of the factor and examined it. The Blackfoot's bullet had entered just above the right hip, passing directly across the small of the back, grazing the spine, and coming smartly out above the left hip bone. The heavy body was helpless as a babe's. Without ado, the girl set to practical work. Leaving him where he lay, she went back to headquarters, secured a strong blanket from the storeroom, and returning, rolled him upon it spread flat upon the earth. Then, gathering the two corners together, forming a sort of skid, she started up the road, dragging her burden. He was a heavy man, squarely built and firmly set, and the flesh on his bones was solid, so that it was a heavy task.

Many times she stopped, easing her hands, whose palms burned with the pulling, and by the time she reached the hard-beaten space before the blockhouse beaded sweat stood out on her forehead, trickling into the open neck of her dress. Up the step and over the sill was the hardest strain, for the inert

body would sag and shake down, threatening to slip out of the blanket until she tied the lower ends.

Once within the big room, she spread a pallet from the furs in the corner, and rolled him out upon it. Then she bared the wounds, which bled sluggishly, and bathed them with water from the hogsheads, finally tearing out the sleeve of her old print gown for compresses, a fresh wound needing an old, washed fabric, and binding them in place with a long, linen towel found in McConnel's little living room.

Not a sign of consciousness lit up her face as she worked, touching this man's body as impartially as though he had been a child that was in need of help.

This done, she bathed the smoke and grime from his face, dampened the sandy shock of hair for coolness, and leaving him where the first soft wind of many weeks swept through the big room, set about the line of tasks which opened up before her.

First of these was a short journey through the gate in the pine partition that shut into his sanctuary the factor's worn, big desk. A slow crimson wave mounted into the thin cheeks as the girl passed within that inclosure.

Memory went swiftly back to a night in the early spring, a night which had begun with the soft awakening of a noble impulse within her breast, a tender thing, new and sweet and wonderful—to end in black disgrace, in misunderstanding, and accusation which seared to baleful ruins that wonderful new emotion, even in the unbearable ignominy of the guardhouse.

That memory scorched her yet like fire.

Beyond the desk, all but hidden by the protruding chink in the lower log, a small iron ring nestled against the wall. Unhesitatingly she laid hold and lifted it. With unused creakings, a small portion of the rude floor rose under her hand. Beneath yawned a dark opening—an underground vault for possible use in warfare. Lois knew all about it. She laid the door back on the floor, and, rising, went to the storeroom.

From here she returned presently, with her arms full of provisions, which she laid at the edge of the opening, going and coming until the pile grew waist high. Then she let herself down in the darkness, and, reaching out, began to store away the pile at the edge of the hold. She, too, knew the nature of the red man, knew that as surely as the sun shone scouts would return to peep and pry, and that when they carried to Tilligamok word of the post's desertion he would come back with his warriors to sack and pillage.

So she made trip after trip to the storeroom, working hard and fast, for she saw ahead a long way, providing, always, that soul and body be left together.

Meal and sugar and tea, salt and beans she carried to cache in the hidden hold, and with each trip grew stronger within her the spirit of defiant force.

Never once did she glance at the unconscious form on the pallet of furs, but presently, as she entered the big room with laden arms, something drew her look toward him, a feeling that compelled her, a strange, resistless force.

The factor's stern blue glance was leveled upon her with questioning wonder. He saw the burden of her arms.

"Lois le Moyne, what do you here?" he demanded sharply.

In that first moment of returning reason the later events were swept from his memory. He was once again the factor, custodian of headquarters, server of his company, and here was this girl, this thief, once more within the sacred hold of that company, still seeking its harm.

He started to rise in his sudden anger, but fell back upon the pallet with a look of dumb horror and unspeakable amaze spreading slowly across his features. Not a muscle had obeyed his will below his hips. The sturdy limbs in their ragged moccasins and dust-grimed leggings stretched heavily upon

the skins, inert, deadly in their weight, without sensation. As the man became conscious of this, he pushed himself up to a sitting posture, and gazed at them in wonder and unbelief. With all his strength, he tried to move one foot.

The girl, watching him with narrowed lids, the old fury surging in her at his quick suspicion, saw the red blood purple his face, the veins stand out on his short, strong neck with the magnitude of the effort. For a breathless time he struggled wildly, with all his great strength, in the doubled power of sudden fear struggled as he had never struggled in all his strenuous life for the small conquest of his own body, struggled and strained and fought—and then, of a sudden, stopped. Stopped and dropped his hands on the floor beside him, and lifted his eyes out the open door to where thin spirals of smoke went up to the cloudless sky, and the deserted post lay peacefully in the sun.

Memory had flashed back to his mind, dazed by its temporary eclipse, and he saw the past few days, the fight, everything up to that moment when he had reached out to close the great gate on the forsaken settlement, and felt the sudden shock which preceded oblivion. But there he faced a blank.

Where was the column? How came he back in the post? Why was the strange girl, Lois le Moyne, going across the big room with the company stores in her arms? His slow wits floundered here.

He turned to her for answer, standing where his gaze had arrested her, and the puzzled scowl drew in his forehead.

"What does it mean?" he asked bluntly.

But with his return to consciousness, the impersonal element had faded from the situation. This was again McConnel, factor of Fort lu Cerne, grim and hard in his narrow creed of zeal, the man who had stricken in its one vulnerable spot her meager life, dragged her high pride in the dust, dishonored her in the face of the populace she had ever scorned, her one implacable enemy, and she raised her head and walked away without reply.

She laid her burden at the hold's edge, and passed back along the room and out.

McConnel, helpless on the floor, gazed after her with pitiable incomprehension.

It was never for him, with his heavy mind, his straight reasoning, and his simple strength to read the swiftly changing soul, the many-sided spirit of mystery which drove to such widely separated points of action the girl whose body was worn with its resistless command. Now again she was obeying that spirit which, though it was facing annihilation for this man, yet could not bear his presence.

There was work outside headquarters—work that waited in those deserted cabins, ghastly work, terrible in its pathos—and she went wearily at it.

Once more she took up a blanket, and in the silent heat of the burning afternoon, alone and wishing for no help, she dragged, one by one to the parched and yawning graves beside the church, those whose own had been forced to desert them in the hard crisis of existence.

But first of all, and with most tenderness, be it said of her, she served all that remained of Richard Sylvester, sliding the stiffened form from its blanket to the padded bottom with more gentle slowness than she wasted on the rest, and filling as softly as she could the shallow mound above him.

He had loved her, and done her service. To the last she paid her debt.

When she had finished the last mound, and stood up from her labor, the sun was just falling, like a great, burnished shield, below the dark rim of the forest.

She knelt beside her work, and with her clasped hands hanging before her, lifted her weary face in the soft shadows of the coming twilight.

Aloud, and with infinite pathos, she repeated the stately service, her only auditors a loon trailing low across the post, and that great infinitude bending above her in its unmatched beauty of delicate lights.

As she returned to the blockhouse in the silver and lilac of the evening, she swept the aching desolation of the forsaken post with eyes too tired for sorrow.

Within, the man lay on the pallet of skins, silent in the deepening dusk.

He did not speak again. What Angus McConnel had read of a possible future in those solitary hours had been so bitter that he had no heart for speech, even though it had been another than Lois le Moyne who brewed the steaming cup on the stove in his little room, and presently held it to his lips in the darkness, silent herself, as sullen and at war with life as he.

In the shadows of that night, one more task waited the hands of Lois le Moyne. In the hidden hole she placed a pile of the H. B. Company's furs to near the level of the floor, and, dragging the helpless form of the factor through the little gate whence he had entered so often in the pride of his life, laid him along the edge, and gently rolled him down on the couch—a couch as soft and grateful as the bed of a king. The girl herself slipped down beside the pile, carefully lowered the heavy door, and, going to a single skin in a corner of the vault, threw herself down in a bodily exhaustion so great that the world and all it held of tragedy, of wrong and passion, and of misplaced love, were from that moment forgotten in a dreamless sleep.

Noise awoke her on the heavy floor above, feet that slipped and whispered in their deerskin moccasins, blows that spoke of falling thing and the work of plunder. The Blackfeet had come back for pillage, as she had known they would.

For two tense hours the pounding and dragging, the footsteps, and the shouts kept up their bedlam in the big room and the storeroom, gradually lessening as one by one and two by two the warriors staggered away loaded to the skies on back and shoulder with all they could carry from the stores. It took them a full hour to depart entirely, with the uneasy return of this and that one more greedy than the rest to scan the sacked and emptied place for some treasure overlooked, and for another hour Lois lay in the dark and listened.

She had heard no sound from the pile of skins beneath the trap, not the slightest rustle of a movement, and during that tense and waiting hour a strange fear grew in her bosom, gripping her throat.

Presently she crept from her corner, feeling cautiously along the pile, and, putting up her hands, slowly lifted the door above. With the first small rift of light, her eyes sought swiftly, not the space beyond, but the silent burden on the rude couch. They looked directly into the level eyes of McConnel, and for that one instant they were off their guard—eager, fearful, yearning.

Then the old enmity swept back, and she turned, pushing up the door to its full width, clambering out into the flooding light of the morning to stare around the familiar place. Chaos reigned supreme. Every nook and corner had been ransacked. Over the floor were scattered the papers from the open drawers of the desk, every box and bale had been upturned, and in the far corner of the open space before the great fireplace where had been piled those hastily gathered gods of the deserted households in that first flight to headquarters, lay a heterogeneous mass of scattered things where they had been kicked apart, and such things taken as pleased the fancy of the marauders.

Lois remembered that she had noticed among them a flaxen-haired doll brought from Henriette, sad keepsake of a child asleep beside the church whose mother could not give it up, and a carved ivory crucifix belonging to Netta Baupre.

These were gone, along with Marie Mercier's brass candlesticks, while there remained the little iron pot of the Cree doctress, an old silver cup from across seas, and, half hidden by a gaudy garment prized of some young girl, the worn little box with its clasp and hinges, the "chest" of Simple John.

The girl looked carefully around, out the open door, up and down among the

cabins, and, satisfied that now indeed they were deserted, set about her business of existence.

In the storeroom, blank emptiness greeted her inquiry. Not a thing had been left of all the stores of the post. Tilligamok must have sent a swarm of carriers, indeed. Broken boxes and torn papers, scattered cases and packing littered the floors and counters. The place was swept clean.

From here her search extended out among the cabins.

Whatever of provisions there had been left, she would gather in to her own small store. But here again the hand of the noble red man had been thrust in its thieving. The cabins were as clean as the blockhouse.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SERVICE OF UNWILLING HANDS.

So Lois returned to the big, echoing place in the soft gold of that day in the late summer, and took up her most peculiar service.

With the aid of a strong plank laid across a chair and the braced-up trapdoor, she rigged a sling whereby McConnel might drag his helpless limbs up to the level of the floor, and with her shoulder beneath his knees she rolled him out into the blessed light, closed down the door, spread a wide bed of skins and the blankets she had stored, and ensconced him in what comfort she could within his own office whose commanding had been his great achievement.

When she straightened from the labor, her face was flushed beneath its pallid thinness, her lips were shut, and resentment flaunted in her eyes. Yet she moved all day in the ceaseless work of making habitable the empty place, straightening the disorder, heaping in a pile the scattered goods in the far corner, and gathering up the papers to put them back in the desk.

All day the broken man on the pallet stared at the beams without speech, and within the blue depths of his eyes the puzzled wonder at the ways of fate had given place to such a mighty despair that the heavy face with its square-set jaw was a thing for pity.

In the little living room, the girl set her hand to the cooking. Here she had stood and looked around, taking in with a keen glance the simple evidence of this man's way of life—the bare furnishings, the cleanliness, the few worn books on the shelf. They were strangers to her, those books, and her fingers itched to touch them. They were not like anything she knew, odd volumes in foreign bindings, whose possession had been the pride of that merry Scotch-Irishman who had left his mark on the wilderness in this Angus McConnel, loyal servant of the H. B. Company, sometime factor of the post of Fort lu Cerne.

They bore no likeness to those books which Father Tenau had given her since the far day when he taught her her letters, a frowning, eager, whimsical child, whose unfolding had been a delight to the old priest, but whose strange nature had drawn back from him when he could teach her no more.

So Lois read a little of the factor's life from the place where he had lived, and her fingers trembled when she took up his utensils to cook his food for him.

No words passed between them when she served him his meal, nor when she quietly dressed the small wound in either side; though when she rose and went away his eyes followed her, uncomprehending and at loss.

It was a queer bit of life that now had its beginning in the forsaken post, between these two, each of whom had played so harsh a part in the existence of the other.

Lois, burning with scorching shame at her servitude, yet powerless beneath its imperious demand, spent the days in an attendance meager as she could make it, yet methodically sufficient. To every need of the silent figure on the pallet she gave punctilious heed, caring for the stricken body tirelessly, though to the spirit of the man within that body she was blind and deaf and dumb.

Never a word did her tight lips utter, never did her eyes encounter his in those short and glorious days that be-

gan to hang their banners of beauty around the stockade. With the quick change of seasons habitual to the Ragged-Lands, the pitiless heat began to give way as the copper hue died in the north, and within three days the little winds took on a refreshing coolness that spoke of autumn. At the end of the first week there came a night when the first breath of frost came out of the north, and what of the foliage was left with sufficient life blushed faintly beneath its touch. The feel of fall was in the air, and Lois, sitting in the big door, looked out across the loneliness and wondered.

Was it possible that but a matter of days back in the past there had been the bustle and feverish work of a settlement of human beings surging within that desolate circle? Utter silence and hushed waiting made the whisper of her moccasins on the blockhouse floor an appalling sound. Not a living thing but one had the Blackfeet left—a starved, forgotten kitten, one of the progeny of the only feline of the post, a striped beauty which Palo le Roc had brought with much pains from Henriette the year before for Tessa. All else had the maurauders taken, along with the lean bunch of cattle belonging to the company. This pitiful thing had crept timorously after Lois, crying in fear, for there was not about the girl that winsome thing which speaks to animals the wordless language of love, and followed her to the big room from sheer need. But even the kitten had wronged her, for after her first grudging welcome of unfamiliarity she gathered the frail thing in her arms and fondled it. Now it crept in her lap as she sat on the worn sill, and sang a little song of cheer that somehow soothed the fretted soul within her.

With the passing days, Angus McConnel began to find what liberty he was to be accorded at the hand of Destiny. The strength still remained to its full in his arms and hands and the whole upper part of his body, but from that chance wound above the hips downward all life had fled, it seemed. A dragging progress, slow and torturous, to the foot of the big desk was his utmost accomplishment, and here he laid his head against its face, being alone, and continued the fight within, the savage battle that would be neither lost nor won.

Silence held unbroken sway within headquarters, silence tempered on one side with bitter feeling, on the other with slow, uneasy searching for a reason, illumined by doubt that had but now awakened, and which began to fill the mind of the factor with anxiety. Which thing was, in these days, his greatest blessing insomuch as it put aside for a season the despair of his soul and body, and by the time the process had worked itself out he had other food for thought.

Lois almost forgot the sound of her own voice, speaking only when the kitten had followed her out among the cabins on some quest of wood for the gigantic fireplace, for the soft warmth of the short season of blue haze and dreams had given sudden place to frost of nights, and the girl closed the big door and made the pallet of skins before the cheerful hearth. Cold winds began to shriek down from the north, tearing the faded leaves from the crowding giants of the forest and hurling them in floating billows across the palisade, to sweep and eddy around the empty cabins and pile in the unused doorways.

King Winter was sending his heralds before his face to shout his coming, and already the few birds had flown to the south. In the Ragged Lands to the northeast the very spirit of the dead year held carnival in the racing winds howling across the shaking flats, the hurrying gray clouds that were mirrored in the bottomless black pools clinging to the edges of the quivering, sun-baked stretches, in the fear-haunted desolation.

Far to the northwest, the Crees had gone into their winter camps of banked tepees, save here and there a runner going on some errand to the friendly Ojibways or the posts of the H. B. Company southward, but runner and courier avoided as the plague the sacked

and pestilence-cleared post of Fort lu Cerne.

So the girl and the man lived on their lives in which there was no good. Day by day, Lois went in search of wood for the fire, and she began to cook their food by the hearth that she might not make two fires. And presently she went a little way into the forest, and set a trap that she had hidden with the provisions in the hold. When she visited it a day later there was naught but a snarling wolf, which she shot and left lying, not even taking the trouble to pelt, and set the trap in another place. She returned to the blockhouse with the old frown between her brows, for on the day preceding she had taken stock of the treasure of the cache, and it had spoken a new word to her.

It was a smaller store than she had thought, an appallingly smaller store, and when she came up from its inspection, her glance had traveled with swift unconsciousness to the quiet figure on the fur bed.

She had used prodigally of the provisions in an unacknowledged anxiety to feed him back to strength, not counting the cost, and now she wished bitterly that she had left the dead unburied that last day, to serve the living better.

She had thought vaguely of the chance coming of trappers in the future, and later of those who should come for their winter's debt at Fort lu Cerne, but news travels swiftly in the wilderness, and already the lone trappers and hunters from the upper regions were going into the far new post beyond, while those in the nearer reaches had made for Henriette. None visited the deserted place.

So the girl began to husband the stores in the hold. Faithfully she tended the trap, going farther and farther into the forest, but ill luck seemed to follow her. The beasts, like the humans, avoided the vicinity.

Day by day she spent out of doors, going around the post gathering wood, looking into this cabin and that, closing the useless doors and windows, walking here and there, her skirts and the loose wisps of her hair blowing in the wind, which did not cease, and ever the kitten followed, frisking among the dead leaves, chasing them as they whirled down the open road. And after a while she set to work to rebuild the burned space in the stockade. It was but the matter of a whim, since the building was but a spider web of such poles as she could handle, yet it healed the gaping wound in the wall, and served to keep her out of the lonely room at headquarters and the presence of him who spent the long hours looking into the fire, or crawling painfully a little way and back to the pallet again.

Thus wore on the wild season of the fall, with silence and shrieking wind, one indicative of the human mood, warring, bitter, unforgiving, the other of the nature mood, reveling, hilarious, triumphant. The North was waking to its time of power. Down from the distant white circles of its mystic keep on every howling blast there rioted suggestions of its unmeasured forces waiting the moment to swoop down upon the land and do to the finest limit the cruelty of its will. To Lois the feeling of impending battle with the elements was as the smell of smoke to the war horse. It stirred to life some spark of joy amid the ashes of humiliation in her sullen soul. She sometimes opened the great gate and stood in the opening with her face lifted toward the north, drinking in the message of the fantastic blasts that tore and flirted by.

It seemed to her at such moments that they gave an answer to the unquiet questioning, a strong and mighty answer infinitely better than she had thought to find at the altar of the Blackfeet god, more fitting, finished, and supreme.

She was kin to the wild wind herself, to the Spirit of the North that crouched and threatened beyond the gray horizon, to all things untrammeled and whimsical, which found no place among the humans by reason of their mystery.

Small, indeed, had been the place that she had found among her kind, a place that, since the passing of one year with its searing touch, had vanished utterly.

Sullen, fighting still against an unseen foe, weary, her very spirit cried out for the end—the end that was not yet, but which beckoned with sedate and fitting gesture from that North which ever spoke to her, the great and warring North whose spawn, she said to her own soul, she was.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SINLESS THIEF OF FORT LU CERNE.

Angus McConnell had lain all day before the fireplace, staring into the flames that had leaped under fresh fuel at the noon meal, and fallen a little lower with each succeeding hour. Now the day and the flames were alike nearly gone. Through the window behind the big desk from whose vantage he had fired upon the crowd at the guardhouse door that spring day, there still came a dreary light from the gray skies, but within the big room there were shadows and darkened corners. Unspeakably lonely, charged with all eerie feelings, the forsaken place was fit only for bats and spirits.

To even the practical, heavy-souled man on the floor, it bore a voice of desolation. Over and over he had traversed in thought every path and byway of the web of mistakes and happenings which had landed him here, at the edge of winter, in the empty seat of his authority, broken, helpless, his manhood shattered into nothing, a heavy burden on the shoulders of one who, less than all others in the world, should have stayed by him—the one of all his people upon whom he had visited his judgment most harshly.

And why had she chosen to stay by him?

Frowningly he stared into the fire and pondered, as he had pondered all through the lonesome hours, the lonesome days, and sometimes the lonesome nights, when the ceaseless gnawing of the growing doubts would not let him sleep.

Why had this strange girl stayed by him, wounded unto death and helpless, her open enemy, her veritable foe in his zeal for right and justice as he saw it, when all those others had deemed him too great a risk to even take him for a way upon the trail, risking her all to save his life.

It was too great a problem for his plodding wits, and he shook his head upon its pillow of rolled skins. The gray light faded from the window, and a howling dusk closed down upon the wilderness. The fire burned lower, and at last the backlog fell in two, sending up a flurry of sparks and a resurrection of flames that leaped in short-lived play.

Suddenly he realized that it was night and the girl was not come in. The kitten cried without the closed door, its pitiful wail flying away on the splitting wind, and with a peculiar tightening at his heart the man raised himself on his hands and listened. There was no human sound in the riot of the wind outside.

As he listened, an unusual fear took hold upon him. Why did she not come? What had happened to her? She was as much a woodsman as any man born in the forest, and knew its ways and its dangers, yet for the first time there seemed to come to him a sense of her womanhood, an odd, awakened sense, and fear took hold upon him.

Some compelling force within him prompted him to lift his voice and call her, yet in the act he faltered, stopped.

What word should he call her?

He waited again, listening to the kitten and the night, fearful, filled with an unnamable dreariness, looking at the shadows by the door. Then——

"Lois le Moyne!" he cried above the wind, his voice startling him with its strangeness. "Lois le Moyne!"

As if in answer to his call, the kitten ran out into the night, its voice growing fainter as it was swallowed up in the blast, and presently the door opened, and the girl came into the dusky room, the kitten crying and frisking at her feet. In one hand she carried a small animal. As she passed through the faint aura of light around the hearth, McConnel saw that it was a snowshoe rabbit. With a wonderful relief, he lay down upon the bed. She had been, he

knew now, on some quest of traps, and he wondered about the reason—and winter was not far behind the howling wind, as attest the snowshoe rabbit.

Lois came and piled wood upon the fire dogs, swung the crane that she had brought from Marcel's cabin across the flames which merrily chased back to the dimmest corners the encroaching shadows, and spitted the game to bake.

Presently she served him such a repast as a king might envy of the crackling, browned flesh, of tea and ash cakes, eating her own portion in silence as she sat on a stool by the warm hearth.

McConnel looked at her with a peculiar interest. Presently, when she had carried away to the room beyond the tin plates and cups, and was once more settled upon the stool with the kitten in her lap and her eyes on the flames, the man spoke, for the first time in all these days:

"Lois le Moyne, why did you stay by me when I fell at the great gate?"

As if a hand had struck at her out of the shadows behind, the girl sprang to her feet, one hand at her throat, the other clenched at her side. For one shaken moment, her eyes leaped squarely to his, and she stood at loss. Then the little line appeared at the corners of the flickering nostrils, and the hand at her throat dropped.

"No business of yours, m'sieu—the factor that was!" she said bitterly, and dropped back upon the stool. The old rage was upon her with his startling question, so sharp in its probing, so unconscious in its slow and puzzled search for truths and reasons.

McConnel turned his worried eyes to the fire—those sharp eyes that could gauge men after a manner, but could read no jot nor tittle of a woman, and after a while, with a sigh, he took his tired mind from the questions which seemed no nearer of solution than ever.

To one who has spent a long day pondering and watching the fire, one who can neither walk the floors nor look from its windows, that process is like to lose interest by night, the more so when one as puzzling and as much of a vague reproach as was this girl to McConnel sits in silent anger at the hearth.

Of a sudden a restless desire to get away from it all took possession of the man. He lifted himself on an elbow and looked around the room for something of another interest, and his eyes fell on the neat pile of those pitifully devastated treasures in the far corner. He would investigate them. That would be a diversion. So he started on his slow way, oblivious of the sight he presented, crawling like an animal with a broken back—slowly, painfully, pitiably. He had set his mind on that pile in the corner. Therefore he would reach it—in time, in his own time. All movement was painful, yet not so much so now as at the beginning. He resolutely took his mind off the girl and the stinging words of her answer. It had gone deep, that cut—"The factor that was."

Slowly, a hand reach at a time, he crept—crept terribly to one watching—toward the little mecca in the corner. Twice he stopped and rested. He had never known how long was that big room which he had trod so often with the swing of strength. Now it was a vast stretch of country to him. He was going very slowly, and was near the corner, when there was a rush of feet behind, and Lois flashed before him.

"What—what is it, m'sieu?" she choked. "What is it that you want?"

McConnel looked up, amazed.

"Something to look at from the pile," he said simply. "Something to look at—the little box, I guess—the box with brass hinges."

"Go back; I will bring it."

Wondering, the factor that was went slowly back to his island of the fur bed, while the girl stood looking down. She did not watch that progress.

When the ceasing of the swish of his garments on the floor told her it was done, she picked up the little chest of Simple John, and carried it to McConnel, who took it in his hands.

He recognized it then. Once he had seen the idiot sitting on the step of his cabin with this worn box on his knees, looking at some treasures it contained.

He held it a moment, and deep in his

nature some feeling of loyalty to the vague soul which had prized it suggested that he set it unopened upon the coals.

But quick on its heels came a counter impulse which seemed to say that it was right, eminently right, that he should open it.

He looked long at it, examining its smoothly fitted joinings, and noting its peculiar make, squat, solid, roomy, deciding that it was fashioned in some land across the seas, and by a careful hand. Upon the shiny brass of the hinges and the clasp there were faint etchings, in each instance the wings of a tiny windmill.

Some forbear of the mindless waif had, doubtless, come from Holland.

For a long time the man held the little chest and pondered, wondering as to its history and what pitiful treasures it might contain, and also its weight, for it was very heavy. He set it down beside him, and thought a moment of Simple John—vague, gentle spirit of the woods and winds.

Presently, with a reverent touch, he set his hand to the clasp and raised the lid. As he did so a strange thrill stirred him, as of some vast portent, a feeling that he stepped into the presence of some mighty truth.

Some faintly glimmering superstition of the Scottish hills behind his own life stopped his hand a moment, but once again the impelling sense of right urged him on. He looked down upon the idiot's store of wealth.

Packed with neat precision, filling every half inch of its space, there lay a quaint assortment of widely differing articles. Rolled tightly across one end was a small packet of some black fabric. McConnel lifted it and shook it out—the weblike length of a scarf of Spanish lace. From its folds there fell upon the pallet a bunch of gaudy artificial roses entwined with tinsel such as flaunt a little hour in the bull rings of the South, and they were streaked with some dark stain. Awed wonder held still the breath in McConnel's throat. A woman, and gallant deeds, and Simple John!

Beside these lay an English almanac with some foreign figures marked in ink across its margin, and next, packed between an ancient German Bible with a golden clasp and a heavy knife in a sheath, there lay a wooden sabot of very small dimensions. Across the bottom, written in a prim and stately hand, were these words:

This shoe was worn in her girlhood by
Hedwig Muer,
The most dear and lovely wife of Johan
Blaatz.

Spread beneath was a silken flag, whose emblems McConnel did not know, and last thing upon it lay a buckled leather wrist guard of such huge size that he who wore it must have been a mighty man. It was black and worn with service.

Musing, the factor held it for a moment. In every keepsake save the flag and the almanac, spoke some personal remembrance. Perhaps some time in his unknown life, when the mind of him was that of a man, Simple John had had loves and friendships.

So, musing still, at last he laid down the trinket, and was about to put back the contents of the chest when some thought to see if the folded flag was all made him lift it up. As its flattened folds came out, McConnel peered beneath. The flag itself was but a bagatelle, only a thickness or two. The bulk was something else. He leaned down to see better its dingy surface, exactly fitting the space it filled. The flames flared up as by intent, and picked out plainly the last keepsake of the idiot who had loved, of all the post, only its factor.

It was the lost book of accounts.

Thus had come, when it was overlate, to the stern tribunal of his mistaken justice, the sinless thief of Fort lu Cerne, and it was not Lois le Moyne.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SCORN OF EMPTY WORDS.

The stupendous meaning of the thing flared before the man like a light from Heaven, a light that scorched and burned, that searched to the very ut-

most the reaches of his soul, and laid bare its weaknesses, its failures, and its sins.

He hung stupidly over the open chest with its scattered contents, the gaudy emblem still lifted in his raised hand, staring like one bereft of reason at the familiar volume.

Outside, the wind tore at the squat structure, and swept southward in majestic wrath, and hurled the dead leaves flittering against the panes.

On the hearth the flames leaped and crackled, and now and then a coal dropped with its cloud of sparks, and still McConnel leaned on one hand and made no sound.

So long did the silence hold, the utter, breathless silence, that something in its quality touched the girl glowering at the fire with raging eyes in which a deadly sickness of some other emotion struggled for mastery, and turned her of a sudden to look at him. The storming eyes dilated with a leaping fear.

The face of the man was ashen, the straight lips had fallen apart in helplessness, the eyes were wild. For one brief space she thought he had gone mad. Then her quick wits took in the box and the direction of his gaze, and she knew it was something he beheld. With one swift spring, she caught his shoulder, shaking him as one does a sleeper who walks.

"M'sieu!" she cried sharply. "M'sieu!"

The upraised hand fell slowly. Slowly, with an effort, he raised his eyes, still stupid with concentration. His lips opened without sound. Then he said hoarsely:

"The book—I have found—the book—of—accounts!"

Lois le Moyne dropped her hand from his shoulder and stood up. She drew her body to its full height, and lifted her head. She felt as if the breath was gone from her lungs, and the shadowy room swam before her sight.

Without a word, she went from him to the little room beyond, and all the short journey her heart seemed bursting. She did not look back, but left him to face the night with his discovery.

And what that night held for the man—strong, earnest, plodding, with his simple sense of right and justice, his stern uprightness, and his crumbling structure of self-faith—none would ever know.

When morning came she found him before the dead hearth, lying amid the scattered trinkets, with his head fallen forward on his crossed arms, where sleep had overtaken him at last, and the lines in his face were deep and cruel.

That day he lay face down upon his bed, and would not eat. He shook his head when Lois offered food, and she, setting it down beside him, found it untouched when she came in from out of doors.

Only the kitten felt any touch of joy, frisking playfully about and striving to win to a tiny brightness these dreary mortals.

Surely, thought the girl, this thing Life was the sorriest tangle of all created things. Never would the crossed threads come straight—nowhere was there an end of peace.

When night again found Lois upon her accustomed stool by the leaping fire, McConnel lifted his haggard features and looked at her.

Her glance fell to the kitten at her feet—sullenly, resentfully, with some whimsical anger. But she thrilled despite herself when he spoke.

"Lois le Moyne," he said steadily, "I have done you a great wrong—it has been the heaviest sin of my life—and I ask you before God to forgive it."

Beneath his glance, humble, suffering, untempered with self-mercy, she felt the hot blood surge upward to the temples.

"To those others whom I unjustly punished in my hardness I cannot make amends, for, Heaven help me, they are dead! But to you I would acknowledge my sin, and do what there is left of right. I would have your words of pardon, and then that you go and leave me before the snows come down."

He waited—slow, heavy man—with pathetic eagerness for her answer.

And in a flash of the old lawless spirit of vengeful fury it came, came with a rush of biting words, while the wind shrieked outside no whit more bitter and tumultuous.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" she cried, springing to her feet. "Forgive! Forgive that spring, the dragging down the main way—the hand of the law that threw me in where the men talked! Forgive the guardhouse and the summer, the shame and the whispers? Mercy of God! The factor that was is modest in his demands!"

For a moment she stood quivering—opening her lips for more, and of a sudden closed them upon the flaying tongue, dropped back upon the stool, and was silent.

At every word the man, waiting, raised on his hands, shrank and cowered as if from a stinging stroke. The anguish of his eyes deepened with each bald truth, and when she ceased he sank down on the pallet.

After a while, he said what seemed like to be the last word between them:

"There remains no more. To-morrow you will start for Henriette."

Instantly she flared reply:

"It is not for you to command in Fort lu Cerne. I stay. But I want no words, empty as the flying wind."

To the other things that went to form her towering score against this man had been added, at the last, colossal scorn. Never while life was in her body would she have asked for pardon of a foe, no matter what of wrong lay between them of her making. As incomprehensible to her as she to him was that alien sense of justice which could so humble him to the seeking of peace before the end.

To her hatred of him was added contempt.

While this thing passed between the man and woman inside the blockhouse another was happening without.

Above the vast bed of the tossing top of the forest the shrieking wind stayed its steps a moment here and there, as if listening for some sound from out the inky north, some faint forerunner of a coming Presence, to tear away again, and again to stop and listen. And presently it ceases its riot of wildness, breaking forth for a last fling, to settle quietly, to stand aside as it were, while its Master passed across the world. The little sound had come out of the north, a soft little sound, like the swish of silk adown the steps of a marble throne, a sound that began to whisper to the naked trees, to swish and whisper into every unguarded way of the forest, until all the vast aisles of the great cathedral of the wilderness sang and rustled with its tiny voice, a low, fine voice—small, insistent, all-pervading.

The King was passing down upon the world. Winter had come in the Ragged Lands.

When Lois roused out of herself by the new note in the voice of the elements with the quickness of the woodsman, raised her eyes to the window beyond the sanctuary, the night was white against the pane.

The Long Snows had arrived.

Dawn of day found the world as white as the gates of heaven, a silver veil hiding it from any sight but the nearest, and piercing cold fulfilling the promise of the wind. Against the cabins the falling flakes were already piling at the north, the windows were half covered, and the trees without the wall were hoary monsters of the forest. Lois, wrapped in a man's blanket coat, its bars bright across her shoulders, went early to the place where she had set the trap. She dug it out from its bed of snow, still set and empty.

Verily luck of the world was against her.

All that day the snow fell steadily, and the next and the next, piling up and up, softening the outlines of all unsightly things until Fort lu Cerne hid its gaunt skeleton beneath the mantle of royal ermine.

For another day the little flakes rustled through the bare branches of the trees, and then they ceased. It was indeed a new world that confronted the lonely two in the blockhouse, a white world of mystery and silence, a silence so deep that one instinctively paused

and listened for the sound that seemed ever on the point of breaking out of the illimitable stretches of space.

To the girl standing on the step before the closed door of headquarters, it brought a somber sense of peace, that great white silence, a peace that seemed the end of many things, that beckoned from the future wherein there was no good, and offered rest from the surging soul which drove and mastered her. Verily she was glad of the snows.

During the week that followed, Lois ate lightly herself of the provisions in the hold, though those portions served out to McConnel were still unstinted. It was that week which saw the death of her last hope of succor from the outside. She began to realize that no trapper would come to Fort lu Cerne until spring, and the power of the H. B. Company had reinstated it, swept and garnished and garrisoned. Pictures began to form in the leaping flames as she scowled at them in the long evenings, pictures which had to do with that constantly diminishing small store beneath the trapdoor, with the failing trap outside the wall, and with the long winter, and they two human souls locked in the forsaken post by the relentless hand of the cold. They were pictures heavy with shadows.

Again in a day or two the snow fell, and Lois piled the firedogs high. She did not go out so much now, but busied herself about the empty place, and the man on the floor took to watching her covertly. She was good to watch, this girl with her shining black head, who carried herself like a princess, and it was of a surety the pride of a princess which gloomed from her face. From the depths of his anguish, McConnel began to see her with new eyes. She was innocent, as innocent as the unconscious kitten frisking on the hearth, and yet she had borne in the face of all Lu Cerne the brand of theft pressed to the cringing flesh by his hand—his hand who now lay at her feet a helpless burden, a grave menace of her very life, and she had accepted that burden—nay, had taken it upon herself voluntarily, and in so doing had sacrificed her chance of safety—more, her half name of decency among her kind, which was her last possession.

These new thoughts, coming slowly to his mind, opening in the light of events like a flower, filled McConnel with unbearable pain. He had wronged her unspeakably, yet she served him. He had humbled himself to the earth in his contrition, yet she scorned him.

What he could do he did not know. There seemed no way in which he might atone, even though he had been a man and not this crawling thing of horror which he was. The look of his face these days was a sight for tears, so drawn and pitiable was it.

And on the day when the gray clouds swung low across the post, and the very spirit of desolation was abroad in the aching stillness, the thought found expression in words.

The girl had stood long at the high window that faced the guardhouse, looking out at the frost-bound scene. Presently she pushed up the hair on her brow with a swift and nervous motion, and turned away, crossing out from the office to put more wood on the fire.

As he passed the fur bed, Angus McConnel reached out and caught the skirt of her gown, ragged now, and not warm enough for the winter cold.

His honest eyes were sick with his trouble as he looked into her startled face.

"Lassie," he said thickly, reverting as he did ever in moments of strong feeling to his mother tongue, "lassie, why dinna ye gang?"

But Lois pulled her skirt away, and passed on, vouchsafing no answer.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SECRET OF THE SANCTUARY.

That great North, whose hand is all powerful beyond an imaginary line along the earth, now took hold of the wilderness. As if a mighty, all-covering screw had settled down upon the world, the pressure of the cold advanced. Steadily, resistlessly, unrelentingly, it pressed down upon crea-

tion until it seemed that life could bear no more, and still the cold grew in intensity, in cast-iron hardness, in that gripping strength which takes the live thing and slowly presses out of it the warmth, the flexibility, leaving it at last a rigid element of itself. The riotous wind no longer howled. It was dead still and cold.

Higher and higher, Lois kept the fire leaping on the hearth, while she began what seemed to McConnel a mysterious task. Out from these furs still in the hold, and not needed for his heaped bed before the fire, she brought one day two fine bearskins, and spread them out upon the floor. With her hunting knife, she trimmed them ruthlessly, cutting with deft certainty, until there emerged from each a strip some three feet wide and nearly six in length. These she rolled together and laid aside, setting to upon a soft white deer hide, which she converted into a little pile of thongs which curled down beside her as she worked, and among whose creamy tangle the kitten rolled and kicked with wild delight.

These things being done, there came a time of work for Lois sitting now all the hours of the day as well as those of the evening beside the hearth, sewing deftly, making small slits in the edges of the heavy robes, and lacing them together with the deerhide thongs. When at last, after two days, she was done of the task there lay at her feet a long sack of the length and width of a man, tight and impervious to the biting cold, warm with the softness of long fur inside.

With a reckless hand, she went among the remaining pelts of the company, cutting and lacing, and presently there emerged from her labor rude garments for herself, a shaggy *cuddy sark,* and after a fashion a coatlike thing which was mightily effective. These things she piled in a corner. Then, from the rafters of the little living room beyond, she brought a pair of snowshoes, McConnel's own, stored from the previous year, and unwanted of the Blackfeet, and set to work mending a break in the web of one.

McConnel watched her wonderingly. It was plain she made ready for a journey, and the man hoped earnestly that she was about to act in accordance with his last command. She vouchsafed no word of explanation, and he could but draw his own conclusions. True, it was a terrible trip down the long trail in winter, even when one had dogs and a light sledge, but the girl was strong and of the wisdom of a man, and he knew that she would make it.

With her going toward safety and humankind would go also some of the heavy load of remorse which burdened his shoulders. Of what would become of him he did not think nor care.

Day by day the girl worked on. When the garments were completed, and the great, racket-shaped shoes, made after the Ojibway pattern, were stood, ready, against the wall, she began to make something out of the heaviest strips of bear hide, a peculiar harness, well padded and sewed, and she calmly fitted the thing upon her own shoulders.

The factor watched and frowned.

What now brewed in the mind of this strange creature?

When the harness was finished, she took it and went outside, though seeming to go no farther than the step of the big door, coming back as if satisfied about something.

In truth, that was as far as Lois went. By the step, weather-worn and gray against the snow, there rode on its steel runners the small dog sledge of Palo le Roc, which she had found behind his cabin. She stood before it, measuring, fitting, adjusting, and the process seemed satisfactory.

This was on a day when the snow had ceased for forty-eight hours, and the cold rose in its tension as the note of an engine rises in tone, settling and hardening the surface of the level white pack. Lois looked around at the frozen landscape and nodded to herself. It was good. She had seen this day from the beginning, and had waited for it. The waiting had been perilously long, too. Only she knew how small was that last store in the hold, so small that it

was but meagerly adapted for a journey —a slow journey—down the long trail to civilization. It was urgent time to start, with the gaunt face of starvation peering around the corner of the future. So now she went back in the big room, to make preparation for the morrow. In her accustomed silence, she served the slender meal from the vantage of the hearth. Afterward she came and stood for a moment beside McConnel, lying on his pallet.

"M'sieu," she said, "what of the papers in the desk would you have go down to Henriette?"

The factor looked up with a sudden thrill gripping his soul, a complex sensation which he could not have analyzed, a mingled sense of joy and relief through which leaped a firelike shot of pain.

She was going at last!

Some little of each emotion quivered in his voice as he replied.

"The two—books of account," he said, "and the contract of Corlier. That of France Thebau. But I will see."

He drew himself up on his hands, and started on one of those unsightly journeys across the open space, through the little gate, and into the sanctuary of his office.

Beside the desk he stopped, looking up, his leonine head not on a level with its surface. The girl had followed, her eyes on the floor just short of the crawling form.

Now she drew out the drawers and held them down, one by one, that he might overlook their contents.

"No," said the man; "there is missing one paper. Did the Blackfeet take, think you, any of these things?" He looked up straight in Lois' face.

"None, I think, m'sieu," she answered. "They but scattered them abroad in the room."

"Then it must be here. It fell, most like, behind the desk. We will move it out from the partition. If you would take hold of the corner——" The slow blood rose in McConnell's haggard face at his helplessness, and he waited, looking down at the floor in the shame of a man who must ask for strength from a woman. But he waited in vain. The girl did not move. Presently he lifted his eyes to see the reason, sinking yet lower in that shame since it was refused.

She stood rigid beside the desk, and *her* face was white.

"It is not there, m'sieu, the paper," she said. "It must be in some corner that you passed."

"Some place I passed? No. There is no other lurking place. Will you move the desk, Lois le Moyne?" There was something in the girl's tone which roused once more the last faint spark of dominance left in the crushed nature of the man.

"No, m'sieu," she said sharply.

"Then stand aside!" he cried tremulously.

With all the strength of his half-strong body, the factor leaned his shoulder to the task, and strove to move the desk, the one-time badge of his authority; but a man upon the floor, who cannot move his limbs, is an eliminated element on the plane of achievement. The sight of him at his futile effort was a tearing thing. The girl, standing back as he had bidden her, involuntarily obeying that command, put a hand to her throat, as if it choked her. Straining every nerve, he endeavored to push the heavy thing aside, but he had no purchase, and it merely creaked a little, resisting. The blood poured into his face, and the veins stood out on his neck. It was the last effort of the old spirit of physical compelling, and his very soul stood out on his features, despairing as he failed.

Suddenly, as she had rushed in her anger to get the little chest for him, Lois sprang forward and caught the corner.

"Fool!" she cried aloud, and she apostrophized herself. "Fool of the world! There!"

With one sweep of her strong young arms, she dragged the desk forward, rasping on the floor.

As she did so, there fell from behind it, not the lost paper, but, tumbling into McConnel's very hands, two moccasins of the measure of a man's foot, and

they were fashioned with most cunning craft of the smoked buckskin, velvet soft; the turned-down flaps were of doeskin, white as a lady's hand; and on the toes, heavy with beadwork, there glowed and sparkled the quaint designs and figures whose intricate weaving was known to but one hand in the wilderness, that of Lois le Moyne, the sign manual of her handicraft, which one, seeing, could never afterward mistake.

They fell before him, and he took them up, stupidly, wonderingly, and looked long at their perfect beauty. As he turned them over, under each flap on the inside there stood out, done in green and scarlet beads, the initial letters of his own name—A. M.

In the moment that followed, the slow mind of Angus McConnel learned its greatest and its swiftest lesson of life and its mysterious ways.

For once it conjured before his eyes the right thing at the right time—he saw a soft night in the early spring, and, bending over this very desk, the slender figure of a young girl whom he, in his blundering, caught without grace and hauled out to public punishment, branding her as thief, and whom he had ruined in the eyes of the populace.

These things he saw as he leaned stupidly on one hand, holding in the other the gift that she had dropped hurriedly, at his approach, *behind* the desk instead of *upon* it, lacking at that moment the daring which had prompted its conception.

Dimly through his heaped anguish, Angus McConnel began to read a page, the wonder of which was the crowning thorn of his abasement.

When he raised his eyes to her at last, they were stricken as with death.

"Lois le Moyne," he said, "I——"

Then he crumpled forward, and, with the gaudy trinkets still in his hand, he laid his shaggy head upon them, while his shoulders shook with dry and awful sobs.

Lois stood still, with her hands clenched at her sides, and the white line at the base of the fluttering nostrils. She had reverted suddenly to that mother whom none but old Jacques had ever known.

By her own hand, voluntarily, yet compelled by some primal lure before whose drawing power she was helpless, she had betrayed herself.

