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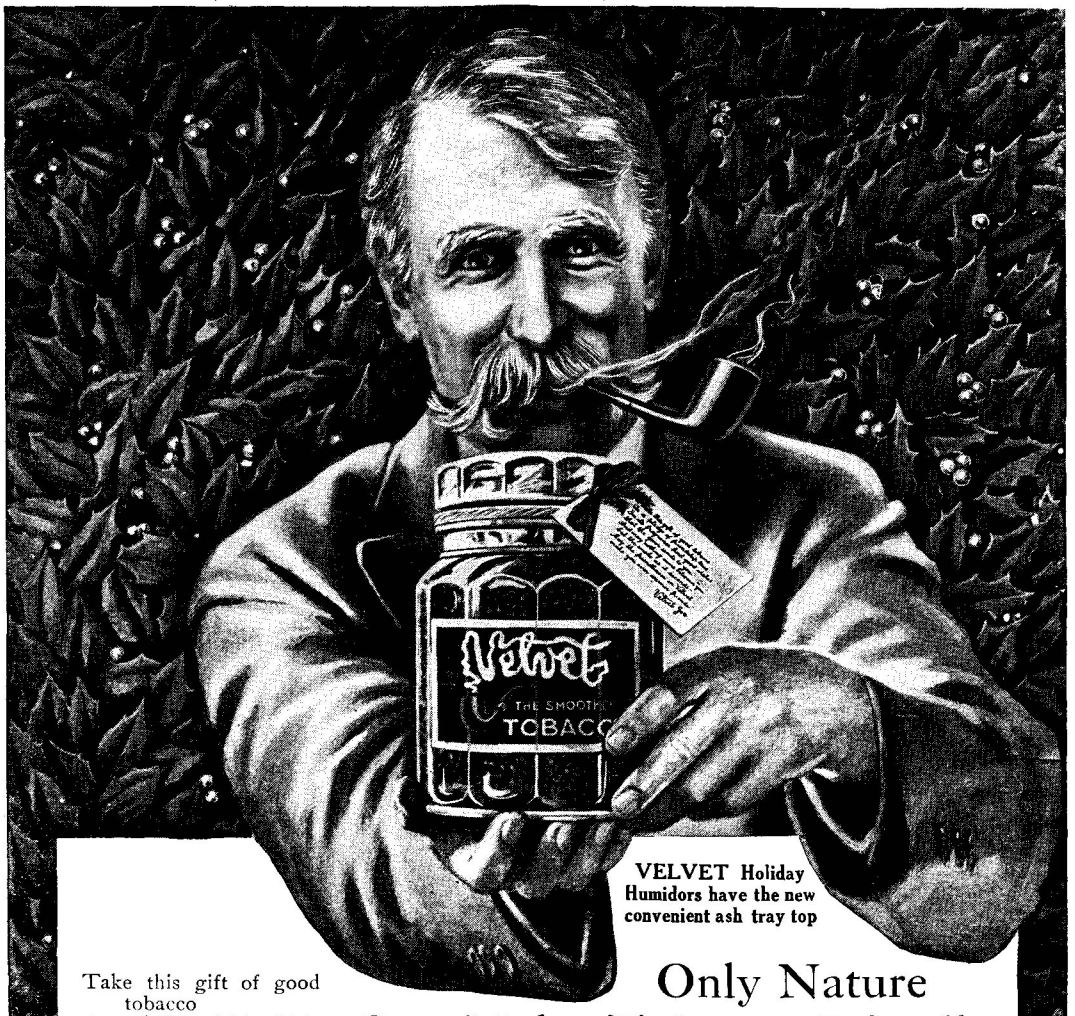

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. XLIII. DECEMBER 20, 1916. No. 1.

A Fourfold Game

By J. Frank Davis

Author of "Garland: Ranger Service," "No Excitement," Etc.

Mexico as seen through the eyes of secret agents—men who ply their calling in foreign lands, finding adventurous hazard in their vocation, and little reward beyond the consciousness of work well done, and yet are more important than the accredited diplomatists who are seldom more than pawns in the hands of the master chessmen at home.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN AND THE TASK.

FOUR men, in widely distant cities, sit planning and plotting, hearing reports and giving commands, weeding, analyzing, collating, sifting. In their hands are the ends of threads that run to and fro across all the kingdoms and republics and principalities of the earth.

One of them is a towering man, with shoulders broad enough to bear the weight of great burdens, progressing in years, with florid face, closely cropped hair, fierce, upturned, white mustaches, a card-index mind, and a passion for efficiency. From his desk in Berlin is a far cry to Tokyo, where sits another of the four—a little, lean, black-haired bundle of fanatic patriotism, whose dreamy almond eyes hold no reflection of the impetuous ambition for his country's future that burns within his soul.