Already the spell of it was passing. The old, raging, uncontrollable anger was rising like a tide within her. Its vibration quivered in her tones.

"A trifle, m'sieu," she said, and every word bit like a blade. "A bagatelle—droll memory of one untaught fool who looked for the eagle but to find the crow."

The crushed and broken spirit of the man at her feet shrank yet lower in its shame.

In him she had sought the eagle, daring the populace by an open act of preference as no woman in all the world beside would have done, matching him in her peculiar soul, strength for strength, daring for daring, silence for silence, and honor for honor—selecting him with simple bravery, and this frank gift, marked with her open sign, had been her guerdon.

And he——

He had done her to death for her grandeur.

As he cowered there in his abasement, he saw it all—every event of the long chain whose links had filled the year—saw it all, and now, with the scales fallen from his stupid eyes, each smallest thing was clear.

To him, who, all his plodding life, had beheld womanhood as an abstract thing, her womanhood now leaped out with startling distinctness. He saw so much that he covered his eyes and cried out for sparing of the revelation. The sight was too condemning—he could not bear it.

Eagle! He had indeed been as the crow in his unspeakable baseness!

And for recompense now at the end, he stood between her and safety, a miserable reminder of what a man can do to a woman's faith. He had ruined her as utterly as might be in all the posts and settlements, as far as the tale might go.

The count was too long and too un-

even. He was a man of the wilderness, and the evening of all scores there, is death. He could never bear the sight of the day nor the contemplation of his soul when this girl had passed for the last time beyond the portal of the deserted place. There was but one ending for so sorry a web of failures.

With a swift motion, he raised himself high on his arms, and swept the long hunting knife from its loop at her belt.

Quick as light, the girl caught the descending wrist, and threw her body forward. In a tumbled heap they went down together on the floor, but when Lois arose, flushed and breathing hard, she held the knife. She stepped out of reach and slipped it back in place.

"A coward, too, m'sieu?" she said.

McConnel rolled over beside the desk, with his arm across his face.

The gray of day had given place to the dusk of night.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DOWN THE LONG TRAIL.

Before the grudging light again peeped in the windows of the blockhouse, Lois le Moyne touched the factor on the shoulder where he slept, exhausted with his misery, on the bed before the hearth.

"Come, m'sieu," she said briefly; "there is work."

She brought his meager meal, and went about strange preparations while he ate.

A fire roared on the hearth, and the kitten frisked about in the flame-lit shadows. By the big door lay a neat, tight pack, and tied to it were those few utensils which one takes upon the trail, a pan from the room beyond, the coffeepot, and two tin cups. Beside the pack lay the long skin bag which Lois had made. McConnel lifted his eyes only for swift glances, but these things he saw with amaze. He saw also that she wore the shaggy garments of skin as protection from the cold.

She was ready for the trail. It did not take her long to complete her few arrangements, the closing of the door between the big room and the small one after a glance around the neat interior, the closing of an open drawer or two in the big desk, the brushing back of the venturesome coals on the hearth. It looked as if the place were being made ready for complete desertion. McConnel sat on the pallet, and the heart of him rose higher and higher in his throat with each lessening task, and the slip of the girl's new moccasins on the floor made him weak with anguish. He dreaded each moment.

Would she say aught to him before she left? Or would she just go in that maddening silence, without a word, a look? Just open the big door and step out—go away with the lessening sounds of her going coming back for a moment or two? The man clenched the hands at his sides, and shut his teeth on the cry that was near his lips.

Yet what else?

More like she would mock him as she went. It would be but fitting.

"Come, m'sieu," said the cold voice of the girl. "It is but a short journey to the door. We must have a good start."

"Eh?" he said, bewildered.

"The dog sledge waits. Come to the step."

Then he knew. The bag—the two cups—the pack—but where had she gotten dogs?

The lean team of Palo le Roc had trotted, howling, after the marching column, and he had never heard a dog cry in the post in these long days of loneliness.

But she intended to take him. That thought came flooding over him with heavy rapture. Then in her heart there must be thought of forgiveness. The haggard lines softened out of his face, and he lifted it to her with the first look of directness.

"You would take me, too?" he asked simply.

"Of a surety," said Lois. "How else, m'sieu?"

"Then you will some day forgive me," said Angus McConnel, "and that is my last hope."

He looked long at her face in the dancing light, fixing its every feature on the page of his memory. It was a wonderful face, and he had helped in its carving.

As he made no move, the girl shifted restlessly.

"Come," she said. "The day will soon be here."

But McConnel folded his useless arms.

"Long enough have I been the burden of your life, Lois le Moyne," he said, with a quiet dignity. "Now I go out of it. The trail in winter is of sufficient hazard for one, light running and unhampered. I remain in Fort lu Cerne."

Patiently Lois spoke, almost, for her, gently:

"If you stay, I stay. Yonder by the door is the measure of our stores, a piece of salted flesh, a little sugar and coffee, a few beans, perhaps a potful, a scant supply of meal, and two cans of meat from Henriette. How long, think you, m'sieu, will they last? I have gauged things well. It is enough to take us down the trail—and the sledge waits."

The tone was as calm and as final as his own had been. He knew she meant every word.

"Which is the better way, m'sieu?"

Once more the man fell before her strength.

"I will go," he said. Without another word he started, crawling from the fur bed, toward the door. On the way he stopped a moment.

"Where did you get the dogs?" he asked.

Lois was catching the frisking kitten, and did not speak.

She came to his side and opened the door. Outside the sparkling cold of the night was as diamond powder and breath of ice. The great stars were close and fairly crackled in their brilliancy. To the north a ribbon of the northern lights waved and whimpered across the blue-black dome of the sky. In the glow from the snow the man looked eagerly out for the dogs that should be fidgeting and snarling. He leaned forward on his hands. There was nothing before the step but the gray skeleton of the sledge, with a heavy harness lying in front.

Lois stepped out and laid upon it, well padded with furs, the long bag, turning down a flap at the top.

"Now, m'sieur," she said.

McConnel drew back, aghast.

"You would draw the sledge?" he whispered.

"There is naught else. Come."

As one in a dream, he shook his head.

"Shall we go back and wait for starvation, m'sieu?" The cold voice whipped him up.

With her help, he dragged himself up on the sledge. Together they worked the helpless limbs down into the warm covering of the bag, which Lois fitted carefully about his shoulders. Then she went back and brought a woolen scarf from the heap in the corner, and bound it tight around his head. Under it all, the man's mouth was tight, and he was physically sick. The girl herself was well wrapped against the pressing cold.

When all was in readiness, she gave McConnel the kitten down in the covering, closed the big door, sat down on the step, and laced on the snowshoes, stood up, and then, picking up the harness she had made with such pains, slipped into it, buckled it across her breast, leaned into the shoulder straps to test their set, and, stopping a moment, looked all around the post. At the corner of the little church, dim and indistinct in the darkness, her eyes lingered longest. She was taking a long farewell of the tiny old man who slept there.

Now she served another, and it was for the same reason.

Without a word, the girl leaned forward, in earnest now; the new harness creaked, stretched, held firm, the light sledge on its steel-shod runners started, slid lightly forward following, and Lois le Moyne went forward with the long swing of the snowshoer, bound for the far city of civilization, the southern post of Henriette.

Down the main way they went, between the pathetic cabins, eerie in their

vacancy, to the great gate in the eastern wall. In silence she let down the bars, drew through, and, turning, shut the gate again. Then, without backward glance or visible emotion, in the singing cold that rang from the runners, these two, whose lives were so strangely knit together, struck into the broad trail, and were swallowed up in the forest.

It was a strange picture they made—the bundled figure on the sledge, the girl far ahead to give unhindered sweep to the long snowshoes, bending forward as she swept easily along. Within the forest there was no reflection from the snow. The cold and the darkness were intense. By that unerring instinct which made her as a man in the great woods, she followed the broad trail. The pressing cold bit at her face, and tingled her fingers in the fur mittens. But for Lois that journey, terrible as it must be in point of hardship, of endurance, and unending struggle, was to be as nothing compared to what it meant to the man on the sledge behind.

The day at last crept in among the frost-bound boles, finding them far in the white waste of the wilderness. At midday they stopped, and Lois made a fire from rotten pith chopped from a leaning trunk, and gathered twigs. Across the front of the sledge was bound her rifle, and at her belt hung the short hand ax and her hunting knife. These things were imperative on the trail. One can dispense with food and drink, but these weapons never. She made coffee and fried a bit of the salt meat in the pan, serving McConnel in silence. The kitten she let out of the warm depths of the covering to frisk and leap with every hair on its diminutive body standing up, pricking with the cold.

They made short stay, only to catch the kitten again, and bind the pot and cups to the pack behind McConnel. Then they started on. Behind them the tiny fire sent up its thin spiral into the dry, cold air, an unspeakably lonely sight as they went away and left it.

At night they made camp at the foot of a giant hemlock. After lighting the fire again, Lois went into the woods with the kitten tearing along on the hard snow, and presently returned with a heaping armful of the soft fir boughs which she spread beside the fire, making a perfect couch. After the meal of hot coffee and meal cakes cooked frankly in the coals, she spread upon the boughs a skin from the sledge, and rolled McConnel upon it, wrapping him tight. He spoke for the first time since they had been on the way.

"Let me sleep on the sledge. It is comfortable—take you the fir boughs."

But Lois worked on swiftly.

"There are more fir boughs," she said.

Before the light went entirely, she had gathered a huge pile of branches, made another couch of the boughs across the fire, spread down the remaining skins, laid the rifle beside her, gathered the kitten in with her, and rolled down to that heavy sleep of the body worn to utter fatigue. In a few moments she was lost to all the world, while the fire died and the cold, pushed back for a little time by the heat, crept in, pressed down with its insidious force, and sought with prying fingers for the living things beneath the skins.

It rimmed the edges with ice where the breath steamed, and felt of every loose end of the covering. And when its prying became too insistent, Lois roused and reached for more wood, sending the fire leaping again, to drop back again into dreamless slumber. But Angus McConnel, sometime factor of Fort lu Cerne, and a man now less than both by the measure of all distance, did not close his eyes, gazing into the crackling cold of the darkness, and praying miserably for death.

Thus went their days.

Hour by hour they fought the pressing frost. In the early mornings it seemed that they would inevitably fail, for then the odds were greatest. It covered the land as with a tangible garment, the merciless cold, a thin, blue garment of ice shadows that spread around and ahead as far as one might see among the giant trees. The stinging air, still as death, danced with fine

powder of the frost. Then they struggled on with renewed vigor, Lois at her task of muscle, McConnel at his task of mind, each striving to do the best.

By noon the distant light of the sun, hidden somewhere behind the lowering clouds that never left the roof of the forest, would send a grudging warmth to temper the gripping cold which lasted for a few hours until the short day turned toward its closing, when the lessened pressure returned, increasing as night came on.

Day by day they went forward, silent, miserable, fighting their common enemy.

Day by day, as she swung ahead, the mind of Lois began to be busy with the old problems, the ceaseless questions. Day by day, as the trail slipped behind her, and Henriette drew nearer in the future, she cast over the years of her short life. What had she gained of the world? Verily less than nothing. And what had the world gained of her?

The score was even. Yet now it swung, with every day's travel, nearer to that point where it was to change, where the balance would at last hang heavy with life's debt to her. She did now a thing whereof she could say to her soul: "This thou hast done out of that scant goodness wherewith thou wert dowered, without hope of reward, one noble deed unsullied with selfish thought, performing for thyself a sacrifice to go before thee at the end, a sacrifice at last worthy." And wearily she turned her eyes to the Great North, whose mystic voice called to the deep of that soul, called with a strong insistence which breathed of rest and peace and of oblivion. She longed with a great sickness for the journey's end, which must come first. So she bent to her task feverishly, summoning all the strength of her body, rising early that the days might be long, pressing on toward the end, and day by day the weariness grew heavier in her heart.

The mystery of life was still unsolved for her, still thronging her mind with its useless questions, and she longed sorrily for peace.

Thus they went down the long trail, these two, warring with life and destiny, still lost in the meshes of that great web of mistakes which they themselves had woven.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HENRIETTE.

Safety, and peace, and rest! Thus went up the prayers of thanksgiving from that worn band of people, carrying their sick and their memories, which marched one day into the strong post of Henriette with its gayety, its civilization, and its ways of the world.

At that column's head still had walked the upright figure of the old priest, his lean face a light of hope before his people, his strong heart still courageous. At his side was Palo le Roc, keeping watch over Tessa, while behind them came Pierre Vernaise, in tenderness supporting the feeble steps of little Jaqua, returned from the land of shadows, and his fine young face was illumined by some inward fire which had its lighting at an altar forsworn in the wilderness. Maren was there, and Marie, and France Thebau, old Blanc Corlier, Marc Baupre, and Netta, young Henri, and his wife, all those who had marched away from the doomed post of Fort lu Cerne save one who slept in a lone grave far back on the long trail, that silent brown server of an alien race, the doctress of the Crees.

And chief of those whose worth was proven on that forced and dreary journey was Marcel Roque, her comely face saddened by the hand of life, her tender eyes shining with its teachings, carrying in her arms, strong once more, the wee, misshapen child, unscathed by harm.

Thus they came out of the darkened valley of danger, and death, and suffering into the high hills of hope and happiness. And all raised their songs of thanksgiving, though two there were who bowed their souls in supplication for that tragic figure left standing alone by the stockade of the deserted post. Two there were who did not forget—Pierre, who had renounced her as a saint to Heaven and to destiny; Marcel,

who watched, unceasing, from the north wall of the great settlement, firm in her courage and her hope.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PRIMAL LURE.

The day drew to a close. The gray clouds hanging low against the white earth shut in the world. The cold pressed down harder and harder as the shadows of night drifted like smoke among the sleeping giants of the forests.

Dreariness and desolation seemed to speak in the very voices of the crackling frost, and all life seemed at a standstill.

Down the broad trail to Henriette, and but an hour's distance from its gates, two dark figures stood out against the gray background of the snow—a tall figure that leaned into the shoulder harness of the sledge, staggering wearily, and another that leaned forward on the sledge behind with a sympathy so intense that its lips opened with every rasping breath which came from the other.

"Lassie," cried the man at last, his voice rising with the strain of feeling, "for God's sake stop!"

His lips quivered, and his helpless hands were doubled into iron fists outside the covering. His heart seemed breaking with the agony. If she could bear more, he could not.

"Stop!" he commanded hoarsely.

As if unconsciously obeying, the girl stopped in her tracks. As she lifted her face, it shone gray as the gray light around them. She stood breathing heavily a little while. The straps on her shoulders were wrapped and rewrapped where they had bitten deep into the flesh, and so were the laces of the snowshoes. The journey had taken its expected toll—of both soul and body. The dreary shadows were heavy in the dark eyes.

For a moment she stood so, then she unfastened the harness with stiff fingers and dropped it from her body. Mechanically, as if there were no further incentive, the girl set about some preparation, while the man watched her, the gripping of his throat precluding speech. Slowly, heavily, like one tired of movement, she gathered a small pile of dead branches, and brought them to the side of the sledge, laying them in reach of his hand.

Then from her belt she took the little box which held their matches. They rattled loosely, being few. These she laid on the covering beside the gun. Then she straightened to her old height, swiftly, easily, by some effort of the will. She swayed a bit where she stood.

"M'sieu," she said, "the ways part. By the coming day there will be those on the trail who seek the forest. They will take the sledge to Henriette. Adieu, m'sieu—and"—she caught her breath for a fleeting moment—"and the past is evened—blotted—what you will—forgiven."

For one moment she looked down straight into the blue eyes of Angus McConnel, and the dreary sickness of her soul swelled and swept across her, flooding her being with the old pain. Then she lifted her head, that regal head which still bore the semblance of its mighty pride, and, turning, swung her body with the snowshoes' sweep toward that glowering North which settled closer with the swiftly gathering night, that Great North which raised of a sudden its insistent voice and called to her, called to her from the ancient deeps where there lay peace and the rest and the blessed quiet of oblivion. Never had the mystic voice pealed from the Infinite with such aching profundity of sound, never had the erring, uncertain soul within her answered with such a leaping cry of faith and gladness.

Here was the end she had waited for, the fitting end of that life whose purpose was as the shimmering mists, whose worth was nothing and whose burden great.

It demanded naught of her now. The end was come when she might serve herself. With new strength she went toward the heavy forest, her lifted face peering into that fantastic North, and

upon it there lay the print of all weariness, all sadness, all failure.

As she went across the snow, the man on the sledge opened his lips, and struggled for speech, but his tongue was dumb. The horror in his throat gripped him to suffocation.

She was going back to the wilderness, going from him forever, going to a white and wandering death because she was sick of life, truly and for many reasons, so sick that it was as if she went to her wedding, so glad was she to go. And with her went all light of the world, all hope of heaven, all the meaning of life.

He struggled like a madman to rise, to cry out, stretching his arms toward her.

And the voice came back to his throat—rushing, strong, compeling.

"Lois le Moyne!" he cried, and the call pealed like a clarion. "Lois! Lois! Lois!"

It reached her where she entered the depth of the great woods, reached her, rang on her soul like gold, and stopped her where she stood, quivering. Her face was still raised to the North, which called, but it listened, rapt, to the man who called.

"Lois! Lois le Moyne! In the name of God come back to me!"

The cry of a man was in that call, the full cry of a man, strong, infinitely strong—a stern, compelling call that was a command, that lashed her spirit back across the snow to him as the master of old brought the woman he had conquered, that pulled at her body with a resistless strength. She flung up her arm, and covered her face, and yet she stayed as she had stopped, at the edge of the shadows, quivering, her whole being, soul and body, in one mighty tumult. And again came the mighty ringing cry, breaking at the end into anguish:

"Lois! Lois! Oh, lassie, winna ye come!"

It struck upon some chord that vibrated, that shivered, and shook her to the foundations, that rang and echoed with its awful pleading and filled her with its might.

Some strange thing seemed to draw her toward the sledge, and all she had abandoned, a wild, peculiar thrall which lured her backward. She shut her eyes against her arm, and tried to shake her weary soul together, to gain that strength which seemed to be leaving her under this terrible spell. And still Angus McConnel, from the sledge in the wide trail, was forcing her toward him. Slowly she turned. Slowly, as if against her will, obeying some primal instinct which draws from the ends of the earth those perfect mates among the mighty ones, Lois le Moyne went back, step by step, to the man upon the sledge.

His piercing eyes fixed on her in the magnitude of his effort, Angus McConnel waited, leaning forward with his hands clenched on the edge, his whole soul bent to his task.

It was no use. The great travail through which they two had passed had made this parting the only thing to be desired. She had wavered for the first time in all her dauntless life. Now she could not fail.

She shook herself to throw off this wild spell, as a huge dog shakes himself free of the hindering snow. Slowly the arm across her face lowered, and she looked before her dully.

Angus McConnel saw that look, saw her proud head turn from him for the last time in life, knew that she had broken the spell with her superb strength.

Slowly she turned about, and once more faced the end she had chosen, that fitting end to such a life as hers, the wild, strong end that is without fear.

As she began to retrace her steps toward the forest's edge, Angus McConnel threw up his arms toward the gray heavens, and screamed a prayer that was a command.

"Oh, God!" he cried terribly. "Gi'e Ye me my strength or let me die!"

And, with all the power of his spirit, that strong spirit that had almost broken Lois le Moyne, he flung himself off the sledge.

With shaking hands, he tore himself

free of the skin covering, tumbling the kitten out in the snow where it set up a plaintive crying, and, with all the blood of his body straining in his face, he essayed to rise.

The heavy limbs were like lead. Once he threw himself forward—twice —— It seemed that all the feeling of a thousand ancestors was tearing in his body, thrilling him with a superhuman strength.

He cast a glance to where that tattered figure staggered slowly away, and gathered the last ounce of power in him.

Was it a miracle? Had that awful prayer reached the Great Power behind the gray sky? Who knows?

With a mighty lurch, the man rose up and stood upon his feet. There was no thought in him of what he had done. He realized nothing save the figure so slowly leaving him, the imperative need to reach it.

Staggering, lumbering across the snow, his hands outstretched to grasp her, Angus McConnel walked!

It was a horrible journey had there been one to see. To him it was a triumphal march. He reached her at last, dropped a heavy hand upon her shoulder, and clutched her in the very agony of rescue.

He swung her to him heavily, and crushed her against his breast.

He pressed his face hard upon hers, and kissed her as one might kiss the wakened dead. With the touch of him, the realization of his body upright beside her, though it swayed drunkenly, Lois felt her soul broken within her, and with a sob she went to him from the far spaces of her nature.

"Lassie," he said brokenly, "dinna ye ken I love ye? Oh, lassie! We ha'e done grievous wrong, and we ha'e been punished beyond most, but so will we be blessed beyond most. Through blood and fire we ha'e come, but it has forged such a love as all the Northland has not seen! It has done a miracle—in my body it has done it!—and in our souls. Henriette waits, and all our people. Come, lassie, let us go together—into life!"

And gently, their arms about each other, their faces glorified, they went together back to the sledge and the crying kitten.

"M'sieu," said Lois, with a voice of gold—the strange, sweet voice that Pierre Vernaise had heard once in his anguish, "take to the sledge again. The miracle has been wrought, but we must guard it still."

But McConnel, in his wonder and his joy, refused.

"Never again!" he cried. "Never again, lassie!"

"But, see, m'sieu; I am strong now! And I would hurry to Henriette! The new blood pulls me forward. Will you not?"

For answer, McConnel pointed to the kitten.

"Catch it, and we will abandon the sledge, and go forward together. I will never fail you again."

And so presently it came that two figures, so closely clinging as to seem one, went forward in the beaten trail to Henriette. Lois had left her snowshoes with the sledge, and with her strong young arms she clung to and guided the heavy, uncertain figure beside her.

At the first near turn a light shone out ahead, that beacon which Marcel Roque, sure in her knowledge and her hope, had caused to be placed nightly in the northwest bastion of the post of Henriette.

"Ah, m'sieu," said Lois softly, "see! We have found at last the meaning of this life of ours, and it is light and hope and all good things!"

"Amen!" said McConnel.

THE END.

RALPH D. PAINE has picked for hero of his new novel a quartermaster-sergeant of marines. The story will begin in the next POPULAR, on sale February 7th. It is called "The Wall Between."

Cephas the Paladin

By Albert Peyson Terhune

In which there is for hero a pig—a month-old porker so rawboned and stunted that not even the most optimistic of farmers could have hoped to sell him. But he had the heart of a Paladin

CEPHAS was his name. He was a pig. But he was, none the less, a paladin. A porcine St. George when fate at last sounded the call for his great adventure.

Byram owned him. Byram was the man who had mortgaged his up-State farm to buy a half share in the "Trip to Mars" concession at the Pan-Universal Exposition.

Most expositions, or world's fairs, are financial failures. But most of their side-show attractions make money. And —thanks to Cephas—the Trip to Mars was one of these money-makers. Through its gingerbread-gilt gateway on the Street of a Thousand Laughs trickled a goodly stream of sight-seers, and of dimes, throughout that long, hot summer.

Byram, exiled for the season from his beloved farm in order to make ten times as much money at the exposition, was acting as his own ballyhoo man to draw trade to the Trip to Mars. And on the third day of the season his raucous cries of "Greatest, most *ree*-fined, most side-splitting show of the century," were suddenly punctuated by a squeal that split the looser volume of his clamor as a sword blade might cleave past-worthy melon.

And at that imperative insult to the eardrum, full a thousand hurrying, babbling people stopped and, for a flash of time, were silent. The sound had wafted Byram momentarily back to his farm. It carried the memory of many another listener to a similar starting point.

Byram sought to locate the cause, and at a glance he found it. Down the narrow Street of a Thousand Laughs rumbled a big market wagon, taking this short cut to the heart of the city. The wagon was loaded high with crated poultry, calves, and pigs.

An insecurely fastened crate at the very back of the pile had shaken loose, and had fallen to the ground, where, from the tumble, it promptly disintegrated. Its late occupant stood free, dazed, indignant, in the middle of the thronged street; giving forth squeal after squeal, that filled the whole walled space with a series of shrill and unlovely echoes.

The vocalist was a very small, very thin, very youthful pig. For scarce a month of time at most could he have been on earth. And during that brief month he had apparently cultivated his voice at the expense of his anatomy. For, seldom has so much leanness been seen in conjunction with so much youth. Indeed, only the most optimistic of farmers could have hoped to sell such a rawboned and stunted baby porker at any market.

The wagon vanished around a corner, leaving the baby pig stranded and deserted; a bit of noisy jetsam on the shores of the Street of a Thousand Laughs. Byram gazed. So did every one. And a Homeric guffaw arose. The Street was for once living up to its name. The piglet retorted with an ear-racking squeal.

A long-legged, rangy dog dashed from the crowd and charged the waif. The baby pig, no whit daunted, wheeled to meet the charge. Yes, to meet it halfway. His pink lips drawn back over tiny, white milk tusks, his scant spine

hairs a-bristle, his vocal cords throbbing with a long-drawn squeal of glad challenge, the pig scampered toward his thrice-larger foe.

Whereat, the dog, which was of many breeds, checked its attack in mid-course, tucked a grubby tail between its flanks, and wheeled in flight; turning piggy's solo squeals into close harmony by the addition of a long, fear-stricken howl.

The baby paused, blinking his near-sighted little red-rimmed eyes in search of his flying foe. And at that moment Byram was mastered by one of the inspirations that had lifted him at thirty from farm hand to rising showman.

He strode forth and snatched up the valiant little porker. The latter seemed to know from the way he was handled that Byram was accustomed to pigs. So, unresisting, he allowed himself to be tucked under the man's arm and carried into the cubby-hole office of the Trip to Mars building.

A boy was sent on the run for a half-gallon can of buttermilk, and with further orders to hunt up the market man from whose wagon the pig had been jolted, and to pay him two dollars for the attenuated prize. Just then Byram's partner, Bud Crane, happened in.

"We aren't showing freaks," was Bud's comment, at sight of the Little Stranger. "What good is a living skeleton to us?"

"But we're selling the dear public," gently corrected Byram. "And I've just bought for two dollars the best barker on the Street. I'm going to tie this pig to a six-foot cord alongside of my ballyhoo bench outside there. His squeals will make every mother's son in earshot stop and listen to me."

But Crane was dubious. Byram expounded his theory of the farm memory that lurks in the back of every one's brain. And he told how the crowd had waxed silent, and had turned, as one man, at piggy's unrehearsed recital.

"But won't the S. P. C. A. butt-ins get after us?" objected Bud, "for—for torturing a dumb animal—or something?"

"This animal's worst enemy couldn't call him dumb," retorted Byram. "And, besides, nobody's going to torture him."

"Then how'll we make him squeal?"

"We'd have harder work to stop him. A pig of that age and breed squeals every few seconds, anyway. Just as he's doing now. He'll be a dandy card. Folks'll get talking about it, too. And then——"

"All right," conceded Bud comfortably. "And say! I've got a corking idea for a name for him. 'Spareribs!' How's that? Look at his sides. You see, he's——"

"His name," coldly decided Byram, "is Cephas."

"Cephas?" echoed Crane, in blank wonder. "Why Cephas?"

"Why *not* Cephas?"

This argument could not be parried. It could only be ignored. Crane protested feebly:

"It's a fool name."

"It's my father-in-law's name," rebuked Byram, with icy dignity.

"Oh, I see. The old man's the one who's got the mortgage on your farm, isn't he? I remember. All right. Let it go at Cephas."

And Cephas it was; thenceforth and for the season.

Through the torrid, sticky summer, Byram, from his ballyhoo bench, extolled the marvels of a Trip to Mars. From noon to midnight he added his ever-hoarsening shouts of praise to the clamor of the Street of a Thousand Laughs.

And on the sidewalk beside Byram, every week day, from noon to midnight, stood, or sprawled, or trotted Cephas; ever and anon lifting to high heaven a squeal or a succession of squeals that tore the busily humming summer air into shreds.

Never did Cephas squeal without drawing as much attention as did all the Street's human barkers combined. City folk would jump in amaze and turn to see whence emanated the fearsome sound. Memories awoke in most passers-by, and curiosity in all. And the Trip to Mars speedily became the best-advertised show at the exposition.

Cephas, with a brazen collar about

his brazen throat, and a long brass chain connecting him with Byram's bench leg, went through the business of the day with undying spirit.

Sometimes he would pace or gallop from one end of his tether to the other; shrieking in drawn-out fervor at every step. Again he would stand and survey the passing hundreds with the impersonally curious eye of a philosopher, squealing only occasionally and in a dispassionate tone, as one with a dull but needful duty to perform. When rain pelted heavily, or the August sun fell like a fiery scourge on the cement pavement, Cephas would lie at ease in the sparse shadows under the bench, squealing with a somnolent but racking dreaminess.

Thanks to the new ballyhoo, the Trip to Mars did unparalleled business. It drew quarters when equally meritorious shows drew nickels. It paid the mortgage off Byram's farm, and started a plump little bank account for him. It earned for Bud Crane a pale-yellow diamond, with crinkly depths and of unbelievable area.

Cephas toiled on; sleeping in the mornings to an hour that would have brought a flush of shame to his farm ancestors; and sitting up till every other pig in America had finished half its night's sleep. He ate in large quantities and at frequent intervals. Beyond his regular diet, there were many and heterogeneous contributions—ranging from apple cores to crack-jack—from passing admirers. And his physical exercise was limited and spasmodic. Yet he gained no flesh. Perhaps nature did not intend that he should. Perhaps squealing for a livelihood twelve hours a day on a crowded, hot, ill-savored cement pavement, and sitting up until midnight do not tend to put flesh on little pigs. In any case, Cephas remained svelte; not to say bony. And his general size increased so imperceptibly that he was scarce three inches longer, or an inch taller, in September than he had been in June.

Cephas' lack of growth, and his perpetual thinness, worried Byram. Yet he could see nothing amiss with the squealer's appetite or general health. He had grown genuinely fond of the queer little fellow during their months of jointly haranguing the multitudes. And Cephas reciprocated the man's affection.

Cephas was not demonstrative. But on such rare intervals as he was loose he would always seek out Byram and trot gravely at his heels, or lie curled in an angular bunch at his feet. Bud Crane the pig openly and throatily disliked. And Bud regarded Cephas merely as an unlovely, but paying, adjunct to the show.

Strewn through the summer there were several happenings to lighten the monotony of Cephas' life. Once, for example, he was stolen. And his squeals of wrath furnished a running clew to his negro captor's movements, until Byram and a patrolman could overhaul the fugitive in the crowd.

Again, the shed wherein Cephas slept, at the back of the Trip to Mars building, took fire just before dawn one day. And the flame-defying squeals of fearless Cephas awakened Byram and other sleepers barely in time to save the pig's bacon from more than a superficial, if painful, scorching; as well as to save the building, and probably the entire flimsy Street of a Thousand Laughs.

An exposition newspaper published a story of the scant-averted holocaust; heading it, "PIG TURNS IN A SQUEAL ALARM," and running a picture of Cephas, the hero of the account. (Cephas never having been photographed, a "stock cut" of a prize Berkshire boar was printed as substitute.)

Then, dog fights were matters of such frequency that they hardly called for comment. It was a favorite amusement for the Street's youthful hangers-on to catch some large or small stray cur, haul him to the space in front of the Trip to Mars, and then gleefully "sick him onto" Cephas.

The baby pig met all canine comers. Yes, met and routed them. Such few dogs as withstood his first indignant rush found his teeth amazingly sharp, and his skin incredibly tough. And the assailants seldom wasted time over the

useless combat; but withdrew as early in the action as they could tear themselves free.

Thus—fighting, squealing, half baking, singed, stolen, stared at, the butt of inextinguishable laughter—Cephas wore out the red summer and shrilled a gallant greeting to the purple-and-gold autumn.

The exposition was at its last gasp. The Street of a Thousand Laughs prepared to put up the shutters. The crowds had dwindled. Summer and shows were past; winter and work were at hand.

Byram and Crane on the first of October, counted up their comfortable profits, divided a good sum of money, and rejoiced. Byram next day was going back to his worshiped farm, to make ready for a record agricultural year, wherein labor should for once be reënforced by capital. Crane, buying out his partner's interest in the Trip to Mars, prepared to take the show to New Orleans for the winter.

Byram went over to the Agriculture Building, on the Street's last day, to buy some farm implements at end-of-season rates. Crane was packing some of the Trip's paraphernalia. Cephas, his position now a sinecure, was snoring shrilly under the vacated ballyhoo bench. The show was closed.

Then it was that Ophido, the Cobra King, from the Hindu Village across the Street, honored Mr. Bud Crane with a morning call. Ophida, in private life, bore the more reasonable cognomen of Murtha. And Bud had known him in the olden years before ever Ophido was a Hindu. The Cobra King's visit was of a business nature. His star python, Brahma—second largest of its species in captivity—was ready to be fed. Brahma, python fashion, ate but once in seven or eight months. And he always evinced his periodic desire for food by an increased liveliness. Such liveliness, Ophido told Crane, had now obsessed Brahma. Nor would the reptile quiet down sufficiently for transportation, or for safe handling in public, until hunger should have been appeased, and sweet reflection should bring back the snake's wonted laziness.

Pythons, Ophido prattled on carelessly, will eat nothing but live food. A half dozen kicking rabbits, a month-old kid whose horns have not yet sprouted, a lamb, or even a small dog, will serve amply for the semiyearly banquet. Or —here Ophido coughed discreetly—at a pinch a young pig might do.

Crane pricked up his ears. Ophido dropped glittering generalities and went further into details.

"Business is dead," he explained. "Here's the last day; and the only way we could get a handful of boobs into the Village was by advertising that Brahma's to be fed. Now, that squealing pig of yours is pretty well known about here. If I could send word around the Street that he's the dinner picked out for Brahma, it ought to draw a whole bunch of folks. Get the idea?"

"Yes," said Crane doubtfully.

"The feeding's advertised for an hour from now," went on Ophido, "and I could get the news around before then. How about it?"

"No," decided Crane, after a moment's wistful thought—during which he covertly surveyed a half-healed scar on his thumb, the imprint of Cephas' tusks on an occasion when Bud had tried to slap the pig into louder squeals. "No. It won't do. Byram would never stand for it. He's fond of the measly little cuss."

"I thought you'd bought out Byram."

"I have."

"Then the pig's yours. He's part of the show, isn't he?"

"Why, I s'pose that's so," admitted Crane, hope dawning in his voice. "But," he added, "Byram would raise an awful kick just the same."

"Afraid of him. I see."

"No," glumly denied Crane, "I ain't afraid of anybody. Besides, he's away for the morning. And the pig's no use to me down South. He'd cost more to transport than he's worth. What'll you gimme for him?"

After some slight dicker, five dollars and Cephas changed hands. And Ophido-Murtha, the Cobra King, de-

parted for his Hindu Village, bearing with him the indignantly protesting Cephas.

"'Twon't hurt him? Not so very much?" queried the conscious-twinged Crane, as he escorted his guest across the Street.

"Not a bit!" Ophido assured him. "When a python looks at the critters that's put in his cage, they just get paralyzed, all at once, with fear. Kind of hypnotized. And they don't move a muscle, but only crouch there, with their eyes popping while he gets 'em ready to eat. It's a painless death. The S. P. C. A. folks themselves says so. Some of 'em."

An hour later the Serpent House of the Hindu Village was full to overcrowding with eagerly morbid sightseers, who had paid double rates for the dual privilege of seeing Brahma feed and Cephas die.

"Ladies'n gentlemen," began the hirsute lecturer, mounting a box beside a glass-faced cage that filled one end of the narrow hall, "you will now be treated to one of the most instructive sights in the fascinatin' domain of Ophidian natural history. Brahma, the mammoth python, second largest snake in captivity, will proceed to break his eight-month fast, before your very eyes, by devouring a large and livin' pig. Please keep as quiet as you can, ladies'n gentlemen, until this wonderful exhibition is over. For pythons is very dainty about their eatin'. And if they're disturbed or distracted, why, they won't eat at all. Ready, Mr. Ophido?"

Ophido advanced from behind a screen, carrying at arm's length between his hands the struggling Cephas, whose presence had been audible throughout the entire brief "lecture." The Cobra King went to the rear of the cage; an attendant with him. The audience sat mute; every eye glued to the interior of the glass-fronted inclosure.

There, on the floor, before a painted backdrop supposedly depicting an India jungle at sunrise, moved something—enormous, sinuous, hideously beautiful.

Fold on fold the python had assembled together his squirming length; the satin pattern of red-brown and black widening, as the body expanded in process of coiling, to the girth of a human thigh. Then, untangling his massed convolutions, Brahma flattened out to almost the full depth of the huge cage; and glided restlessly from end to end, from corner to corner of it; running his head and neck man-high along the slimy surface of the glass.

Nothing short of famine or intense pain could rouse a captive snake to such unwonted activity. Clearly, Brahma was hungry. He could not stay quiet. His habitual dead-and-alive lethargy was shed like last year's skin. He nosed in corners; and, coiling himself once more, gazed at the spectators in expressionless malignity from lidless bead eyes set in a triangular head as large as a dog's.

Uncoiling again into a thick, sinuous bar, he recommenced his undulating tour of the cage. Suddenly he halted, slithering to one side of the inclosure, and raising his three-cornered head as though in preparation for attack.

At the same instant a panel in the back of the cage was shot open, and then shut. In the momentary interval the gaping spectators caught a glimpse of two hands that tossed an object through the aperture.

And Cephas stood in the cage's cleared central space.

The pig's little white-lashed eyes blinked with a fleeting look of bewilderment—none who knew him could call it fear—at his strange surroundings. He gazed beyond the sheet of glass, and beheld the staring audience. Professional instincts seemed to tell him that here was a show of some kind, and that it was incumbent upon him to squeal.

The pink mouth opened for a vocal effort. Then, evidently, a swift, rustling sound distracted his attention, and showed him he was not the cage's only occupant. He wheeled abruptly. And Brahma came into his blinking line of vision.

The python, at sight of his prey, had coiled tight, and was now thrusting forth and drawing back his three-sided

head, almost on a level with the floor; to gauge the distance for a strike.

"Yes, ladies'n' gentlemen," the lecturer had resumed in a carefully subdued voice, "the first glance from the python's mysterious hypnotic eye charms the trembling prey into a sort of stoopor. And——"

He got no further. Just then Brahma, having satisfactorily measured the distance, struck, flashing forward his head and ten feet of his mighty length with a speed that the eye could not follow.

At that juncture, Cephas had caught for the first time a full and comprehensive view of his horrible cagemate.

The python struck. But Cephas was not there. With a squeal whose shrill fury paled all his life's former attempts at song or at displeasure, the pig sprang forward to meet the assault.

Yes, and he launched himself into the fray a fraction of a second sooner than did Brahma. High in air leaped Cephas, above the swift-darting triangular head.

And down he came, all four pointed trotters bunched together on the neck scales of his adversary. His sharp little white tusks promptly buried themselves to their entire short length in the flesh at the very base of Brahma's skull.

With one convulsive start the giant snake upreared; until his head, and the neck in whose nape Cephas' teeth were sunk, smote resoundingly against the cage roof.

The impact was terrific. It shook the cage like a miniature earthquake. But it did not shake loose the hold of Cephas.

Dearly, no doubt, would the pig have loved to exhaust in a battle squeal such little breath as the blow against the roof had left him. But, to squeal, a pig must open wide his jaws. And Cephas' long, narrow jaws were otherwise engaged. So, in his hour of mortal stress, this one beloved expression of emotion was denied. He must fight without the inspiring thrill of music.

The python dashed himself against the painted walls and the floor, striving in growing panic to shake free and to strike. Each smashing beat of the flail head and neck seemed more than enough to flatten Cephas into shapelessness.

But he was a hard, gristly little fellow, this sacrificed pig; as resilient as a rubber ball, and bothered by no easily crushed flesh. Also, he had the heart of a paladin: zealous, flamboyant, unafraid. D'Artagnan's, at the Gascon's glowing best; even if swathed in porcine skin.

Finding the puny foe refused to die, the python resorted to the constrictor tactics of his race. Around the bristling, tense body of the pig he swept his giant folds.

Coil upon coil Brahma cast around his enemy; hampered vastly, it is true, by the fact that Cephas was behind, instead of in front, of him; but none the less managing to secure a fairly close grip on the tiny hero. Then the python proceeded to "constrict."

Had Brahma been able to coil himself in his customary way, around the pig, the end might have come quickly. But Cephas' position made this impracticable. So the python merely held such hold as he had caught.

Ophido, and the lecturer, and the attendants, and every one else remained almost as moveless as the combatants; powerless to shake off the primitive spell of battle.

That was the situation when Byram —a rumor of the intended slaughter spectacle having reached him in the distant Agriculture Building—elbowed his way into the hall.

Byram was as dangerously angry as only an even-tempered man may become. He was yellow-white, and there were gray dents on either sides of a mouth that was clenched as tight shut as Cephas' own.

He went through the packed crowd without causing the remotest inconvenience—to himself—and made straight for the glass-fronted cage. He stopped only once, and then but momentarily, in his swerveless progress. That was when Crane, as Byram pushed past him, tried to say something by way of excuse or explanation. Byram halted only long enough to aim—and land—a left hook that reached Bud's jaw, and caused him

to sit down with great force and promptitude.

Byram, not even troubling to look back, continued his way to the cage. In his right hand was the thick blackthorn stick he always carried.

He had nearly reached the cage before he was first able to see, through the press, the motionless duelists on its floor. Another step brought him to the glass. And he smote its polished surface with the full swinging force of his stick.

At the first blow of the blackthorn knob, the thick glass split in five directions like so much skin ice under a boy's toe. The second, third, and fourth, delivered with a speed that seemed to make them but a single stroke, shivered the entire glass front, leaving a huge, ragged gap in the center.

Through this gap, Byram stepped; the jutting point of glass tearing his clothes and his hands as he went.

Above the two fighters he towered, his stick upraised, seeking the most vulnerable section of the snake's anatomy. The smash of glass had broken the spell that had gripped the crowd. Silence was replaced by confused shouts and babbling; through which boomed the quite unheeded imprecations of Ophido-Murtha, the Cobra King. There was a surge and a scramble in every direction, too; with much scuffing of feet. No one greatly cared to be so near the abode of the second largest python in captivity, when that captivity was lessened by a broken cage front.

But the incipient panic was wholly groundless. Nor did Byram's upraised blackthorn descend upon the snake. For, even as the man poised the stick for the blow, there was a sudden movement in the mountainous mass of coils, from tail to head. Then, very slowly, the thirty-foot body unwound; twisted feebly over on its back; exposing an endless stretch of white, scaly underside; and lay there. The python's neck was quite scientifically broken; by the incessant and ever-fiercer grinding of a double row of white little tushes.

Beside his huge foe lay Cephas; a small, crumpled heap, curiously awkward and twisted in pose.

Ophido strode vengefully toward the wrecked cage, chanced to observe Bud Crane scrambling up dazedly from a sitting posture on the floor, paused, and reconsidered his planned onslaught.

"If I'd charged ten dollars a head for admittance to this fight," half blubbered the Cobra King to nobody in particular, "it wouldn't half 'a' paid me for losing that python!"

Byram did not hear. He was kneeling beside Cephas, running a tender hand over the limp body, and straightening out the cramped limbs and back.

"Somebody's going to get the licking of his life for this!" he announced to all and sundry, as he gently lifted the small hero in his arms.

Cephas the Unafraid opened one white-lashed, red-rimmed eye, and contributed to the babel of surrounding din a feeble but dauntless squeal. Byram, in incredulous joy, fanned the half-swooning warrior with his hat, and once more ran practiced fingers over Cephas' battered anatomy.

"A rib bashed in, and shoulder 'way out of joint," was his half-audible diagnosis. "But he's beginning to breathe free. And his heart's going. It doesn't hurt him when I punch him anywhere but on the shoulder and the rib. No inside injuries. He'll live—the gaudy little scrapper."

"Say, Byram!" hailed a freak-show manager as the rescuer bore his wounded pet, unopposed, through the excited crowd, out of the Serpent House, "I'll give you fifty dollars for that pig, for my mu-see-um. I'll bill him as the Porcine Paladin and Python Killer, and he'll be——"

"You'll buy *me* as easy as you'll buy Cephas," growled Byram. "He goes back to the farm with me to-morrow, after the vet has fixed him up. And there he stays forever and ever. In clover. As Providence meant a pig to. Not ballyhooing and killing pythons for breakfast. Hey, Cephas?"

And Cephas, the porcine paladin, gave assent, in a muffled but defiantly happy squeal.

The Maid of Paranito Mine

By W. L. George

We thought we had read all the stories that were to be told about mines that were salted. We were wrong. Here is a brand-new one on a very old subject

"LOOK'EE here," said the American at last. He paused, as if hesitating to advise. He threw the stump of his cigar into the water that showed like black oil along the slow-moving side of the ship. Then, as if carried away by an impulse: "You told me how it was with you, Mr. Marston, and I'll talk with you heart to heart, as it were; it's a bad place you're going to." The speaker turned upon his companion a kindly pair of gray eyes which gleamed in the light of the taffrail lamps. There was genuine concern in the lean, alert face which contrasted with the rather obstinate, fair countenance of Marston, who was evidently an Englishman.