A third—chieftain in this respect within his country because he is chieftain in all matters, being the one strongest man amid a swarm of weaker ones—is younger, handsome of face and figure, stern and commanding, wearing an empty sleeve, where once was an arm strong in battle. He sits within the national palace in the city of the Montezumas, and stares with brooding, bitter gaze across the mountains to the north. Beyond those mountains, three thousand miles away, the fourth man sits in Washington. And this fourth has neither the mien nor manner of statesman or warrior, but looks and acts and moves—albeit inconspicuously—as might look and act and move any prosperous, serious, purposeful middle-aged American man of business.

Diplomatists all these may be, and are, but not commissioned as such. Nor does the army of men and women that each commands enjoy public credit

or great honor, even within their own countries.

Accredited diplomatists who serve their nations well receive their meed of thanks and reward, and yet, in these days of fast mails and faster telegraphs, are seldom more than pawns in the hands of the master chessmen at home. In contrast, the secret agents who ply their trade in foreign lands find adventurous hazard in their vocation, but little reward beyond the consciousness of work well done. Success does not mean for them the cheers of the multitude, because the multitude never knows. Failure may mean disgrace. It may mean death. Most bitterly, it may at any moment carry with it complete disavowal by the nation that is served; even this they are prepared to suffer. And in the very nature of their occupation, the higher class of secret-service men and women, whatever flag they serve, are seldom pawns. They must initiate and play their own moves.

Sometimes cautiously, sometimes boldly; sometimes slowly, sometimes with lightning action; sometimes fearlessly, sometimes fearfully; sometimes blithely, but *always* secretly, they go up and down the earth, and into its farthest and most dangerous corners, playing the Game of Nations.

Waite Braxton finished his late and solitary luncheon at a table near the front window of Roth's restaurant. His check, which the waiter presented with the impressive courtesy due an obviously prosperous patron, totaled seventy pesos, and Waite slipped from a bulky wallet a fifty, a twenty, and a ten—the ten constituting the waiter's tip.

Lest it be thought the young American was a Gargantuan trencherman or an extravagant fool, be it said at once that the bank notes were Carranza currency, valued at that moment at a small fraction over two cents, gold, to the peso. Translated into terms of United States money, the luncheon cost one dollar and fifty cents; the *pourboire* totaled a trifle less than a quarter of a dollar.

As the waiter, bowing, faded into the middle distance, Braxton lighted a cigarette, sat back idly, and, through the window, let his eyes rest upon the passing throng.

It was quite surprising that the Avenida San Francisco could look so peaceful and unscarred, after more than three years of revolution piled on revolution.

Madero, Huerta, Carranza, Villa, Zapata, had come and gone, and Carranza had come again, during the swift-speeding months since Don Porfirio Diaz awoke to the desperate fact that his aging hands had lost their strength to curb a turbulent people.

Musketry had rattled and shells had screamed through the beautiful avenues and plazas of the city. Dictators had risen, struggled to keep their place, and fallen. Tattered armies had entered, looting; and, looting, had departed. Ambition had made little men great and great men little, and sent many of them, little and great together, to take their stolid turns before the firing squads. Cannon had roared and swords had flashed and fire had burned, and there had been famine and pestilence.

Yet, for all this, up and down the Avenida San Francisco still flowed the afternoon procession that for years has made it one of the fascinating thoroughfares of the world. To a casual observer, the same procession; to the careful student, a subtly different one.

Waite Braxton watched the changing, shifting crowds, and compared them with the crowds of other days.

He knew Mexico City. He had been there many times—when Diaz's hand was iron; when Madero's dreams were

straw. He had been there in February, 1913, when the younger Diaz and Reyes sprang their revolt, to be followed so speedily by the treacherous coup of Blanquet and Huerta, which sent Don Panchito the weak, and Don Gustavo the strong to pay the price of power taxed against the house of Madero.

The last time he had sat here in the window of Roth's and watched the passing swarm, he recalled, there had been a sudden fanfare of bugles, scattering of vehicles and pedestrians, a galloping whirl of cavalrymen, cheers, and a rolling automobile, in the tonneau of which sat a short, squat, uniformed, stone-faced Indian with a wide, thin, cruel mouth—Victoriano Huerta. Then more automobiles, more soldiers, more cheers, and the dictator was gone.

And only a few months later Huerta was gone, indeed—as Diaz had gone, as Villa was to go, and Zapata; as Carranza also would sooner or later go, and who could tell what procession of others before the coming of a ruler strong enough to rule?

That scene in the late spring of 1913 came back to Braxton, and it was difficult to realize that three other chieftains, in the intervening time, had been cheered along the avenue. It might be the same scene, this afternoon—almost. Only one very familiar with the city in the old days, he thought, could see a difference now.

Up and down the street rolled automobiles and carriages bearing beautiful women in Paris-made frocks. Along the sidewalks strolled frock-coated, high-hatted men, gloved, swinging sticks. In the gutters, moving at the queer, untiring dogtrot of the Mexican Indian, swung along noiselessly the never-ending procession of barefooted or sandaled *pelados,* their shocks of coarse hair hanging over dull, lackluster eyes, bands about their foreheads, packs of incredible heaviness upon their backs—bearers of burdens in a country where man is the cheapest of all beasts.