"Oh," said the latter coldly, "you're very kind, but what do you mean?"

"Well," said the American slowly, "I know Mexico, and I know this Paranito Mine you're going to see. It's up to you to find out whether it's worth anything. If you'd told me sooner it was Cupster was running the proposition, I'd have told you it was dollars to doughnuts you'd be up against some dirty work."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Marston cheerily.

"Maybe," said the American. "Do you know what they used to call Cupster? 'Crook' Cupster. He had to get out of Texas slick, for horse stealing in ninety-nine, and he escaped from Campeche Jail, where they'd got him nailed for gun running; had a wife and a little girl in those days; the wife sort of vanished; they say he dropped her overboard conveniently when nobody was looking."

"Oh, well," said the young Englishman, "that's all right; it's not my business to inquire into Cupster's morals; if he's got the ore, that's good enough."

"If he's got the ore," repeated the American significantly.

Marston went below into the second-class quarters, where he found his sampler yawning over some surface plans. The terrible heat of the Gulf had filled him with listlessness, and for a long time the two men sat silent in the night, which was broken only by the rhythmic plock-chuff-chuff of the engines. At last, Marston went to the porthole; upon the sky line, behind the greater brilliance of the lighthouse, he could see the dim radiance of the lights of Vera Cruz.

"We'll be in in an hour," he said.

The sampler grunted. The heat was affecting him; already he was sick of the tropics, and before him lay yet another journey—two hundred and fifty miles of steaming through the haze and the heat to Tampico, and then a seeming endless progress through desert, mountain, and wilderness of cactus, until at length he might reach Paranito, that little speck upon the sketch map.

"We may as well turn in," said Marston, with a yawn. "The doctor won't pass us to-night."

The young man nodded in salutation, and went to his cabin.

In spite of the open door and porthole, no air seemed to stir about him, and, as he moved, all his clothes felt sticky and heavy as lead. No dreams haunted his sleep, no dreams of adventure, though here he was, Jack Marston, fresh from the school of mines, on his first prospect, and privileged to go

into the wildest Mexican country to estimate for his company the value of this Paranito Mine, the fabulously rich assay plans of which were safely locked in his dispatch box.

Some little excitement came to him next day, when, after rescuing the luggage from the screaming and wrangling peons upon the wharf, he discovered that good fortune was already his. He had expected to wait a week at Vera Cruz, for the *Chihuahua* was timed to sail twelve hours before the scheduled arrival of the English ship; he would have to wait until the *Garatimoren* sailed for Tampico.

A casual remark made to a minor railway official, who seemed to be in charge of the peons, elicited the startling fact that the *Chihuahua* had been delayed, fouled in harbor by a collier, and was now repairing her propeller; the repairs would be completed within a few hours.

Excitement seized the two Englishmen, for to catch the *Chihuahua* instead of her successor meant not only a saving of seven days, but an exemption from seven days of idle loneliness in a Mexican port.

Such, however, was their "tenderfoot's luck." Within four hours, they were steaming northward; the *Chihuahua* rolled intolerably, but the engineers were glad, for another dawn would see them on land, and there was a coolness in the air that invigorated and cheered them.

But coolness is deceptive; Marston had not been an hour in Tampico before the prostrate body of his sampler was carried to the hotel. It was sunstroke. Marston sat anxiously by the man's side, but soon realized that the case was hopeless. Violent sickness accompanied dreadful pains in the head, so that the sick man wrenched at the ice bag about his forehead; high fever was followed within an hour by delirium in which the sampler returned to all the wild places of the earth where he had spent his life; within six hours, he was dead, and Jack Marston was steaming alone toward the station where would begin his interminable march.

II.

"Paranito," said the peon, pointing a lean, brown finger toward a long, black ridge that jutted out of the stony white plain, broken here and there by dark, dry shrubs.

Marston nodded, put his horse to the pace nearest a trot that the uneven ground would allow. The fairness had gone out of his skin in the ten days' march; indeed, he was a strange figure, for his vivid blue eyes and his tight, curly, yellow hair clashed with the coppery brown of his cheeks. His heart bounded within him as he saw under the ridge a white wooden shanty, evidently that of Cupster, sole occupant and master of this desert.

As he drew near with his escort, he saw upon the threshold of the shanty a man who was evidently Cupster, clad in riding breeches. The sleeves of his shirt were rolled up, showing enormous brown forearms; and soon, under the great white sugar-loaf hat that Cupster was wearing, Marston saw a massive head the impressiveness of which was accentuated by the long, black beard that fell upon his chest.

As Marston rode up, the man negligently shifted the strap of his rifle from shoulder to elbow, and stepped forward without salutation.

"My name is Marston," said the engineer, holding out his hand. "Are you Mr. Cupster?"

"I am," replied Cupster. He paused as if embarrassed, and Marston saw that his dark eyes were full of suspicion. "I didn't expect you this week."

"No," said Marston. "I had a stroke of luck, caught the steamer to Tampico a week sooner than I expected."

"Oh!" said Cupster, and paused again. His face cleared; he smiled. "Well, since you're here, make yourself comfortable." He turned toward the shanty, and shouted: "Marianne!"

A young girl came out, and for a second seemed shy in presence of the stranger; a quick blush rose into her cheeks, and as Marston bowed low, he had an impression of youth and freshness, for everything was color about

Marianne Cupster—dark-brown eyes, very red lips, a complexion ruddy under the blush, and a negligent mass of black curls.

"My daughter," said Cupster carelessly; then, nodding toward the young man: "Mr. Marston, who has come to see the mine."

All that evening, Marston was conscious of a peculiar atmosphere. Cupster seemed delighted to have a visitor. A native of Devonshire, he talked endlessly of his village in Dartmoor Forest. And he grew almost excited when he found that Marston knew Torquay. His great legs outstretched, he sat on a block of wood in a corner of the shanty, smoking pipe after pipe, but he refused to talk of the mine.

"You can see it for yourself to-morrow," he said, in response to an overture, and Marston liked him for his tact, appreciated the big man's evident desire that Paranito should be judged fairly, and smiled at the warning which the suspicious American had given him.

Marston found little reward even in Marianne, for she remained shy with him, did not take part in the conversation until the end of the evening. He could understand her better now, and as he talked to her of New York and London, of the shops and the theaters which she had never seen, he grew more and more conscious of her beauty, of the extraordinary vitality which seemed to fill her; the vitality of a young, wild animal, which one expects at any moment to leap into the air out of sheer life exultation.

But, little by little, her shyness fell away from her; when, at last, her eyes boldly met those of Marston, she asked him queer, direct questions; whether he was married, and whether he got big money, questions which charmed him, for the girl, who could not be less than eighteen or nineteen, had the simple trustfulness and curiosity of a child.

At length, Cupster got up and went to the oil lamp.

"Well, Miss Cupster," said Marston, "it is good night now, I suppose. I'd better get a good sleep if I'm to test your father's mine properly."

The girl threw him a quick look, a look which disturbed him. An expression passed through her eyes that was neither shyness nor merriment. He thought of that look as he went to sleep under the mosquito net; he wondered what it meant, if there were anything in the words of the American. He would have to be careful, he thought; it would never do for a man to make a mistake in his first report.

"But that'll be all right," Marston cheerfully reflected. "I'll sample it myself, end to end; it shan't be said I let my company down through not taking trouble; they shan't go into a rotten proposition if I know it."

Soon his thoughts of business were expelled, for the face of Marianne, sometimes smiling, sometimes mischievous, sometimes shy, ruddy, glowing, young, and in every aspect charming, held his memory so firmly that even his dreams were not free from her.

III.

For five days the thought of Marianne had to struggle with the sterner business care of sampling, as the two Mexicans whom Marston had engaged to replace his dead assistant were entirely raw. They had continually to be watched as they measured off the outcrop into ten-foot lengths, knocked away a fragment of quartz, and put it into the bag, which they drew behind them on an improvised wooden sled.

Very little work had been done on Paranito; there were a few trenches across the outcrop, and in the middle was a prospecting shaft, so narrow that Marston had to kneel at the bottom to take his specimens.

Cupster had driven about thirty feet at depth, so roughly and so carelessly timbered that Marston lived in continual fear that the roof would come down upon his head whenever he struck the side with his hammer.

Still the work progressed, though it seemed endless, for nothing relieved it during the day; the party had their meals far from the shanty, and Cupster, endlessly smoking, stood watching the

work, always amiable and courteous, but evidently anxious that the engineer should not be influenced by the kindly hospitality he was enjoying. Indeed, he spoke very little, and, after the third day, his presence oppressed Marston.

The big, black-bearded man, in spite of his excellent manners, had acquired something of the grimness of those who seldom meet their fellows; Marston grew fanciful, had to tell himself that his suspicion of the big man was absurd, for Cupster was always willing to help, yet never officious. But the wilderness and the silence preyed upon the young Englishman; the cries of birds seemed shrill and threatening; he started when rubble suddenly slithered down a slope; he watched Cupster as if he feared foul play. But the evenings were delightful.

Cupster seemed content with the behavior of his daughter, who was now talking freely to Marston, laughing readily at jokes that were not always very funny, expressing delighted wonder as he described for her a court at Buckingham Palace, a review of the English Life Guards, all the wonderful world that she had never seen; and one night, careless of the dangerous air that blew toward them, icy cold and laden with strange scents, Marston suddenly realized a change in himself.

He looked at the girl, who seemed pale in the moonlight under her massive crown of black hair. At that moment he was telling her that a London fog was sometimes so thick that you could not see your hand before you, but he stumbled.

"So thick—so thick——" he muttered and stopped.

There was a long, tense silence, during which they looked into each other's eyes. They were very close to each other, and Marston was filled with a burning desire to seize her in his arms and, without a word, to crush her to him.

The girl looked up at him with a serious face, and in her eyes an extraordinary excitement, in which was some fear; her breath came quick as she waited, but a fleecy cloud passed across the moon, dulling its radiance, and as the potency of the spell passed away, both laughed low and awkwardly; and as they fell again into commonplace talk, Marston felt that the inevitable had happened, that some intoxication of love was upon him.

As he felt this, he tried to scoff, to tell himself that this little, wild girl could be no mate for him, the civilized, worldly-wise engineer; but the fleecy cloud passed away from the moon, and as the rays fell like silver upon their white faces, they were both of them serious with their new consciousness.

IV.

At last, the weary labor was at an end; two tons of samples, filling ten bags, were piled in the corner of the shanty where Marston slept; still haunted by the warning of the American, Marston had rigged his camp bed between the precious specimens and the hole in the partition which separated him from Cupster. Marianne occupied a small space at the far end of the shanty.

During the last three days, Cupster, still dignified and amiable, had made Marston almost regret that he had ever suspected him. Not only had the prospector continued to entertain him with reminiscences of Devonshire scenery, but he had been very useful; he had helped him to measure off, carted tools, lent a hand when the sleds laden with ore had to be dragged under the blazing sun while the hardy Mexicans seemed about to faint with exhaustion; also, he had cleared a space of about thirty feet by thirty some distance from the ridge, leveled it, swept it, removed the stones, and filled up the crevices with sand; neatly marked out with ropes, it was an ideal sorting table, beyond which was a smaller space for the final sorting.

On the last morning, therefore, the bags were emptied on to the sorting space; the quartz was shoveled into position until it formed a translucent, whitish bed no more than four or five inches in thickness; then the business of

the day began. Row by row, the bed was deprived of its fifth specimen, which was thrown on the smaller space.

Cupster discreetly abstained from offering help in this delicate business. Indeed, as he had his fowling piece with him, he amused himself by picking off such unwary crows and zopilotes as settled on convenient rocks. Once only did he venture to advise, when a pile of about a hundredweight had fallen on the small space.

"You'll have about enough," he said.

"I'd better do the job thoroughly," said Marston.

With the help of the sulky Mexicans, he picked out every seventh specimen. The sun was high; his fingers were cut by the quartz; and fine dust seemed to have filled his eyes and mouth, to have penetrated his very skin; but, half bent to the ground, he went from row to row, selected fairly the fragments that showed color, and those that were obviously sterile.

At last, he gained the last row, the last specimen, and flung it upon the heap. He stood up and went to Cupster, for the prospector, broadly smiling, was holding up to him the welcome surprise of a leather bottle. As they drank the diluted mescal, the men smiled at each other with the consciousness of work fulfilled. Marston rubbed his painful hands against each other, and felt a kindness rise in him for the good-natured prospector.

"So that's over," said Cupster slowly. "I'm sure, I hope——" He broke off, his face became rigid, and his eyes stared out from under his bushy, black eyebrows.

Marston followed the direction of his gaze; fifty yards away, beyond the sorting space, stood an unknown Mexican, in his long, loose riding trousers, a white sugar-loaf hat upon his head.

A sound, half oath, half growl, escaped Cupster. Then, suddenly, the whole wildness of Mexico seemed to descend upon the plain. Cupster had shouted "Perez!" and, as he shouted, brought his fowling piece to his shoulder. As Marston heard the report, the Devonshire man's enormous hand seized him by the shoulder, threw him face down by his side upon the stones.

The whole scene had the quality of a dream, for Cupster, taking cover behind a rock, was firing wildly at what seemed to be no more than the point of a sugar loaf beside a shrub. But this was real earnest, for Marston heard a bullet hiss over his head, and saw another splinter a rock a few yards in front of him. He wondered if he were dreaming of some Buffalo Bill show that he had seen as a child; and he wondered still more when, suddenly, no more bullets came from the Mexican.

The whole affray had lasted a minute. Cupster cautiously raised his head, and murmured under his breath: "Lie low!"

"I can see his hat!" cried Marston excitedly.

"He ain't under the hat," said Cupster, in a contemptuous tone. And, true enough, as he spoke, they heard the faint clatter of a horse's hoofs. Perez had left his hat as a blind, and was making off under the shelter of the ridge.

"Skipped out," said Cupster, as he rose to his feet, "but I'll get him yet, the quitter." Then, in a few words, he told Marston an extraordinary story:

Perez, a local desperado, had dared to seek Marianne in marriage; rejected, he had sworn to be revenged on her father. "But I'll get him afore he gets me," said Cupster, with a laugh.

As Marston collected the specimens from the small space into the two bags which were to travel back to England, a passion of jealousy rose in him, and he was thrilled by the realization of its significance; he loved her. The rivalry of Perez had enlightened him, so he packed his bags eagerly, for he was anxious to see once more the beautiful brown eyes and the smiling mouth which had become so desirable.

That evening gave him no opportunity, for Cupster, more amiable than ever, insisted on teaching him euchre, which he did successfully enough at a cost to Marston of some ten dollars; and when, next morning, the young Englishman woke up, he realized hope-

lessly that he could not dally much longer, that he must decide whether he wanted Marianne, and that, if he really wanted her, he must speak at once. Something in him still rebelled against the idea; the interests of his young career, and the incongruity of so wild a young wife.

. Torn by uncertainty, he walked out of the shanty, his eyes fixed on the uneven ground. He must have walked half a mile without coming to a decision, when he stopped in front of a dry salt pan. High was the sun when he looked up. Addressing the enormous, deep-blue sky, he whispered: "Yes, I do want her."

Peace fell over him. Then his senses became alert, for he had heard a sound to his left, a cry. He listened again; yes, there it was: "Help!" It was an English voice, a girlish voice, and Marston did not think clearly, as he ran across the ridge, falling sometimes on hands and knees on the bowlders of pink and gray granite.

"Help!" cried the voice louder. It came from a clump of wizened, sun-scorched mangrove trees. There, two figures were struggling—slim Marianne, the heavy waves of her black hair fallen to her waist, one hand clutching at the throat of a tall man in loose trousers and sugar-loaf hat. As the man looked toward him, having heard his footsteps, Marston loosened his revolver in its case; he just had time to guess this must be Perez. The Mexican released the girl, his hand went to his hip, but automatically Marston fired.

Marianne clung to Marston's arm, and her convulsive shudders ran through his body. At their feet lay Perez, arms wide apart. Between his eyes was a small, dark hole, from which had flowed only two or three drops of blood.

"He is dead," said Marston dully.

The girl clutched his arm so hard that she hurt him. "Thank you," she said; "thank you, Jack."

Then Marston forgot Perez and all incongruous adventure. His arms were about Marianne, and she lay very still upon his breast. Softly he stroked the smooth, dark hair, and often bent to kiss the unresisting red lips.

V.

When at last their love dream lost some of its potency, Marianne again thanked him; but, still, there was in her eyes an expression which was not one of joy, and not one of fear; something undefinable and disquieting.

"Come, Marianne," said Marston softly.

"Not yet," she said.

She put both hands upon his shoulders, looked up into his face, seemed about to speak.

"Oh, I can't, I mustn't!" she murmured, almost to herself.

"Can't what, darling?" said Marston fondly.

"I can't tell you; I oughtn't to tell you."

"You don't mean you can't marry me?" said Marston quickly, and a pain shot through him.

The girl laughed low, and, drawing his head down, kissed his cheek.

"No, not that," she murmured; "I'll marry you to-morrow if you like, but you——"

"But what?"

Marianne's features grew tense again. "It's the mine," she said. "Father——" And again she broke off, and knotted her fingers together. "I can't, I mustn't," she whispered, and suddenly she burst into tears.

Marston put his arm about her shoulders, comforted her, but, as they walked slowly toward the shanty, there was between them a silence full of fear and uncertainty. Filled with his new consciousness of love, Marston tried to put away the suspicion that was again beginning to gnaw at him, his fears that even in Paranito he might be accountable for murder; but even love was not enough.

That night he cautiously crept out into the brilliant moonlight, to join the two improvised samplers whom, earlier in the day, he had secretly appointed to meet him. Soon all three were bending over the outcrop, and regularly chipping

away the fragments of quartz. Each one, as it broke away, Marston put into a sack. He was determined that no mistake should be made, if the foul play which he suspected was actually in progress.

He swore that he would sample the whole mine over again at night, even if he had to affect fever to allay Cupster's suspicions.

For four hours they worked easily enough, for the moon shone almost as brilliantly as the sun, and the whole of the quartz outcrop glittered like burnished silver. At last, however, the flush of dawn came into the east, and Marston wondered whether it were safe to go on. While he hesitated, he heard a sound, but this he disregarded as he took out his watch and walked out of the shadow of the scrub in which he was standing. It was three o'clock in the morning.

"I had better stop," thought Marston.

To his left he heard a shout, then Cupster's voice swearing at the peon.

Marston turned. In the moonlight, he saw two figures struggling; the peon, his hands buried in Cupster's beard, trying to drag him down. They swayed, locked and sharply outlined; the big Devonshire man was trying to free himself, pushing at the Mexican with the barrel of his gun; but the peon clung to him desperately, well knowing that if he released his antagonist, the latter could shoot.

Marston ran toward the figures, but as he came up to them, the struggling couple fell upon the stones; the gun went off; Marston found himself standing by the side of the trembling Mexican. Cupster lay upon his side, his face turned up toward the light; part of the small shot had bunched and penetrated the brain through one of his eyes. The rest of his face was, in twenty places, spattered with little wounds.

There was a cry. Marianne came running from the shanty, clad in a dressing gown. Painfully she limped over the stones which hurt her feet through her slippers. Marston seized her by the wrist, but she shook him off and threw herself upon the body. "Father!" she screamed. She clutched Cupster by the shoulders, looked into his face, drew back suddenly in horror at what she saw.

Marston bent down and felt the man's heart; he was dead. Very gently he helped Marianne to her feet, pillowed her head upon his breast, and there for a long time she wept pitifully, calling for her father, repeating again and again that he had never given her a harsh word, and Marston, too, felt tears very near, as he tried to comfort her.

Suddenly she looked up at him. "I am all alone now," she said.

"No, not alone," said Marston tenderly, as he pressed her to him.

"Oh, I am, I am!" she cried shrilly. "I am not fit—if only you knew——"

"Don't tell me now, darling," said Marston soothingly.

"I must," she panted, freeing herself; "it would not be right. Listen! I know what father said about Perez when Perez fired at him—he did want to marry me, that was true—and father wouldn't have minded."

"But he said——" cried Marston.

"Listen!" said the girl impatiently. "It's I wouldn't marry him; he was a friend of father's. When you came yesterday he was asking me again—he said he'd kidnap me—he's rich—oh, I'm so glad you killed him; I was afraid of him, though father wouldn't have minded."

"But why did your father fire at him?" said Marston, puzzled.

"It was a trick," said the girl, in a low, harsh voice. "Perez only pretended to fire, he missed on purpose; it was all arranged so that father might fire back—but not at him."

"Not at him?"

"No; father was firing at your specimens; it was not lead he was firing—it was gold dust."

"Gold dust!" cried Marston. "Do you mean to say——"

"Oh, of course you understand!" said the girl, and a flush of shame rose to her face. "That mine's no good, but when you get your specimens up to London

you'll find they are full of gold. Full of the gold father fired into them," she said bitterly.

There was a very long silence. Then Marston bent over the dead man, taking out his handkerchief.

"Poor old Cupster!" he said, and he turned to Marianne: "You couldn't give him away, of course you couldn't, darling."

She clutched his hand, and he heard her whisper, very softly: "I didn't know what it was to be loved yesterday. I know now that you have said that."

Together they looked into the dead man's face, and, with a start, Marston saw in the light of the moon that, in every one of the little wounds, the last charge of the fowling piece had left a tiny speck of gold; all round the edges of the big wound was a halo of deadly, treacherous gold.

"His last charge," he said softly; "no, his last but one; he has left me his large charge—you, Marianne."

Then very reverently, with his handkerchief, Marston covered the dead man's face.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

HENRY PHIPPS, who accumulated a few hundred million dollars making steel in the good, old days, and now collects his twenty dollars a month for attending board meetings of the United States Steel Corporation in the same spirit as the twenty-dollar-a-month farm hand collects his wages, has little use for the Beau Brummel type.

One glance at his appearance would lead one to believe that his clothes were remnants from the Civil War, and he backs up this belief by carrying an old, faded umbrella large enough to shield ten ordinary men.

Having an important matter to take up with Chairman Gary, he dropped into the Steel offices and was stopped by an office boy who happened to be new on the job.

"Wanta see Mr. Gary," snapped Phipps.

"Can't see him," answered the boy. "There's been four other old guys here before you this morning looking for hand-outs."

LINCOLN AT MONTE CARLO

CHARLES M. SCHWAB, who is considered our greatest steel expert, used to have a mania for trying his luck at the game of chance. Monte Carlo was at one time Schwab's favorite stopping place on the other side, and while he has "reformed" of late years, the great steel maker enjoys nothing better than to play "small stakes" whenever he finds himself at the French resort.

Not long after the new Lincoln penny made its initial appearance, so the story is told, Schwab made a hurried business trip abroad.

Arriving on the other side, he found that it would be two or three days before he could conveniently enter into negotiations with the desired parties, so Monte Carlo loomed up before him.

Taking his accustomed seat, he reached into his pocket, and, to his surprise, found that he had been carrying a package of one hundred new Lincoln pennies around with him.

As he unwrapped the package, his ever-ready smile made its appearance, for it strongly appealed to him that the new penny greatly resembled a certain foreign gold piece.

He arranged the pennies in a glittering pile before him and started his play, and at the end of a few hours found that he had "cleaned up" several thousand dollars on the investment of a few Lincoln pennies.

The management would never have known what had happened, but Schwab thought the joke was too good to hold secret.

Auld Charlie Darwin's Law

By Robert Welles Ritchie

Author of "The Goblin's Treasure House," "Guns and a Girl," Etc.

As told by the old Scotch engineer. A story not of men but of cats. An almost incredible tale of a derelict in the Pacific; but as the Chief says: "There's things at sea which fall under no law of God or man, and, churchman that I am, I set them down for ghosts, for want of a better classifeecation."

HEAR auld Maggie up aloft there, crying her heart out to the wide water world!"

The Chief, with a little gesture of disgust, of professional protest against what touched him intimately, passed me the beaded siphon bottle, and with a nod of his head toward the rack over his washstand invited replenishment from the chunky, white-labeled bottle in the ring there. He tipped a ginger-ale bottle over his own glass.

"Aye! Blaw-aw-aw-aw-oup! Go it, old Mother Trouble, and waste three scoops of good Bellamy steam coal with every breath. One'd think we were making past the Hook o' Holland, with all the trawlers in the German Ocean piled up ahead, waiting to be run down, instead of doing our little eighteen out in the Pacific Noman's water, with not so much as a sampan between our prow and Hiogo."

The *Malaysia*'s foghorn sent another sobbing, wavering call out into the white silence. Then pulsed again the engines down below—thrum—thrum—thrum; sounded again the endless whispering and rustling of the rushing water over the rail. Through the opened door of the Chief's quarters, the fog appeared a close-packed infinity of fluff and smoke—dour, unworldly, engulfing. The limitless expanse of it smashed into my head the stupendous majesty of that word of Genesis which has it that "In the beginning—the earth was without form and void." To my mind it was as if the ship had left behind the tug of gravity, binding her to something terrestrial, and was simply coursing at random through the nebula of a new creation.

I looked to see the solid mist coalesce into flat rings of Saturn, like unblown automobile tires; upon one of these the *Malaysia* would easily climb and skim a tenuous rim, like a scared cat taking a fence. Anything is possible, given a sea fog that is ponderable and an imagination that is a bit touched.

In nearer prospect, framed by the casing of the door, the myriad specks of moisture swirled and danced like the sparks of the Milky Way on a night of frost. They settled down to spike into a jeweled hedge the rough fuzz of the Chief's heavy jacket, to bead the dropping tips of his grizzled mustache. His big face, rough-hewn as out of lignum-vitæ, was made hoary by the rime of thin moisture; bushy eyebrows blinked back the heavier drops that slipped down from the line of rat-nibbled, iron-gray hair.

The Chief had drawn his life from engines for nearly thirty years—had loved engines and fought engines and conquered engines for so many years that there was about him something as

precise as the thrust of his tail shaft, as metallic as the high polish on his boiler heads. Lay on a solid Scotch foundation an intimacy with engines, and you have something as unromantic as a table of pressure pounds—as eminently practical as a fourteen-inch coast-defense gun. But interesting, withal. Interesting—yes, fascinating. Because I happen to know a good deal about mining machinery and ore crushers and all that, my company was attractive to the chief engineer of the *Malaysia;* because this technical knowledge does not atrophy in me an abounding curiosity in things relating to human nature, the chief engineer of the *Malaysia* was a double delight to me. So we got on famously. It was before Diamond Head was dropped astern that the Chief and I hooked up; we were four days west of Honolulu, and fairly near the middle of the Pacific, when the fog came down.

"No," the Chief was saying, "you mining engineers now don't go at the business o' machinery right. I've looked over the centrifugal pumps and the stamps they have there in Montague's place in San Fran', and it looks to me a mining man's satisfied with an alarm clock to do his work for him, so long as it holds together. The time must come when—well, by Jiminy, look who's here!"

He paused, and looked down smilingly on a draggled bit of fur on four legs that had come on velvet feet through the fog to the door of the Chief's room. A cat, it was—what is known, I believe, as a clam-chowder cat—all yellows and blacks and whites, slammed together like some drunken mosaic worker's dream. A matronly cat it was, too, beyond question. Her maternal rank was, indeed, advertised by a shriveled fluff of fur she held in her mouth—something all curled in on itself and with only two blue, pinpoint eyes showing against a fuzzy background of ears. With a deprecatory "by your leave," coming muffled through the bundle the proud mother was carrying, she stepped over the brass-capped baseboard of the door, stalked past the Chief's legs, and deposited the kitten next his yellow slippers underneath the bunk. Then she rubbed herself once—just once, as if paying necessary obeisance—against his shin, and was off again into the fog.

"That's number one," chuckled the Chief. "There's four more o' the brats, and they'll be here inside of half an hour. The perseestence that old Mollybruiser has, man!" He wagged his head, and he rubbed his hands together as if over a piece of waste—a trick the old engineer had when his thoughts ran rapidly or were thrown out of their channel.

"Would you believe I've taken those five kitlets out o' my room this three times now and dumped 'em down next the door of the paint room for'ard. And each time back comes old Molly, with her sick tribe, to take up light housekeeping under my bunk. It's outrageous, that's what I call it—fair outrageous, and me a man with a reputation and standing in Calvary Church, out on Bush Street."

"You've made a hit with the lady," I ventured, laughing at the crinkles of puzzlement that formed about the man's mouth and under his narrow eyes.

"The scut! For a nickel I'd heave the whole kit and kin of 'em overboard."

Even as he breathed murder, the Chief leaned tenderly over and grasped the solitary kitten by the scruff of the neck. As he raised it from the floor, the little beast curled its tail under itself, twisted its head to one side, and closed its eyes in a perfect attitude of trusting resignation. A big finger went exploring its ribs, gently as the finger of a girl might, chucked the thing under its silly chin, scratched between its ears. The fluff ball curled tighter on itself and the blue eyes winked foolishly.

"And yet," said the Chief, as if carrying on an argument, "there's lots of life—real, terrible life—in this bag o' skin. A good God has endowed the brat with more lasting power than my engines down below have."

I laughed.

"A snick in the back of the neck——" I said.

"True for you—now. But when the beast grows up—when he's got his strength—— Why, the lasting power that's in him then—it's all steel, I tell you!"

I could not help being amused at the Chief's earnestness in his willingness to qualify this mewing kitten for the world's championship. Maybe I showed it in my face. At any rate, his voice immediately took on an argumentative timbre, and he spread out one cracked and oil-blackened hand as if to check off knock-down points on his fingers.

"Through starvation—through thirst—through fighting and bitter sickness this wisp of fur'll survive when you and I are gone mad—or dead," he solemnly declared. "He's the living proof of auld Charlie Darwin's theory about the fittest surviving in this world of sorrows. I know, because I've seen with my two eyes—seen a thing beyond your believing. Or mine, either, if it hadn't been given to me to see the cruelest bit of tragedy ever in the animal kingdom."

The Chief paused. I sipped my high ball, waiting and unwilling to disturb a story that was on the ways and ready for the launching. He carefully set the kitten on the floor and looked out into the blinding white smother for a long minute, as if gathering up facts from the scattered floor of his memory.

"Auld Darwin and Wallace and those rare boys say that Nature is a grim and cruel mistress," he began slowly. "That she kills the unfit so that the fit may reproduce its kind, and the world be better for it. The test is on you and me—on this dab o' skin and bones under my bunk here—every minute. And when we waver, or falter, or whine about it—zam! we're done. The Book of Holy Writ says the same thing, but in a different and more terrifying way—hell-fire, and that. The world o' men is too busy to see the principles work out; that's the reason people say, 'Aw', barley water' to such theories. Maybe I did myself once—but——

"About three hundred miles from this spot—no, two hundred and seventy-five, or six—was where it was. I could give you the latitude and longitude if that meant anything to you, which it does not. But enough to know it was in the most terribly desolate and plague-shunned part of the Pacific—this place where it happened. Ships never go there unless they're blown off their tracks, and then it's only steamers down from the Great Circle or off the Honolulu-Yokohama course, for sailing ships find no profit in this deadhouse of the ocean.

"Yes, it's a dead sea. Currents are slack, and they drift round and round in a lazy circle there, carrying weed like the Gulf weed that's thrown off in the Sargossa Sea you'll know about—between Porto Rico and the Canaries. Let a ship beyond care of herself get caught in these currents, and she'll swing round the circle until the sun goes cold, with never eye of man to see her decaying bones and the judgment of the Almighty heavy upon her. Ah, a fearsome place! The moon must be like that, I take it."

The clam-chowder cat strode in and deposited another of her brood beneath the bunk; was gone like a shadow.

"'Twas ten years ago coming January—January twenty-sixth, to be exact—when I was second aboard the feckless cripple *Adair*. As musty and fusty a tramp as ever took grain at Port Costa for the filthy ports of China, what with her engines threatening each minute to drop through her bottom and the coal consumption something awful. The auld *Adair* had sighed and snorted her way to Honolulu, and was wallowing for the one hundred and eightieth when, on the day I mentioned, she sprung a crack in her shaft you could hide a dog in. In a fog like this, too, and not so far from our present position on the westward track.

"As a man acquainted with machinery, I need not describe to you, sir, the ghastly business of shrinking a collar onto that blasted shaft o' ours. Days on end in the muck and the murk o' the tunnel—sweat—burns—profanity—

ah, yes, profanity; for I was once a very profane man before I joined Calvary Church, on Bush Street. The auld man—Jones was his name, and no wickeder drunkard ever came out o' Holyhead—divided his time with square-face and tremens, what with his taking no observation, on account o' the living fog and his horrible observations concerning the engine-room crew. Ten mortal days in the Bad Place was our portion, and then the last bolt was riveted and the fog lifted at the same instant."

The Chief's voice trailed to nothingness, and he sat hunched up on his stool, eyes out on the dank blanket over the rail in the hypnotism of recollection.

"Like that out there it had been for ten days, and then—whisk!—clear as a bell, and a crazy-horse ship wabbling atop the oily swell not five cable lengths aport. A ship growing on yellow weed, like scum on a boiling pot o' soup. Weed, weed everywhere, all blotchy and leprous looking against the dead blue-gray of ocean. Do you get it, man—the picture? Ah, fair nasty and ghoulish; if a troupe of skippies had danced over the rail o' that charnel ship wallowing there and played tag on the weed, it would have been no more than natural.

"A barkentine she was, with rags o' sails flapping from her foremast and the mainmast lopped off at the cross-trees. And she was green and ripe with age. You could smell mold coming down the wind from her—the mold o' death and corruption. The *Flying Dutchman,* you'd say.

"It bides in my mind how the auld man took the first shock o' that ship riding in the weed there, like some crazy tea house on Golden Gate Park lawn. One look he cast at it, as the fog curtain rolled up, and then he made a gurgling noise in his weasand, and did duck into his cabin like a scared conie, there to bank his raging internal fires with more fuel. Up he comes, with the bottle still in the crotch of his arm, and a neat bit brannigan giving him the aspect, at least, of a man unafraid.

"'Mr. Simpson,' he calls to the first officer, 'clear away a boat, and take a run over there and look over that lazar house. Belike there's dead men aboard her, and records to be carried to port.'

"Saying which, His Rums ducks below to comfort his tried nerves with the square-face. It had been a sore trial to a man with the jims—the popping up o' such a specter from the fog.

"I went along upon invitation of Simpson; I was ridden hard by curiosity, though I will say it the flesh on me was all pricked out like the business side of a nutmeg grater. Nor were the boat's crew any too willing; the smell o' mold down the wind was in their noses, and the whity-black bleach of spars and hull had about it the looks of graveyard trees. Over the crawling, slimy waves—heavy like molten lead—we pulled, making hard going of it through the raft o' weed. To the windward side we went, and so to the stern, where falls dangled from outswung davits. The ropes were threads o' punk; they parted when the man fending off with the boat hook grabbed them—parted and shed a little cloud of dust like rotten wood. We had to scramble to the deck by the anchor chains, flaking shreds long as your hand as we swarmed up the rusty links.

"Scat, you brute!" (The third kitten had just been added to the credit of the Chief's hospitality.) "'Tis an important line o' thought you're interrupting.

"As I was saying, sir, the decks were a sieve with dry rot; we had to mind our feet sharp, or drop through to foul blackness. I take it the deck of the ark looked like that a hun'erd years after Noah shooed the last elephant off to the top of Ararat. Death and decay had played knucklebones on that deck, and the marks of their fingers were in the rotted planks. But down we went, stepping mighty light and following close to the side—to grab a hand hold should the deck go down from under—and so to the poop, where the outswung davits stuck over the ocean like two skinny arms, beckoning for the long-

boat that would never come back. There was the trash of a mad haste there at the davits' feet: a broken water butt, bone dry; the stove-in half of a bread tin; the rag of a man's great-coat. Fear o' death, these things spoke —curdling, crawling fear.

"Simpson it was that picked up the wreck of the greatcoat at fingers' ends; some little white bones—like a cod's skeleton—fell to the deck with a dry whisper.

"'God save us!' groans one of the boat pullers—and over a little handful of white bones! The spell of that ship was strong on us.

"Then we started to go below to the captain's cabin, and we were passing the mainmast, when Simpson stopped and ran his hand over the butt of it, just above the spike rack. He called me over with a jerk of his head, and there was a puzzled look in his eyes.

"'What do you make of it—these scratches?' he asked.

"I looked, and there all up and down the mast as far as our eye could catch the grain of it, were ten thousand score of little pits and digs; the timber was slivered into a fine fuzz as if—well, as if some one had run a glass cutter over every inch of it every day for a dozen years. The scores ran straight up and down.

"'Ghosts' toenails,' Simpson said with a laugh; but his laugh was flat as a cracked ship's bell.

"Then we went down into the captain's cabin. And as we crept cautiously down the short companionway and over the floor of that musty cabin, our feet crunched little white bones—scores and scores of 'em. They snapped like glass. The cabin was heavy with mold and a mare's nest of disorder. Books, papers, instruments, clothing, all tumbled about. And the little white, snappy bones—in the closet —under the bunk. Augh! 'Twas enough to raise the hair on a man's head!

"The log and the ship's papers we didn't find; they had been taken. But there were bills of lading and letters from the owners. From these we learned that the *Glencraigie,* out of Liverpool, had cleared Sydney for Kobe—had cleared just a month short of fifteen years before the day we boarded her. No port had seen her since.

"A month short of fifteen years! Man, is there any knowing the mystery of the great ocean?"

The Chief's voice was sunk in reverence as before the shrine of a deity. One hand waved out toward the fog —a gesture of obeisance.

"We were standing there, Simpson and myself, with the boat's crew huddled around, when a fearsome thing happened. It plumped out of the silence of that dead sea like the voice of God. Footfalls!

"Aye, footfalls on the deck boards above our heads. Little, scampering paddy-pats, with a claw ring to them, once over our heads, and then—silence."

The Chief suddenly whirled one hand over, and rapped with his finger nails on the wooden partition behind him—quick, sharp raps as each nail fell smartly against the panel. The stamp of great awe was on his face; in his eyes something born of the water spaces, their mystery.

"It bides with me to this minute," he continued, in a voice sunk to the murmur of prayer, "what one of those boat pullers did that instant. He laughed just once—'twas like the grating of a broken bone, that laugh—then he curled up in a heap on a rotting locker cushion and went fair sick to his stomach. As for the rest of us, we stood as if before a plague for a full minute, and then we bolted for the deck. Nothing there! Of course, nothing there. It was a sea ghost belike—a yammering, chuttering sea skippie of the most vengeful kind.

"No, don't smile, man"—the tale teller held up a checking hand and wagged his head sagely. "There's things at sea which fall under no law of God or man, and, churchman that I am, I set them down for ghosts for want of better classifeecation. But wait:

"Back to that frowsy cabin Simpson and I went—the boat's crew preferring to stick in the sunlight. We took such papers as would prove the finding of the derelict, and we searched long for some clew to tell the story of why a ship in good order should have been abandoned—a hint of plague, mayhap; the sign of a mutiny even. Not a whisper on the mystery, either there nor in the after hold, where we went to look for water. Water there was, to be sure; but no more than a deserted ship would take in through parting seams in all those years of loose drifting. No, nor sign of fire. The *Glencraigie* had been sound when those frantic men swung her longboat over the stern davits and pulled out to doom; so much was certain, though she was a fearsome hulk now.

"Simpson and I were turning o'er the problem of this thing when we came back to the deck, and we were just going for'ard to take a look at the fo'c's'le when——

" 'For the love o' God, man; look at that!' Simpson yells, grabbing my arm with a grip like a pipe wrench's. With his free hand, he waved up to the main's'l yard on the foremast—just where it made an angle in crossing the mast front. I looked. For a second I saw nothing, and then—a cat's eyes burned into mine—yellow—shining."

"O-ow-ow!"

The Chief jumped on his stool, and one clenched fist was half raised before his face. My head—I confess it freely—banged back against the edge of his bunk.

"O-ow-ow!"

The piebald cat, her mouth choked with a kitten bundle, gravely considered us with level, unperturbed eye. Then she dropped the kitten with its fellows beneath the bunk, and stalked out into the fluff.

"The wretched beast!" The engineer passed a hand over his forehead. "And right when I was—— Well, no consequence. You follow? Cat up the mast on the yard there? Aye, and two palsied men down below, glaring up at those two eyes—twin sparks out o' hell.

"Maybe it was a full minute we were held there, fascinated, you might say. Then we walked slowly forward, to get beyond the mast, and see more of the cat. But as we moved, the spirit beast on the yard moved, keeping its eyes always on us. We got just the flash of a long, shadowy, black body, thin as a wafer, and of the hair on a black tail all on end. The thing's lips were parted as we drew nearer, and the tiger teeth of him showed. We heard the devil hiss. Oh, aye! 'twas a wild beast up there. A beast from the dawn o' the world!

"It was while Simpson and I were standing there, matching glances with that black imp up the mast, that a most unworldly yell came from up the deck, where the boat's crew had been loafing and whispering between themselves the mystery of the hulk's spirits. We whirled to look. And what we saw there, sir, was the working law of auld Charlie Darwin—the law down to the bone—and operating. It was on the sagging top o' the deck house. Two skeletons, sacked in black fur, were writhing and tumbling and clawing over the torn body of a bird—a Mother Carey bird, all rumpled and feather-strewn. As they fought, they screamed most awfully. Like the screams o' fighting women, those curdling, coughing yarrups!

"But the space of a breath and from out the aft companionway came flashing two other prancing skeletons; down from the foremast perch slid the devil we'd been gazing at the minute back. All unfearful of the presence of the sailors by the rail, these skuttering shadows drew together in a circle about the fighters. They crouched there, tigerlike, all in a circle, their club tails lashing and their chops slavering with lust o' fighting and lust o' meat. The two contending were careful not to uncover the body of the bird; through the blood in their eyes, they saw the hungry mouths ringed about them. Anon, one of the brutal circle would make a dash forward, as if to seize the prize; but instantly he would have the others on his back. It was a fair fight

—aye, fair as the law which says the fit survive.

"In less time than this telling it was done. We saw a rush in of the silent, bloodthirty watchers—a streak o' black shoot up the mizzenmast, dropping feathers marking the bird in its mouth. Behind the victor was death for the loser — tearing, ravenous-worrying death. The pack of watchers became a pack of killers. They gorged; they fought; they yelled with sharp, mouthing yells. And in the end there were four cats on that charnel ship instead o' five.

"Four cats—get it, man? After fifteen years o' Nature's rule aboard that drifting derelict—rule o' birth in a moment when food was a-plenty; rule o' death to the weakest when food lacked —four of fifty generations alone survived. Four cats—bone-tried and hunger-tested! Four persisting springs o' life in the little space of an abandoned ship—life pared down to the chance of a feckless bird's alighting on a spar and being caught. For fifteen years, battle had been done on that moldering barkentine. Once a year—I figured it out later—maybe a bit oftener, if winds favored—the wreck drifted near the Laysan, or Bird Islands, out west of the Hawaiian group. Then there must have been plenty; then the grip of Uncle Charlie's law was loosed for a spell—comparative comfort and reproduction there. But for the rest—ah, man—man!

"The Hebrew God is, after all, the God Who Rules. 'How terrible art Thou in Thy works!' "

The Chief stopped abruptly, bent over, and lifted one of the trembling, puny kittens from beneath the bunk. He raised it, curling into a ball, and with the head twisted foolishly awry, to a level with his eyes, and contemplated it solemnly. This way and that the gray old man turned the flabby bit of life, with a thick finger exploring its wispy ribs.

"Well, what's the end of the tale?" I asked.

"There is no end—no end," murmured the Chief. "We left 'em there on that ship cursed o' God."

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ADVERTISING HIS ATTRACTIVENESS

CHARLES DICK, former United States senator from Ohio, was closely associated with the late Mark Hanna in the campaign to nominate McKinley for the presidency, and, in this capacity, passed on all of Hanna's mail before it was handed to the Warwick of the Republican party.

One morning Mr. Dick discovered the following communication, written in a feminine hand on delicately scented paper:

MY DEAR SENATOR HANNA: I had always disliked you intensely, because of the cartoons of you printed in the papers, until I visited the Senate gallery the other day. But, as I sat up there watching you hour after hour, I realized that my opinion of you was wrong, and now I admire you even more than I disliked you. I shall be in the last seat on the left of the front row in the woman's gallery at two o'clock to-morrow afternoon. If you will glance up at that corner twice in succession, while I am there, I will meet you at the west entrance of the Senate restaurant. I want to tell you how glad I am that I have changed my opinion of you. (Signed) YOUR NEW ADMIRER.

Dick, having read the note twice, placed it third from the top in the pile of letters which he passed on to the Ohio leader. Hanna read the note, reread it without moving a muscle of his face, rose from his desk, and limped out of the room which he used as a combination of study and office when in his home. After a few minutes, he returned and went after the remainder of his correspondence in calm and businesslike manner.

"Senator," inquired Dick, struggling in vain against his curiosity, "what did you do with that baby-blue letter?"

"I dropped it," Hanna replied carefully, "exactly in the middle of the floor of my wife's sitting room."

The Fight on Standing Stone

By Francis Lynde

Author of "The Taming of Red Butte Western," "Scientific Sprague," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

Into the Standing Stone Cañon, where Stannard, a young and enthusiastic engineer is pushing to completion a railroad cut-off, comes a private-car party upon a bear hunt in the Buckskin Mountains. Right along, a rival railroad has been laying tracks to beat Stannard to his goal, and had caused him many delays in work and defection among his men. This hunting party caps the troubles, for the private-car people are headed by Silas Westervelt, a millionaire stockholder in both the railroads now fighting for right of way. One of the picnickers is Anitra Westervelt, niece of the magnate, and with whom Stannard fell in love hopelessly the year before. The engineer looks upon the sport-seeking visitors as invaders. And soon he senses that Banker Westervelt is in the field for bigger game than bears—in fact to persuade Stannard to report unfavorably of his project to President Merriam, and advise ending activities on the cut-off. A series of "accidents" follow that show Stannard his enemies of the other railroad job are determined to spoil his chances of success. Greer, their chief engineer, is using every underhand method, and under cover of night visits Westervelt to confer confidentially with him. Stannard does not have to wait long in suspense, for Silas Westervelt adroitly intimates that if the young engineer will convey a hopeless view of the railroad project to Merriam in New York, he will be richly rewarded, and the capitalist upon leaving Stannard puts on the table a transfer of a thousand shares of valuable stock. The engineer is powerfully tempted to accept the bribe, and all the more so when Anitra Westervelt advises him to make all the money he can, whether the means be straight or shady. Meanwhile Greer, his opponent in the field, is pushing his track-laying, and open warfare seems imminent. At this moment of crisis Stannard is bidden by Anitra to dine with the fashionable party in the private car.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SNARE OF THE FOWLER.

BETWEEN the reading of Anitra's note and the hour when he might be expected to put in an appearance at the private car, Stannard changed his mind a dozen times. Setting mere social kindliness aside as the unlikeliest of the reasons for the dinner invitation, it was not difficult to trace Anitra's note back through Mrs. Grantham to Mr. Westervelt.

To go and hobnob with the millionaire over the dinner table, after he had definitely decided to refuse to fall in with the millionaire's plans, cut crosswise through the straightforward grain of the young Missourian. None the less, when the time came, he changed from khaki soiled to khaki clean, and, without saying anything to the mess-room squad, made his way across the yard to the *Egeria*.

Though he was not specially early, he found only Anitra in the open compartment of the car. He was glad to see that she walked without limping when she got up to welcome him.

"Oh, dear! I've lost out," she lamented, giving him a wry little smile. "Doc Billy was just leaving when I wrote the note for Aunt Jeannette, and I bet him a bright red tie against a box of civilized chocolates that you wouldn't come. What made you come?"

"You did. I couldn't miss the happy chance of sitting at table with you at least once more. Did Mr. Padgett go back with Kitts?"

"He did not. He stayed to tell us bear stories over the canned soup. Won't you sit down?"

"After you," he grinned. "I have had one lesson in manners lately, and I'm not needing another."

She laughed and sat down on the wide leather-covered lounge, making

This story began in the January month-end number, which may be obtained at news stands.

room for him beside her. He ignored the wordless invitation, and drew up a chair so that he might sit facing her.

"How is the sore ankle by this time?" he asked.

"It's well," she returned calmly, and he grinned again.

"Kitts wanted to bet me that you had changed your mind one other time about joining the bear hunters. I turned him down and saved my money," he told her.

"Are all Missourians so cautiously thrifty?" she inquired mockingly.

"Got to be. We haven't any Wall Street in our metropolis. One can't well take a flyer in little red apples, you know."

The two waiters were laying the shortened table for six, and Vallory and Padgett had come in from the other end of the car. Shortly afterward Mrs. Grantham made her appearance, and Stannard was presented in due form.

"So good of you to come to us, Mr. Stannard," gurgled the motherly lady, sinking into the biggest of the wicker chairs, and fanning herself purely from force of habit. "You are so busy—you must be so dreadfully busy——"

"Mr. Stannard is never too busy to be polite," put in the younger woman. "He has the Missouri manner—not manners, but manner, you know—and he has only to be shown."

"Really, Mr. Stannard, you mustn't mind anything that Anitra says," murmured the chaperon, apologizing vicariously for the covert impertinence. "She is a spoiled child, sadly spoiled, I'm afraid."

"I like children," Stannard laughed; "I was raised with a houseful of them."

"You never told me that you had brothers and sisters," Miss Westervelt protested, with the air of one who has been denied a confidence.

"I hadn't; they were cousins—my Uncle Jasper's children. They came to live with us after their mother died," he explained; and, while he was doing it, Silas Westervelt, massively complacent and leisurely, came down the compartment.

"Glad to see you, Stannard—glad you're giving us a chance to be hospitable," he said, with his nearest approach to cordiality; and before he could say any more, the dinner was announced.

In the seating at table, Stannard found himself at Mr. Westervelt's left, with Vallory opposite, and Anitra beside him, facing the broker. From the beginning the talk was general, turning easily at first upon the bear-hunting expedition, and a little later coming around, or being cleverly brought around by the banker-director, to the railroad-building project.

The topic of tunnel driving fairly afoot, the host, heartily companionable to a degree which Stannard had thought impossible, openly declared his continued opposition, though he made it easy for the guest by praising the ingenious intention of the plan.

"You were all right in pushing it, Stannard; I'm not blaming you at all," he said. "You were merely a few years ahead of your times, as all the great innovators have been. That is the point I tried to make when the matter came up for discussion a year ago. The Eastern roads have set us the example of shortening and straightening, and it's a good one; but we are prone to forget that the great Eastern companies are old and well established, with an assured earning power, and abundant resources."

"That's the idea," Padgett cut in; "it's the American mania—not to be able to wait for results. We capitalize the future right along."

"Pernicious activity," said Vallory, making an epigram to fit the mania. "Something doing all the time. Isn't that about it, Stannard? We've made a fetish of the 'get-busy' idea."

Stannard had been keeping his face in his plate, chiefly because, having made up his mind to complete his undertaking at all costs, the Westervelt dinner table seemed scarcely the proper place at which to fling down the gauntlet of defiance. So he was careful not to commit himself.

"As a general proposition, I presume we are all a little too eager to see the wheels go around," he returned eva-

sively, adding: "And I suppose that is especially true of the men on the firing line. It's an American trait to want to push a fight just a little harder when there is determined opposition, or added difficulties and obstacles."

He was looking at Anitra as he said this, and he saw her lips move in a soundless whisper. The whisper said: "So, among other things, you are a coward!" At least, that was Stannard's translation of it, and the dull flush which her taunt of the day before had evoked came again to make him warm and uncomfortable.

"Sober second thought is always a pretty good thing," the broker put in smoothly. Then he added that which made Stannard suspect that he, too, had seen and translated the wordless whisper: "It sometimes requires a finer brand of courage to stop and turn back than it does to go on. I don't own any G., L. & P. stock, but if I did, I should be scared to death. I climbed that terrible mountain of yours this afternoon, and had a look-in at your tunnel, Stannard. Your man Pearson did the honors, and you won't take it amiss if I say that, to a man up a tree, it looks like a financial frost."

"Stannard knows the frostiness of the situation better than any of us," the banker commented suavely. "As an engineer, he would like to go on and finish the project at all hazards; that is only natural. But as a stockholder in the company, I think I may venture to say that he is willing to be judiciously conservative. Isn't that so, Stannard?"

The blow was so sudden and so cleverly driven home that it left the Missourian gasping. The simple retort would have been a prompt denial of the stock-owning implication, but, in the circumstances, this was obviously impossible. The bribe had been tendered, and, from Mr. Westervelt's point of view, had apparently been accepted; at least, it had not been specifically refused. Technically, he *was* a stockholder; and the *Egerian* dinner table was no better place for explanations than it was for defiances.

Nevertheless, his hand went mechanically to the inner pocket of his coat. He had a vague idea of handing the stock certificate back to Silas Westervelt before the tableful of witnesses, thus driving the nail of honesty, and clinching it beyond any posibility of withdrawal. But in the act he remembered that he had changed his clothes, and that the bribe had been left in the pocket of the cast-off coat. Betrayed thus by his own carelessness, he sought to turn the accusation aside as a joke.

"I am not a stockholder of record," he asserted, and he tried to say it lightly. "You'll have to produce the books, Mr. Westervelt, before you can drag me into it that way."

Westervelt laughed.

"There are a good many stockholders in every company who do not find it advisable to become 'of record' on the transfer books until just before dividend day," he said meaningly. "You are among friends here, my dear fellow. Nobody is going to run to President Merriam with the story that his chief of construction has been taking a quiet little flyer in the company's stock."

Padgett looked up quickly and struck in before Stannard could reply.

"Have you really got a block of G., L. & P.?" he inquired. "If you have, I don't know but I shall be chasing you. I've been sweeping the corners for a customer of ours who has been careless enough to sell more of it than he can deliver."

"Mr. Westervelt says I have, and, since he is in some sense my superior officer, I can't very well contradict him," laughed Stannard, still trying to turn the desperate situation into a jest.

Vallory's thin lips curled in a half-cynical smile.

"Did you mortgage the apple orchards to get the money to buy G., L. & P., Clay?" he asked, with carefully calculated malice.

"Of course," said the Missourian; "what else could I do?" He was looking Vallory straight in the eyes, but this was because he did not dare to look at Anitra. The sixth sense, however, told him that she had pushed her small coffee cup aside, and was regard-

ing him curiously, as she might have looked at a new and rather unpleasant cage beast in the Central Park exhibit.

Mr. Westervelt had timed his attack judiciously. Before anything more could be said, Mrs. Grantham had risen, and the table party was broken up. Stannard saw his opportunity for any straightforward unwinding of the tangle vanish when Mr. Westervelt asked Padgett and Vallory to go with him to his stateroom.

"Stannard will excuse us, I'm sure," he said; and then, to the engineer: "It's a little matter of business, stirred up by some New York telegrams which came just before dinner. We'll leave you to the tender mercies of the ladies, and join you later. You'll find cigars in that humidor, and I hope Mrs. Grantham and Anitra will be charitable enough to let you smoke."

Stannard did not trouble to investigate the contents of the cigar cabinet. A fierce and thirsty desire to set himself right with Anitra was consuming him, and he was mortally afraid that the motherly chaperon was going to come between. But the fear was unfounded. Mrs. Grantham let him place the easiest of the easy-chairs for her under a shaded reading light, and settled herself comfortably with a magazine. When he joined Anitra, the young woman was standing at the rear door, looking out upon the construction yard.

"Well?" she said shortly, as if he had begun to say something, and had failed to finish saying it. "Did you enjoy your dinner?"

"No," he returned bluntly; "you know I didn't."

"So much for our small attempt at hospitality!" she laughed, with a touch of scorn, real or most cleverly imitated. "I'm afraid you are hard to please, Mr. Claiborne Stannard."

"I shall be easily pleased if you'll let me take you out on the platform where I can say a few things that are needing to be said."

"It's cold out there," she objected.

"The weather is changing again, and if you'll tell me where to find it, I'll get you a wrap."

She left him abruptly and went to her stateroom, returning almost immediately with a coat. "I'm going out on the platform with Mr. Stannard," she told the motherly lady, in passing; and then she let Stannard hold the coat while she put it on.

"You got an entirely wrong impression of things at the dinner table," he began abruptly, when he had dragged out one of the wicker chairs for her, and had found a camp stool for himself.

"Oh, I'm sure I didn't!" she retorted. "I gave you some good advice the other day, and you have taken it. I suppose I ought to feel highly complimented."

"Just a moment," he pleaded; "you don't begin to understand."

"Oh, yes, I do," she broke in. "Uncle Silas is going to make your fortune, and you're going to let him. Why shouldn't you?"

The Missourian's jaw came up with a click that was plainly audible.

"Money," he frowned; "always money! I've been hoping you didn't mean what you said yesterday morning."

"Why shouldn't I mean it? Isn't money the greatest thing in the world—the thing that makes all other things possible? Don't preach at me, please! Is there anything it won't buy? Men sell themselves for it, and so do women."

The words cut like the flick of a whip. They seemed so strangely out of harmony with the soft voice, and the ripe lips, and the eyes which were like brown velvet stars in the half light of the hood globe. Also, they were entirely out of keeping with the carefree, generous-hearted girl-woman of the house-party summer interlude, who had seen that her uncle was making it socially hard for a young man out of the West, and had striven—so Stannard believed—to make it up to him.

"Tell me plainly," he said; "did you gather from the talk at table that I had actually gone so far as to sell myself to your uncle?" Another man might

have put it less baldly, but he was too deeply stirred to consider the conventional amenities.

"I didn't 'gather'; I *know*," she flashed back. "But again I ask, why shouldn't you? Do you think it is something to be ashamed of, that you try to cover it up and hide it? What have you done, more than any other man in your place would do? Isn't it a mere business decision, whichever way you make it? If you say 'Yes' to whatever Uncle Silas wants you to do, one set of men will make—or lose—some money; if you say 'No,' another set of them may make, or lose. You have been wise enough to choose what seems to you to be the winning side, that's all—the side that will win for itself, and let you win."

The young engineer's voice shook a little when he said: "I'm obliged to believe that you mean what you say—even if you don't know what it means to me. I thought—I hoped you would let me explain."

"What is there to explain?"

"Nothing, I suppose."

"Of course, there isn't," she mocked; and then, with the hard ring in her voice, which had been coming and going as she talked: "I hope you got enough to make it worth while."

"Your uncle's offer was enough to turn any man's head—any poor man's."

"That isn't the point," she insisted. "It must be enough to promise you the chance to get more. You'll need more before you can ask the 'one altogether' to marry you, won't you?"

"Yes; a great deal more."

"I thought so. And if she is foolish enough to say that she doesn't want you, with your money, you will have just that much wider field in which to look for the second choice."

"My money won't make her say she doesn't want me," he asserted grimly.

"How do you know it won't?"

"I have her own word for it."

"Oh," she said, with a toss of the pretty head. "I didn't know it had gone that far."

"It has gone far enough to make me understand exactly what I've got to do," he returned.

Now it so happened that in drawing up the camp stool to face Anitra's wicker chair, Stannard had turned his back upon the near-by torrent of the Standing Stone, and the forested buttressings of the Rock Race looming darkly beyond the brawling stream. From the beginning of the platform tête-à-tête he had been dimly conscious of a subdued medley of sounds coming from nowhere in particular, the grumble and chuck of wagon wheels, minimized shouts, a stir as of a straggling army on the march. In the little pause for which the young woman was responsible, a man came along the side of the private car and stopped at the platform railing. It was Patterson, and, seeing his chief, he looked relieved.

"The boys are all out hunting for you," he broke in, apparently ignoring Stannard's companion. "Can you come, right away?"

"If I'm needed," was the rather brittle reply.

"I reckon you're needed, all right," said the grade engineer; and then he considerately turned his back and moved away.

Stannard got up reluctantly. "You'll excuse me, won't you?" he said to the one who had been ignored. "I'm at everybody's beck and call, as you see. I'll go in and thank Mrs. Grantham."

Miss Westervelt twisted her head and looked through the full-length window behind her chair.

"Don't bother to do that," she said quickly. "I'll absolve you, and make your excuses. Besides, Aunt Jeannette is asleep."

Stannard said "Good night" much more abruptly than he had meant to, swung himself over the railing, and hastened to join Patterson.

"What is it?" he asked, when he had caught step with his summoner.

"You must have been deaf," Patterson growled. "Greer's been moving up for the last three hours—in the dark. Don't you hear 'em over on the other side of the river?"

"I do now, yes. But that was what we were expecting."

"It's something we wasn't expecting that made us all turn out to hunt you," was the gruff rejoinder. "The first thing Greer did, while we were all at supper, was to shove a big gang across the Standing Stone at the upper ford. It was after the night shift had gone up to the tunnel, and if little Jack Bannagher hadn't been torch fishing at the mouth of the cañon, we mightn't have known what was happening till morning."

"What was happening?" queried Stannard, with a shade of impatience.

"Greer had sent his big gang to hit the hillside just beyond the point where the old Overland survey crosses our line. There's eight feet of difference between the grade levels, as you know, and when little Jack brought the news, and I rushed Gallagher and a bunch of his tracklayers up there, we found those cusses building an eight-foot dump smack across our track, cutting into the hill, and using the spoil to make their fill. They had us pretty well buried by the time we got there."

"What did you do?"

Patterson grunted. "There was a free fight, and Greer's crowd got the worst of it. We ran 'em off, and heaved their tools after 'em. Gallagher's up there now with his bunch, clearing the track. Roddy's found some guns, somewhere, and he's served out a few to Bully's Irishmen, and set 'em to patrolling our right of way. Then he shucked us all out to chase for you."

The yard crossing had been made, and Stannard turned short upon the big, red-faced assistant.

"I'll drill along with you in a little bit," he said, "but I'm going to the telegraph office first. Wait for me up at the headquarters shack."

Notwithstanding this announcement, Stannard did not go directly to the wire office, a cramped little shelter, half cabin and half tent, which, for the convenience of the yard crews, had been placed midway between the commissary and the temporary repair shops. Instead, he turned aside after he had passed the bunk houses, and sat down on a pile of crossties, and filled and lighted his pipe.

Though he was loath to admit it, he knew that the time had come for a final decision, and he strove desperately for the clear-sighted view which would enable him to decide wisely. It was inevitable that the constraining influences should refuse to be set aside. Grapple with them as he might, the princely bribe, with all it might stand for in the future, blocked the path to any fair-minded weighing of the real issues. Deep in his inner consciousness, he was beginning to fear that Westervelt's urging, or, at least, that part of it which made the averting of a smash and the rescue of the Merriam management a sufficient excuse for the seeming disloyalty, was insincere. But even so, the stubborn fact remained: the project could be defeated in any event, with or without his help; he had only to choose between being driven out empty-handed, and going out of his own free will, with the road to fortune lying fair before him.

In this crucial struggle he refused to consider the clamorings of desire—or thought he did. There had been little in the after-dinner talk with Anitra Westervelt to fan the flame of passion. Yet he knew in his heart that this willful young woman, with the winsome face, and laughing eyes, and bitter tongue, was for him the embodiment of all that was most alluring in womanhood; that for her sake he could batter down barriers, good or evil, if he might hope to win her in the end. And she—he could shut his eyes and see again the curl of the pretty upper lip, and hear her say: "Why shouldn't I mean it? Isn't money the greatest thing in the world?"

All at once he remembered a thing that he had heard while he was a business sojourner under the Westervelt roof during the summer of committee meetings. One of the house-party guests, a married woman with a loose tongue in her head, had told him that Anitra's fortune was held in trust; that she would lose it if she should marry

against her uncle's wishes. He had tossed the story out of his mind as a bit of idle gossip at the time; but now it came back to send the blood galloping through his veins. Was this the kernel at the heart of the girl's half-bitter urgings? Did she mean that the money to make love possible must be his because she would have none of her own?

The ecstatic suggestion was dinning in his ears when he sprang up from his seat on the crossties, and walked quickly on to the wire office. Hempstead, the operator, was lying in his bunk, reading a paper-backed novel, when his chief came in and sat down at the packing box which served as a table, took out his code book, and began to write a telegram. What Stannard presently handed to the operator, with a brief command to "rush it," was a cipher, and was thus unintelligible to Hempstead, who cast the worn novel aside and sat down to his key. But the original, which the chief was thrusting into his pocket as he went in search of Patterson, was a sufficient indication of the direction in which the tree of decision had fallen:

To JOHN P. MERRIAM, President, The Waldorf-Astoria, New York: Situation very serious. O. N. grading force reached Travois to-day, and interference has already begun. See no possibility of completing tunnel approach before O. N. will be in position to obstruct and delay work in cañon. Tunnel still giving trouble. Prospect exceedingly discouraging.

C. STANNARD, Chief of Construction.

CHAPTER XVII.

FLINT AND STEEL.

Banker Westervelt's plea of business as an excuse for leaving Stannard at the dinner-table dispersal was merely an excuse. As a matter of fact, the retreat of the three men split itself as soon as it had passed the door of the forward corridor, doing so on Westervelt's suggestion to Vallory.

"You'd better smoke your cigar on the outside, Austin, and be ready to intercept Greer. He's pretty sure to come over, and it won't do to take the risk of these two scrappers getting together." Thus the suggestion; and Vallory went out through the forward vestibule, leaving Westervelt and Padgett to kill time as they might in the privacy of the banker's stateroom.

"You played it pretty fine," was the broker's comment, punctuating the cigar lighting behind the closed door of the office stateroom. "Stannard was going to back down and quit us cold. I saw it in his eye. Greer's to blame."

"How is that?" queried the magnate.

"Judson is pushing things too spitefully. It's a word and a blow with him, and the blow usually comes first. There was a fight up in the cañon this afternoon, and one of Stannard's men got shot in the leg."

The banker asked for the details, and Padgett gave them as they had been given to him by one of the commissary clerks.

"That is bad—worse than that, it's a blunder!" was the archplotter's frowning comment. "Greer may be a good railroad builder, but he is sadly lacking when it comes to handling a delicate situation involving a knowledge of men. A little injudicious fighting just now would——"

"Of course," said Padgett. "Stannard is precisely the kind of young hothead to be thrown over by any attempt to drive him. Greer ought to know that."

"Greer ought to obey orders, at least. I have told him definitely and positively what to do and what not to do," fumed the great man, with a touch of impatience. "You say one of Stannard's men was shot: will he die?"

"No; Kitts and Stannard were walking down the grade, and they happened along in the nick of time. The man was rushed down to the camp, and Kitts sewed up the cut artery."

From this the talk went on to a further discussion of ways and means. Being a capitalist, and hence a man of peace, the banker leaned more and more heavily toward the expedient which seemed to promise a bloodless victory. Tacitly, though for a time neither of them spoke of it, both of the plotters understood that Stannard's

decision hung in a delicate balance, which might be tipped either way by the featherweight of sentiment. By the careful removal of the obstacles, sentiment had been given its chance, but that chance might be irretrievably spoiled by the caprice of a certain willful young woman. Padgett bottled his impatience on this score until it finally blew the cork.

"We're not above making blunders ourselves, Westervelt," he broke out, at the lighting of his third cigar. "A preliminary word from you to your niece might have taken a good deal of the uncertainty out of this dinner-party business."

The banker's smile was grimly sardonic.

"If you knew David's daughter as well as I do, you wouldn't say that, Padgett," he objected.

"I've known her ever since she wore pinafores. She is all the things you can say of her, and then some; but down underneath them all she's a woman. Sometimes you seem to forget that."

"I don't see the application," said the magnate, and his manner was that of one who would rather not see.

"You're thinking that an attempt to enlist Anitra on our side would be the surest way to make her do the other thing," laughed the broker. "That's so; if you should go at it in any heavy-handed fashion, she'd probably fly the track in a minute. But a little diplomacy might make the turn."

"Give your idea a name," was the brief command.

"It's merely a suggestion based on the supposition that she has taken at least a passing fancy to Stannard. You intimated that there was a possibility, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And you have given her to understand by your attitude toward Stannard that you considered him definitely and positively the chief of the ineligibles, haven't you?"

"I have."

"Well, suppose you take the other side for a few moments. Snatch an early opportunity to tell her what a fine young man Stannard is—which is the truth—and what a pity it is that he isn't in her class, and so on. You get the idea?"

Westervelt nodded slowly. "Again I'll pay you the compliment of saying that you have an exceedingly long head, Padgett," he said. And then, abruptly: "Vallory wants to marry her. Did you know that?"

Being a florid man by nature, Padgett could flush without showing it. As the banker's right hand and lieutenant in many a fiercely fought business battle, the broker thought he knew his principal by length and by breadth. But the simple statement and its tagged query revealed an unscrupulous depth which Padgett had not hitherto suspected, and the revealment touched a hidden spring of generous revulsion in the round-bodied little man of business. He knew now why Vallory had been brought along on the sham bear-hunting expedition. It was because his college comradeship gave him a hold upon Stannard—and his reward was to be the uncle's encouragement of his suit—for whatever such encouragement might be worth.

"Vallory's a pretty poor stick; you wouldn't back him up in trying to break into the family, would you, Westervelt?" said the broker, forgetting that he himself had just been suggesting an unholy mixture of the sacred wine of sentiment with the beer of business.

"Oh, I don't know. Vallory comes of good stock."

"Yes; but it's good stock gone to seed, and mighty poor seed at that." The broker was going on to enlarge upon the quality of the seed, but at that moment the door opened, and Vallory himself came in, bearing tidings.

"That fellow Greer has fumbled the ball again," was the clubman's announcement. "There's been a big row up along somewhere, and Stannard was sent for. He's just gone."

Padgett chewed the stump of the third cigar thoughtfully, and the banker said a hard word.

"Greer will have to be called down," he rasped. "Guthrie ought to have

known better than to handicap us with such a firebrand!"

Vallory's smile showed his fine, even teeth.

"We may need the firebrand a little later," he said, and then, pointedly, to the magnate: "I'm afraid you overdid the matter a little at the dinner table to-night. I know Stannard pretty well, and you've got to play him with a mighty light hand. He was fighting mad when he went away just now."

"You ought to have gone with him," snapped the great man, rising heavily from his chair. "Since you didn't, you'd better go and find Greer, and tell him I want to see him at once—to-night." Then, still more impatiently: "What's the matter with that telegraph boy? We ought to have had the closing quotations hours ago. Padgett, suppose you go over there and wake him up."

Left to himself, Mr. Westervelt went in search of the opportunity which Padgett had advised him to snatch. With the blundering complications piling in one on top of another, it had become highly necessary to act promptly. The door of Anitra's stateroom was open, and the room was empty. The banker passed on into the open compartment, and found Mrs. Grantham asleep under the reading light. The observation platform remained, and a moment later Anitra looked up to see her uncle standing beside her.

"Enjoying the fine night, are you, Nita?" he said, placing the camp stool, recently vacated by Stannard, in the corner of the platform rail, so that he might rest his back against the brass. Then: "Stannard's gone, has he?"

"Yes; some one came after him a few minutes ago."

"He's a fine young fellow," remarked the uncle, with the air of one who has made a discovery. "I'm beginning to suspect that I didn't more than half appreciate him when he and I were quarreling over this shortening project of his a year ago last summer."

"*I* appreciated him," said the girl shortly.

"I've often wondered if you did, or if you were only trying to make me believe that you did," was the genial counter retort. "Of course, he was only an incident to you—something different. I supposed you would have forgotten him by this time."

"Mr. Stannard is not the kind of man to be forgotten so easily; at least, I thought he wasn't a year ago."

"But now you have changed your mind?"

"Decidedly."

"Just what does that mean?" queried the guardian uncle.

"It means that he isn't 'something different,' as you put it. He is like all the others."

"That is a rather large generalization, isn't it?"

"Perhaps."

"You couldn't particularize?"

"Easily. Money is the key word. Doc Billy married it, Monty Carroll means to marry it, and Eggie Montjoy had no other reason for coming to America."

"And you think Stannard wants to marry it, too?"

"He wants to marry me," was the calm reply.

The guardian uncle's sudden start made the flimsy camp stool creak.

"Hah!" he said. "He certainly doesn't believe in the policy of delay. How many times have you seen him since we came out here?"

The young woman counted upon her fingers. "Four times, including this evening."

"H'm; rather swift work, I should say," the uncle commented.

"Oh, he hasn't asked me—yet. But I know. There was only one thing to stop him—the lack of money—and you are doing your best to remove that."

"You are certainly taking a great deal for granted, Nita—as you usually do."

"Maybe; but I don't often have to go back and rub out the mistakes. While we are speaking of it, perhaps you won't mind my saying that I don't thank you for spoiling him for me, Uncle Silas."

"Now you are absurd—which is also

as usual. I suppose it wouldn't be worth while to ask you to explain just what you mean?"

"Oh, yes, it would; and if you like, I'll consider myself asked. A year ago, or a little more, Mr. Stannard was quite capable of carrying a woman merely because he was in love with her. Now he wouldn't think of doing such a thing."

"What would he think of?"

Money; his own money first, and, after that, the young woman's. He wasn't that way before, and you've made him that way now."

"Again you are talking absurdities. What have I had to do with the making or unmaking of Stannard?"

The young woman in the wicker easy-chair sat up quickly. "Do you really want me to tell you, Uncle Silas?" she asked, with a dangerous softness in her voice.

"Not unless you can put it in some logical and believable form. And you know you can't do that."

"But I can," she flashed out. "You have made him believe that money is the only thing in the world worth having, and when that was done, you bribed him with money—— No, don't deny it, please. You are my father's brother, and I want to keep on remembering that, if I can."

"Stannard told you all this, did he?" was the harsh assumption.

"No; he didn't think he was telling me anything. But I know. Why is it that the men of your generation persist in clinging to the idea that the women of mine are children? I've been here in Mr. Stannard's railroad camp as long as you have, and I have eyes and ears. You told us all at table this evening in just so many words that you had given Mr. Stannard a block of the railroad company's stock. And you and Mr. Padgett together made the reason for the gift very plain."

Mr. Silas Westervelt was a patient man, mainly because he had usually found that patience and immobility are the winning cards in any game. But there were limits.

"One thing which your generation hasn't learned is a decent respect for your elders, Nita. I came out here a few minutes ago with the best of intentions, and you met me with a slap in the face. Do you wonder that I still regard you as a child—a badly spoiled child, at that?"

Here was a rebuke to bring the most hardened young outlaw to her knees. But the young woman showed no signs of yielding.

"I can judge of a person's intentions only by his acts. You took particular pains to humiliate Mr. Stannard a year ago last summer, when he was, constructively at least, a guest in your own house. When I tried to make it a little easier for him, you took occasion to tell me that if I chose to 'encourage' him, as you put it, I would do it at my peril—the peril of losing the money that my father left me."

"Exactly," said the guardian, regaining some portion of his own peculiar brand of composure. "It was a plain duty to you, and to your father's memory. I knew nothing about Stannard at the time; nothing more than that he was not in your class, and was most probably quite willing to become a fortune hunter if some inconsiderate young woman with money should give him a chance."

"And you thought I was giving him the chance?" she asked, again with the dangerous softness in her tone.

"You seemed to be," was the cold rejoinder. "I was not the only one who thought so. But that is neither here nor there. I don't think you'll want to marry Stannard after you know him better; but this, too, is a matter of indifference. What I wish to say is this: if you find any pleasure in cultivating him, you are entirely free to do so, so far as I am concerned."

Miss Anitra's thrusting arm was not yet weary. "You think if you withdraw your objections it will be the surest way of turning me against him, don't you?" she charged; adding: "Perhaps it will—that is the attitude you have always forced me to take." She stood up and laid a hand on the doorknob. "Is that all? If it is, I think I

shall have to ask your permission to go to bed. I'm tired and sleepy."

The guardian uncle had risen with her, and he was beaming down upon her with the frozen smile once more in permanence.

"You are so absolutely and unspeakably childish that it is impossible to be angry with you for more than a passing moment, Nita. If you had been my own daughter, I could hardly have been more watchful of your interests, or more careful for your future, and I am sure you realize this when you will allow yourself to think calmly about it. As I started to say a moment ago, all these harsh things you have been saying are entirely unmerited. I merely wanted to——"

"You want me to do something for you. What is it?" she demanded shortly.

Silas Westervelt could be as direct as the bullet from a gun when he chose to be.

"While the present situation continues, I shall be glad if you will make Stannard feel at home with us when he comes to the *Egeria*. It is a small thing to ask, and possibly I don't need to ask it; but——"

"I'm sorry; but I can't help you to make Mr. Stannard any more of a money maniac than he has already shown himself to be. I'm going out to the Teton camp to-morrow—if Doc Billy comes in for me."

And at that she turned and left him.

Silas Westervelt gave his niece plenty of time to disappear before he went back through the open compartment to his own office stateroom. Letting himself in, he found Padgett busy with pencil and paper at the desk. As the door opened the broker flung down the pencil and made a triumphant clucking with his tongue in his cheek.

"We've got him!" he announced, flourishing the sheet of paper upon which he had been writing. "When I went over to the wire office, Stannard was just going in, and I killed time on the outside for a few minutes. After the coast was clear, I got a grip on young Hempstead, and made him give me a copy of the message he had just sent for Stannard to John P. It's a cipher, and I've just figured it out. Read it, and then tell me that money doesn't talk!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE KICKING DEER.

Stannard had little to say to Patterson, the gruff-voiced second assistant, on the half-mile walk to the scene of the recent crossing fight. His silence was partly due to the fact that he had now fairly committed himself in the telegram to the president, but mainly it was chargeable to a small incident which occurred at the outsetting from the headquarters.

The incident was a word from Bailey, the yardmaster, who had come up, boiling with wrath, to report that the Overland Northern track force was laying a siding apparently designed to connect with the G. L. & P. yard tracks at the lower end of the Travois.

The young chief had listened to the report, and had told Bailey to sit tight and say nothing. None the less, the high-handed and arbitrary way in which Greer was forcing the fighting was provocative of silence, and the stirring of promptings which Stannard had assured himself had been safely put to sleep.

Reaching the crossing, he found the situation much as Patterson had described it. A rough gash had been dug in the clay-slide talus of the Dogtooth above the newly laid track of the cañon approach, and the point of obstruction had been cleverly chosen. Gallagher's men had cleared the buried track by the simple process of shoveling the heap of clay and broken rock on across the track to the other side of the embankment. The clearing was completed before the chief and the grade engineer came up, and the trackmen, armed with repeating rifles, were scattered up and down the line, guarding it.

Moodily viewing the battlefield by the light of the gasoline flare torches

left behind by the retreating obstructionists, Stannard put Patterson in command, and called Roddy to return to the camp with him. They had covered a good half of the half mile before the assistant broke the stubborn silence to say: "You're taking me back to give me my time check?"

"No," Stannard denied briefly.

Another interval of the track-walking silence intervened, and again it was Roddy who broke it irritably.

"You're not going to fire me, but you think you ought to," he snapped. "Is that it?"

"You did exactly what you were hired to do, Jacksie," was the sober reply.

"But you don't approve it?"

"Yes, I do," was the brittle agreement. "It may be necessary for us to lie down, Roddy; as I see it now, it is necessary. But the man doesn't live who is going to make us lie down with a club! You did exactly right—precisely what I should have done if I had been on deck at the time."

Roddy, wise in his generation, let the matter rest at this, and a few hundred yards farther along they came within the radius of the masthead arcs. At the yard limits, Stannard said: "How many more guns have you, Jackson?"

"Plenty," was the laconic answer.

The young chief stopped and shaded his eyes from the glare of the electrics.

"I—suppose we ought to picket the yards," he growled thoughtfully. "Greer seems to be the sort of thug that doesn't stop for anything short of a knock-out." Then, with a quick survey of the empty yard: "There are two fellows dodging along over there by the *Egeria* now. Go and see who they are and what they want."

Roddy went part way across the tracks. Before he could reach the two intruders, they disappeared in the vestibule of the private car. But an intervening arc light had shown the assistant what he needed to see.

"Speak of the devil, and you hear the clatter of his hoofs," he said, rejoining Stannard. "One of the men was your friend Vallory, and the other was Mr. Judson Greer, himself."

For a moment Stannard saw red. Then he crushed back the rising tide of unreasoning rage and tried to think it out calmly. The effort helped a little. Westervelt had made no secret of the fact that the Overland Northern wished to buy the uncompleted tunnel. But the fact that the banker had so far taken his own acquiescence for granted as to open negotiations with the Overland chief of construction, rankled like a barbed thorn in an angry wound.

In the headquarters workroom the lights were turned on, and when the Missourian went in, Roddy followed him and took his accustomed seat on Brant's drawing stool.

"We've come to the jumping-off place, Clay, and you've got to tell me where you stand," he began abruptly. "Greer's confabbing with Mr. Westervelt over yonder in the private car; Vallory was sent out to find him and bring him in. What better evidence do you want that there is crooked work going on?"

Stannard dropped heavily into the desk chair, and then got up to strip off his coat, and fling it aside.

"I tried to tell you day before yesterday, Jacksie. I don't know the ins and outs of this deal much better than you do. Mr. Westervelt has made it appear that if we fight, things will go to smash for the G. L. & P. Co. on the Stock Exchange, and Mr. Merriam and his crowd will lose out. On the other hand, he assures me that if we come down easy the smash will be averted, and the Merriam management will be able to pull through. As I told you the other day, he has put it up to me; not because he wants to, I think, but because he can't very well help it. Mr. Merriam will take my word as chief of construction. He will say, very justly, that I am here, on the ground, and ought to know what I am talking about. If I advise him to quit and sell out while he has the chance——"

"He'll take the advice?—not John P. Merriam!" Roddy broke in. "He's got more sand than you have, Clay."

"That doesn't cut any figure; I mustn't let it cut any figure. My duty to Mr. Merriam and the management is pretty clear. If I wire Mr. Merriam the exact facts as they stand to-night he'll——"

Roddy pointed an accusing finger at his chief. "Clay, you have already done it, and by the Lord Harry, you were hired to do it!"

Stannard, leaning back in his chair, went livid under his tan, and for a pounding heartbeat or two knew the impotent rage of the fighting man who has deliberately tied his own hands.

"Don't go too far with me, Jacksie," he cautioned, and his tongue was thick in his mouth. "I've had enough to-night to make a murderer of an ordinary man, and if this thing goes on much further, I shall certainly hurt somebody!"

"You can begin on me, if you like," Roddy offered, and the baby-blue eyes were snapping. "If you want another punch, I'll remind you that you haven't denied anything."

Stannard sprang out of his chair and bolted through the door, and across the passage to his sleeping room, without a word. When he came back, he was drawing a big envelope from the pocket of his working coat. Dashing the coat aside, he tore the envelope open and thrust the stock certificate at Roddy.

"Look at it—read it, and then turn it over and see what's written on the back," he rapped out; and when Roddy had obeyed, glancing at the bribe and handing it back with an exclamation that was less an oath than a prayer for justice upon the banker-director, Stannard slammed it upon his desk, snatched up a pen, and crossed out the incriminating transfer, scoring it again and again until his own name was hidden under a blur of ink.

"Now, then," he gritted; "that's out of the way, once for all, and maybe I can talk to you without choking! It *was* a bribe. Westervelt pretended to use it as an illustration. He said he was going to make me a stockholder for a minute or two, to see if it wouldn't change my point of view. When he went away he left this thing on the desk, and I thought he had merely forgotten it. I took it over to the car, and he wasn't there. Then the devil got hold of me, Jacksie, and I began to see it the way Westervelt had meant to make me see it: I had been given a chance to butt in—I was to be paid for butting in—on a game in which the cards could be just as easily stacked without my help. And I wanted the money, Roddy; God only knows how bad I wanted it just at that minute!"

"I know you did—I know why," cut in the blue-eyed little man in instant sympathy.

"It was rotten, and I knew it; but my rottenness has nothing to do with the facts in the case. The tunnel's a failure if we don't get it arched this fall; and if I don't advise our people to drop it, Greer can get in the way and make us drop it. Whether Westervelt's been honest with me, or not, those are the stubborn facts."

The assistant nodded. Then he said: "I want to ask you one question, Clay, and if it hits you crossways, you can haul off and land me one. Have you any reason to believe that Westervelt would like to make it possible for you to marry his niece?"

"Good Lord, no! I have every reason to believe that he doesn't want to make it possible!"

"Yet he gives you a hundred thousand dollars' worth of stock which was last week selling around one-fifty, and intimates that he will put you in the way of making more. There's a nigger in the woodpile, somewhere, Clay, as sure as the devil's a hog! Silas Westervelt isn't handing out money that way unless there is some mighty good reason for it."

"You mean——"

"I mean that what you're asked to do—what I'm afraid you've already done—was a move in some big game; a move that couldn't be made any other way; that Greer's bluff is only a bluff, and your voluntary lie-down is the real thing—the one absolutely indispensable and needful thing!"

Stannard sat staring at the blank log wall over his desk, with a thoughtful frown furrowing itself between his level-set eyes.

"I can't see it that way, yet," he objected finally. "The Merriam management is in trouble—that much is plain from Mr. Merriam's telegram—and the president is asking for the straight truth. I couldn't do any less than give it to him."

Roddy brought his fist down upon the drawing board with a crash that made Brant's ink bottle fall and roll away across the floor, leaving a black trail along the rough slabs as it went.

"But what you've given him isn't the truth!" he exploded. "Not the truth as you believed it to be before Westervelt came over here and hypnotized you. You say the bribe's out of it now, and I believe you, Clay; take the one other necessary step, and tell Westervelt to go to the devil—tell him you won't quit until Mr. Merriam orders you to quit!"

Again Stannard stared at the blank wall; but, before he could reply, there were footsteps in the passage, and Vallory came in, followed by a small, dark-faced man with a Vandyke beard and mustaches, and sharp, roving eyes, that instantly took in every detail of the bare workroom.

Roddy got down from his stool, and the bad jaw which was so curiously out of keeping with the childlike blue eyes was thrust out aggressively when he nodded a brusque recognition. Vallory was lighting a cigarette, and he took time to pinch the match out carefully before he said: "This is Mr. Greer, Stannard. I've come over with him to see that you don't cripple him before he has a chance to square himself. Roddy, shake hands with Mr. Greer—and don't go; there's nothing private about this late-bedtime drop-in."

Stannard stood up and put his back against the wall. He knew Greer by sight only; the Overland construction chief had been pointed out to him one time in the University Club in Chicago.

Greer followed up the introduction rather snappishly, for a man who had come to square himself.

"There was a mistake made this evening, Mr. Stannard," he began. "One of my subcontractors took matters into his own hands, and opened up a crossing interference on your right of way. It was unauthorized, and I was sending Murtrie over to call him down when your men ran him off. That crossing business can be arranged amicably, I'm sure. We needn't come to blows over it."

"It seems that we have already come to blows," said the Missourian, not too placably. "I wasn't on the ground, as it happened; but if I had been——"

"I know," Greer put it quickly. "If you had been, you would have chased Duffey out. I'm not kicking. I'll be frank with you. I've just come from Mr. Westervelt, who is a director in your company, and a bondholder in ours. He says there's a compromise deal on, and asks us to keep the peace. More than that, he gives me a hint that you're a coming man in G. L. & P., and tells me that I don't want to get in bad with you right on the jump."

Roddy, standing behind his stool, and leaning upon it with propped elbows, said: "What difference would it make if you should, Greer? Since when have the G. L. & P. and the Overland Northern been bunking in the same bed?"

"Oh, I don't pretend to know anything about the Wall Street end of it," said Greer carelessly. "The two roads may be figuring on a consolidation, for all I know to the contrary. But that's neither here nor there. Mr. Westervelt, who, as an investor heavily interested in both companies, ranks us both, wants us to keep the peace, and I'm ready to do my part."

"Mr. Greer came over to make an explanation," Vallory cut in smoothly, "and he has made it. Of course, there is always a chance for more or less ill feeling when two construction outfits get to mixing and messing over a disputed right of way. But there is no occasion for the ill feeling in the present case."

Roddy was determined that the angel of peace should not rustle its wings too prematurely.

"We are working under orders from our own management, and we haven't been given authority to make terms with anybody," he snapped.

Greer turned upon the assistant with an angry glint in his eyes. "I was under the impression that Mr. Stannard was the chief of construction on this job," he struck back, with a sneer.

Roddy had shot his small arrow, and could go no farther without backing. But Stannard did not withhold the backing.

"Mr. Roddy has stated the fact very clearly," he said. "Mr. Westervelt has made a proposal which I shall submit to our people in New York. Pending an answer from Mr. Merriam, I shall be glad enough to keep the peace. But it may as well be distinctly understood that our work goes on during the interval. If there is any interference, it will be resisted."

It was just here that Mr. Judson Greer, a past master in the gentle art of breaking records in rushing a railroad line through to completion, made the capital mistake of entering the field of diplomacy.

"It will be altogether better if we agree right here, Stannard—you and I —to suspend operations until we have definite instructions from headquarters. I don't know how much Mr. Westervelt has told you, but, really, you know, it's all over but the shouting. The courts have decided that our original right of way in Standing Stone Cañon holds good, and I don't need to tell as good a man as you are that you can't complete your tunnel approach if we insist upon our rights."

"That remains to be seen," said Stannard dryly.

"Oh, of course, I grant you that," was the ready response. "I suppose we two could scrap it out and waste a lot of money for our respective companies; but in the end you'd have to get down and out. The Overland is going to be the first railroad into the Kicking Deer district; that's written in the books."

The effect of this remarkable statement upon the three listeners was a striking commentary upon that Scripture which characterizes the human tongue as an unruly member. Vallory turned aside, and his half-audible oath was poorly hidden in a choking cigarette-smoke cough, forced for the occasion. Roddy straightened up with a flash of blue fire in the childlike eyes. A cool wind was sliding down from the high snow balds of the Buckskin, and blowing in through the open window of the office workroom. Stannard reached for the nearest of the two cast-off coats and put it on.

"I've said all that I need to say, Mr. Greer," he remarked quietly. "If you want to mark time pending the clearing up of the situation from New York, that is your own affair, of course. But I shall neither discharge my force, nor lay it off. Was there anything else?"

There might have been many things else if Vallory's presence of mind had not come to the rescue.

"You're working all-night shifts over here, Clay," he laughed, dragging out his watch; "but even at that, I suppose you have to sleep a little once in a while. Come on, Greer; let's give these fellows a chance to turn in. They'll be doing the somnambulist act with us, talking in their sleep, if we stay any longer." And he locked arms with Greer and took him away.

Stannard walked the floor of the workroom, with his hands behind him, for five full minutes after the departure of the clubman and the engineer. As at an earlier period in the evening, Roddy was the one to break the silence.

"Well?" he said tentatively.

Stannard stopped and began to arrange the papers on his desk. "I am clothed and in my right mind again, Jacksie," he asserted soberly. "What I do now will be done without tangling itself up with anything that may happen to me personally. This bribe goes back to Mr. Westervelt in the morning, and that lets me out. Just the same, I've got to take care of Mr. Merriam's interests, and not let all this double-dealing and chicanery make a hot-headed fool of me."

"You are still believing that Mr. Westervelt is telling the truth about the

Wall Street situation, and the calamities that are going to befall if we don't sell out to the Overland?" queried Roddy.

"I am going to give Mr. Merriam a chance to duck, if he wants the chance."

"But you've already advised him to duck, haven't you?"

"What I wired him an hour or so ago may fairly be taken as an offset to some of the optimistic things that I have signed my name to since we began hitting the bad luck. I didn't advise him; I merely told him that the outlook was plenty discouraging; and it is, Roddy —you'll have to admit it is."

"Also, you gave him to understand that you wanted to lie down, didn't you?"

Stannard sat on the edge of the desk and tried to be perfectly fair and straightforward with his ruthless questioner.

"It might be taken that way," he admitted.

"I thought so. It's getting along toward midnight; but it's up to you to chase this wire of yours with another before you go to bed, Clay. Make it plain to Mr. Merriam that you are willing to fight to the last gasp, if that's what he wants you to do. I'll back you —every man on the force will back you. Great heavens! Didn't you hear what Greer said!"

"I heard him make his brag about swallowing us whole, if that's what you mean."

"You heard him say that the Overland was going to be the first railroad to enter the Kicking Deer district, and you saw your friend Vallory turn away and come mighty near choking to death to keep from cursing Greer for letting some sort of a cat out of the bag."

"What's that?" exploded the Missourian.

"Oh, you're catching on at last, are you? I don't know any more than you do what's going to happen in the Kicking Deer district; but if there's any reason why the Overland wants to get there first, you'll admit that it's a still bigger reason for us."

Stannard made no further comment. "Come on down to the telegraph office with me, Jacksie," he said; and they went out together. As they were passing the commissary, the potential recanter suddenly changed his mind. "On second thought, perhaps, you'd better get busy another way, Roddy," he advised. "Go back to the office and call up Patterson on the working phone. Tell him to pick out half a dozen good men from his picketing squad, and send them down here to patrol the yard. I wish to the Lord we could get that private car out of the way, or, failing in that, get the two women that are left in it over to that camp in the Teton foothills!"

The blue-eyed assistant laughed shrewdly as he turned away.

"Mr. Westervelt meant to make you keep the peace, whether you wanted to or not," he said. "That's the reason he brought the women along. Go and send your wire—and make it stout and mansized. I'll see to the guard mounting."

Roddy went back to the headquarters, and picked up Patterson on one of the field phones in the cañon. Transmitting the chief's order, and getting Patterson's assurance that a guard squad would be sent down at once, the assistant changed the switch plugs and rang up the west end of the tunnel. Markley's night man answered, and Roddy asked for Markley himself. When he had the red-headed tunnel driver at the other end of the wire:

"That you, Charlie? All right; this is Roddy. Want to take a little hike for your health?"

"Hike nothing! I'm driving tunnel!" was the indignant retort that came back over the wire.

"Never mind about that. Put that big Cornish head driller of yours in charge for the night, and one of us will be over in the morning to start the day shift. Get that?"

"Sure. What's broke loose?"

"That's just what we want you to find out, and you're the man to do it, if anybody can. Make you a blanket roll, and pitch out down the mountain to Castleman's horse ranch. Take a pine torch if you can't find your way in the

dark. At Castleman's get the best mountain-climbing bronc' he'll let you have, and make a straight shoot for the Kicking Deer."

"All right; say I'm watering the bronc' in the Kicking Deer—what next?"

"That's what I can't tell you, Markley—it's what you've got to find out for yourself. Prospectors have been finding float gold in the hills a mile or two north of the Deer any time during the past twenty years, but nothing that would pay to work. Turn prospector yourself, and see if there has been anything done in that neck of woods lately. If you turn up anything new and startling, climb your bronc' and burn the wind to get the news on the wire. That's all. Go to it, and bring back the money."

"I'm It!" snapped the red-headed one, and the click in the receiver told Roddy that his one-man scouting expedition had as good as taken the field.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN WHICH THE CAT CAME BACK.

The morning following the clash of the two rival construction forces near the mouth of Standing Stone Cañon saw a return of the delightful autumn weather, clear and cool enough to be bracing, but with a windless air, and sunshine that was like the golden glow of the Italian October.

To the casual observer the passing of the night had changed nothing in the aspect of the end-of-track construction camp. The yard crews, with the two big "camel backs" for switching engines, were sorting the trains of material which had come in during the night; gangs of laborers were unloading crossties and rails; a few trackmen were laying a "cut-in" from a new siding to the main line; and in the lower yard, Bailey, with a road crew and its engine, was making up trains of empty cars to be taken back to Yellow Medicine.

If the yard gangs were larger, and the activities a little more strenuous than usual, the increase in numbers, and the quickened pace, were not significant enough to evoke more than a passing comment on the part of the two men who stood on the railed-in rear platform of the *Egeria*. Though it was still early, the banker-director and his business lieutenant had already breakfasted. What was even more remarkable, they had been out on the platform before breakfast, at the hour of shift changing; had seen the night men from the tunnel come down to make a hungry assault upon the big mess tent back of the commissary, and had looked on while Patterson loaded his pick-and-shovel army on the work train, preparatory to a resumption of the daily grading drive among the firs on the high shoulder of the Buckskin.

Not having the deductive gifts of a Vidocq or a Holmes, the round-bodied broker and his principal missed some of the details of the stirring scene which was staging itself in shuttling trains, in the hurrying crews, in the clangor and slide of the steel as the loading gangs, heaving and shouting in unison, shot it skillfully from car to storage stack.

For one of the missed details, each of the "camel backs" carried a third man in the cab—a man whose sawed-off gun lay on the cushion at his feet, and whose most onerous duty seemed to consist in hanging from the cab window to chaff with the various working squads as the engine passed them. For another, there were idlers in each of the working gangs; men who, upon closer inspection, would have been identified as members of Gallagher's track-laying army, each with a short repeating rifle carried at ease in the crook of his arm.

Over on the bare mesa knoll behind the log-built headquarters there was a third of the missed details figuring as one of the commissary clerks with a field glass, which he focused from time to time upon the distant Rock Face, with the new camp rising at its foot, or upon a point a mile or more up the valley, where Greer's bridge gang was busily at work throwing a trestle across the Standing Stone.

Neither the banker nor his companion on the *Egeria's* platform noted any of these small significances; but Mr. Westervelt had marked the activities of the Overland Northern bridge gang, and he commented impatiently upon them.

"Greer is proving exceedingly hard to hold down," was the form the comment took. "After that blunder of last night, and its consequences, he ought to know better than to go on baiting Stannard at the most critical moment in the entire undertaking!"

"Greer has some reason on his side," Padgett interposed. "You remember he told you last night that, though he would make the proposal to Stannard because you insisted upon it, he couldn't afford to stand still; that a halt would disorganize his force, and make him lose just that much distance in a hard-fought race. He believes as I've been inclined to believe all along—that Stannard will have to be knocked into line with a club."

"You change your mind every few minutes, Padgett!" said the magnate, irritably critical. "Last night, after you had translated that message of Stannard's to Merriam, you said we had him."

"It did look that way. But, on second thought, it's just as Vallory says: the message doesn't say anything that can't be taken back. Merriam's reply will be the turning point; and Stannard has fixed things now so that we may have a good bit of trouble in finding out what Merriam says."

"How is that?"

"Didn't Vallory tell you? Some time during the night, or early this morning, Stannard had his telegraph office moved up to his headquarters, where he can have young Hempstead right under his eye."

Mr. Westervelt shook his head. "That looks bad, Padgett," he commented. "It looks as if Hempstead might be under suspicion. Have you seen the boy this morning?"

"No; I was over there before breakfast with a message, and that blue-eyed, steel-trap little chap—Roddy—took it in. He shut me off pretty short; said the wire was very busy, but he'd get my telegram off as soon as he could."

The banker drew up a camp stool and sat down astride of it, squaring his arms on the polished brass railing.

"This is settling day," he said. "That wire you brought me last night was from Sawtelle. He's got Merriam right where he wants him, and if Merriam doesn't come to terms by noon, a break will be made in G. L. & P. on the floor of the Exchange. Stannard's wire will help out, but it wasn't strong enough. He must send another this morning."

Padgett waved a fat hand in acceptance of the necessity.

"You say he must; but will he—with Greer slapping him in the face with that trestle building up yonder? I'm afraid we missed a bet by letting Greer get in here before Stannard was definitely committed."

"But Stannard *is* committed," persisted the magnate. "He has accepted his retainer."

"You mean he has not as yet refused to accept it. There's a good bit of difference in that distinction, don't you think?"

It was at this precise moment, as if the broker's query had evoked him, that handsome Eddie Brant dropped from a string of moving cars on a near-by siding, and came across to the *Egeria*. "Letter from Mr. Stannard," he said, handing an official envelope up through the railing to the sitting millionaire; and he was gone before Mr. Westervelt could run his finger under the freshly gummed flap.

There were two inclosures, and the banker held one of them, face down, upon his knee, while he read the other. As more than once before, since he had projected himself into this unwonted region of things unfettered and elemental, Mr. Silas Westervelt swore picturesquely.

"Listen to this, Padgett!" he grated. "It's from Stannard; he says:

"I am returning herewith stock certificate Number 1663, for one thousand shares of G. L. & P. preferred, which—doubtless

through an oversight—you left lying on the desk when you were in my office the other day. In order to guard against possible accidents, I have crossed out the indorsement on the back of the certificate, as you will see."

The banker-director paused, and swore again; and Padgett asked: "Is that all? Doesn't he say what he is going to do?"

"Of course he doesn't—he doesn't need to say!" the great man rapped out angrily. Then: "Where's Vallory? I want him to go and find Greer! I told you all that hustling over yonder meant something! Hurry up and send one of the colored boys after Vallory; or, better still, go after him yourself. He's over there somewhere, trying to keep tab on Stannard."

It was possibly five minutes before this episode of the letter-reading that Miss Anitra Westervelt, rising much later than her uncle and his two subalterns, had entered the open compartment, meaning to get her morning breath of fresh air on the rear platform while the waiter was laying the breakfast plates for herself and Mrs. Grantham.

The shades were drawn in the two full-length rear windows, and she did not know that the platform was occupied until she stood with the knob of the half-opened door in her hand. When her uncle laid his mandatory commands upon Padgett, she was thankful for the qualifying change which sent the broker over the railing instead of back through the car, in search of a messenger. It gave her the short reprieve that was needed; and a moment later, when Mr. Westervelt passed through the car on his way to shut himself into his office stateroom, the plate-laying waiter was the only occupant of the open compartment.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FLANKING COLUMN

The cheap little alarm clock on Stannard's desk had measured off an hour or more beyond the dispatching of Eddie Brant on the errand which had proved so disturbing to Mr. Silas Westervelt. Like a good general alertly aware of the approaching conflict, the young chief of construction, sitting at his desk, and directing the activities, was thoughtfully making his dispositions for the battle which now seemed inevitable.

That Mr. Westervelt would pass the fighting word to Greer was hardly to be doubted. In the little time which yet remained to him, Stannard was striving anxiously to cover the weak points, and to outmaneuver the enemy. The prime necessity was to keep the interferers out of the cañon of the Standing Stone until the rails of the approach track could be laid around the gulch-head curve and up to safety on the high shoulder of the Buckskin. To accomplish this, the excavating force in the great rock cutting had been doubled, and a cordon of Gallagher's men, armed with the smuggled Winchesters, and commanded by Gallagher himself, had been thrown across the mouth of the cañon, with orders to hold the intruders back, peaceably if possible, but by force if no other alternative offered.

With the cañon mouth picketed, and with Patterson driving the work in the cutting and on the grade at heart-breaking speed, Stannard had organized a swift but orderly campaign of preparation at his base of supplies. All morning, at his new desk in the farther corner of the long workroom, Hempstead, the novel-reading telegraph operator, had been kept busy rattling his key on hurry messages to the dispatchers and division superintendents on the main line—wire appeals in which Stannard rang all the changes, from coaxings to curses, to expedite the forwarding of his material still in transit.

In the yard the preparation hustle was going forward on lines of efficiency laid down by the young chief and his first assistant in the small hours of the morning. Crossties and rails were being shifted into rankings of easy accessibility so that they might be loaded and rushed to the front without delay; and a steam wrecking crane, borrowed from the Yellow Medicine headquarters a

week earlier to pick up a derailed locomotive in the Travois yard, was pressed into service to help in the quick transferring of the heavier material.

At all points, in the yard as well as on the grade, Stannard was maintaining the guard of the loyal tracklayers, not so much to forestall a possible attack as to keep his laborers from deserting. This was Roddy's idea, and Roddy knew Greer. "About the first thing Judson will do will be to send walking delegates over here to stampede our crowd," Roddy had suggested; and thereupon the guard had been established as a sort of emergency constabulary, with orders to arrest stragglers or strangers promptly.

Past these workmanlike preparations Stannard had taken another leaf out of the good general's book by turning his commissary clerks and staff helpers into a scouting corps. It was one of these who was posted on the little hill behind the headquarters building to keep watch with his field glass, and to report from time to time on the progress of Greer's work in the upper valley. Others were stationed at various points in the danger zone under Roddy's direction; and the importance of this precaution was demonstrated when a young chainman came across from his hiding place near the *Egeria* with the word that Padgett had hurriedly sought and found Vallory, and that Vallory had immediately set out for the valley head, "Pikin' out like he was goin' for a doctor," in the scouting chainman's phrase.

Taking all these preliminary steps with the vigor of an undaunted fighting man, Stannard was still sweating under an uncertainty that was little short of paralyzing. As yet there had been no reply from the president to either of his messages of the previous night. Again and again he made Hempstead break the sending of the "hurry orders" to ask Yellow Medicine if there were anything from New York; and the reply was always the same: "O fm Nw Yk."

He had just fallen upon the operator again, with the same disappointing result, when Roddy, completing a scouting round which had included a trip to the east-end tunnel workings, and a hand-car flight to the end of track in the cañon, came in.

"I was just beginning to wonder if Greer had sandbagged you," was the young chief's greeting. "What do you know?"

"We're hanging on by our eyebrows, but we're still alive," said Roddy. "Weatherby has just reported in from his verifying trip down the South Fork of the Deer. He got me on Pearson's phone from the west end of the tunnel, and I told him to stay where he is, and take Markley's place."

"Markley's? What's the matter with Markley?"

"Didn't I tell you? He wanted to lay off for a day or so, and I let him go," said the assistant coolly. "I had him on the wire last night while you were down at Hempstead's shack."

"Wanted a lay-off?" Stannard exclaimed. "That's a little queer, isn't it? I didn't think Markley was the sort of man who would ask leave to go fishing in the hot middle of a fight."

"Oh, that's all right," said the granter of lay-offs nonchalantly. "He'll be back in a day or two, and Weatherby can drive tunnel as well as anybody we've got." Then he switched abruptly. "Pearson's holding his breath. Another section of his roof is threatening to tumble down. I did my best to 'hope him up.' One day more in the big rock cut will give us room to get by with the ties and rails; and Patterson says he's in shape to surface for us now as fast as we want to push him with the steel."

"Which means that we may possibly be able to shoot Pearson's concreting material up to him in time to save his roof—if Mr. Merriam doesn't call us down," was the young chief's half-discouraged rejoinder.

"No telegram yet?" queried Roddy.

"Not a word. I've been worrying the life out of those poor devils at Yellow Medicine all morning. I don't understand it, Jacksie. It isn't like Mr. Merriam to crawl into a hole and pull the hole in after him."

"No, it isn't," agreed the little man,

and then he switched again. "What have you done about the private car?"

"Nothing. Mr. Westervelt may stay if he wants to. But I have sent Crowley out to the camp in the Tetons with a note, asking Kitts to come in after Mrs. Grantham and Miss Anitra. He'll do it."

Roddy slid down from Brant's stool and walked to the window behind Stannard's chair.

"He has already done it," he remarked casually. "He is coming across the yard now—with Miss Westervelt. That's my cue to drop out, I reckon."

"It's nothing of the sort!" growled the Missourian. "Kitts may be coming to see me, but Miss Westervelt isn't. Stay where you are."

Roddy obeyed the order so literally that he was still looking out of the window when the athletic young surgeon came in and turned to hold an imaginary portière aside for his companion. For a little time the talk was strictly frivolous; with Kitts asserting that he had brought Miss Westervelt over to say good-by, since he was going to take her and the chaperon back with him, and Miss Westervelt protesting vigorously that she didn't mean to be dragged off to any place more primitive and barbarous than the Travois construction camp.

Stannard never knew whether it was Kitts or Roddy who was responsible for the shift which presently left him alone at his end of the long room with Anitra, but the thing was done when one or the other of them suggested that McClarty's wound ought to be seen to, and they left the workroom together.

"I'm glad they've gone," said Stannard, seating his remaining visitor in the one chair, and planting himself on the desk end. "I want to talk seriously to you, and Kitts makes a joke of everything. You didn't mean it when you said you were not going back with him?"

"I haven't made up my mind yet," was the flippant rejoinder.

"Then I'll make it up for you: you go; you've got to go, and take Mrs. Grantham with you."

"Why have I got to go?" she demanded, with an uptilt of the pretty chin.

"Because I say you must."

Her laugh was a delicious little ripple of defiance.

"This is positively refreshing!" she mocked. And then: "I'm *not* going; n-o-t, not. Now what are you going to do about it, Mr. Sublime Porte Stannard?"

Stannard's heavy brows went together in a frown.

"What I shall be obliged to do will add a little more pepper to a stew which is already hot enough. I shall have to send the *Egeria* back to Yellow Medicine—without waiting for the other members of your party to rejoin it."

"Mercy!" she gasped, and if her astoundment were an affectation, it was a triumph in its way. Then: "Something dreadful must have happened since last night. Wouldn't Uncle Silas give you enough money?"

It was just at this conjuncture that Hempstead got up from his table in the far corner of the room and went out. With a clear field, Stannard braced himself and smashed his way through the conventional barriers.

"You've given me the chance that I've been aching for all morning," he broke out. "You've had every reason to believe that I was about to turn grafter, haven't you?"

"I don't think we have mentioned any such dreadful word as that," she returned. "You were simply going to be like other men, and get all the money you could, weren't you?"

"No!" he denied roughly. "I was tempted—I'll admit that. But I think there was never a moment when I really meant to take your uncle's bribe. That's what it was, you know; just a plain, shameless bribe!"

He was looking her fairly in the eyes when he said it, and the wide-open brown depths were glowing like velvet stars, as they had on that other occasion when he had been brutally self-assertive with her. Then she took his breath away.

"I know the bribe was given you, and

I also know that you have proved yourself the impossible hundredth man by returning it," she said quite calmly, adding: "That is why I made Doc Billy bring me over here, don't you see?"

"No; I don't see," he objected blindly.

"Then I'll make it quite plain," she went on, as blandly as if she were discussing the weather. "When we first met, a year ago last summer, I liked you because I thought you were different. I've been thinking of you that way ever since, and it simply made me furious when I found out, or thought I found out, that you were going to be just like all the others."

Stannard gripped the edge of the desk until he could feel his heartbeats in his finger ends.

"Then you didn't mean what you were saying when you told me——"

"Not one single word of it. But I was just catty enough not to say one word that would stop you. Being a man, I suppose you can't understand that—but any woman would know."

Stannard was well out of his depth now, and floundering helplessly.

"You wanted me to refuse, and yet you talked money to me until I couldn't think of anything else?" he exploded.

She nodded brightly, adding: "You needn't shout at me that way. Be a good lion, like the one in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' and roar me gently."

The little quip broke the strain, and he laughed with her.

"There never was another woman like you in all the world," he exulted. "Now I can tell you why you must go with Kitts, and take Mrs. Grantham. There is going to be the biggest kind of a row right here in this valley—if the president doesn't call me down—and I'm going to ask you to be disloyal enough to your uncle to go away."

"Disloyal?" she queried.

"Yes. He brought you and the other women along so that I couldn't fight, even if I should want to. That is one of the meanings of this picnic party."

She made a charming little face at him.

"You couldn't drive me away with a stick now," she told him, sweetly obstinate. "The idea! Just when something really worth while is going to happen!"

"All right, then; I shall have to order the *Egeria* out of the danger zone."

"You do it, and I'll go over to the other side!" she struck back.

"Do you mean to say that you are on my side, as it is?"

"Of course I am. Why else would I have made Doc Billy bring me over here? I wanted to tell you that Uncle Silas is fairly hopping. He has sent for this Greer person, and—oh, dear! I had forgotten! Now you won't have any money, and you can never tell the 'one altogether' that *her* money doesn't make any difference!"

"My money wouldn't make any difference to her," he put in hastily. "It was a pipe dream—as I told you a few evenings ago. She liked me a little once, just as you did—because she thought I was different—but that's all. She can marry an Italian count, if she wants to—and pay all his debts. So you can see I'm not in it; not even in the outer edges of it. You say your uncle has sent for Greer?"

"I did; but I shan't say it again unless you'll promise not to send the *Egeria* away."

Stannard took time to consider. Her sudden change of front was sweeping him off his feet. In the lilting exaltation of the moment he felt as other men have felt since the world began—that with the chosen woman looking on, he could smash his way to success through anything and everything. Then he remembered that story he had heard and tossed out of his mind; how she would be disinherited if she should marry against her uncle's wishes. He would have nothing but the apple trees to offer her to make up for the lost fortune; and, as matters stood, Mr. Silas Westervelt's opposition was a thing already earned.

"I wish you didn't have a dollar to your name," he said, which was as near as he came to making the required promise about the moving of the private car.

Her laugh was a tonic for overstrained nerves and a troubled mind.

"That means that you are going to let the car stay here," she approved. "Now I'll be good and help you. Uncle Silas read your note, and he—he simply *coruscated.* I didn't mean to listen, but I couldn't very well help it. Then he hurried Mr. Padgett off to find Austin Vallory, and Austin Vallory was to hurry, hurry, hurry and find the Greer person. What will the Greer person do to you?"

"He will try to make me do what your uncle tried to hire me to do; quit, go away, lie down on the job."

"Can he do it?"

"Not in a month of Sundays—unless Mr. Merriam tells me I've got to."

"Then you haven't heard from Mr. Merriam?"

"No. I'm looking for a telegram any minute."

She got out of her chair, and went to stand for a moment at the little square window commanding the camp and the yard.

"Doc Billy and Mr. Roddy are coming back," she said quickly. And then, still more hurriedly: "There is something behind all this: I don't know what it is, but I heard just a whisper of it in New York before we started. There is a great deal of money involved, some way, and—and Uncle Silas hates Mr. Merriam. I haven't tried to find out; but now I *am* going to try. That is the reason you mustn't drive me away. You won't, will you?"

He was trying to assure her in some burbling fashion that he and the entire Travois camp were hers to play skittles with, if she so desired, when Kitts and Roddy came in, and the conventional side scenes shifted quickly into place again. Stannard watched for his opportunity, and farther along, when Roddy made it for him by taking Miss Westervelt to the door to show her the "snow veil" blowing over the sharp, high-pitched summit of Bald Mountain, he backed Kitts into a corner.

"Miss Anitra has changed her mind about going with you," said the Missourian, without preface. "She wants to stay and see the scrimmage, and what she says goes as it lies. I'll see to it that the *Egeria* is kept out of way of any bombardment, and——"

"So you're going to make the fight?" Kitts broke in. "I knew you would! By Jove, I'm going to be here to see it!"

"You can do me a good turn by herding the others away from it," said Stannard quickly. "That's what I wanted to ask you to do."

Kitts laughed.

"Are you of the same mind that you were a few days ago? Putting it up that Uncle Silas brought us along to force you to keep the peace? Because if you are, you can bet high that his first move will be to call us all in. He couldn't embarrass you any more eftually than by turning the lot of us loose on you right in the middle of things, and if war has been declared, that is just about what he'll do."

"If he does, I'll trundle the whole bunch of you out on the desert, and leave you there," said the young chief, with a grim laugh; but, after Kitts had taken his charge back across the tracks to the *Egeria,* Stannard remembered his compact with his new ally, and, never doubting for an instant the ally's sincerity, he could not help wondering if her coming had not been part of a deeply buried move of Silas Westervelt's with a further tying of a fighting man's hands as its object.

Coming back to business after the visitors were gone, Roddy was quick to remark that Hempstead's chair at the telegraph table was still vacant. While he was asking what had become of the operator, Eddie Brant loafed in, hot, dusty, and with a fine fire of excitement blazing in his boyish eyes.

"I'm the sweet little Sherlock Holmes of this outfit!" he bragged, climbing to a seat on his high stool, and fanning himself with his hat. "When I get through telling you where I've been, you're going to get me the Carnegie medal!"

"I'm going to dock you for staying away so long," growled the chief. "What have you been doing?"

"Butting in," said the map maker briefly. "I gave your letter to His Nibs in the *Egeria,* and on the way back I stopped at the commissary. Boligee, the engineer, who came in with that last train of material just before daylight, was there, buying himself a plug of tobacco. I got to talking with him, and he asked me what in Sam Hill we'd been building a wagon road for across our track about four miles back in the desert."

"What's that?" Stannard demanded.

"A wagon road. I fell on him like a thousand of brick. His engine was standing on the coal track, and I got him to take me down the line and show me. The wagon road was there, all right; crossing planks all in, and everything shipshape. More than that, it looked as if all the teams in the round world had been using it—right recently."

"Cut out the frills!" snapped Roddy. "You didn't stop at that?"

"You bet I didn't! I sent Boligee back to camp, and piked out to follow the road to the south. When it got into the hills, it looked like a sure thing—and it was, and is. When I came out on top of the south spur of the Dogtooth, which was where the tote road took me, I could hear the Standing Stone pounding among the bowlders a good three-quarters of a mile straight down in the cañon."

Again Roddy broke in with a fierce: "Cut it short and get to the nib of the thing, can't you!"

"I'm there, right now. On a ledge in the woods above our rock cutting, I saw the end of my tote road, and what the road had been made for. There's a big grade camp on that ledge in the woods, with a couple of hundred men sitting around doing nothing—waiting for orders, I suppose. While we've been watching the mouth of the cañon, Greer's gone all around Robin Hood's barn and outflanked us. When that big bunch up on the Dogtooth ledge drills its first set of holes, and touches 'em off, we'll have to take a magnifying glass along when we go to hunt for our rock cut! Now don't I get that medal?"

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The next and last installment of this novel will appear two weeks hence, in the POPULAR, on sale February 7th.

DEFERRING TO EXPERT OPINION

REPRESENTATIVE RICHMOND P. HOBSON, who was the hero of the big boat-sinking in Santiago harbor during the Spanish-American War, and who later had his reward in being kissed by the longest and loveliest line of girls known to history, was cross-examining Miss Minnie Bronson, an anti-suffragist, at a hearing before a congressional committee.

"So you don't think women would do as well as men in politics?" asked Mr. Hobson.

"I emphatically do not," replied Miss Bronson.

"Well, tell us why. We would like to hear more of that."

"For one thing, women are much more emotional than men."

"More emotional than men?"

"Certainly."

"Can that be possible?"

"Nobody should know that better than you, in view of your experience directly after the Spanish-American War."

Bowman's Code

By Mayn Clew Garnett

Author of "A Motor-Boat Necessity," "Going Into Business," Etc.

With the fisher folks of the Bahama Cays. Bowman's code is no new one, but it is sufficiently rare to make it notable. What another white man would have done in Bowman's place is easily answered. Whether his code was the right one in the circumstances is not so easy of answer

HE was an old man when he first came into the camp of fishermen off Norris Cut. He had only one friend, or it might be said acquaintance, and that was the fishing boss who sold to the company over in town. But he had a dignified manner, and an air of a person of importance, albeit he was very dirty and exceedingly ragged. He had fished alone many seasons along the reef, but he had never made many friends.

There was something distant, almost sinister, about old man Bowman. He was a man with a past, a man who had done many things in his youth, and had acquired knowledge fiercely, savagely, and with great hardship.

Bill Smith, the fishing boss, knew him, however, and relied upon his judgment regarding mackerel, kingfish, and the rest of the finny produce which he sold at a fair profit to the company over the bay where Bowman's family lived in more or less squalor.

Bowman's second wife was young and good looking, and had left him for reasons she never made public. Her present husband, the father of two stout lads, who roamed the reef in their skipjack, was a plumber and a good mechanic, who made a fair wage, but spent most of it on "redeye," a distilled beverage which for potency, perhaps, has no equal for making a wild Indian out of a steady workman.

Sometimes the two boys, twelve and fifteen, fished for Smith, but only when the weather suited them and their youthful tastes ran to a slight exertion. To them Bowman was a "bum," a good-for-nothing old man whom their mother disliked. Bowman never mentioned their names, nor did he ever show any feeling at their taunts when he met them.

"There's old Bum Bowman," Jim, the eldest, yelled as they passed out the cut one beautiful morning and stood offshore to fish.

"Hey, Bum—what's doin' outside?" yelled Jack, the other lad.

The old man who stood at the landing heard them, and looked straight out to sea over their heads. They repeated their taunts, and made several remarks which brought a laugh from some loafing fishermen who were in to repair a skiff.

The old man watched them a moment, letting his gaze rest upon them strangely for an instant. Then he bowed gravely to them, and continued to look far out to sea, his old, whiskered face showing no emotion whatever. The lads passed out with the tide, and the fishing boss turned to the old man.

"Good day for mackerel, Jack. Are you going out to-day?"

"Just as soon as I get my squids ready —in about an hour," said the old fellow.

II.

The day was well advanced when Bowman was ready to set forth. The sunshine was hot and the wind was

light, the sparkling reef snoring gently with the surge as he started out. Overhead the little trade clouds, white and fluffy, hung in small bunches of vapor, and seemed to hardly move in the clear atmosphere. Far away on the horizon, the white dots of fishing boats showed the edge of the Bank, the coral reef where the chasm hung sheer and steep, dropping down a thousand feet or more in a quarter of a mile. Along the edge of the Bank the fish would come at intervals, and strike at anything moving and showing signs of life.

The few boats stood back and forth over a stretch of sea about two miles in length. Flynn's lads followed the fleet, and dragged their squids along with the rest, every now and then hauling in a large fish.

Among the fleet were several negroes. One boat held three men. These three negroes were large, unkempt men, with black faces and blue gums beneath their shining white teeth, hard-looking blacks of almost pure Kongo type. They had come out of the Glades, many miles below, and fished furtively upon the farther edge of the Bank, always sheering off at the approach of a boat. They were three outlaws, who had evaded capture for several years, and who had gone in among the Indians of the Everglades, to cast their lot against the white man. The Indians refused to mix with blacks, but tolerated them on account of certain perquisites paid in the way of ammunition and rum.

Bowman sighted the small fleet many miles distant, and watched the boat with the three men. He knew them well enough. He loosened a short, high-powered rifle he always carried in his boat for killing sharks, and, taking it from its scabbard, wiped the breech with a piece of rag. Then he put it away again, and got out his lines and let them troll astern. He was nearing the Bank, and would strike fish in a few minutes. It was not his business to capture outlaws; he was no sheriff, nor deputy, but it was well to be on the lookout for such men who might give trouble at any time when the opportunity offered.

The old man's set face almost softened as he watched the far-distant boat. He was thinking of the sheriff, the constables who were afraid to go after three black pirates. Altogether his sympathy was with the pirates. In his saturnine and lonely life, he had no use for what stood for law and order as he had seen it. It had meant only graft and trouble to himself. In the gun fights among the drunken fishing camps, law had never been observed at all. The will of the strongest was usually the right of way, and when this was backed by arms, it generally succeeded. Sheriffs seldom bothered a fishing camp, and a sudden death was generally treated as an accident, or carelessness due to the victim. His life needed no protection. He had lived it, almost finished it, and his own children were now grown.

His boat was now almost out of sight of land and a full eight miles from the fishing station. Two white men passed, and waved their hands in greeting. They were too far away to hail, but Bowman raised his hand in reply. The boats went slowly onward, trailing the squids. Bowman's small craft was sloop-rigged—that is, with a mainsail and a jib upon a short bowsprit. He had a small engine in the boat, but he seldom used it, the gasoline costing too much and his knowledge of gas engines being limited.

The two Flynn boys came up.

"Hello, Bum Bowman," they yelled at him. "Strike any fish?"

Bowman bowed gravely, and they jeered at him.

"Hey, you bum fisherman, don't you know how to fish?"

They passed on, with their engine turning slowly, and Bowman saw them close to the boat with the three outlaws. The boys deliberately crossed the trolling lines with theirs.

This is against the unwritten laws of mackerel fishing. No man shall cross over another's lines. It is against all custom, against all rules. The crossed lines fouled, and two of them came away with the boy's boat. A roar of curses came from the blacks.

Bowman was too far away to hear anything, but he saw the affair, and knew that there would be some consequences following. The three outlaws were not the kind of negroes to put up with anything that savored of trifling. The two lads did not appear to know this, and they shouted in derision as their boat went away with the two trolls of the others.

The largest fellow of the three, a huge black with an ugly scowl, and whose face bore a long razor-cut scar from temple to chin, showed his teeth like a wolf.

"We'll take dem kids in, sho'—we'll hole 'em till dat Flynn pays a good squar' bit, 'n' if dey doan' come we nabs 'em. Put yo' tiller over, Sam, an' we'll hang onto dat boat, 'n' see."

"Sho' will," assented Sam. "Haul in dat main sheet a small hitch, Luke," he added, as he headed for the two Flynns, who now stood offshore and cleared their lines for fresh fishing.

In a few minutes, they saw that the three blacks were overhauling them, and were evidently bent on trouble. They squared away for the land, which barely showed in the distance above the horizon, and they opened their engine to its fullest extent. They pulled out a little at first, but the wind was freshening, and the smart sharpie of the blacks began to close in. For a mile or more the two boats sped along, and Bowman saw that there was no attempt at fishing by either. He watched them, but attended strictly to business.

A giant king mackerel struck his line. It was a sudden, fierce pull, and as the fish struck he leaped clear of the sea a full fathom, as was the custom of his kind. Bowman held the line taut and tried to haul, but the fish fought furiously, and he feared tearing out its mouth or gills, and just kept the line taut, gaining slowly.

Gradually he hauled line. The huge fellow, a full thirty pounds in weight, came swerving and sheering alongside. He refused to come closer to the foe he now saw plainly above him, and fought with fury to tear clear.

Bowman held him steady, and pulled line until he brought the fellow directly beneath him, and close to the piano-wire leader of the line. Then he suddenly lifted him with a full-arm swing, and without jerk or jar raised him clear of the sea, and swung him inboard. He fell with a mighty floundering and slapping into the boat. Bowman promptly struck him over the head with his fish club, and his struggles ended. Then he looked again at the two fleeing boats, and saw that the blacks were coming fast upon the wake of the two lads ahead.

III.

The old man studied the case but a moment. He saw what was going to happen, and his face relaxed for a moment. The thought of Flynn, his enemy, being held up for payment almost amused him. Also the two had jeered at him and insulted him upon every occasion. He knew that Big Jake, the leader of the three blacks, would whale the two insulters of his dignity with ratline stuff until they could neither walk nor stand. This he felt was not exactly unfair, and he did not disapprove of it, but the thought that the negroes might do real harm if the money was not forthcoming, made him take a more serious view.

He knew that Big Jake was not to be fooled, that he was afraid of no consequences, for there was already a reward of a hundred dollars offered for him because of his participation in a certain affair in Redlands, where a store had been gutted. That the three were in pursuit was evident, and that they would capture the lads and hold them, he felt was just as certain. Flynn had a good position, and kidnaping was the commonest kind of blackmailing game among the bad men of the Glades.

Without a word, he hauled in his main sheet and headed for the fleeing boats, which were now at least two miles distant and going fast to the southward to pass the station. It would be an hour before they came in close enough for any one at the station to see them. This would mean that if overtaken the game would be

easy. Ten miles below the cut was an inlet, known to only a few, and this inlet led into a thick mangrove cay, where through tortuous passages the boats could make the Glades unseen by passing craft. Once inside this green-mantled opening, the blacks would be safe. A single man might hold this hidden entrance easily with a rifle, and no sheriff in those parts cared enough for a hundred dollars to give his life for it.

Old Man Bowman headed to cut inside this cay, and started his engine to give him additional power. Soon the thudding of his motor and the rushing of foam told of his increasing speed, and he set his course silently and steadily for a point about nine miles distant and close enough in to intercept the now fast-running boats of both pursued and pursuers.

Bowman sat down, cool and collected, at his tiller, and thought over the past. The two lads were not his; they were the offspring of the man who had taken his wife away from him, who had done him all the evil he could without breaking the law. He had cared a great deal for the woman. His love had been of a quiet kind, for he was no longer young, but he was a perfect physical specimen, strong and healthy, and he never drank liquor to excess, except at rare intervals, when his loneliness was too heavy upon him to bear. He had never forgotten the slights, the insults, the open hostilities practiced upon him by his enemy and his children, but he could never quite bring himself to go far enough away from the reef to get clear of them entirely. He had lived sixty years on the reef, fished, explored, and sponged along its hundred of miles of length from Key West to the Fowey Rocks, and he knew no other world, no other place where he could make a living after his manner of working.

The boats stood steadily along, and the persistent following of the blacks showed him that they were very much in earnest in their purpose. They would revenge themselves for lost lines, and also turn a new trick at the same time.

Bowman took his rifle out again, and placed it near at hand. He would only use it at the finish if the three outlaws forced him. His boat was not fast, and he saw that he was not gaining much on either craft. The minutes passed, and the three boats were standing along the edge of the Gulf Stream, the Flynns edging inside the current as far as possible and the negroes holding along against it, and making fast time in spite of the set to the northward. They would not push the chase inshore, where the sight might attract comment.

At the end of an hour the cay was close ahead, and the blacks were in hailing distance of the fleeing boat.

Bowman took up his rifle and sat ready for the finish.

IV.

The boys were now thoroughly frightened. They steered badly, and although their boat was running well, they failed to make the most of her speed, and the three black devils in pursuit came closer and closer upon them. The station was passed too far out for any one to notice the boats; and the outlaws, now having gained the windward position, and edging between the shore and the fleeing boat, forced the quarry farther and farther out. Right ahead was the cay with the hidden channel through the mangroves, and the negroes now pushed the chase so that they might quickly make it and disappear with their prey.

Bowman knew of the spot where the cut went through the coral and watched for some sign of it. None showed, for the heavy jungle growth lay close upon the water, and made a solid green wall with apparently no possible opening.

The old man was now close enough to hear the blacks yell.

"Come, yo' boys, an' let's us see dem lines yo' stole—come in—stop dat boat—we git yo', sho'—stop dat boat."

But they held on, frightened at the

steady pursuit. Soon the blacks came up alongside. The big one leaped across the gap, landed in the boat, and instantly the sheet flew out as he let it go. The next instant, he had the two safely, one in each powerful hand, and the boat was alongside.

They were trussed over and piled into her in less time than it takes to tell of it, and their boat was taken in tow.

Bowman, now a half mile astern, saw things distinctly. The negroes knew him well enough by sight, and felt that he would not take an active part in a rescue. His history was well known along the reef. But they had not counted on the old man's code, his methods of dealing with his fellow men. They towed the boat astern, but with no attempt to conceal their work. Bowman's steady pursuit told them plainly they would be overhauled shortly, but one old man against three armed ruffians was not a dangerous proposition to them. They held on for the hidden cut, and Bowman kept on after them.

Close to the cay, a small stake stood clear of the sea. It was well inside the deep water, and far enough in to be able to stand the low wash of waves which never broke heavily so far inshore. Bowman knew that it must have been planted there, and noticed that the boat now headed straight for it. He instantly divined that it was the mark, the guide for the hidden opening.

The boats were now running straight for the cay, and swerving enough upon its side to be free from the outside sea. Bowman took up the rifle and laid it across his knees, while he steered with one hand straight for the fleeing boats. At a quarter of a mile, he stood up and waved it at the blacks. A shot was the answer to this, and a bullet tore through his sail close to his head. It was certain death to go on, to go in to a close fracas with the blacks, but he held along under full speed.

The two boats ahead were now very close to the mangroves and heading straight into them, straight into a green wall of vegetation which showed not a single break in its long line resting in the water. The stake was passed close aboard the first boat, and Bowman knew that it was either now or never—they would go clear in a minute. He shook all over with the excitement of the chase, and steadied the tiller with his knee as he raised the rifle. If he could but hit the engine in the fleeing boat he might still hope to stop her.

A black hauled the towing boat astern alongside, and unstepped her mast, laying it down within her. Another doused the sail on the boat ahead, and in a moment the two boats were ready for the dash into the cut. Overhead and solidly about them would be the tough mangrove roots, which grow well down into deep water, and which form usually an impenetrable barrier to anything. The cut at the water line and below it must be hit squarely to drive through into the channel inside and beyond. The blacks appeared to know the opening wall. They were now right upon the mangrove, and heading straight into it at undiminished speed, their engine going fast.

Bowman aimed steadily at the black spot of the cylinder of the engine, now but a couple of hundred yards distant. A bullet from his rifle would penetrate its thin cast-iron wall easily, or crack it. A glancing shot would almost certainly break the firing gear of the make-and-break spark, and he might stop them yet. He was a very good shot, a deadly shot when upon a steady platform, but the vibrations of his boat made aiming difficult.

He fired.

Nothing happened. The boats struck the edge of the mangrove, and penetrated. Just as the green leaves closed upon them, he fired again. Then the dark, heavy wall of vegetation closed upon the fleeing boats, and they were inside the channel. Bowman slowed down his engine, and swung about in a circle. He was hesitating. If he had disabled the craft, he might force the blacks to give up their prey, but they would be almost sure to kill him for what he had done. He would not

shoot the men. That was not his code. He felt that he had no right to shoot them. It was his strange philosophy, his strange code, worked out by himself in his lonely life. That they would shoot him was certain. He knew them all for bad men, men who would stop at very little, indeed.

He headed away from that stake, which marked a deadly spot, and stood for the fishing station. The green wall of the mangrove gave no parting sign of anything, no sign of life or struggle. It had swallowed the two boats as completely as if they had been utterly destroyed. There was silence along the cay save for the soft snore of the reef.

It was now growing late, and the sun was sinking in the west. The station lay a few miles away, and could be made before dark. Bowman headed for it, thinking hard, studying the case. He was afraid to enter that mangrove. He knew it. He was so afraid that he trembled at the thought of the gloom within its depths, and the blacks probably waiting, fully armed, for him to follow them. He shivered, and put away his rifle.

But within his dull mind was a strange feeling that he was not quite right in his actions. He was not doing what was required of a white man, and a man who had been always straight and fair in his dealings with his fellows. Something like a feeling of shame came upon him. He could not bring himself to kill a negro, he was not a killer by nature. Had he been less quiet and steady, he would have put Flynn out of his life years ago. The unwritten law of that section would never have so much as questioned his right to do so. No, he was not a savage, not ferocious, in spite of the fact that he made his living like a predatory animal, preying upon the fish and game of his universe.

The sun was almost out of sight when he suddenly hauled his sheet, started his small motor again, and swung out to sea, straight away from the station. He had been studying his life for an hour, and he acted like a man who had come suddenly to some sort of decision, some definite line of action.

Just before darkness fell, the fishing boss who was watching for him with a powerful glass, saw him far to the southward, and standing away from the station.

V.

Inside the green fringe of mangrove, a black pool lay sluggish and fetid with decayed vegetation. Upon its scummy surface a strange creature moved at intervals. A small alligator swam quickly across it at the sound of human voices. Three black men in two boats, with two lads bound fast hand and foot, moved slowly over the dark water, poling through the scum with long staves which sank deep into the black ooze at the bottom. The water was only a few feet deep, but sufficient to float the small boats. Overhead the solid green vegetation made a dome, impenetrable to the dim light of the fading day.

All was silence save for the wash of the rippling water against the boats' sides and the voice of a huge negro, who toiled at an engine with a broken cylinder case, which leaked water through it where a bullet had struck with amazing force and cracked the thin cast-iron shell.

"It sho' ain't no use—we got toe stay right heah fo' de night, 'n' fix dis heah engine. Dat old fool, he done hit it fair, 'n' we sho' got toe patch her up somehow—she's as hot as a furnace now; dere ain't no water above de base."

"I'd sho' like toe git a crack at ole Bowman," said one poling, with an oath.

They poled a little farther in, and soon the passage opened wider, and the faint light coming down from above showed a wider bayou, which led away into the swamp. They came to a solid bank, and tied up for the night.

A small fire was started, and the three cooked a piece of fat pork in a frying pan, and followed it with some coffee. The two boys were given a slice apiece, and told to eat or go hun-

gry. Then all hands lay quiet and made ready to pass the night. In the morning, by the light of a tropic sun, they would work upon the engine, and patch the cracked cylinder so that they could proceed across the cay, and so on farther over across the shallow channels between the reef and the edge of the Glades. Here they would enter, and follow up as far as an Indian village, where they would remain until Flynn paid handsomely for his sons.

About four o'clock, Bowman, who had been far out to sea, stood in toward the shore again. The cay rose like a dark shadow in the gloom of the night, and as it would be two hours before daylight, he stood straight in. He found the stake easily in the darkness, for he had that instinct of position which comes to all true hunters and fishermen.

Softly and with infinite care, he explored the mangrove for the passage. It did not show until he shoved the bow of his boat right into the foliage. Then, within he found the inky blackness was not obstructed by branches. He passed inside, and with an oar shoved slowly ahead. The slue opened gradually, and after a hundred feet or more he was in comparatively clear water. Silence, utter silence, lay in the Glade.

He poled ahead swifty, and soon saw what he thought was a will-o'-the-wisp, which glowed at a distance. He made it out to be the remains of a fire, and, feeling along the black bank, came suddenly upon the boats.

It was so dark he could not see his hand before his face, but he felt about him slowly and cautiously. The boat with the two boys lay a few feet from the other craft. He untied it, and without awakening them, poled softly away in the direction he had come.

In that intense blackness of the bayou, a darkness where even in the glaring sunlight the gloom was deep, it was almost impossible to steer through the night without striking the banks and losing the way at intervals. Although the general direction of the old man was correct, he went too far to one side of the opening, and was jammed in the tangled mangrove roots, which were tough as rope yarns, and impenetrable. He was forced to give up.

Patiently, and with untiring exertion, he poled and prodded about for the opening. The camp of the negroes was several hundred yards back, but in that silence, broken only at distant intervals by the cry of some wild animal, the sound of his scraping and prodding made an unusual racket. The boys were awakened, and they spoke out loud in protests. They were sore, and crying at their plight. The dim light of the dawn began to show in the opening behind him, and Bowman knew he would soon be discovered.

He renewed his exertions, and after incredible effort finally found the cut where the roots had been cleared out and a passage made for a boat. He instantly pushed into this, and in so doing made a loud crash in the mangrove. In a moment a shot sounded, then another and another. A bullet struck the old man fairly in the side. He fell—arose again, and pushed clear of the jungle. Then he started his engine, and as the dawn broke he headed toward the station.

VI.

The fishing boss was up and looking around for him when he came to the small landing.

"What have you there — Flynn's boys? In the name of the sea, what have you been doing to them—are you hurt, old man?"

"Aw, dis old Bum Bowman an' them niggers been playin' some of their tricks on us," said one lad.

"Yes, the old man'll make him sweat for this business—keepin' us out all night," said the other. "We never done nothing—did we, Jim?"

"Naw, we done nothing at all."

"Take them over to town, will you?" asked Bowman, in a strange whisper.

"Sure. Bill is going over for grub at high water—he'll take them over if they can't run their own boat themselves."

"Aw, we kin run our boat—we don't need no one to take us to town," said the eldest.

"Well, see that they get home safe—I'm going out again," said Bowman.

The fishing boss wondered at him. He was so quiet, so strained. He watched the old man stagger up to his shack, a few hundred yards down the shore, and then as business was beginning and the boats were going out, he forgot him entirely.

Late that evening, Flynn and two sheriffs came over to the station.

"We want old Bowman," said one. "There's a charge agin' him by Flynn's boys."

"Yep," said Flynn. "An' if the law don't trim him—I will."

"He's in his shack—over the other side there," said the fishing boss. He was not much interested. The three did not know the trail, and could not see that hut from the landing. The boss went with them.

The setting sun shone over the reef and struck fairly upon the shack where the old man lived. He was sitting outside in a chair, and his gray hair was blown gently about in the breath of the trade wind. His hands were folded over his breast, and his head was held well up, and a set expression of extreme determination was upon his lined face.

"Better get yo' guns ready—he might show fight," suggested Flynn.

They went up to him, the old man sitting there in the fading sunlight, and the leading sheriff touched him upon the shoulder.

"We want yo', Bowman——"

He stopped, started backward, then looked strangely at the rest.

"My God—he's dead—dead as a stone."

A FORGOTTEN DETAIL

WHEN Joseph W. Bailey, now practicing law in New York, began his career in Texas, he was approached by a negro, with a request for legal assistance. The negro was accused of having beaten up his wife in a manner that endangered her life.

Bailey immediately went after the facts.

"What did you do to her?" he asked.

"I ain't done nothin' 'cep' hit her 'cross de haid," explained the offender.

"Now, look here, Jack," said young Bailey, "you must have hurt her pretty badly. What did you hit her with?"

"'Deed, boss," Jack was emphatic, "nothin' but my han', an' I des hit her once."

"You just struck her on the head with your bare hand?" pursued Bailey.

"Yas, boss," insisted the negro, "an' you knows a nigger's haid is mighty hard."

"But didn't you have something in your hand when you hit her?"

"I sw'ar to goodness, boss," said Jack solemnly, "I didn't have nothin' in my han'."

After a good many more questions had been asked, the client left the lawyer's office, but in a few minutes returned.

"I done been thinkin' 'bout whut you axed me 'bout havin' somethin' in my han' when I hit her," he explained.

"Well, what have you got to say?" inquired Bailey.

Jack was absorbed for a few moments in an effort to reminisce.

"Sence you wuz speakin' of it, an' sence I done tried to ricollect all de trifial details," he replied slowly, "I b'lieve I does remember dat I had hold of a skillet—but I ain't noways sartin—noways sartin which han' it was in."

In the Tule Tangle

By Herbert Coolidge

The result of a hunt for wild cattle on the desert side of the San Jacinto Mountains. Herbert Coolidge knows this section of the West as Mark Twain knew the Mississippi, and he has given us a story that is realistic and full of color. We had thought of calling the novel "The Blind Cowman;" for one of the cowmen, although he has accurate vision in the tule tangle, is absolutely blind in a far more vital tangle.

(In Two Parts—Part One.)

CHAPTER I.

POISON IVY MAKES HER MARK.

WHEN you find yourself a lone cowman of forty, you hate to lose a partner like Joe Foley, even by marriage. And as Joe was to marry the one woman I ever could want for a wife, the knife seemed double-edged.

If you live alone in a big, silent, brush cañon, you think too much. And sometimes I would get to feeling as blue as a whetstone, and looking straight down my nose. Then, to end this, I would fly in and abuse myself worse than a man does a horse that's mean to bridle. Because I thought that if ever there were two people in this world who were intended to be man and wife, it was Joe and Londa. Clear-skinned they were, and clean-cut—sound through and through like new gold money.

Finally, about three weeks before the event, I said to myself: "You'd better get out of this cañon before some one comes in and finds you jumping up in the air at things. And Joe and I may as well have one more good, old hunt."

So, with no thought whatever that I was starting on a chase after insurrecto raiders across the Baja California line, I caught up my two best saddle animals and a couple of gentle pack mules that would follow, got down my old 45.90, and headed over the ridge to the Hernandez.

Joe had been home from what they call summer school less than a week. When he came out to the corral, grinning all over, I said: "Joe, let's go over to the desert side of the San Jacinto Mountains and hunt wild cattle."

"I'll go you!" he replied. "I was going over to your casa to-morrow, and spring the same thing."

"You lying, lovesick, young devil," said I. "I could stay dead a month over in that brush hole, and you'd never know it."

"I hope to drop in my tracks, Durk, if I wasn't coming over to-morrow, sure. Londa's going inside to buy some stuff, and——"

"Yes, I savvy," I put in roughly. "Well, we'll have one more hunt, anyway. And we'll get an early start out of here in the morning."

I noticed Joe taking a mighty thoughtful, glinty grin at me while I was saying this, but as that young man always has something or other up his sleeve, I didn't pay much attention.

"Durk," he said, "you're getting to be a mighty wise old cowman, camping by yourself over in that brush cañon.

But, come on, shoot your stock into the corral, and we'll give them some hay. Well, well, Durk; long time I no see you. How's everything? How's the pet butcher knife—finest little piece of steel ever was, isn't she? And how's the pet lass' rope? That's a fine reata, all right, Durk. There never will be another that will cut the air just like it. And how's the old forty-five-ninety? Most reliable——"

"Young feller," I interrupted, "you haven't been learning much manners off of them rah-rah boys."

"Well," retorted Joe dryly, "when a feller comes from away across the ridge to go on a hunt, it's the most natural thing in the world for me to ask him about all his folks."

I was grinning myself when I replied: "Young feller, that's a pretty rough dig for a cub of your age to take at a suffering old cowman of forty."

Londa was at the house taking care of Joe's mother, who had been a long time kind of ailing; so I wouldn't go in until supper, saying I wanted to stay out where I could smoke. The only way I could keep that girl out of my mind was to stay clear away from her. I had found that out during the summer.

Joe and I hung around the corral then, chinning about the horses, and knocking corners off each other. The insurrectos were making things boil on both sides of the Mexican line, and we talked all that over. Joe was against Diaz; but I was for him, because that old man knew how to put the fear of God into the bandits. And that's the main job in Mexico.

At the Hernandez the white folks, the company, and the cow hands all eat at one long table. Londa was there opposite me, at the white folks' end. She didn't look near as happy as I'd seen her. But I didn't think much of it, remembering something a wise old hombre had told me about women. "Every mother's daughter of them," he said, "throws an awful worrying spell just before the wedding, no matter who they're going to marry."

After supper Londa and Joe asked me to sit into a game of hearts. But I said: "No, I want to smoke. I guess I'll go out to the bunk house."

Londa chipped in then, saying: "But we haven't seen you for nearly two months, Durk. So you can smoke right in here by the fireplace. Mrs. Foley has gone to bed, so it won't matter."

But I said: "No, I want to see Paisano Red."

I saw that this didn't make any hit whatever with Londa, and I dug out of there right away—before I got my foot into it any deeper. I make a worse show of myself than a horse in quicksand when I get in a house where there are women. I feel tall for the ceilings, some way, and long-legged, and freckled, and sorrel-haired. Because I'll have to admit, like Paisano Red, that "I ain't no beauty." There's quite a lot of rawboned Irish in me—and when I get cornered up in a house that way, it sticks out all over.

I found Paisano Red twisting strands for a horsehair rope.

"How?" said he, without looking up. Then, when he had run his whirligig for quite a while, he began: "Say, have you heard about Joe's wedding? It's to be put off. Looks to me——"

Paisano Red is always stringing some one. Also, he isn't the kind of hombre that I want dragging Londa's name into bunk-house conversation. So I did what I could to chop him off.

"Looks to me like you're talking out of a crack in your head," I cut in shortly.

"It's the truth, Durk. I got it straight from——"

"It looks kind of funny to me that Joe doesn't know anything about it," I replied hotly. "So give us a rest. Say, Joe and I are going over onto the desert side after wild cattle. But if you see any Old Mexico Mexicans snooping around when you're riding, send an Indian after me and I'll come home."

Paisano Red turned on that sorrel, side-winding smile of his, and we went to talking cow and Mexican revolution.

Ordinarily, Joe's Londa isn't the woman to ask or expect a cowman to be careful around horses. But the next morning she came out to the corral,

looking white and rattled. This was a new one on me. For I have seen Londa make the rocks smoke chasing cows downhill; and I have seen her stand steady when the blood was flying. She's a range-bred girl, with a trained nurse's education.

I was having a red-hot powwow with Joe when Londa turned up at the corral, trying to get him to outfit with gentle pack mules, and gentler saddle animals than Poison Ivy and a worse roan devil we called Poison Oak. And how Londa did light in and help me out!

I hate to see a woman butt into a man's business that way, but I was glad when Joe finally came across to the extent of agreeing to turn Poison Oak loose, and take Londa's horse, a gentle, old pelt called Chapo. Poison Oak, like Poison Ivy, was a plug with a record. He had killed one broncho twister, and had chewed, kicked, or trampled several others.

While Joe was pulling his saddle off Poison Oak—he was watching his "P's" and "Q's" to keep from getting hurt—I saw that Londa wanted a word with me on the side.

"What's the matter with you, Londa?" I asked, going over to where she stood. "Have you been having bad dreams?"

"Durk," she said, "I'm worried about Joe. Something has got an awful hold on me. I just can't shake it off. You know I never make a fuss, don't you, Durk? You'll be careful, won't you, and don't let him take too many chances?"

"Sure thing I will," I said. "Joe's afraid of me. He'll do anything I tell him. I'll make him be careful."

Londa had to laugh at this. But it wasn't much of a laugh. And she came right down to tacks again, making me promise solemnly to be careful and look after Joe.

When Joe and I finally pulled out, Londa rode with us to the foot of the ridge. When she said good-by, the girl watched us without turning back. She was steady enough, standing there by the trail under the sycamores, but I knew from her eyes that she was seeing danger, and worse than danger, out ahead.

Joe and I have had some lively times on the range together. But that hunt after wild cattle beat all previous records.

It was in the third week, and we were out of grub except for two mule loads of jerked wild cow, when we finally started back for the home ranch.

The morning we pulled out for home, Joe again came within an ace of getting his, this time on the edge of a two-hundred-foot jump-off, where Poison Ivy lit into bucking. But, finally, after a couple of days' travel over some of the roughest mountains on the desert side of California, we made the rim of a divide where it was a good trail, and all downhill to the Hernandez. Here we camped for the night in a clump of pine timber above a glade, where the horse feed was good.

That night I woke up about eleven o'clock. Poison Ivy and the mules were snorting. The glade they were on was fully a couple of hundred yards below, but their resonant trumpeting came to me plainly.

I woke Joe.

"Something is stirring up the stock," I told him. "Listen to that!"

"That's mostly Poison Ivy," replied Joe drowsily, "and a Chualar bronc has a right to snort every time she smells a coyote. Nighty-night." And a minute later I heard him snoring. But for me there was no more sleep. This was partly, I suppose, because I was nervous on account of having been several days without tobacco. Anyway, I was as uneasy as a dog in a trap. Daylight couldn't come quick enough for me to get Joe headed down the trail to the Hernandez.

When you're up high the nights have an edge on them—even in August—and the coldest time of day is at dawn. Then you feel like lying a while in your blankets. But as soon as the first light came I rolled out and hurried down to the glade to make sure that the animals were all right.

My two pack mules, both of my sad-

dle horses, and Joe's Chapo were gone. Poison Ivy stood in the middle of the grassy glade, her head held high, and weaving back and forth on a half circle at the end of her tether. Joe's two snorty mules were hobbling around near her.

Poison Ivy was the only mare in the outfit, and the geldings all liked to hang around her. The mules, especially, would hee-haw like homesick fools if Ivy so much as stepped behind a bush. I knew that the hobbled animals would have circled back to Poison Ivy if they had been scared away by a bear, and was dead sure at once that they were stolen.

I ran back and waked Joe, who was still snoring comfortably on his bed of boughs. He looks like some man, Joe does, when you see him stretched out. He is six feet two with bare heels; and he would weigh two and a quarter hundred without an ounce of soft meat on him. He has a head of black, wiry hair, that makes him look bigger than he is. And that jaw of his is as solid as iron.

Joe drew on a face as long as a mule's when I told him that Chapo was gone. Because that little plug was all the same Joe's brother. It was because he thought more of Chapo than a whole herd of horses that he had made him a present to Londa.

That was one of the few times I ever saw Joe look real serious. But I heard him chuckling as he hustled into his boots: "Out of ammunition, out of grub, out two gentle pack mules and three gentle horses. How's that for a hatful of luck?"

His remark caught me feeling through all my pockets for the makings of a smoke, and I added glumly: "Yes, and I'm plum out of tobacco."

As soon as Joe got his boots on he grabbed up his saddle and rifle, and ran for the glade.

"Get your outfit, Durk," he said, "and come on."

"What you going to do?" I called.

"Going to get that stock, of course. We've got to hurry if we beat them to the Mexican line."

When he got to the edge of Poison Ivy's tether he stopped suddenly and began looking along the ground. Then he called: "There's blood here, Durk. Poison Ivy has left her mark on some one, sure."

"She'll leave a mark on you one of these days," I replied, hastening on to see the signs, "and it won't be a birthmark, either."

No one but Joe and old Dad Mills, who had believed a fortune teller when she said that no horse could kill or maim him, would go near that brute. She was a Chualar; and the Chualars, I believe, are the most vicious strain of desert mustangs on earth. Poison Ivy was particularly devilish with her forefeet and teeth.

Joe began trailing the red marks toward some brush and rocks.

"You want to look out, Joe," I called. "You're liable to find some one lying around there crippled."

Joe swung his rifle around in front as cheerfully as though it had a cartridge in it, and kept following along the trail. As I approached he stooped down behind a bowlder and picked up a Mexican sombrero.

"He must have been rattled to leave that," said Joe. "It's got on fifty dollars' worth of pretty."

I took a skirmish around the clump of brush and rocks before I made an answer. When I had satisfied myself that there was no one there in hiding, I replied:

"Joe, that's a proper bandit's hat. You never saw a Cholo horse thief wearing gold braid like that. And, say, Joe, it looks like the one the hombre wore who worked you for the ammunition."

Joe examined it closely. "No," he said, "it isn't. That hombre didn't have a very expensive hat. But it's off of some one from away down in Old *Mcjico,* all right."

"I'll bet it's his pardner's, then."

"Like as not," admitted Joe. "But there'll be a dead man if ever I catch that hombre I gave the ammunition to with Chapo."

"Who?" I demanded.

"Now you look out, Durk," replied

Joe, grinning, "or I'll be coming across at you."

"Face the facts, Joe," said I. "It looks to me as though the Mexican has got all the ammunition. But I expect he'd give you back a cartridge if he knew you wanted to shoot him, he's 'such a good-natured, funny kind of a cuss.'"

That was what Joe had got off the day before when I jacked him up for giving a couple of boxes of ammunition to a stray Mexican we found camped along the trail. The paisano offered to pay for the shells, giving it out that he was an exiled patriot.

I told Joe at the time: "Never give any cartridges to a Mexican. You're liable to get one of the bullets back." And Joe had said: "Oh, I guess he'll use these on some of his Mexican friends, all right. He claims he's going to shoot up things for old Porfirio Diaz, the King of *Mejico*. He's a funny, good-natured kind of a cuss, anyway."

And now Joe grinned as he admitted: "That's another horse on me, all right."

"Yes, and a Chapo horse at that," I added sourly, catching myself feeling through all my pockets again for tobacco.

"Oh, we'll get the stock back all right," said Joe, as usual bobbing up hopeful one hundred per cent, "but I don't care to have that little horse of Londa's all gaunted up being chased around by Mexicans."

"I tell you what you do, Joe," I said hopefully. "You jump on Poison Ivy and pull out for the ranch after grub and ammunition."

I had a hunch that Londa would corral the young man if only I could get him back to the Hernandez. But Joe didn't listen very hard to this proposition. He had dropped the sombrero, and was much interested in following the trail of blood.

The trail ended by a scrub oak near the edge of the glade, where the ground was cut up by shod-horse tracks.

"Here's where your busted Mexican got on his horse," Joe decided hastily. "But I'll bet a dollar some one helped him into the saddle."

We hurried back to our outfits then. While I was lass'ing the least snorty of the two hobbled pack mules, Joe began working the saddle and bridle on to Poison Ivy without taking too many chances on getting killed. Poison Ivy wasn't one of those nervous plugs that fight in self-defense. She had a steady, sullen, watchful eye, and was only waiting for a chance to down you.

As he worked, Joe hollered over to me: "It's ten to one the paisanos have made up a band from our back ranges. And if that's the case, they'll be whooping them across the line by way of Loop Cañon. No?"

"I guess so," I said sulkily. "What you going to do about it?"

"Oh, we can turn them in the Loop Back," replied Joe.

"Don't consider it for a holy second," said I hastily. Then I added viciously: "But we would have stood a reasonable show of getting the stock if you hadn't shot all but two of the cartridges we had left at those ground squirrels."

I suppose I'm one of the worst men in the State to travel with when I'm out of tobacco. I felt like taking a shot at Joe every time he said anything hopeful, which was every time he opened his face. As Joe says: "So much for the soothing weed—when you're out."

"Burning up those cartridges is another horse on me, all right," Joe responded. "But we'll get the stock back. You keep the two cartridges you've got, Durk. I'll ride Poison Ivy on ahead—there's no use of your trying to keep up with the mules—and if I cut the outfit's trail going down the Loop, I'll tie up and climb across the ridge on foot, and turn them. You pick up Ivy when you come along, and follow on down the cañon. You will want to watch out for the stock's coming back, and get in behind the rocks and brush to let them go by."

Joe's cocksureness, combined with the monkeyshines of that crazy curse of a mule, made me so mad that everything turned red.

"Joe," I yelled, "how in the name of all the limping, suffering gods is one man with an empty rifle, and on foot, to

turn a bunch of raiders back from Mexico?"

"I can show you better than I can tell you, Durk," replied Joe, grinning. "But don't let that worry you. You watch out that the horses don't run over you coming back, that's all."

I saw then that nothing would stop Joe from going, and I blurted at him angrily:

"You want me to go along, so I can pack you out, don't you? Is there any particular place you want to be buried?"

"A Mexican can't hurt anything out of reach of a lass' rope or a knife—and especially these hombres from away down in Old *Mejico*. And, say, Durk, put some jerked 'carney' and some canteens on the pack. If they beat me out of the Loop Back, we're liable to have to chase them down into those unholy lands."

Thereupon Joe took a position opposite Poison Ivy's withers, where she could not cow-kick him from behind, or strike him from in front. He gripped her headstall so he could hold her off if she tried to bite. Then he artfully inserted his foot in the stirrup. The next moment he was pulling her head around toward him, and simultaneously swinging into the saddle—this, with a prod of the spurs, circled Poison Ivy into a running start.

As Poison Ivy tore up the earth across the glade, Joe looked back, and I saw he was jubilant.

"So long, Durk," he yelled; "we'll get that stock all right."

"Good-by, Joe," I called, my anger giving way to a sudden fear of never seeing the boy alive again.

I guess that Joe saw I was feeling solemn, for he shouted back:

"Look up, old cowman! Everything's all right—except you're out of tobacco."

CHAPTER II.

JOE BATTLES WITH ROCKS.

From the glade where Joe made his start after raiders, you can see farther than a man likes to look across the Yuma, the Cocopah, and Juarez Deserts. The cañons twist away like snakes, from your feet down to the edge of the sand. They cut into the mountains and throw great masses of gravel out on the level beyond the lowest contour of ridges. The chamisal fights bravely to make this wilderness green. But most of the way there is too much raw, gray granite.

There is a dim trail running from the lower end of the glade straight down into the Loop Back. The tracks that Poison Ivy made in shooting this dim trail gave me a scare—and I have been brought up where chasing cows over brush and rocks was a part of the day's work. In a case of this kind Joe always has a hunch that his horse will keep its feet—and if the mount does fall, no matter; because a man can't be killed till his time comes.

Joe found the bottom of the cañon cut up by a band of a hundred head of horses. They had just gone along and had been whooped through to beat four of a kind. Some of them had left bunches of hide and hair on the rocks. The dust from their hoofs had not yet settled.

Joe followed down the cañon a quarter; then, marking the branch-off place for me by making a monument on a rock, he hid Poison Ivy in a side ravine, and started on foot to cross the Neck of the Loop.

This Neck of the Loop was a low pass where, by a short, steep climb, you could look down into the lower reaches of the cañon. The pass was considered too rough to get through with a horse. But it was two miles across, against ten miles around.

Joe is a rattling good climber for a hombre who has done most of his walking on a horse, and, in spite of the brush and rocks, he made fast time up to the summit of the low pass. When he looked over into the lower part of the Loop, he saw, from the dust raising up by Nose Point, that he was ahead of the band of horses.

Now, Joe has a good head on him—except for his fool way of being hopeful without cause and believing that you can't get killed until your time comes.

His plan for turning the stock was all right. By picking out the right place in the cañon, a bloodthirsty man could have killed or crippled half the Mexicans and their mounts, as well as heading the herd of horses.

The only thing that puzzled Joe now was how to get the band of horses turned and running up the cañon without having some of the Mexicans being in the lead. He saw, of course, that it would be only a matter of time until the stampede would be headed back toward Mexico, if there was even one paisano riding along in front of the herd.

Joe leaned up against a rock for a while and puffed and figured and watched the dust working toward him from Nose Point. After a few minutes, he thought of a place down the cañon where the water had, at some time, cut through into a side ravine, thus making a double channel. The trail followed the original channel, which was better traveling by considerable than the cut-off. Between the two channels there was a low but very rough ridge, an island, it might be called, that was a quarter of a mile long and about two hundred yards wide in the thickest part.

Joe made the gravel fly; then followed along the side of the ridge. He stopped a little beyond and above the lower point of the island, where there was a big bunch of rocks piled up on the brow of a steep, cone-shaped slope.

Joe sized up the layout and decided that for his kind of a battleground, the place was made to order. The rocks were of granite formation. They came in a shattered, shelving ledge, and were all sizes, from that of a water bucket to a chicken house, where a rancher keeps twelve hens. Below this rock nest, the slope pitched straight down to the cañon bed for three hundred yards. It was considerably steeper than the roof of a house, and carried no dikes and no brush to speak of.

When Joe was a kid, he was a rock roller from away back, and he at once got busy quarrying out a likely looking rock about the size of a cook stove. He gave his rifle a horrible deal, using it for a pick and a crowbar. When he got the first roller in shape so that a push would topple it over, he began on another.

Joe's rock nest, as I have said, was on the brow of a cone-shaped slope. The bottom of this slope formed an outward bend in the cañon. By starting a rock down the left extreme of this cone, Joe could bump the lower point of the island; and by working back and forth on his ledge, he could cut the cañon at any point of the outward bend for nearly three hundred yards. As Joe worked, he planned a lively scattering for the Mexicans.

Joe had time to get things fixed to suit him before the paisanos came in sight. As they rounded the turn above the head of the island, he got down behind a block of granite and lay watching them.

When a paisano is happy, he puts on about as much style riding as a white man does when he's drunk, and Joe couldn't help but notice that these paisanos were good and happy—it was sticking out all over, as they came piling down the cañon. Four hombres with flashy, silvered sombreros led the band.

Whacking up the stragglers in the rear, rode more Mexicans. There were twelve or fourteen of them. Joe couldn't be sure of the count, as they showed up dimly through the trailing dust; but he made out that the Patriot, the hombre who had worked him for ammunition the day before, was in the bunch. One hatless paisano with a bandaged head acted sick.

As the Mexicans bore down on the head of the island, they swung to the right into the old channel, which was on Joe's side of the cañon. And a few moments later, a puff of wind from a side arroyo brushed aside the trailing veil of dust and disclosed a dirty tragedy.

A young colt that was scrabbling along, trying to keep up with the band, kept dropping back from its mother. It was so dead on its feet that it traveled like an animal with the staggers. Suddenly a hombre wearing a peaked, black sombrero, spurred his horse up alongside of the faltering little fellow, and

swung on its head with a honda of his reata. The colt flopped down in his tracks, tried to get up, and couldn't, and the Mexicans whooped and laughed.

The mare, a beautiful young creature, belonging to Joe's father, was half crazed by the shrill whickering of her foal, and tried to whirl. Whereupon Mr. Black Hat swung his reata and gave her a brutal welt across the nose. Looking around, then, he saw the colt staggering blindly to its feet. With an "Ee—Ee—che-la," and a monkeyshine with his shoulders, he drew a revolver and fired back a couple of shots—and the Mexicans whooped and laughed again as the colt dropped.

Joe got mad prompt, and, standing up in plain sight on a rock, he shook his fist at the Mexicans. One of the paisanos in the lead noticed him first. He began whirring like a sidewinder in Mexican-Spanish, as he pointed Joe out.

Joe came to a little when he saw the Mexicans coiling up their lass' ropes and unlimbering their carbines, but he didn't get clear onto himself until the *capitan* burned the rock beside him with a bullet. It was mighty close shooting for a man on a running horse, and Joe, forgetting for the moment that a man can't die till his time comes, dropped down behind a block of granite.

This *capitan* of the outfit was a red-headed Mexican. He didn't flourish his elbows as much as the rest of the bunch and sat steadier in the saddle, like an Anglo-Saxon. Joe took him for a white man at first. Then he began to get it through his head that this was Thumb-off Juan, a noted Baja California outlaw. The mother of this hombre was a mountain Mexican woman; his father was reputed to be a renegade Irish criminal.

The red-headed *capitan* whirled in his saddle as he fired the shot. Joe, who was now taking gapings at the outfit through a bush, saw him motioning with his smoking carbine and heard him yell: *"Eche la penca!"* which is Mexican-Spanish for, "Lay on the rawhide."

The red-headed Mexican then, followed by the other three lead riders, let out his horse, with the evident intention of clearing the way for the herd of horses. Thumb-off Juan kept yelling, *"Eche la penca!"* over his shoulder. His three compañeros had their lass' ropes tied up, and all hands were strictly on the qui vive for trouble.

Joe crawled over behind the first rock that he had loosened, and there laid low. He thought he saw where he would have those leading paisanos jumping sideways, and this without taking any chances on smashing the herded horses.

Thumb-off Juan and his compañeros were one hundred and fifty feet in advance of the herd when they came abreast of the lower end of the island. This suited Joe to a T and he shoved off the loosened rock, timing it to crash into the cañon wall ahead of the herd, and behind the leading paisanos—if they hurried.

Joe certainly had the outfit going straight up in the air then. The riders in front threw the spurs into their horses to get them past before the rock struck. When a scared Mex runs a horse, he works with his legs and arms and shoulders, as though he was pumping a hand car. They were well mounted, and it was a sight to see. Thumb-off Juan found time to yell like a Comanche back over his shoulder, but he was too busy going south to get action with his carbine.

Joe immediately pried off two more good-sized rocks. These were aimed to follow the first one. Then he flew at the ones he had named "the paisano chasers."

Rock rolling was good. The rock nest, as has been said, was a shattered ledge that shelved toward the cañon; and Joe, with his rifle barrel, could easily pry off big ones.

It doesn't take long for a rock to roll three hundred yards—as the advance guard of outlaws found out. One, a big, spraddling devil, with fierce mustachios, couldn't seem to work his legs, and arms, and shoulders half fast enough, and he dropped his rifle so he could pour more rawhide into his mustang. The red-headed *capitan* came within an ace of being pinned by an old holy roller, but managed to get safely

past the base of Joe's cone. He had the best mount, a fine black, and was a wonderful rider.

The big, black, spraddling devil, after dropping his gun, got out of the cañon bed by spurring his mustang up a bank that no one but a scared Mexican would have asked anything but a cat to climb. But the other two were hemmed in, and had to dodge rocks for their lives.

A rolling rock no bigger than a horse's head would make a man look like a watermelon that has been dropped on a cement sidewalk if it hit him. These two Mexicans found themselves with rocks the size, and twice the size, of cook stoves plunging on both sides of them across the bed of the cañon. And big rocks always bring along a train of little ones.

The men were vaqueros, good riders, on well-reined mounts; and, dodging whirling blocks of granite big enough to have pulverized a dozen paisanos, they jumped their horses hither and yon, like crickets on hot griddles.

There was less than a minute of this. Then, taking desperate chances on a brief opening, both Mexicans raced their horses at the cat climb where the big, spraddling fellow had escaped. They made the scrabble, all right; and spurred after the spraddler, who was now riding like a scared devil back toward the island, through the brush along the side of the ridge. The three got to the double channels just in time to see the tail of the horse herd stampeding up the cañon.

Joe might be said to be a scientific rock roller. He had timed those first three rocks exactly right, so that they banged into the cañon wall, one after another, just as the leaders of the horse herd breasted the lower point of the island. The animals were all trying to turn tail even before the rocks struck, but the Mexicans in the rear rode back and forth in behind, swinging the bights of their reatas. Then, of course, the leaders of the band sheered into the other channel of the cañon bed. Before the Mexicans knew what had struck, they found themselves following the band north. And when you stampede homesick, unbroken, three and four-year-olds toward their range, you have to travel some to keep them in sight.

Joe was sure that the Mexicans could not now get a rider to the lead of the herd until it got out of the cañon. Once out of the cañon, the horses would scatter in the brush before they would stand for being turned toward Mexico.

As the horse herd passed out of sight, Joe got in behind a big block of granite, where no one could get a shot at him from the lower part of the cañon. The red-headed *capitan* hadn't gone up yet, and Joe was expecting to see him go by any minute.

The young man was snuffing the gunpowder smell that came up from the busted bowlders, and having a big haw-haw over the way he had headed the horses, and the way the paisanos had dodged rocks, and, also, I suppose, over the way he would saw it into his old friend Durk about not yet being a candidate for burial, when—bang! went a revolver from the rim of the ridge just behind him.

The bullet creased Joe's shirt, and burned his hide over the short ribs. For the second time that day the young man forgot all about the can't-die-till-your-time-comes proposition, and lit into a run, with Thumb-off Juan after him.

Joe hadn't figured on any one riding up over the ridge, as he thought the country was too rough to get through with a horse. But that was where Thumb-off Juan came in with his wonderful riding. Joe ran like a rock rabbit; and that red-headed devil spurred after him, plunking a bullet at him every jump.

CHAPTER III.

ANOTHER "HORSE" ON JOE.

I had a lot of mule troubles after Joe rode Poison Ivy away from the glade. They began to pile up directly following that cheer-up Charley he gave me about everything being all right except that I was out of tobacco.

The black pack mule started things by hobbling off after Poison Ivy. He was halfway across the glade, and

kangarooing it nearly as fast as I can run, before I could get my reata off the mouse-colored fool that I was saddling.

By this time I saw there would be a long, stern chase ahead of me if I tried to catch the black devil on foot. I wasn't stuck on doing any vaqueroing on an unreined pack mule. But it was a case of doing what I could as quickly as I could.

Knowing that my Spanish bit would cut Mousey's mouth all to pieces, and that the worse hurt he was, the less he would rein, I hastily rigged a hackamore by tying my horsehair rope into the rawhide nose piece of my bridle.

I was less than a minute getting Mousey rigged to suit me. I piled on him then, and he lit out after the black devil, who by this time had crossed the glade, and was hobbling away through the brush.

I overtook the pack mule before he had reached the rim of the Loop Back, and snapped my reata over his head. An animal learns not to run on a rope after being lassoed and snubbed a few times. And the black came up standing without waiting for the rope to tighten. But my vaquero mule was for keeping straight on after Poison Ivy.

Seeing that something would snap sure if I didn't get my fool mount stopped before he got to the end of the reata, I headed him over into a big nest of rocks. Then I jumped down right quick, and in a few seconds had both the mules tied to bushes.

As soon as the *mulos* were anchored I ran to camp on foot, got a pack saddle, shoved some jerked beef into one kyak, and the canteens into the other, and, without stopping to even put the wild-cattle hides and the rest of the jerked beef out of reach of coyotes, humped myself back to the mules.

A little later I was riding Mousey down into the Loop Back, with the black following.

The mules traveled all right on account of being on the trail of Poison Ivy. But about halfway down to the cañon bed, where her whickering came up from far below them, they traveled too much, all right, for a dim trail on a steep mountain.

There was no need whatever of Joe's rock monument, as the mules cut across the corner there on their own accord, and went up the ravine to Poison Ivy, charging.

Then I struck a bunch of horse trouble. I wanted to ride Poison Ivy, of course, as the mules would follow her, and we could make good time down the cañon. But, like every one else in our part of the country with any sense at all, I was afraid of the brute because she was a man-killer.

Poison Ivy was tied short to a big laurel, and I didn't like the idea of going close in front of her to loosen the knot. To make a bad matter worse, Joe had hung his loaded quirt on the horn of the saddle, instead of leaving it to one side on a rock.

I cut a single-handed, green club to stand off Poison Ivy with. But she took this for a sign that I was going to beat her up, and wouldn't let me get anywhere near her. Finally I compromised by throwing down the club and mounting without untying her. When I reached forward and cut Joe's horsehair rope, the mare went off quietly enough. And I was glad of it, because if that brute ever bucked a man out of the saddle, she would kick him before he hit the ground, and then pile onto him with her teeth and feet.

Under the saddle, Poison Ivy is second to none, and I made her split the wind down the Loop Back on the trail of the horse thieves. We had gone about three miles, and I was beginning to hope that the Mexicans had got by before Joe could cross over the pass, when, on ahead, I heard the low roar of a stampede—there's nothing else in the world just like this sound, and a cowman hears it a long ways.

I wheeled Poison Ivy then, and rode into the mouth of a blind side cañon. I was certainly feeling scared for Joe, because I knew that insurrecto raiders headed for Mexico are not easily turned.

When I had worked back into the side ravine about a hundred yards, I drew

rein, and listened to the stampede roar coming louder up the cañon. The colts were certainly traveling—but they seemed a long time on the road.

When the running horses approached the mouth of my hiding place, Poison Ivy began ramping around and fighting the bit, being all on fire to join them.

The herd of horses, with a thunderous beating of hoofs, shot by my place of hiding. Following closely passed the clattering of shod horses on the rocks, and some high old cursing in Mexican-Spanish. Then, taking a chance on meeting some belated horse thief, I shot Poison Ivy out of the ravine, and raced her down the cañon—with Londa's hunch riding me harder than I was riding Poison Ivy.

I thought a lot of Joe. When the boy was born, I was nineteen. There was trouble at that time, and I spoiled the best horse father owned, going for the second doctor. I watched the kid grow up, and I liked him always. Now that he was twenty-one, I was forty, and when we traveled or worked cattle with one another, it was give-and-take—two men together. I fell in love with Londa the first time I saw her. Of course, Londa knew it—you can't fool a woman. But Joe never did. I thought I saw that she was Joe's Londa—and went to working cattle down on the edge of the desert.

Two miles down the Loop Back took me to Nose Point, where the gutted channel turns to make the horseshoe. And I certainly made Poison Ivy swing on the corner. I was three miles farther down the cañon, and still jumping the blue devil of a mare along on a keen run, and leaving the two mules away behind, when a voice hailed me from out the brush:

"Hey! Come back here, you crazy, red-headed fool! What's your hurry?"

"Joe!" I shouted. And I set Poison Ivy up, with her hind hoofs sliding.

I was so glad to see the young man that I forgot all about my tobacco, and horse, and mule, and hunch troubles, and grinned all over.

"You're riding kind of fancy for a man going to a funeral, ain't you?" asked Joe, grinning.

Even that failed to get a rise out of me.

"You'd better get back here among the rocks," Joe went on. "There's the red-headedest devil of a Mexican down there you ever saw. Or he may be up on the ridges. He just gave me the chase of my life. It was across a country that would have been rough for a mountain sheep, but he jumped his black after me, and kept bullets in the air until he'd emptied both six-shooters. I finally dodged him by piling over some ten-foot cat steps. There was a ravine at the foot, and I got away in the chaparral. There's no use talking, Durk; you can't kill a man till his time comes."

While we waited there for Mousey and Blacky to overtake us, Joe went on to tell how he had turned the horses. When the two mules finally came up, the poor devils were puffing fit to break their cinches. They were in about as bad a stew over being left behind by Poison Ivy as I had been about Joe.

"We'd better lie low here in the brush a while before we start back up the cañon," said Joe, as soon as he had caught Mousey and Blacky. "I don't know what's got that red-headed devil of a Mexican. Perhaps he went back to get the gun that his black pardner threw away. Anyway, you've got two cartridges, and, if he jumps in on us here, you can shoot him."

After leading Poison Ivy and the mules back into a side arroyo, and tying them out of sight behind some live oaks, Joe and I went up among some brush and rocks on a little knoll, where we could see without being seen.

It was dead quiet down in that cañon. The sun hadn't loosened up the lizards yet, and, except for some silent little rock wrens, there was nothing stirring. Joe wanted to talk, but I made him shut up, so I could listen for the red-headed Mexican.

I wanted to play safe right where we were until nightfall. But Joe got as restless as a fish before we had been there a half hour, and was strong for hitting the trail home. I didn't blame

the young man too much, either. I would have been in a hurry myself if I had been going home to anything but an empty cabin in a lonesome cañon. Anyway, I finally consented to pull out.

Poison Ivy and the mules had got their wind, and were ready to travel when we went back to the scrub oaks. Joe was for getting on Mousey, but I found my voice mighty quick then.

"Here, young feller," I said, "I'm not much stuck on riding pack mules, but I like them a whole lot better than your blue-roan devil of a mare."

Mounting then, we headed back up the Loop Back, keeping a sharp lookout on all sides for Joe's red-headed Mexican. We were about a half mile from Nose Point, and talking things over, when I asked Joe: "Did you see anything of my Buck in the bunch of horses?"

"Yes; Buck was there along with Johnny, and Chapo, and your two mules. I would have followed that outfit to glory before I'd let them run off Chapo."

"The chances are you'd have landed in glory yourself if you hadn't been lucky enough to turn them."

"It's a bum business, chasing horse thieves without ammunition," admitted Joe indulgently. "But the stock is scattered in the brush by this time, so it's all right. The only thing that worries me now is about that paisano who worked me for the cartridges. You know, sometimes you meet a man, and you like him. You feel like giving him everything you've got, and you could sit down and chew the rag with him for five hours without thinking to move into the shade. Now, that is just the way it was with me and the Patriot. Every time he said anything he thought was funny, I felt like laughing. And when he finally got wound up on the deal the Mexican grandees are passing out to the children of peons, I felt like going down there and taking a punch at old Profirio Diaz. And now, in spite of myself, I keep feeling as though I'd lost a good friend."

"Joe," I replied, "I have met people like you said; but it was always when I was drunk, and that hasn't been lately. So get onto yourself, and don't worry about losing that friend. And, so far as the ammunition goes, it isn't too late yet to get some of those bullets back. It looks to me as though there's a chance of meeting some of that bunch coming back down the cañon."

"The Mexicans never will quit chasing that stock as long as they have saddle animals that can stand up under them," returned the young man wisely. "But it might be a good scheme to work off up out of the cañon as soon as we get around the Nose."

"I wish we were up out of this cañon now," I replied, "because you never can tell what will happen. The worst of it is that there is sand for a mile the other side of Nose Point, so if we should be about to meet some of those devils, we couldn't hear them coming. It looks kind of like dust rising up there now."

"Durk," said Joe insultingly, "I wouldn't be a victim of that tobacco habit for a thousand dollars. Get a flake of that jerked cow to chaw on. That might steady your nerves."

Less than three minutes after Joe made this crack, five of the insurrectos galloped around Nose Point. And one of them, the Patriot, was riding Chapo. Behind came the whole band of horses. Joe's "red-headedest devil of a Mexican you ever saw," mounted on my Buck, rode in the lead.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PILED PAISANOS.

Loop Neck Pass was considered too rough to get through with a horse. The brush and rocks were so bad there that neither Joe nor I once thought of any one's being able to get a mount across.

But Thumb-off Juan, being half wild Irish and half mountain Mexican, was a terror of a rider; and he spoiled the splendid black getting up over Loop Neck Pass and down to the cañon above where Joe and I had crossed. There he had shot the stampede into a walled side arroyo, where there was no

getting out. When the rest of the raiders came up, all hands went in, lassoed fresh mounts, and headed back for Mexico. As they galloped around Nose Point, and caught sight of us, they let out Comanche yells, and put steel to their horses.

That iron jaw of Joe's shut like a trap as he whirled Poison Ivy.

"Come on, Durk," he shouted, "and come a-running."

Mousey was halfway around before the words cleared Joe's mouth. My cinch lacked a lot of being tight, and my mule wheeled so nimbly after his blue-roan divinity that I came within an ace of being flopped.

"What you going to do?" I yelled, as soon as I found myself sure of my seat, and bounding off down cañon.

Joe turned a glinty grin back past me at the paisanos.

"Going to turn that stock," he snapped. "There's lots more rocks down the cañon. You pick off the Patriot, Durk; it's the only way we'll ever get Chapo."

As my scrabbling pack mule buckled madly to the task of keeping up with Poison Ivy, all kinds of things began chopping around inside my head. After I had ridden half a mile, I became desperate enough to fight.

I remembered my two cartridges; and I told myself that the paisanos would get both of those bullets before they got Joe. But it wasn't all brotherly love, nor yet the love of a woman, that decided me—because I hate to have a bunch of saddle-colored paisanos yapping and whooping after me like I was a jack rabbit. In fact, there's some Irish in me—and some Dutch.

Out ahead of me Joe was leaning forward over Poison Ivy's neck—and the mare was splitting the wind. Mousey was doing all that any animal with a burro build could, to keep from being left behind. But already there was a wide gap between us. The paisanos were shooting, and put their bullets in pretty close to us for men firing on the run.

"Joe," I shouted, motioning wildly. "Hold on! Hold on! I'm going to make a stand."

"All right," called Joe, flashing another glinty grin past me at the chasing paisanos. "I'll go on ahead, and be working out some rocks. There's some good ones up on that pinnacle just around the bend."

That made me mad.

"How am I going to stop this hammer-headed curse of a pack mule with a hackamore?" I yelled furiously. "Hold up a minute, can't you, until I can slow down!"

If Joe heard me, he didn't pay any attention. I kept yelling at him, but it was no good. He evidently had his mind set on going around that bend, and climbing up to good rock-rolling grounds on the pinnacle.

But a little later, when Joe hit that bend, I saw where I was going to get off. Because it's next to impossible to keep a single-rigged saddle in place on a grass-fed, pot-bellied mule. Mine was riding Mousey's withers.

Joe whirled that curve on a full run. It was a caution the way he leaned inside, and shook himself down with his elbows and shoulders, to keep from being bounced by the terrific stiff-legged hops that a running horse makes on a fast turn. My mule smoked up quite a bit, being scared out of his wits over the prospect of losing sight of Poison Ivy. I didn't try to slow him down. It was no use—with a hackamore. All I hoped was that I wouldn't hit my head on a rock.

I was lucky enough to land in a clump of chamiso when my mule struck that curve. The paisanos yelled, and Mousey went chasing on after Poison Ivy, with the saddle dangling under his belly.

Joe pulled up, but I shouted: "I'm all right, old son. Keep a-going."

Then, rifle in hand, I pulled myself out of the bushes, and stepped in behind a ledge of rock, and was ready for my two-cartridge stand.

I think the paisanos thought that I had run off through the brush; anyway, they whirled down on me with a clatter.

The Patriot, being on Chapo, who is

a slow, old plug, was away in the rear. Thumb-off Juan, on my Buck, rode in the lead of the other three Mexicans by about ten feet.

I waited until Thumb-off Juan was within a hundred yards. Then, stepping out from behind my rock, I pulled down on him. I aimed for his red-whiskered muzzle—and bored my Buck horse square between the eyes. The poor brute went down under his rider as though lightning had clipped his forelegs. He changed ends like a flash, and his hips hit the ground with a thump, almost pinning Thumb-off Juan.

Instantly, then, came the paisano pile—when the mounts of the three following Mexicans fouled on the carcass of my dead Buck horse, and on each other. It made one yelling, cursing, snorting, floundering, rolling scramble of hoofs, bellies, manes, boots, arms, carbines, tails, and saddles.

I stepped back in behind my rock to see if anything alive would come out of that pile. I decided I had another cartridge for Thumb-off Juan if he acted at all healthy. I particularly wanted to stop that man, as he was too dangerous a combination of Irish and paisano to be at large.

Thumb-off Juan came up first. But he whisked in behind one of the mustangs that was just scrambling to its feet, getting out of sight before I could pull down on him.

I passed up a standing shot at one of the other three Mexicans, hoping for a chance to salivate Thumb-off Juan. Finally, as he piled up behind the saddle of a compañero who was already making a flying start back up the cañon, I whanged away. I burned him, too. I could tell that by the way he flinched and yelled. But I learned afterward that the bullet only plowed through his hide. Anyway, he acted like a pretty healthy paisano as he and his four pardners humped themselves back toward the herd.

Thumb-off Juan and his compañeros rode straight at the leaders of the herd, heading the band around, and rushing it back up the cañon. They acted very much as though they thought I had more ammunition.

As the Mexicans passed beyond reasonable rifle range, I worked up on the side of Joe's pinnacle. But I kept watching them all the time over my shoulder. Presently the paisanos behind the herd halted, and I made out, by their wildly flying hands, that Thumb-off Juan and the Patriot were assaulting each other in the Mexican-Spanish language. Suddenly there were knives flashing—but the other Mexicans jumped in and stopped the fight. Then, as near as I could make out, they proceeded to tie the Patriot in his saddle.

I was out of wind, as well as out of tobacco, when I finally worked up the pinnacle to Joe. So I felt kind of double-edged. But Joe was feeling good.

"Durk," he said, as I approached him, puffing, "you can give the best shot in the world cards and spades, and then beat him. You sure did fine for a man who had just been rolled by a mule."

"I killed the best horse to lass' from in San Diego County," I replied sourly.

"That was because Thumb-off Juan ducked and jerked Buck's head up just as you pulled the trigger," said Joe comfortingly. "But, say, Durk, those paisanos are driving the stock north. I wonder what they're doing this time."

"It makes very little difference to me what they're doing, young feller, so long as they keep on up the cañon. For as soon as I can get my wind a little, and get my saddle straightened up on that crazy curse of a mule, I'm going to take a chance on bulling straight across the mountains to the Hernandez."

"Huh," replied Joe incredulously; "they've got about twenty head of your three-year-olds in that bunch."

"They can have them—and my packs, and both my other saddle animals. I've got a bellyful of chasing horse thieves without sufficient ammunition."

"Well," said Joe judicially, "they can have our range stock, all right, but they can't have Chapo. Chapo is Londa's horse."

"Chapo! Why, my Johnny-horse is

worth ten of that plug. If I owned that skate I'd give him to the first paisano that came along—or take him out and shoot him."

"I'll admit that Chapo isn't quite the horse he was," said Joe, "but you know, Durk, when you're a married man you value all these old mementos—especially if they belong to the lady." And the young man grinned as he does sometimes when there's an extra card up his sleeve.

"You're not married yet, young feller," I returned roughly. "Furthermore, you never will be married unless you get back home alive."

"Oh, I'll get back home alive, all right. But as long as I've got a good mount under me, and every turn of luck coming my way, I'm not going to back off without Chapo. I told Londa that I'd take care of her honorable horse, and you bet your life I'm going to do it."

CHAPTER V.

THE MARKED MEXICAN.

While Joe and I sat on the rocks, chewing jerked wild cow, and looking up the cañon, we saw the herd of horses disappear around the bend at Nose Point.

"What do you suppose those devils are up to now?" asked Joe.

I changed my seat, where I could see without being seen from up the cañon.

"You come down here, young feller," I replied. "That Thumb-off Juan isn't a safe man with a rifle. He's liable to climb up high some place, and take a rest on a rock, and show us some long-distance shooting."

"The outfit certainly can't be figuring on going clear back up the cañon to get out through that pass across to the La Honda. That would throw them twenty miles out of their way, and their stock has had a good lot of chasing for nothing already."

"Get down here a little lower," I repeated sourly. "There's no use whatever of taking unnecessary chances on that red-headed Mexican."

"No, of course not," replied Joe. And he moved down behind a rock, just to show me, I suppose, what a cautious young man he was.

After we had chewed jerked beef a little while longer, he sprung a new one.

"Durk," he began, "here's the scheme: You take Mousey and strike back over the mountains to the ranch. You can tell Londa that I'm all right, and get some grub, and tobacco, and ammunition, and come out and overtake me on the trail. Poison Ivy's fresh, and game for fifty miles more to-day; so I'll take her and hang around—at a safe distance, you understand—and keep watch on the paisanos."

"You go to Yuma," I replied hotly, seeing through his polite little scheme to ditch me. "*You* head back to the ranch on Poison Ivy, and let me follow the paisanos on the mule."

"You go to Yuma," said Joe, grinning. "It would be all off with Durk if that red-headed devil of a Mexican caught him snooping around on a mule. He could run you down awful easy."

"Well, I'll tell you one thing right now, young feller. If you insist on trailing those raiders, I'm going along to pack you out. I owe that much to the womenfolks; they always want to see the remains."

Joe thought this was funny. I guess he thought I was getting off a joke. But if that was a joke I hope never to get off another.

I went around behind the rocks where our stock was. I was having quite a fight trying to get my saddle righted on Mousey when Joe began to holler.

"Hey, Durk," he called, "those paisanos have started across the ridge for the La Honda."

I ran back to Joe, where I could see off, and, sure enough, there were the Mexicans coming up out of a rough side arroyo that opens just across from Nose Point. How in the world they ever got the herd through the brush and rocks there is more than they can tell. But they had made it in some shape or other, and were now crossing the ridge.

"Well, th' nerve of some folkses' children!" exclaimed Joe wonderingly, as the outfit passed out of sight over onto the La Honda side.

"Well, what you going to do about it?" I inquired grimly.

"If we stay on their trail, Durk, it's only a matter of time till we get the stock," replied Joe enthusiastically. "The paisanos are traveling now, all right, but after a few days the outfit will sure stop to get drunk. We can get some ammunition of the Indians when we go past the La Honda Rancheria; and maybe we can run in on the Mexicans, and show them a thing or two to-night."

To me it looked like a crazy fool's move for unarmed men to tack onto the trail of horse thieves through a rough country. The paisanos would certainly expect to be followed, and could easily leave some sharpshooters to pick us off from the brush. But I didn't make any holler—what was the use? The only thing I said was: "All right. Pull out."

Joe is the best-natured hombre you ever saw—especially when everything goes wrong. And, as we rode up the cañon, after having stopped where poor Buck lay, and caching Thumb-off Juan's saddle, he began to pull off all kinds of remarks about what had happened that morning. It would have made a dog laugh to hear Joe tell it, and it actually made me feel a good bit looser around the girth.

Forcing our way out of the cañon on the trail of the Mexicans was a fierce proposition, even with the chamisal ahead of us smashed down. Joe and I agreed that it takes horse thieves to get a band of stock through brush and rocks.

Every rise we came to I fully expected to get a shot from ambush. My chief hope was that we would not be jumped till after we had reached the La Honda Rancheria, and had got some ammunition.

We got down into the La Honda all right. There is a kind of a soapstone formation along the bottom of this cañon, and the freshets have scooped out great water holes, some of them as big as the tanks along railroads. There was water that had not yet evaporated in the largest of these. One of them had a shelving approach, and here we found where the Mexicans had watered the stock. And a little below this, around the curve, we came upon the sorriest-looking Mexican you ever saw.

The paisano didn't see us until we were nearly on him. He had his head tied up with an old barley sack, and was sitting hunched up on a rock. When he saw us, he began to make a fuss in Spanish, like a woman.

"Ow, ow, ow! They robbed me—a lot of bandits from *Mejico*—a lot of accursed insurrectos. Ow, ow, ow!"

"Hard luck," I interrupted. "They got action on us last night. Say, have you got any tobacco?"

"Ow, ow, ow! No. *Nada! Nada!* They take all, horse, saddle, bridle, sombrero, cartridges, tobacco—everything. And wounded my head."

Joe winked at me and began in Spanish:

"So they're insurrectos, are they? But, anyway, it's the same outfit that ran off our stock last night when we were camped on the rim back yonder. One of them left a sombrero that I'll bet is good for fifty pesos." While Joe was talking, he kept edging closer in on the Mexican with Poison Ivy, and the Mexican kept edging back. "They left us on foot except for two broncho pack mules and this gentle old mare. Wait a minute, hombre! Here, what's the matter with you? You climb up behind my saddle now, and we'll ride you down the cañon, where there's a rancheria. The Indians will——"

"Ow, ow, ow!" yelled the paisano, almost falling over himself shying back from the approach of Poison Ivy. "She's the wife of the devil. Ow, ow, ow!"

"I arrest you for stealing our horses," snapped Joe, pulling down on the Mexican with his rifle.

The gun was empty, and had a crook in the barrel because Joe had used it for rolling rocks, but I guess it looked like a pretty bad weapon to the paisano.

He acted like it at any rate, the way he threw up his hands and yelled:

"Ow, ow, ow! Mercy, señor! Mercy, señor! But come no nearer to me with that devil of a mare."

"You admit that you stole the horses, then, do you?" demanded Joe, letting Poison Ivy take a few steps toward him.

"Ow, ow, ow! *Si, señor.* But mercy, señor, mercy!"

"Then you roll down there on your belly, and stretch out your arms. Pronto, now! Get off and search him, Du-k. Feel him over good for knives —all sizes."

I got a couple of pretty mean-looking knives out of the Mexican's clothes, and made good and sure that there were no more hidden. He also had a big nickel-plated six-shooter, but no cartridges.

"What will we do with the blighter?" asked Joe.

"Shoot him through the head," I answered, in Spanish, sourly. "We've got no time to monkey with a prisoner."

"Ow, ow, ow!" howled the paisano. "Have mercy on a poor, misled Mexican. I have tobacco, señor, a little I think, if that will help you."

Joe began to laugh like a fool over this, and I said: "Stand up here, then, and dig up your tobacco. But you're a dead greaser if you can't dig up enough for two cigarettes."

Then the Mexican pulled off the carefulest and politest search for the makings of a smoke a man ever saw. Joe kept swearing that it was the lowest-down holdup he'd ever seen, and nearly haw-hawed his head off watching the fellow dusting off the turned-out insides of all his pockets. As Joe says: "So much for the soothing weed —when you're out."

There are two things they have good in Old *Mejico*—tobacco and coffee. I sat down right there and enjoyed my two cigarettes. There was only one thing the matter with those cigarettes —they were slim.

While I was smoking, my accommodating paisano friend made an appeal for mercy by unwrapping the strips of sacking from his head, this with a great many "ows," and "oo-oos," and a lot of sucking wind between his tongue and the top of his mouth. But when he showed me where Poison Ivy had grabbed him with her teeth, I concluded that he was not making too much fuss—considering. The lower half of his left ear was torn off, and the side of his neck was badly gashed.

"We'll have to leave this hombre at the rancheria, I guess," said Joe. "If Old Tony's woman is there, Mr. Mex will stand a pretty good show, because she's a high-up Injun doctor."

We helped the horse thief onto Mousey then—and had quite a time doing it, as the Mexican didn't seem to have any confidence whatever in our stock, and the wild mule was scared by the smell of blood. I walked alongside when we got him loaded, and held him steady, as he was pretty wabbly in the saddle.

The paisano told us as we worked along down the cañon that he had become too sick to ride farther, whereupon Thumb-off Juan, being in need of a saddle, had taken everything away from him but his knives and pistol, and had left him there by the trail to die.

"There's one good thing about the outfit," remarked Joe grimly at this point of the Mexican's tale of woe: "they don't treat each other much worse than they do the horses that get crippled along the road."

I felt like asking the young man: "What kind of a deal would they pass out to two fools without ammunition, if they caught them following on their trail?"

CHAPTER VI.

TRAIL SIGNS OF RAIDERS.

Mexicans and Indians always take a shine to Joe, and our prisoner loosened up, giving us a lot of information about the raiders, but throwing in, of course, a lot of lies. According to him, the raiders were insurrectos, who had crossed the Gulf of California from the mainland, near the mouth of the Colorado River. They had worked westward, then up Hardy's Little Colorado, into the Cocopah Bottoms, and had

fallen in with Thumb-off Juan and five other outlaws, who were hanging out there in the brush. The insurrectos were in need of mounts; and Thumb-off Juan, who had been stealing stock along the border for years, and knew all the trails, agreed to go in with the insurrecto leader on a raid across the line.

At this point Joe interrupted our prisoner, saying in English: "Cocopah Bottoms! Did you hear that, Durk? Bud Dugan's been down in that country in the summertime, and he claims it's the wet part of hell. Says there's a kind of a little black horsefly down there that will cut through two overall shirts, and more wild hogs, and tule swamps, and mud, and mean, outlawed Mexicans than any other place in the world. It's where the overflow of the Colorado River slops over onto the desert."

Again turning to our prisoner, Joe asked offhandedly: "Who is that curly-headed, good-looking young Mexican who rode the blaze-faced sorrel after the change of horses? I mean the hombre that was going to fight Thumb-off Juan, and got tied up?"

"Ag-g-g-r-r-r!" grunted the crippled Mexican. "That is no one but José Ramos, *capitan* of the insurrectos. There is trouble between him and Thumb-off Juan—both want to lead."

Our prisoner went on from this to a long string of cuss words against Ramos, and Joe, giving me a wink, said: "Be careful, that man is my friend!"

"A thousand pardons, señor," cried the paisano, and added, with a lift of his shoulders: "But you are joking?"

"No, not at all. I gave him two boxes of ammunition, and then we got so friendly that he helped himself to my horse. But, withal, I am inclined to believe that he is a pretty good fellow."

"Ah, I did not know," replied the paisano, trying hard to play safe, but very much puzzled. "You see, he is from the mainland, and has odd ways."

"According to that, then," cut in Joe quickly, "you were one of Thumb-off Juan's outlaws."

"No! No, no, señor! I—I—you see, señor, it is a little difficult to explain."

"Don't attempt it, then," snapped Joe. "You won't be tried in the United States for what you did in Mexico. But what was the trouble between Thumb-off Juan and the patriotic José Ramos? I saw them talking with their arms before they pulled their knives."

"It was over a matter of his friendship toward you, señor. *Capitan* Ramos was in favor of doing you no harm."

"Hum," said Joe very dubiously. "All I know is that there will be a handsome new face in Hades whenever I catch up with José Ramos riding my blaze-faced sorrel."

As Joe got this off, we rounded a bend in the cañon, and came upon the La Honda Rancheria, or what was left of it—six smoking circles of burned poles and rushes. Some Indian women with young children, all crying, were sitting on the ground near the ruins of the huts—the women were rocking back and forth. When they saw us they made a great outcry, and scuttled for the brush.

"They've burned out these poor, helpless, starving devils," choked Joe hotly. And he flew off the handle, and cursed all paisanos.

Joe Foley is the maddest man you ever saw when he does get mad, and our humble prisoner kept saying under his breath: "Ow, ow, ow! Mercy, señor, mercy!"

All the Indians within fifty miles of the Hernandez know the Foleys. Joe began shouting who he was, and presently three old squaws came stringing back from the brush. One of them was Mrs. Old Tony, who could speak a little Spanish.

Between Mrs. Old Tony's trying to talk Spanish and cry at the same time, we had a hard time making out what had happened. But the gist of it was that they were out of grub, their men were all away up in the mountains on a seven days' hunt, and that four of the raiders, led by a red-headed Mexican, had charged after the Indian women and girl children with their reatas. All the four rode and laughed like devils,

and had chased them here, there, and everywhere through the brush. Finally, becoming enraged because all the squaws and girl children got away where the brush and rocks were too bad to run through with horses, the paisanos set fire to the huts, and started on ahead of the stock down the cañon.

When the woman was through, Joe said: "You quit hollering, now, and we'll give you more grub than you've seen in ten years. You'll find it on top of the ridge, near where the trail crosses the rim from the Loop Back. There are three pack loads of jerked 'carney,' and one of hides—take the whole outfit."

Half "the whole outfit" belonged to me, and I thought that Joe had an awful crust to make this generous offer. But, seeing it was Joe, and seeing it was a cinch that he would show me up before the squaws as a pincher, I neglected to make any roar.

"Now, we've got to leave this crippled devil of a Mexican with you, ladies," Joe went on.

"What you figuring on doing, young feller?" I cut in roughly. "This is our last show to get any ammunition, so we may as well go back and take the Mexican with us."

Joe gave me a funny little look, as much as to say: "You poor, old-footed, tobacco-hungry devil!" What he said out loud was: "Old Dry-wash Thompson has got a prospect up on the ridge from the lower La Honda. All we've got to do is to find where his burros leave the cañon, trail him into his camp, and make him divide his grub and ammunition. That way we can shoot up the horse thieves to-night. We'll be sure to find them at the last big water hole on the edge of the desert."

"Huh!" said I glumly; and Joe, turning cheerfully to Mrs. Old Tony, went on: "Take good care of this hombre until the sheriff comes to get him, and I'll pay you well for your trouble. We'll tie him up good and hard, and whatever he says or does, don't you let him up. If he makes any fuss, get a double-handed club and beat him good. Did you get that, Don Alphonse?" added Joe, turning ferociously to the prisoner. "These squaws have got instructions to hammer you on the head with a chamiso root if you make any break to get away."

"Ow, ow, ow! Have mercy on a poor, misled Mexican!" howled the paisano. He certainly got it off good and humble.

After staking the Mexican out in the shade of a rock, Joe began writing a letter for the Indians to take to the Hernandez. When he finished the one to his mother, he wrote one to Londa, telling her, I suppose, that we were all right, and would be back in a few days with Chapo. I hated to think of the way the girl would take the news, and said:

"It's none of my business whatever, young feller, but I want to tell you right now that Londa will be jumping right straight up and down when she hears we're headed for Old Mexico. I'll bet she burns the ground coming out on our trail."

"I don't think she will," the young man replied—somewhat glumly for Joe. "But even if she does, she'll know enough to follow our tracks, and, in that case, we'll meet her coming back with her honorable horse."

My thought was: "It's more likely that she finds us in the middle of a ring of buzzards." But for once I had sense enough to keep still.

CHAPTER VII.

ACROSS THE LINE.

Twilight that evening took Joe and me to the desert's edge at the mouth of a cañon paralleling the La Honda. We were still up against it for ammunition, as we had found Dry-wash Thompson's camp deserted. But the old man's burro tracks, leading up out of the cañon when they did, saved us from an ambush. This we had found out when we looked down from a ridge and saw four saddle horses being held by a Mexican in a side arroyo.

After coyotering around on the desert half the night, we discovered that the

paisanos had been too foxy to camp near the big water hole, where the rock rolling was good, but had headed on across the dry toward Pero Springs. It was thirty miles farther, and must have made a terrible drive for the stock.

As Joe and I worked back to the dry cañon, where we had left our animals, the young man was good-naturedly cursing the luck. But I thought that our luck was first class, as I took it for granted that there would be nothing for it now but to turn back.

If Joe had any brilliant ideas for recovering the stock, he didn't spring them that evening. But, when he had lain in the warm sand and snored till morning, he came up smiling. The first thing he did when he got his eyes open was to amble over to the kyaks and pull out an old five-gallon oil can that he had picked up at Dry-wash Thompson's deserted camp.

"Durk," said he, pawing the can over carefully for holes, "this will hold water all right. We'll need it, too. It's going to be hot going across that desert."

I sat up in the sand, looking and acting worse red-headed than I really am.

"Young feller,' said I fiercely, "what are you talking about?"

"Oh," replied Joe, grinning, "I forgot to tell you my scheme. I've got it all figured out that once we get into the Cocopah Bottoms, we can sure get that stock. The paisanos will stop to tank up on mescal as soon as they get into the brush. And Bud Dugan told me that there's an old squaw man down there they call Quin Sabe John, who has all kinds of guns and ammunition."

Sometimes the young man tries to get a rise out of me by acting two hundred per cent more hopeful and daring than he really is. So I didn't say a word. But I did some tall thinking while we were saddling up and riding over to the big hole. Then, when I saw that Joe was really bent on starting across that desert, I made a stand like a fighting hog. The date set for the wedding was only four days off, and I finally threw this into the boy good and hard. Thereupon Joe threw it into me about being tobacco hungry, and just as good as accused me of being afraid. While he was getting this off, I held down hard on my temper; then I played my last card.

"Joe," I said, "if you think for a holy second that I'm afraid to go up against that desert, and those horse thieves with or without tobacco, you're mistaken. And that's all on that line of talk that I'll stand from you. But I refuse to go out on that trail with you, or to let you go without me, or to go by myself without ammunition. *But* if you'll go back to the Hernandez and *stay* there, and send me out some grub and ammunition, I'll get Chapo. At least, I won't come back without him. And here is my good reason for making this proposition. You've been talking about your hunch; well, *I've* got a hunch. I've got a hunch that you're a dead one if you follow those horses into Mexico. And I know for a cinch that you'll not be getting burned up by the sun on the Cocopah Desert, or shot up by insurrectos, if you are back at the Hernandez, where you belong."

Then I told Joe all about Londa's hunch, and her making me promise to take care of him, and also all about how my brother Jim came out, trying to override a hunch. "And now, young man," I went on, "this will do for you. Get on that blue devil of a mare, and chase yourself up the cañon. Send Paisano Red or the Fighting Runt out with a lot of tobacco, a little grub, and all kinds of ammunition. If either of them is fool enough to go with me, all right. If not, I'll go alone. Now pull out."

Then, to my great surprise, Joe actually did pull out. Before getting on Poison Ivy, he called me a gentleman, and gave me an awful grip with his hand, and, finally, tried to talk me into going along back home. But I said:

"That'll do for you, young man. Shut up, and get out of here. I'm going down into Mexico after that horse—and also after some Mexicans." I said this last because I had been getting meaner and meaner thinking of the way the paisanos had abused the Indians.

It seemed too good to be true when

Joe disappeared around a bend in the cañon, with the black pack mule bobbing along after him. He was such a bull-headed, cheerful, obstinate young devil, that I had only half hoped to pull him across. And, besides, it had begun to look as though nothing could turn him, just as it had been with my brother Jim the time he rode into the Pecos River.

About an hour later, as I was sitting and sweating where the shade was the thickest by the water hole, I heard a glad yell up the cañon. It was Joe. Presently he came charging down on me, leaving the black pack away behind. He was waving a gun, and had one besides his own hung onto the horn of the saddle.

"What are you doing back here, young feller?" I demanded faintly, as he rode up to the edge of the hole.

"I ran across Old Dry Wash. I happened to hear his prospector's pick tapping up a side cañon. When I rode in there I found him pecking away at a quartz cropping. It was the luckiest chance on record. He loaned us his pump shotgun and his bone-sighted Winchester, and all kinds of ammunition. Couldn't get any grub, but a little corn meal, and no tobacco at all, because he doesn't smoke nor chew. But he gave me another five-gallon can, so we'll be all right for water."

At that point Joe saw that I was about as much pleased as a man that has just had a good punch on the solar plexus, and he added airily: "Oh, that's all right about that hunch of Londa's. She's forgot all about it by this time. There was nothing to it anyway, except that the poor girl had two pieces of pie the night before for supper."

"You lying young devil," I said furiously. "That girl never ate any two pieces of pie for supper in her life. She ain't a pie eater, and you know it."

It always pleased Joe when I got mad, and he began to haw-haw and laugh.

"I might have got that pie count wrong, Durk. I'm kind of absent-minded when my feet are under the table, and I'll admit it. But it's all right about the hunch, anyway. We've got arms, and ammunition, and water cans —and that's hunch enough for me. I had no intention of letting you follow off on that trail without me, anyway, so falling in with Dry-wash Thompson saved me a trip to the ranch and back."

I thought I understood then. That was the way it had been the morning my brother Jim tried to ford the Pecos River. It seemed as though nothing could turn him back. And I gave up wearily.

"All right, Joe," I said. "Jerk your saddle, and we'll hit the trail when it gets cool this evening."

When the first stars began to shine we headed silently out across the heated sands. One consolation was mine—we had arms and ammunition.

From the big hole at the mouth of La Honda Cañon it is thirty miles to Pero Springs. It is a sand stretch without water. We rode slowly through the night, for the footing was loose, and the heat even now oppressive.

Pero Springs is guarded by the pluckiest bunch of mesquites in the State of California. Part of the time the wind blows sand in on them clean up to their top branches. And sometimes it lays their roots bare. Yet there they stay, standing the shifting banks off from the drinking hole, and making the green sign for water. All around them for a terrible stretch there is gray desert brush and white desert sand.

I am a first-class man to travel with Joe. He always goes ahead on his luck, and the supposition that everything is O. K. I always figure that you can never tell what's going to happen, especially when you are on the trail of insurrecto raiders. I wasn't looking for any ambush at Pero Springs, taking it for granted that the paisanos would keep busy trying to get off that desert alive. Nevertheless I said to Joe:

"You stay out here and hold the stock, while I sneak up to the spring from behind the sand banks, and fire a few shots into the mesquites, just to make sure that they're deserted." Joe, just to humor his weak-minded old friend Durk, I think, consented.

Nothing stirred or sounded when I sneaked forward and fired four shots into the clump of wind-and-sand-frayed sentinels of desert water. And when Joe and I rode in, there were no signs of horse thieves except their tracks, and the bed of their camp fire. Nevertheless, there was something laying for us at Pero Springs.

As we dismounted, I said to Joe: "Let's tie up, and let the stock stand while we get a drink, so the animals won't get it muddied."

And Joe said: "All right."

I got my mule tied up first, and, as I went down to the spring, I called back:

"She's pretty clean, Joe. That's the first decent thing those paisanos have done, not to foul this water hole."

I always wash my mouth out before I drink, and, as I did so, I thought I noticed something bitter. This surprised me, because Pero Springs has the reputation for sweet water. Then, just as Joe came down, I noticed some tadpoles lying belly up in the pools around the edges. And I said: "Here, young fellow, wait a minute. There's something——"

"Go to Yuma, Arizona," returned Joe cheerfully. "I'm thirsty."

He was brushing past me to get down to the water, when I gave him a root with my shoulder that sent him sprawling.

"That water's poisoned, you crazy fool," I said; "now you stand back."

Joe got partly onto himself then, but it was not until he had looked a long time without being able to locate a single live tadpole or wiggler that he admitted that he had had a narrow escape.

This fact did not depress the young man, however, he taking it as a sure sign that you can't get killed till your time comes. And a little later, when scooping out a new water hole, where it was damp off to one side, he had the nerve to bawl me out and give me the laugh because he caught me looking around for "snipes" that the Mexicans had tossed aside when sitting around their camp fire.

"So much for the soothing weed—when you're out!" he chuckled.

But there was a worse jolt than that coming to me later. The one slim cigarette, made from a dozen discarded snipes, tasted heavenly; but it made every nerve in my body crawl for more tobacco. As I was searching restlessly around the outlying mesquites, I ran across a peculiar trail. It looked as though something had been dragged through the drift sand, and I followed it out into the dunes. I presently found blood signs along the furrow, and, before going twenty yards farther, came upon a dead Mexican. He was left lying on his back, with his arms trailing out behind just as he lay when the rope was taken off.

Joe came quickly to my call, and he recognized the Mexican at once as the big, black-mustached fellow who had thrown down his gun and spurred his horse up the cat climb to get away from the rocks. And we both agreed that it was a fright the way the raiders treated the living and the dead.

As we stood there, considering what to do with the corpse, I suddenly noticed that Joe was eying me curiously—then, like a flash, I realized that my fingers had been fumbling through and through all my pockets, and that I was wondering if perchance there was any tobacco on the person of that dead Mexican.

The discovery left me too staggered and disgusted to say a word. I was thankful on the moment that Joe wasn't quite raw enough to josh me in the presence of the dead; but, expecting to hear from him later, I pulled myself together enough to say:

"If ever you open your head about this, young feller, now or hereafter, I'll beat your face in, so help me. And if I sweat for it the rest of my days, I'll never again touch tobacco."

I abruptly pulled out for the water hole then, telling Joe that he had better spread half a saddle blanket over the corpse, and cover it up with drift sand.

I surprised myself that day by getting quite a little sleep under the shade of the mesquites. It surprised me, also, when I realized, along toward evening, that the tobacco craving had to some

extent left me. I decided that this had come about because I was so sore on the "soothing weed" that I had not once allowed myself to look out ahead at a picture of myself with my mouth full of tobacco.

When we were saddling up a little after sundown, Joe handed me a leaf torn from an old account book, saying: "Here's something I found by the dead paisano. It was lying beside him, writing side down. What do you make of it?"

Written in finely penciled Spanish were the words:

Death came to this dog of an Indian for poisoning a desert spring.

Underneath, in English, the words were repeated.

"That must have been written by Ramos," said Joe. "He told us, you know, that he was educated in Spanish and English."

"Huh!" said I. "It's too bad you lost that man for a friend. You said he'd use the cartridges on some of his Mexican friends, and I guess he did."

"But any one that would poison a water hole in this man's country ought to be shot. I've been wondering if Ramos isn't our friend some way, after all, but is being held back by Thumb-off Juan's outfit."

"If he was working for us, Joe, all he had to do was to flag the spring. If it hadn't been for the dead tadpoles we would be tied up there in knots right now—a sign of bad water."

"It looks that way," admitted Joe. "Still, sometimes things turn out different from what you think. But anyway," he went on hopefully, "it's a cinch that there's trouble among the paisanos; and where there's war in the ranks, the enemy always has a look-in. I think it's a cinch we get the stock, all right."

"It's my opinion, young feller, that we'll find ourselves looking in on an awful big nest of Mexicans when we get into those mesquites, where Ramos left his main bunch of insurrectos. And those Cocopah Bottoms are the headquarters for all the outlawed scum of Old Mexico."

"We'll give them a run for their money," replied the young man, nodding confidentially toward our borrowed guns.

So saying, Joe headed Poison Ivy out through the sand-mauled mesquites, into the hot desert night. My Mousey mule swung in behind; and the black pack mule, carrying the two oil cans full of water, came after.

Following the broad trail of the horse herd was easy, for on the desert plenty of light comes from the stars. Joe set the pace on Poison Ivy. He was cheerful, as usual, and wanted to talk. But I told him to shut up, as talking makes people thirsty. Mousey and the pack followed automatically, and I sat my mount silently—alone with my thoughts.

It kept running through my mind that two days from to-morrow was the day set for Joe's wedding. And here the young man was bulling off across the desert after a horse.

Two days from to-morrow, if we had good luck, we would make the Cocopah Bottoms. "Joe!" I exclaimed, startling myself by suddenly bursting roughly into speech. "What's the matter with you? Are you dead, young feller? Then why don't you talk?"

CHAPTER VIII.

JOE BITES ME.

The Cocopah Desert is farther south and lower in elevation than Yuma, Arizona, which claims the hot-weather record of the world. It is a desert that never cools off at all in August, and any one caught out there in what they call a hot wave is liable to get piled up, even with plenty of water.

For some days we struggled on; then the horses scented water, and the pack mule was in such a hurry to reach it, that he toppled into a watery mudhole, and we were out one mule and the grub, guns, and ammunition, which he carried.

We got Poison Ivy and Mousey to a safe watering place; then Joe insisted on going back and making an attempt to recover the guns and ammunition. I

tried to dissuade him, but he stripped and dove into the slimy water, with a reata around his waist. I thought it was all over with him, but when I hauled him out he had salvaged a rifle, with sixteen cartridges, and was as talkative as an old woman.

As I began cleaning the gun, I told Joe that I never expected to see him alive again, and he said indulgently:

"I savvy, Durk. Your nerves are all shot to pieces. So much for the soothing weed—when you've quit. But now that we've got the hang of the thing, we can get the rest of the stuff up easy. I'll go down again as soon as I get my wind."

I certainly would have gone straight up in the air then, were it not that I again suspected that young devil of being two hundred per cent hopeful and courageous, just to get a rise out of me. So, instead of going up in the air, I regarded him fixedly.

I don't know yet what Joe's intentions were. Anyway, he threw his shirt over his shoulders and backed up into a bush where there was deep shade. There he sat breathing heavily, slapping horseflies, and examining a snagged place on his breast that was bleeding pretty freely. I couldn't say whether he got off the line of talk that followed because he was in hopes of loosening me up to the point that I would let him go down after more arms and ammunition, or because he felt gay over having got the rifle.

"There's no use talking, Durk," he began; "it's neither safe nor expeditious to be cautious. You can't hog tie fate, savvy? A man's life is all framed up in advance—and there's no use hanging back going down a toboggan. The way to get there with both feet is to throw off the brakes and holler 'Hoorah.'

"Always look up, Durk," the young man went on wisely. "Now, in the case of my making another trip down to the level of our dear, departed mule, don't see a picture of little Joey resting eternally there in the blue, mud ooze—but look up! And, say, Durk, don't bat an eye, nor make a move, but there's one of those long-haired Cocopah trailers snooping around out there in the mesquites. I'll bet he's doing some prowling for the horse thieves. Just lie low now, and watch me start him for the tules with his gee-string flying straight out behind. Meantime, let your mind run back over certain names we know—Carney Smith, and Johnny Smith, and old Pete Smith, and the rest of the Smith outfit that haven't died, and Bud Larue, and old man Lane, and Bob Lane——"

When Joe ran out of white names he began on Mexicans we knew. He had worked farther back into his bush, and was all the while casually decorating himself with the blood that was still oozing from his snagged chest.

The mud had by this time dried on Joe, leaving him as blue as a lizard. On this blue background he smeared a red stripe for each rib. On his face he painted a fierce, red grin that tipped up at the ends like the devil's. And he shocked his muddied hair back until it looked a good deal like a pair of red horns.

"And Juan Machado and Pancho Alvitro," he was going on, finishing up all the paisanos we knew in Coloro, "and that black-hatted devil that downed the colt with his honda, and Profirio Diaz, and Thumb-off Juan—and with these few words, and thanking you one and all for your kind attention—— *Yhar-r-r-r-rough!!*"

The yell that Joe coughed out was like a dog tackling a cat under the floor joists at midnight. He sprang up from out the bush as hideous as jack in the box. He flopped with another yowl over on top of me, and bit my neck. He bit hard, too. I want you to know that Joe is something fierce as a josher.

That got a bona-fide yell out of me, and immediately Joe was pointing to the Cocopah with his long, hairy arm. Then, brandishing his horns, he charged. And run? That Indian burned the ground—and Joe after him. I only got a few streaks of the Cocopah through gaps in the mesquites, but he was running with his face slewed straight back like a scared mule's. I don't blame the

poor devil a bit, either. Because Joe can run a little himself; and has more hair on his breast and legs than any other man I ever saw, and kept barking and howling like some animal out of the inferno. I forgot all about my chewed neck, and the biting flies, and being quit on tobacco. When Joe came back he found me rolling around among the bushes, laughing.

Joe was sweating like a horse, and the trickling blue mud was ruining his make-up.

"If that Cocopah loses any toenails," he puffed, "he'll blame me. There were two of them at first, Durk. They came sneaking along on the cattle trail to where our mule turned off, and followed on his track till they saw us. Then one of them crawled away through the brush, and the other one kept coyotering around, watching. So it's ten to one they've been sent out by the horse thieves to trail us. In fact, I saw some saddle horses tied in the brush on the other side of the slough."

I got onto myself then with a jerk.

"Young feller," I said, "you slide it into your clothes, and we'll get out of here pronto. Because some of those Mexicans are liable to ride in on us any minute, and this place is no good at all to stand them off. I'll keep watch with the Winchester. She's in working order, all right, and there are sixteen cartridges in the chamber."

Joe got mighty busy dressing, but he had to finish that line of hopeful thought.

"From now on, Durk," he said, "there's going to be all kinds of dog-devil stories circulating in these bottoms. It'll help to buffalo that paisano outfit, all right. You bet, Durk, we can rig a plant now that will clean them out. Because *pendejo* stories will make those hombres as nervous as a horse that's been beat over the head."

CHAPTER IX.

IN AMBUSH.

Two bits doesn't look very big to a millionaire, but it looms like the hind wheel of a wagon to a starving hobo. To him, if he happens to pick up a quarter, it's a mighty lucky streak of sunshine.

In something the same way I felt like a mighty lucky, well-armed man when I swung on to Mousey, and took off after Joe along the edge of the slough.

A few minutes later we had spurred back to the place we had watered. Before leaving the mired mule, Joe cut the reata, so the carcass would settle. Also, while still barefooted, the young man had molded a mound of stiff mud into the palm of each hand, and, taking a hurried walk around on all fours, made some fierce, monkey-looking tracks along the edge of the tules.

"How's that?" he had asked. "Does that look like some devil animal had been wading around here?"

We rode across the slough, where we had watered, and followed off a trail through dense mesquite thickets. Poison Ivy and Mousey were rested up a little, but were still pretty limp, and, besides, were logy from an overload of water.

After a half mile's travel we came out of the brush on the bank of Hardy's Little Colorado, a very broad, and very deep, and very sluggish river, lined with a dense, vivid green growth of brush tules, and tall banks of plumed willows. Near the other shore, fully two hundred feet from where we had halted, there was an island, and Joe said:

"Durk, our animals are all in, and that place is made to order for a stand-off. You stay here with the stock, and I'll swim across and see if the mud around the island is hard enough to hold up the animals."

I said: "All right." But, as Joe swung out of his saddle, we heard the horses coming, and I added hastily: "Get back on your horse, young feller, and lead off. We'll have to swim for it, and take our chances."

The hoofs behind were beating a lively tattoo, and Joe and I urged our animals desperately through the water toward the island. As we neared the bank, the mud looked oozy enough, and Joe exclaimed:

"We'll have to try the other side."

As Joe passed behind a bunch of tules at the point of the island, the Mexicans rode out of the mesquites, and began yelling and firing. One of their bullets splashed the water in front of Mousey, and the next moment one chopped into the cantle of my saddle. I was glad to be alive when I passed out of the Mexicans' sight behind a bank of rushes.

Joe was lucky enough to find where the wild cattle had beaten a trail through the tules, and, a little later, Poison Ivy, followed presently by Mousey, scrambled, dripping and snorting, to the level of the island.

Before Mousey was fairly ashore, I swung down out of my saddle, and started through the brush across the narrow island, saying to Joe: "I'll see if I can't pump a little reason into those cursed murderers."

I cocked the rifle as I spoke, and the young man saw that the arguments I was going to use would be lead-nosed.

"Dry Wash says she's sighted for a fine bead, and shoots exactly where you hold her," replied Joe, as I pushed away through the mesquites.

In the last few days I had done a lot of hard riding, and had lost a lot of sleep, and had been bumped a lot by Mexicans. And now, as I headed for the horse thieves through the thicket, I was grinding my teeth.

Before showing myself, I thought to work down to the lower point of the island, so that Joe wouldn't be plugged if I drew the horse thieves' fire. When I finally stepped out in a gap in the thicket, I saw six hard-looking Mexicans, headed by Thumb-off Juan, strung out on the opposite bank of the river. I instantly pulled down on the middle button of Thumb-off Juan's fancy shirt, and pressed the trigger.

When Thumb-off Juan failed to drop out of his saddle, I thought my eyesight was failing me. But he was certainly alive and well, as he spurred his horse up the bank, plunking a pistol bullet into the brush close to me as he did so. Before the other five Mexicans could get out of sight in the brush, I fired four more shots—without plugging one horse thief that I knew of. As I had covered each of them on a vital spot with a fine bead, I was certainly confused. But I didn't loiter there very long, figuring on the proposition, as the paisanos were clipping the brush all around me from the cover of the opposite thicket.

A little while later, when the shooting had stopped, and there were no more signs of Mexicans, I worked back to Joe, who was waiting by the animals expectantly.

"Joe," I said, "what's the matter with this confounded gun? I burned up five shells without even so much as making a Mexican hunch his shoulders."

Joe began to laugh. "You crazy fool," said he. "Look at your sights!"

The sights were elevated for a five-hundred-yard shot! And now I remembered having been cleaning them when Joe had interrupted by biting my neck. As I got this through my head, my sheepish bewilderment turned to bitter rage.

All the rest of that day, while Joe alternated napping and taking big drinks out of the river, I sat in a thicket at the lower point of the island, and slapped at the biting horseflies, and cursed the horse thieves, and watched for horse thieves, and hoped that they would come.

When evening came, the situation remained the same—except that I was slapping mosquitoes. Joe begged me to try to get some sleep, and let him take a shift on guard, but I said: "There's no use of two of us being awake at night at the same time. You get in and pound your ear while you can, and when my disposition gets through boiling around, I'll call you."

I felt all drawn out of shape for want of sleep, but my head was still working furiously, and my eyes were dry and burning.

Down in the Cocopah Bottoms every kind of a night bird comes on shift a couple of hours after sundown. Their crawly, croaking, hooting voices make sounds like lost things out of hell.

When the moon arose I could see everything. Before me lay the broad, dead river, beyond the thick fringe of

tules footing a towering, endless bank of tall plumed willows.

I had begun to think of sleep when I thought I heard something from out the dark bank of willows on the opposite shore. It was something rustling—too steadily for the flapping of night birds. Then there was a muffled trampling, like hoofs—the flick of a spur chain against an iron-bound stirrup—the ratcheting of a horse tongueing the wheels of a Spanish spade bit.

Poison Ivy began to *whoo-oo-oof* softly through her nose, after the fashion of wild horses when they are listening, or think they smell something. Joe was snoring like a good fellow—and when Joe snores it's all the same as a sawmill sawing wood.

I think the Mexicans heard Joe hoeing it down, and were reassured. At any rate, five of them presently spurred their mounts down the bank into the river. I had seen four of them before—with Thumb-off Juan that morning. From the dark bank of willows I heard more horse sounds, and some very low talking.

I don't know whether my hands were steady or not—I wasn't thinking about my hands—but I remember feeling my mind fill steadily with evil, sullen hatred. At close range I am a dead shot with a rifle. And I intended to get every Mexican who rode into that river. I must have been just about the same as crazy.

I waited patiently until all five of the mustangs were in the stream, and swimming. They shoved their noses forward, settling low under their silent, watchful masters, and pushing ripples out into the sluggish, moon-glazed river. Still I waited, hoping that more, and particularly that Black Hat or Thumb-off Juan, would follow.

The Mexicans sat tight and high in their saddles, their carbines ready for action. They half raised their weapons and crouched doggedly as Poison Ivy's suspicious *whoo-oo-oof* became plainly audible.

It occurred to me that these were brave horse thieves to be swimming in the moonlight toward our brushy island. Then I reflected bitterly: "They think they're safe because I trimmed the willow tops this morning."

The horse thieves swam their horses steadily toward the head of the island. When the foremost outlaw was a little more than halfway across, I lined my fore and hind sights on his hip. Mechanically my trigger finger drew the three-quarter pressure. That is the trick of my way of shooting straight with nervous hands—line the sights directly below the spot where you want the bullet, press hard enough on the trigger, so that a very little more pressure pulls it off; then, with a swift, upward motion of the barrel, and keeping the sights still lined, you fire as the bead passes over your point of aim. I will always feel hotly ashamed that I drew the three-quarter pressure on a man from ambush—and thankful to the bottom of my heart that something—was it luck that held me back, or was it some long-ago petition of my praying mother?

All I know is that I suddenly loosened the pressure on that trigger as though the metal was burning hot, and that I realized that here I was, an American, shooting Mexicans from the brush.

For a few dazed moments I stood there watching the five horsemen forge steadily toward our island. Then, stepping out into the open, I shouted in Spanish: "Go back, or I'll shoot!"

Instantly the two foremost Mexicans cut loose at me, shooting their carbines from the hips. And instantly I pulled down on the haze of smoke that clouded the leader, and drew trigger. The man slid down into the water on the farther side of his mount, yelling as though he was all shot to pieces except his voice. He kept howling: "I'm killed! I'm dead!" The man wasn't very hard hit, as we afterward found out, but he was so sure that he was killed that I believed it. And his outcries made it seem a horrible thing to be shot unto death out in the middle of that great, calm, dead river.

The wounded Mexican's moaning and howling put the crawl into the soul of

his four compañeros. Quick as a flash they slipped out of their saddles into the water, at the same time pulling around the heads of their mounts. Before I could step out from behind my smoke to get another bead, the four horses were swimming silently shoreward, with their riders out of sight behind them. Suddenly, then, I dropped to the fact that the outlaws on the opposite bank were clipping the brush all around me, and I dove forward for about twenty paces through the cover of some mesquites.

A few moments later, when I poked my rifle barrel out through a clump of brush that commanded the open, the wounded Mexican's mount had swung around, and was following after the other four mustangs. The man was now in plain sight of me, as he had slipped out of his saddle on the farther side of his horse when the animal was still headed toward the island. The head of the crippled outlaw showed up plainly there in the bright moonlight. He was still howling: "I'm killed! I'm dead!"

I was suffering to pull down on that bobbing head. I ached to plug the mustangs of the other four, and send the whole outfit, the last one of the five murderous scoundrels, to the bottom of the river. I could have, and I would have, if the words of my old father had not kept flashing across my mind: "Fight like a man, son. Never fight at all unless you have to. But if you do have to, fight like a man."

As I stood there, held between the words of my old father and my hate for the escaping horse thieves, one of the Mexicans on shore must have caught the glint of my rifle barrel. For the next thing I knew a rifle cracked, and the small of my back felt as though the flat of a white-hot butcher knife had been laid across it. That fired all the Irish in me, and I wheeled and began pumping shots at answering flashes from the opposite thicket. When I found myself again, I was still pumping and pulling trigger on my heated, empty rifle.

My firing and the firing from the opposite shore stopped at the same moment. Still, I stood there watching the five mustangs swim ashore across the slow, sullen river. When Joe came boiling out through the brush, and pulled me farther back into the thicket, I was like a man coming out of a dream.

"Are you hit, Durk?" Joe asked anxiously.

"No, except a scratch on my back. But I ought to be hit through the heart."

"What's the matter with you, Durk?"

And I replied slowly: "Joe, I've burned the last of our ammunition."

CHAPTER X.

"THE WET PART OF HELL."

In the Cocopah Bottoms in summer the little black biting horsefly comes on shift at daylight. Suddenly at that time the mesquites seem to roar with them, and the loose stock run and bawl through the brush.

I was so dead on my feet after the shooting in the night, that I dropped into a sound sleep about twelve o'clock. But at dawn I began dreaming that herds of tiny devils were prodding me with red-hot wires. Then I realized that here we were in the Cocopah Bottoms, out of ammunition, and with the little black horseflies back on the job. They were making Poison Ivy so fighting mad that she squealed.

I got up and took a circle around the island. And a little later, when Joe hollered at me to come and eat, I was standing where I had done the shooting—looking moodily out over the sullen, silent, sluggish stream.

When it came to eating, there was no more jerked beef, of which we were glad. But of tule roots and mesquite beans there was a-plenty. Joe and I sat on our heels and threshed off the little black horseflies with willow boughs while we ate. At the same time we proceeded to pull off a council of war.

I felt so desperately hard up for ammunition, and so mean about shooting those last cartridges, that I was for

going back, and diving down to the mired mule. But Joe said: "You blankety-blanked fool! I wouldn't let you go down into that mud for two hundred dollars."

Coming from Joe, I thought that was all right.

"No, sir," went on Joe, "no more mule diving for any one in this family. In fact, if you only knew it, we've got these Cocopah Bottoms so buffaloed that we can get our stock away *without* ammunition. At the same time, a few cartridges would come in most almighty handy, and if these flies weren't so infernal bad, I'd be for going down to the Cocopah Rancheria and hunting up the old squaw man with the guns; but if we stay too long in this brush, with these biting, black, devilish flies, that mare of mine is going to get so mean that I'll have to kill her in self-defense. So it's up to us to make a quick move and grab that stock, and get back to the part of this Cocopah hell where there's no water, horseflies, or mosquitoes."

I replied glumly:

"Joe, you talk like a man up a tree. If you know what you're trying to say, spit it out."

"Here's the proposition, then. And it will work like dogs a-fighting—only, Durk, you'll have to look up."

"One's enough to look up. I'll look *out*."

"All right," grinned Joe; "only don't try to hang back when you're going down a toboggan. Anyway, here's the proposition. All we've got to do is to tack onto the trail of what's left of the outfit that came after us last night. Their tracks will take us straight to the horse herd. We won't be likely to jump any of the outfit, if we're careful. But if we do, you just stop and pull down on them with your gun. It'll be empty—but they won't know it. Anyway, you've got a fighting record that'll carry you through these Cocopah Bottoms *without ammunition*. Do you get that? Even in case our bluff is called, we can fly back to this island."

"That sounds fine, young feller. Go ahead. How you going to get the stock? Will the outfit run away and leave the horses when we show them our gun?"

"You keep your mouth shut, and your eyes and ears wide open, and I'll tell you," retorted Joe vigorously. "Because I've got a reputation that will carry us farther at night than your fighting rep will in the daytime—or, at least, I *will* have when I strip off all my clothes, take a dip in blue mud, paint a blazing, phosphorous, tipped-up devil's smile on my mug, and put on a braided tule tail three inches through at the butt."

By this time Joe had me going so that I stopped fighting with my willow bough, and sat there on my heels staring at him, and letting the little black horseflies bite.

"Man alive!" I gasped. "Are you crazy, or am I?"

Joe, seeing that he had me coming, grinned wide.

"You bet your sweet life, Durk, that kind of an apparition yowling around in the brush would have that bunch of paisanos bobbing right straight up and down. And when you figure that it's a cinch that they'll by this time have booze in camp, you can see where the outfit would start for the tules."

"Not at night," I interrupted. "But I believe they would pile up around their fire."

"In which case," proceeded Joe, "you could sneak around and tear the end out of their corral. Every animal would break his neck getting out of these Bottoms."

Then, to clinch his argument, Joe gave me a shove that tipped me off my heels, saying:

"Come on. You've chewed roots now till you're as pot-bellied as a Digger. Le's take the trail of those horse thieves."

You have to watch Joe all the time. He is a confidence man of the first water. The trouble is, he believes the thing himself, and if you don't watch out—and sometimes when you do watch out—he'll pull you across on propositions that would scare you to think of a year or two later. Anyway, I was feeling like a convert as Joe and I

spurred our animals into the water, and swam toward the plumed, towering bank of willows.

To our surprise, the horse thieves' tracks followed down the river, instead of striking back over the trail which Joe and I had come in on. But when, after traveling a couple of miles farther on, and crossing two bayous, we found where the outfit had forded the river, we decided that the raiders' camp must be some place out in the tules, and not, as we had supposed, in the brush along the lagoons near the edge of the desert.

The Hardy's Little Colorado is more like a succession of sloughs than a river. It twists here and there, and sends off backwaters in all directions.

The course of the Mexicans, in a very general way, was that of the stream, and Joe and I had a terrible time following it through tule swamps and across mud flats, deep bayous, and shallow lagoons. A mule is up against it in soft ground on account of his small feet, and Mousey was twice mired. We found several places where the paisanos' animals had bogged. The sun shone straight down on the weltering stagnation, and the mesquite thickets and banks of willows along the river held the dead air like a corked bottle. Joe named it when he stopped and looked around about noon, and remarked: "The hombre who called these Bottoms 'the wet part of hell' was sure some poet."

A little later we found where the raiders had camped, and made some coffee. This time, though, I wasn't looking around for cigarette snipes.

Until the middle of the afternoon we had a lot more of the same kind of travel. Then the monotony of the sweltering, wallowing journey was broken by the sound of voices out ahead. Leaving our animals, we sneaked forward, and presently sighted the Mexicans.

They had two horses bogged on the farther side of a bayou. There were eight in the crowd. All hands were loaded down with knives, revolvers, and carbines. But it was a miry, wilted-looking outfit.

Thumb-off Juan was one of the bunch; and that he was the boss was sticking out all over.

After snaking the bogged mounts out of the mud, the Mexicans pushed on out of sight into the tules. Joe and I saw that we were following the Mexicans a lot too close, and decided to camp where we were for the night.

One good thing about the Cocopah country is that, after the overflow of the Colorado River subsides, there's lots of good, hard horse feed everywhere. But so long as the little black, biting flies last there is no such thing as a fat animal in those Bottoms.

The Cocopah range, a twenty-mile string of long, low, volcanic mountains, turns Hardy's Little Colorado eastward toward the Gulf of Baja California. The trail of the horse thieves led us the next morning for ten miles across the angle made by this turn in the river. Joe said then that things were coming our way, as we were being steered straight for the Cocopah rancherias.

When we finally came to the river again, the tracks of the raiders continued on toward the gulf along the north bank of the stream. But Joe and I crossed over; for we knew, from what Bud Dugan had told Joe, that there were Cocopah rancherias strung along between the overflow bottoms and the long, low range of mountains.

We had heard that the Cocopahs were a peaceful, agricultural people, who raised quantities of watermelons, green corn, and pumpkins. Joe complained that, thinking of our prospects, set his starved belly to throwing backward handsprings. I was somewhat braced up myself, but more over the prospect of finding Quin Sabe John, the heavily armed squaw man, and getting information as to the exact location of the horse thieves.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

The round-up of the horse thieves will be told in the second and concluding part of this story, in the first March POPULAR, on sale February 7th.

Memories of Texas

By George Steunenberg

I REMEMBER, I remember, that big maneuver camp,
Where the wind was always windy and the rain was always damp;
I have a pleasing vision of a brimming Texas flood—
With seven miles of canvas in a sea of dobie mud.

I remember, I remember, the norther's chilling blast,
That used to make us think each day was sure to be our last;
When, wrapped in army blankets like a wild Comanche horde,
We'd pray for sunny weather and the mercy of the Lord.

I remember, I remember, how the tent fly used to flap,
And drive us bughouse every time we'd try to take a nap;
How night and day it slapped away without a pause for breath
Till we used to wish the blasted thing would slap itself to death.

I remember, I remember, how we used to rave and swear,
And cuss the folks at Washington, because they'd sent us there;
We'd cuss the war department and the Mexicans and Japs,
And then we'd cuss each other till the bugler sounded taps.

I remember, I remember, how it used to knock us flat
To think that Davy Crockett died for such a land as that;
And how one night we grabbed our guns and hit the southern track
To go to war with Mexico, and make 'em take it back.

I remember, I remember, the hikes to Leon Springs—
The chiggers and the rattlesnakes and other creeping things;
How 'round about the fire every time they got a chance
The scorpions and centipedes would do a song and dance.

I remember that bold hero who braved the midnight flood
To smuggle in some whisky, but got mired in the mud;
And as his shoulders disappeared beneath the slimy ooze,
He shouted, "I'm a goner, boys—for God's sake, save the booze!"

I remember, I remember, how with joy our faces shone
As we'd jump the crowded trolley for the lights of San Antone;
Where down at the St. Anthony our troubles we would drown
And break the Ten Commandments every time we went to town.

I remember, I remember, how we used to scheme and plot,
Devising sundry methods to escape our cruel lot;
And how with light and joyous heels the Texas soil I spurned
When I worked a pull and got away, and never more returned.

Babes in the Wood

A STORY OF THE DAWN OF HUMANITY

By George Sterling

II.—THE POOL OF PITCH

THE men of the tribe, squatted around a large fire of dried wood, were howling the food chant, to the dull, crude rhythm of which proceeded the cutting up of the body of a half-grown tiger cub. The light of the flames lit up the face of a limestone cliff but a few yards distant, at whose base an opening, low and round, gave promise of shelter and refuge. The hacking and slicing went on, deftly performed with sharp, though rudely fashioned, implements of flint, and at the close of song and task the beetling-browed chief of the tribe allotted the flesh, thoughtfully reserving for himself the largest and choicest portion.

The meal began forthwith, the meat being devoured in its raw state, as the cave man of that period had learned to use fire but for its light and its protection against beasts. There was no pause in the feasting until the entire body of the animal had vanished down the ravenous throats of the tribe. Then slowly, and one by one, the gorged banqueters arose and plodded to the entrance of the cave, which opening was wide enough to admit a full-grown boar, but which had to be negotiated on hands and knees. Within, however, the cave rose abruptly to a considerable height, and extended with many windings and divisions into the bowels of the hill. A current of air swept it continuously, drawn in by night and expelled by day, the hill breathing, as it were once in every twenty-four hours. The quarters were nevertheless noisome, being foot-deep in spots with gear and refuse of many sorts—chipped flints, casting stones, sharpened stakes, cracked nuts, dried berries, scraps of fur, and slivers of bone. Among the bones were those of men.

The whole tribe apparently under shelter, the chief thrust forth his head at the entrance, and cried thrice, in a deep, booming voice. There came no reply, and, turning, he laid hands on a round bowlder that lay just within the mouth of the cave. Two of his fellows assisting, he managed with this almost completely to block the entrance. The bowlder was then braced with rocks, and several sharpened stakes laid near it. The other members of the cave folk had by now dispersed themselves among three halls or chambers of the cavern, into the pitchy blackness of the nearest of which he then proceeded, emerging in a few moments with a squirming boy in his grasp. Him he deposited on the top of the rock, thrust a stake into his hand, without a word, and returned noiselessly to the chamber he had just visited.

Silence, modified by occasional brute-like gruntings and moanings, held conditional possession of the place. The boy gazed sullenly at the edge of the sea of moonlight just without the cave, a radiance untainted finally, as the slow hours went past, by the glow of the fire, which moldered slowly to ashes. The moon sank as slowly, and her light stole, as she drew near to the horizon, gradually into the cavern, thrusting shafts of inquisitive silver along the lower half of the bowlder.

It was now a little before dawn. So

This series began in the January month-end POPULAR.

far, the night had been without incident, only the cries, for the most part remote, of nocturnal birds and beasts giving sign that the dark was full of menace to most things that were abroad in it. Suddenly the boy, whose name was Uk, shivered a little, sniffed once, and descended from the rock. He took up his position behind this, gazing steadily around its right side, where the receding wall of the cavern left an opening nearly a foot wide. From without there came the sound of some large animal, lumbering and shuffling, with an occasional deep sniff, among the many rocks and fragments of limestone.

The boy stood tense and silent, biding his time. It was, he knew, his duty to make outcry promptly, upon which the men of the tribe would awake, rush forward, thrust him aside, and make ready to repel with the sharpened stakes any attempted invasion of their abode. But he craved excitement, if only for a reward of his long and hateful vigil, and made bold for the nonce to set at defiance the law of his people.

The sounds without grew more distinct, as the unseen creature drew nearer. From the scent that lay heavy on the air and which already had set several of the tribe to tossing in their slumbers, the boy knew that their visitant was Grush—for so the cave folk of that region called the great grizzly bear of the Pleistocene, a brute so huge, savage, and strong that he was avoided by the saber-toothed tiger, and feared by solitary mammoths.

The brute was now very near. Uk could hear him nosing about the squatting place for bones; but the cave folk had taken all such edibles into their retreat, to be cracked for marrow in the days to follow. Suddenly the shaft of moonlight was blotted from the cave mouth, and a great snout was thrust, with a deep-drawn sniff, inquiringly into the narrow opening left between bowlder and rock wall.

The boy did not hesitate for even a second, but lunged with all his strength at the intruding head. A roar of pain and rage, followed by many such roars, was the result of his action; and when he drew back the stake and felt of its fire-hardened point, it was wet and warm to the touch. Even then he did not, however, realize the extent of the injury that he had inflicted on the great beast. For the point of the stake had chanced to strike the bear exactly in one of his small, ferocious eyes, completely destroying that member.

But at the first sound of the grizzly's wrath, the space behind the bowlder swarmed with cave men, who rushed thither with a common instinct and purpose, falling over one another in the blackness of the cavern. Uk was knocked aside, and stakes and certain heavy stones caught up, as the adult males of the tribe prepared to resist invasion.

Almost immediately a woman emerged from the gloom at their backs, blowing on a coal of fire, which she deposited in some dried grass. That bursting at once into flame, she added twigs, and soon a brisk fire was filling the vault of the cavern with smoke. A little more, and lighted brands were placed in the hands of some of the men. Even the women took up casting stones, and the whole tribe stood at bay, noisy and menacing.

Could the grizzly have but come at them, their best efforts at defense would have been but pitiful, and the extermination of their number but a matter of moments. Grush, however, had had enough, and retreated, with growls and whimperings, to his unknown den among the upper hills. Dawn had broken in the meanwhile, and a careful scrutiny having proved that the coast was clear, all the cave folk came out into the open, each expounding to another what prowess he would have shown had the bear persisted in his efforts to get even as much as his huge head into the cave. The excitement wore off in the course of the morning, nevertheless, and Uk being discovered asleep in a remoter part of the cave where he had sought hiding, he was haled forth, given a drubbing, and set to that most distasteful of primitive forms of labor, the gathering of wood.

As the days went by, however, it was

proved to the tribe's dismay and woe that the incident was far from closed. The bear took up his abode somewhere in the neighborhood, and began to harry them to the best of his uncommon abilities. Their first knowledge of his thirst for revenge came with his sudden irruption on one of their feasts a week later, as they were peacefully devouring an elk that had fallen into the tribal pitfall that afternoon.

There was a rush from the outer darkness, and without warning Grush was among them, striking right and left. The cave folk fled, a howling mob, for the entrance of their home, where naturally a jam occurred, and more than half of their number would surely have been wiped from existence, had not the bear been desperately hungry from the past days of his lying-up. As it was, he stopped to devour the scattered portions of the elk, and when ready to set forth once more on his scheme of revenge found the cave mouth closed against him and his foes prepared. Too stupid to know that his vast bulk forbade his access to the cavern, he tried to force back the bowlder with his head, and had to abandon the attempt, smarting from a half score of wounds.

The tribe was aghast. Heretofore, the great fire about which they sang and feasted at night had been sufficient to keep at a safe distance all molesting animals, even the saber-tooth. Now, evidently, an end was come to their evening festivities. As a matter of fact, the situation was soon seen to be even worse than they had dreamed. Grush came upon them by day as well as by night, cutting off now a woman and now a child, and on all occasions sending them in a body halfway up the rugged face of the cliff, their past lesson having made them too wise again to incur the jam at the cave mouth. There he would hold them until some of the men, climbing to the top of the cliff, would pelt him with pieces of limestone; raging, he would then make the detour necessary to bring him to the spot where they had so misconducted themselves.

In the meanwhile, the tribe, by fours and fives, would descend to the shelter of the cave. Grush never comprehended this stratagem, though made the victim of it almost daily. But the very frequency of his visits—often accompanied, too, by the death of one of the cave folk—made the situation an impossible one, and the men of the tribe were already beginning to plan an exodus to a refuge at some remote and undetermined spot, when an incident happened that made an end of that especial predicament.

Uk and O-o, a girl of his own age—ten years—his constant companion, had discovered in the course of their wanderings a strange phenomenon. This was none other than a pool of unknown depth, made up of a bituminous substance, black and viscid. They had announced their discovery to the people of the tribe, but the women were incurious, and the men, after one or two experiences in getting the stuff on their hands or bodies, had forbidden all meddling with it, expressing the conviction that the pool was the home of some unusually perverse spirit of evil.

The children of the tribe, however, delighted to play with the substance, and would secretly hide grass-covered masses of it in prepared camp fires, where its sudden blazing up would send the elders into surmises limited only by the slenderness of their vocabulary, and the children into secret ecstasies of mirth.

It was with the notion of obtaining a portion of the pitch to throw at Grush, and, if successful in the cast, to defile his fur, that Uk and O-o set forth one morning for the pool. It lay in a region which, though not distant from their limestone hills, was geologically different. The pool was of late formation, and held on its surface and along its borders as yet but few of the birds and small animals for which such places prove so deadly a trap. It had welled up in a caldron of rock about four deer's leaps across.

On three sides, a steep wall of sandstone rose for double the height of a man above the pool, and on the fourth side the substance crept sluggishly

down a narrow channel toward the near-by plain. Dust, sand, and leaves, borne by the wind, sometimes covered a portion of its surface, and gave almost an exact simulation of solid earth. This coating would, in times of high wind, extend over the whole pool. Then would ensue a slow and noiseless upboiling from the depths below, and again the bosom of the pool would gleam inky and repellent. Usually these ebullitions lay like vast black lichens here and there upon the surface. Rocks thrown into any portion of the pool would land with a dull sound, without splashing, and slowly settle from sight.

Altogether, it was a most impressive place, and the children now approached it with a certain sinking of spirits, and were quiet even beyond their wont. The day was one of mid-autumn, and strangely chill and overcast. A low and fitful wind was blowing, a portent of approaching rain. They hastily thrust into the pool the stout sticks that they were carrying, withdrew them, and repeated the act several times. Having finally obtained a good-sized portion of the pitch on the end of each stick, they ceased from their efforts, and were about to retrace their steps, when the sudden far-off clamor of a wolf pack was borne to them on the freshening wind.

A dense grove of large trees stood at no great distance, and, hurrying to that, they awaited the sight of the animals, which were patently approaching at a very rapid pace. Nor were they to be kept long in suspense. A little way up the narrow and almost woodless valley appeared a great elk, closely pursued by a band of wolves, perhaps twenty in number. The valley rang with the clamor of the beasts, and soon the very clatter of the elk's hoofs was also audible as he dashed down the rocky pathway. A moment more, and he had reached the bank of the pool and leaped far outward.

It may have been that he mistook the pool for one of black water, though it is more likely that in the haste of fear and desperation he was heedless of all save the relentless foes behind him. As it was, he struck with a strange glutinous sound about thirty feet from the bank, and was followed in almost a second by the entire pack. Their outcry was checked in mid-air, and for an instant there was no further sound except that caused by the impact of falling bodies. Then their howls burst forth again, but in another key, one of despair and terror. They sank slowly, the elk being the first to disappear, though the tips of his great horns were visible above the surface for over a minute. Soon the pool lay again unruffled, two irregular spaces, freshly black, alone showing where pursuers and pursued had vanished.

With one exception, however. For a wolf that was running toward the rear of the band had finished his leap on the back of one of his comrades, and, springing awkwardly sidewise from such support, had managed to land with his fore quarters upon a large piece of bark that had been blown into the pool by a recent high wind. This bark was still upon the surface, though destined to final engulfment. The weight of the wolf was not great enough entirely to sink it, and he remained in an almost upright position, his head and shoulders above the level of the pool, and joined in the despairing chorus of his mates. Soon these were hidden from sight, whereat he ceased from howling, and after gazing around him for a while and struggling vainly to draw up his whole body on the bark slab, had apparently resigned himself to his doom. It was to come even sooner than he might have expected. The mark was far too tempting a one for even a boy of our own day, and, descending from their perch, the two children began to pelt the trapped animal with as heavy stones as they were able to hurl to that distance. Accuracy of aim was an essential matter in such times, and the very first of the missiles—a large, round stone, hurled by Uk—reached its mark, striking the piece of bark immediately between the feet of the wolf. It broke in halves, and the half to which the animal at once shifted his position proved too

small to support his weight. Bark and wolf slowly subsided, until at last the black muzzle of the beast seemed like a gray spot on the engulfing blackness. A moment more, and this, too, sank from sight.

Uk and O-o, tremendously impressed, hurried homeward, but did not dare to speak of their adventure even to the other children of the tribe, since a visit to the pool was strictly forbidden. But an idea had come to being in the brain of Uk, a brain that was yet to make him the most feared and envied of his people, and after a day's hard thinking he proceeded to act upon his plan.

His first move was to place a few uncracked bones at no great distance from the mouth of the cave, and in the direction of the pool of pitch. Grush, like all of his kind, was naturally a scavenger, and almost omniverous, not holding in contempt even the smallest of windfalls. He found the bones that very day at sunset time, and on the morrow was back for more. More were his portion, but on this occasion at a somewhat farther remove from the abode of his enemies. The succeeding days saw him extending his foraging grounds to regions at no great distance from the pool, and when Uk found that he had, within a week, succeeded in forming this habit in the common foe, he laid his final plot for the destruction of Grush.

The grizzly, finding that such titbits were not to be found at their wonted spot in the evening, nor even in the early morning, now made it his custom to look for them in the late afternoon. And on such an occasion he found, after ten days' success in such incidental foraging, that the usual offering was not in evidence. In no small indignation at the disappointment, he glared with his one eye wrathfully about the neighborhood, and was rewarded by the sight of two pygmy forms that danced up and down on a large, flat rock at a slight remove from him. He proceeded sullenly to investigate, and approached them at his usual lumbering gait.

On gaining the spot, he found that the figures had disappeared, but further glaring discovered them on another rock, this one also not far away. A little less patiently, he covered the distance to this place, only to meet with a fresh disappointment. However, he soon made out again the two small and doubtless edible figures, this time in swift flight to a solitary grove of large trees. Once more in motion, he was not long in reaching the spot, where his growing resentment leaped suddenly to acrid wrath on being struck on the snout with a large fragment of dead wood.

This had been purposely thrown by O-o, who, with Uk, was now perched halfway up the largest of the trees. Gazing down, they saw the great brute shake his head angrily, and stare up at them with his small and baleful eye. Then, suddenly, he reared, placed both his huge forearms on the trunk of the tree, and thrust his terrible visage within a half score feet of them. He stood nearly the height of three men of that epoch, and as he reached up a swift paw and struck viciously at Uk, the boy was barely able to restrain himself from dashing farther up among the branches. As it was, he had a task to perform, and that without delay, since, if it entered Grush's head to shake the tree, it was at the best doubtful if they would not be shaken to the ground like so many ripe nuts.

But in the crotch of the limb to which he clung, Uk had a long stick, and on the end of this was a large, viscid lump of pitch from the pool. Reaching swiftly down with this, before Grush had had time in which to withdraw his paw, he smeared the bear forcibly across his one remaining eye with the end of the stick. Grush roared horribly, and dropped at once to a position on all fours. He then attempted to wipe the pitch from his face with his left paw, the only result being to mix the sticky substance the more thoroughly with his long hair, and smear it the more completely over his face. In rage, he then began to thrust his great head along the ground, and succeeded merely in mixing the pitch with earth

and covering it with dried leaves. He kept up a furious roaring, and, completely blinded, began to lumber slowly out into the open.

It was the moment for which Uk had been waiting. Swarming down from the tree, closely followed by O-o, he rushed alongside of the bear, and once more applied a coating of the pitch. The act was one that might ordinarily have been followed by fatal results; but so completely was the foreface of Grush covered by the substance that scent as well as sight had entirely failed him, and in default of the two senses he was for the time as helpless as a stranded whale. Uk then struck the grizzly a sharp thwack on the flank. He turned promptly, and made a rush in the direction in which he imagined his foe to be. The boy had, of course, stepped swiftly aside on delivering the blow, and the blind onset of the bear carried him several yards in the direction of the pool. On stopping, he began once more to scrape impotently at his eye, and as soon as Uk found him facing toward a suitable point of the compass, he once more assailed him from behind, and was rewarded by having Grush turn again, and again make a vicious rush in his supposed direction. This was repeated several times, till on the final occasion the onset of the bear carried him over the northern bank of the pool, and he fell with a soft, enormous splash into the awaiting trap.

The fury of his rush and the height from which he fell had been enough to cause him to roll entirely over in the pitch. The depth of the pool was not, however, considerable at this point, and when he rose to his feet he was little more than knee-deep in the substance. But completely coated as he was with it, he presented an awe-inspiring sight as he waded to the verge of the pool and stood on the dry grass, the pitch lazily sliding from his immense flanks and shoulders. His blindness was now absolute and without remedy, and his spirit so utterly cowed by the strange mishap that had befallen him, that he did not even resent the prodding that Uk and O-o now began, but gave way instead to the will of his tormentors, and shuffled stickily before them with the helplessness of a beast of burden.

It was a little after sunset, and the men of the tribe were gathered about their squatting place, moodily discussing the exodus that they planned to take place, for parts unknown, on the following morning. They knew of no caves except those in the immediate neighborhood, and it was necessary to find a new home at some considerable distance from the haunts of Grush. Their forebodings were of the gloomiest, and even Ark, their clever chief, seemed at an end of his resources.

On certain large rocks at three points of the compass were stationed several boys of the tribe, as watchers against the approach of the grizzly, whose coming was expected each moment. One of them now lifted his voice in a childish wail, and at the same time descended from his perch and made for the gathering of his elders, all but a few of whom swarmed promptly up the face of the cliff, the remainder, for the most part women, entering the cavern.

It soon appeared, however, that no great need for haste existed. At some distance, they could make out the huge form of Grush, but he approached with unwonted slowness, and loomed strangely black in the gathering twilight. Soon after, two small figures were discerned, one at each of his flanks, who with sharp poles were urging him steadily on his way. A few minutes more, and the bully of the Pleistocene, black, enormous, blind, waddled, rumbling intermittently, to the squatting place, precursor, it may be, of that Lion to be led in the still distant Golden Age by a little Child. As it was, the men of the tribe slew him with rocks cast from the cliff top, and for days feasted mightily on the great carcass.

"Naa-Shus the Man-Ape" is the title of the next story in this series. It will appear in the first March POPULAR.

A Chat With You

EVERYBODY, sooner or later, is bound to go to a moving-picture show. If you haven't been in one of the "movie" theaters yet, you will some day. You may like them, and you may not. The vibration may hurt your eyes, the wordless pantomime may irritate you, the incessant action may please you. We have heard it suggested that the moving pictures may keep people away from reading the magazines, but we haven't the slightest fear of that kind in regard to THE POPULAR. You get something in this magazine in the way of color that can never be put on a film. A writer like Bertrand Sinclair, or B. M. Bower, can describe scenes for you so that you really see them with your mind's eye and feel them in your imagination. A portrait by a good painter will tell you more about a man than a hundred snapshots with a kodak; and, however lively and diverting the adventures of the Three Guardsmen may seem on the film, no set of pictures run on a reel will ever give you half the charm, half the interest, one hundredth part of the good solid enjoyment that Dumas provides for you in his book.

INDEED, instead of finding a rival in the moving pictures we find in them material with which to make THE POPULAR still more interesting. All is grist that comes to our mill. No matter what the fad or the fancy of the hour, we welcome it as long as it furnishes a new field for stories. Variety is something more than the spice of life; it is a good deal of the substance of it, and what we want is life in the form of stories. The best part of the moving-picture play never appears on the films. Those figures that flit and flicker before you as you sit in the darkened hall are but the shadows cast by human beings. The hairbreadth escapes, the fights, the heroisms, and villainies are good enough in the picture, but are still more interesting at the time the pictures are being made. If you read the next issue of THE POPULAR you'll learn more about the "movies" than you ever will in a theater. It opens with a complete novel by Henry C. Rowland, called "The Movies Man."

THE MOVIES MAN" is a moving-picture manager who was born for the business. A good picture means more to him than anything else in life. Hardships and danger are nothing in his service of his god, the film. When he stages a Central American revolution he wants his pictures made at the real place in one of the "banana republics." He is really devoted to his art, and he spares neither men nor money in getting what he wants. Rowland makes him live for you as he does the four men and the one truly remarkable and human girl who start South on the yacht in search of local color. You can depend upon it that any story told by Rowland is well told. In this case the story itself is even better than usual. There's enough thrill in it and surprise for a dozen reels of film. The actors set out to make a picture. They get the picture and a whole lot more besides—romance, adventure, politics, treasure, warfare,

and self-sacrifice. Rowland will tell you all about it two weeks from to-day.

IMAGINE, if you please, two of the toughest characters it is possible to meet or conceive. They are hardened in iniquity, steeped in vice, capable mentally and physically, brutal and ferocious, and, above all, desperately greedy and avaricious. Such a pair are "Skookum" Bill and Sam Dobbs. There are such people. Chisholm has painted this precious twain from life in his new story in the next issue of THE POPULAR. They know where a quantity of gold is buried, and they are both resolved that nothing in the world shall stop them from getting it. Something does stop them. It is not their physical inability, but what might be called a moral or sentimental consideration on their part. We defy you to guess what it is, and yet we have stated the case fairly and accurately. Chisholm has called his story "The Stumblingblock." You'll have to read it to find out what the stumblingblock is. What in the world could make such an unscrupulous and determined pair pause and falter? You'll find the story as good a tale of the Northwest as Chisholm has ever written.

IF there is anything at all we believe in it is that a man's value and worth should be gauged only by his personal qualities and never by his rank, wealth, or station, or as Burns puts it in more simple fashion—"A man's a man for a' that." A story that expresses this idea always seems stimulating to us. The serial by Ralph D. Paine, which starts in the next issue of the magazine, might well have the line from Burns as a title. It is called "The Wall Between," and is a story of the United States army. The wall that Paine mentions is the rigid and invisible wall that separates the officer from the enlisted man. Paine seldom writes anything that has not in it a sturdy optimism and a wholesome and strength-giving quality. This new serial of his is the best he has done in a long time. It is a solid, real, genuine piece of work, and at the same time it is speedy enough in action and stirring enough in feeling and incident to satisfy the most excitement-loving reader. We haven't had anything from Paine in a long time, and we've never had a better serial from him than "The Wall Between."

NO doubt you remember Bill Harris, the thoughtful and philosophical burglar who was described in some of the stories of Howard Fielding. It is a long time since Bill committed a burglary. For years he has been strongly on the side of the constituted authorities and a powerful deterrent of crime when it came his way. There is another novelette about him in the next issue of THE POPULAR. It is called "Bill Harris Investigates." All who know Bill like him in spite of his past. What he says is always worth listening to, what he does is always efficient, sensible, and generally dramatic. If you haven't made his acquaintance as yet you have a new experience in store for you. Bill is quite in a class by himself. In the same issue of the magazine is a new story of the army by Peter B. Kyne, who writes better tales about the officer and enlisted man than any one since Rudyard Kipling. There is also a story by a remarkable new humorist, Stephen Leacock; there's another story in the unusual series by George Sterling, and other good things from such writers as Herbert Coolidge, Francis Lynde, and Robert V. Carr.

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Full address of any of these people if you wish.

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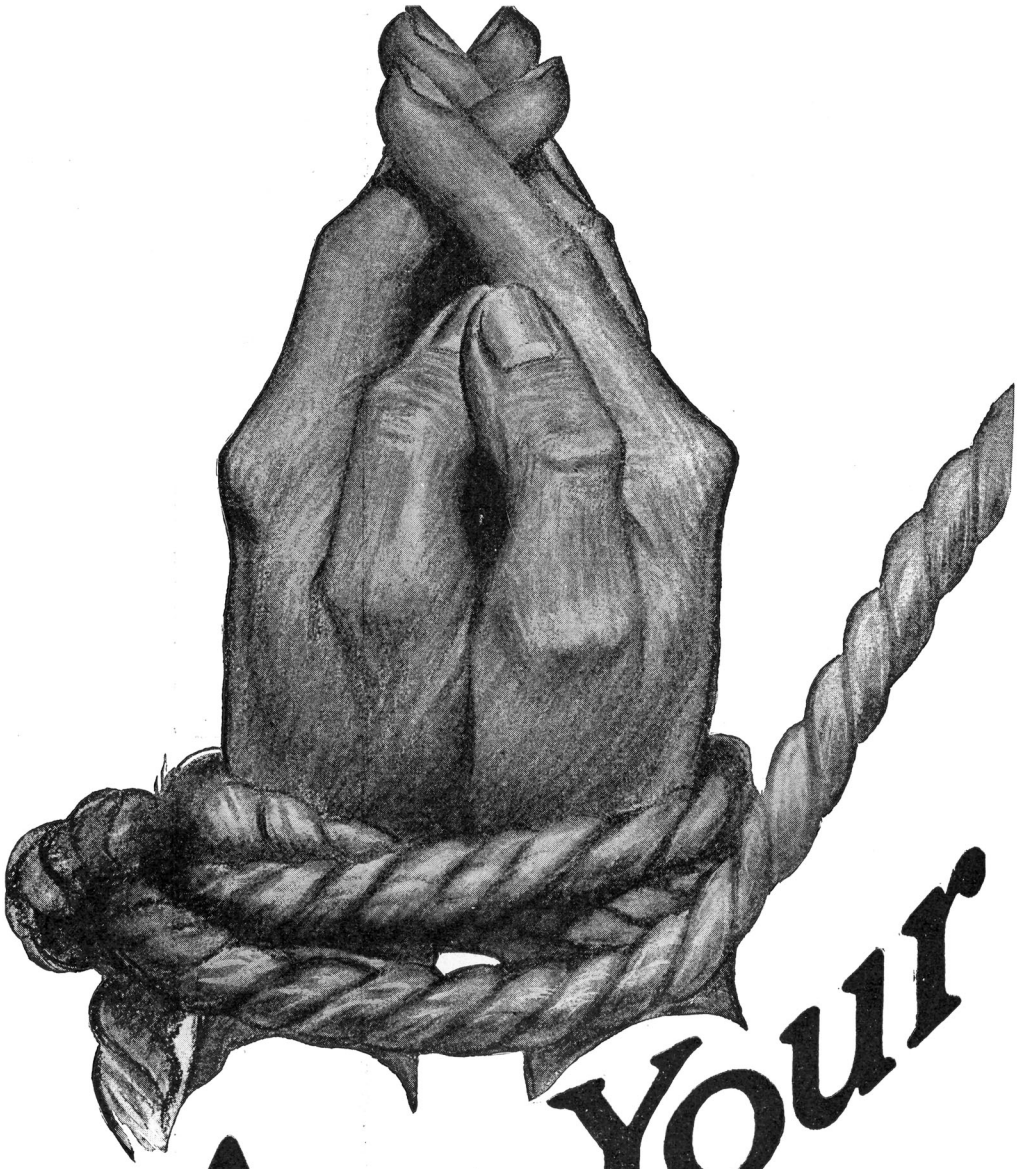
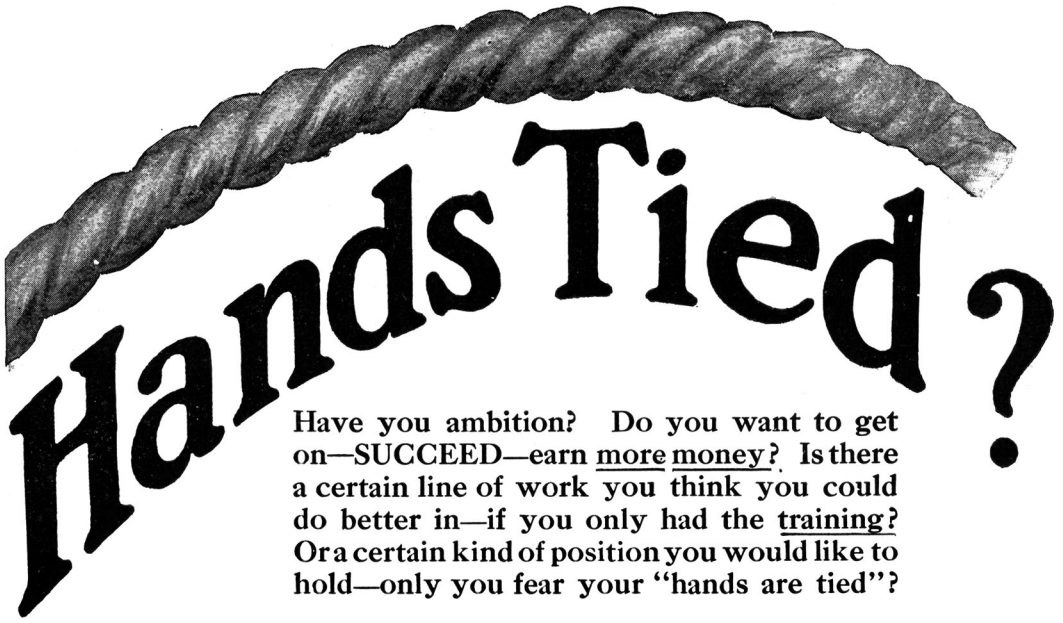


Are Your

Do you long for BETTER THINGS—yet do not know how to reach out to get them? Or—do you feel as if your "hands are tied?" Don't give up—there is hope for YOU!



Have you ambition? Do you want to get on—SUCCEED—earn more money? Is there a certain line of work you think you could do better in—if you only had the training? Or a certain kind of position you would like to hold—only you fear your "hands are tied"?

DON'T let your ambition die! Don't think your hands are tied! Don't think that you can't strike out for advancement and *success*—that you do not dare, because you must eke out your daily bread—that you must go on in the same old rut as long as you live.

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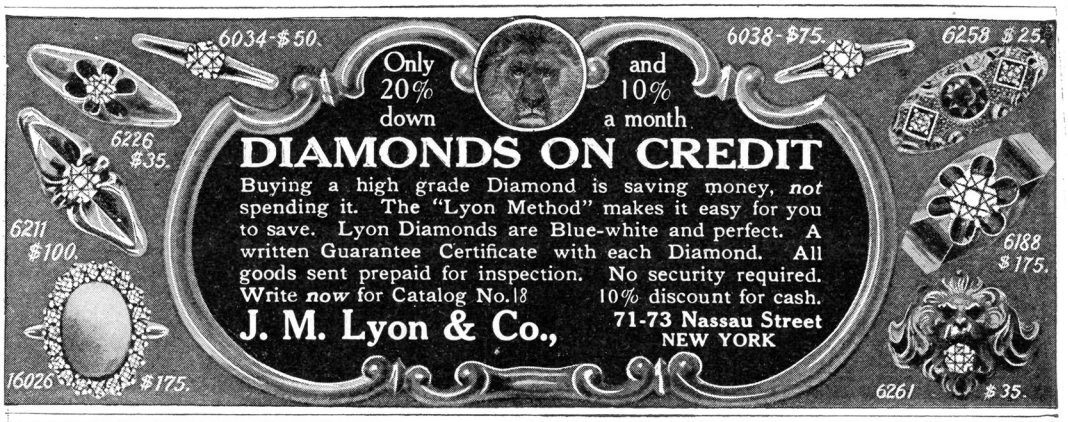

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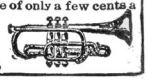

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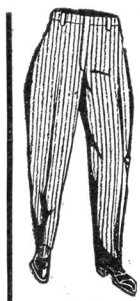

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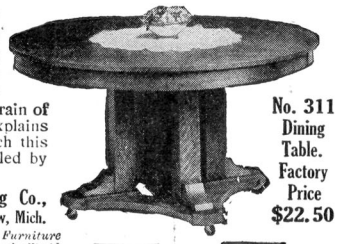

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