Back and forth flowed the river of deep contrasts that ever has fascinated the looker-on in Mexico City; a stream of the very rich in the middle and on the banks, and of the very poor, like some muddy, copper-colored backwater, slipping along between the two.

The clear, high-altitude sun shone down on the picture, throwing all the color of it into sharp relief. It touched the immaculate street—perhaps the only main thoroughfare in the world that is literally washed and scrubbed by hand—and the magnificent façades of ornate buildings. It threw its light alike upon the glittering contents of the plate-glass windows, upon the fashionable raiment in carriage and on sidewalk, and upon the filth and sordid poverty and hopelessness of the Indians who swung past, their eyes upon the ground.

This describes the Avenida San Francisco on that afternoon in late February, 1916, when Waite Braxton sat idly smoking in Roth's restaurant. Thus far it could as well pass for a description of the Avenida San Francisco on any pleasant week-day afternoon five years or more ago. But Braxton's eyes comprehended the change.

The shop windows glistened, but with contents less expensive than before; offering as small a temptation to loot as was consistent with necessary display and decoration. The automobiles and carriages were fewer and less well kept. The horses were thin and shaggy. The prosperous pedestrians and carriage folk, taken as a whole, did not look *quite* so prosperous as aforetime, and there were not so many of them. The efficient little policemen swaggered as bravely as ever, but in frayed and ragged uniforms.

When one came to analyze it, only the backwater stream of poverty-

stricken *pelados* had not changed. They had become no richer; they *could* become no poorer. There is some compensation, perhaps, for being of the very bottom dreg of society. "He who sleeps on the floor," says an old adage, "cannot fall out of bed."

Braxton saw the passing throng and considered it, but even while he looked at the moving procession he was looking through it, his mind busy with the task that had brought him again to Mexico City.

Barely three weeks since, the chief had summoned him from New York to Washington. This of itself was a rare occurrence. In all the six years he had been connected with the secret service he had visited headquarters not more than a dozen times. He could count on his fingers and toes the number of people in the United States, including secret-service officials, who knew him to be a servant of the government. The success with which this incognito had been maintained had not a little to do with his value to the service.

The chief had given him succinct, comprehensive orders. The talk lasted nearly an hour, but its substance could be summed up in sixteen words:

"Learn the contents of the note Carranza is about to send by special messenger to Japan."

A task, certainly, involving both difficulty and risk. A task the chief thought Braxton stood the best chance of accomplishing, not only because he had often succeeded where others had failed, but because his generally accepted position as a scion of wealth, more or less interested in the handling of certain corporate inheritances, furnished him the logical excuse to do certain things that, done by other agents of the department, would arouse prompt suspicion.

"There is a limit to what bribery will accomplish, even in Mexico," said the chief. "Not more than a half dozen people, I suppose, know what is going into this note, or what has gone into it, if it is already prepared. Carranza and Obregon, of course—it might be more proper to say Obregon and Carranza—and the foreign minister and two or three subordinates in his department. Probably, although not necessarily, some of the other members of the cabinet. Payne says—— You know Payne quite well, don't you?"

"Intimately. We were in the same class at Harvard."

"Payne reports that in his opinion the men closest to Carranza, and likely to be aware of the contents of this Japanese note, would prove incorruptible if approached by any one who they thought might represent this government. Mexican officials may not be very strong patriots, as we understand the word, but they certainly all agree in their hatred of the American government. So, while there may be men on the inside—probably are—who, for a sufficient consideration, would let slip the secret in some quarters, they would want to feel sure that those quarters did not represent Washington."

"You would suggest?"

"The same tactics as when you were there in 1913."

"Universal Oil?"

"Exactly. You are already identified in the minds of some Mexicans as a representative of Universal Oil, and Universal Oil has had its finger in some of the internal affairs of Mexico during the past four years. There are Mexican patriots who would hesitate a long time before selling a secret to the American government who wouldn't pause a moment if they thought they were giving their information merely to that corporation. They take it for granted that Universal Oil does not run to the president with what news it gets."

Braxton allowed himself a moment's

digression from the immediate business in hand.

"It is odd," he said, "how firmly the public is convinced of my connection with the Universal, considering that I don't own a share of that stock, and never did."

"An illustration," the chief replied, "of what a newspaper reputation can do. Your father is a director of the Equity Trust. The Equity Trust has a community of interest with Universal Oil. You travel to and fro, seemingly an idler, yet sufficiently alert and active, so that it appears hardly probable you have no business interests; also, it would hardly be expected that your father's son should waste his time. The newspapers, which cannot overlook any of the activities of the rich, guess that, perhaps, you are concerned with the inside affairs of the Universal. The Universal does not deny it, because it never denies anything. So the myth grows and grows, until to-day you are Braxton, the Universal Oil man. And I must say it has proven a very valuable asset to the service, that reputation of yours."

"The queer thing is that on more than one occasion, in this work, I have run up against secret agents of the Universal, and they have never seemed to know for certain that I was not also one of them."

"The company's policy of never letting its right hand know how many fingers on its left hand are closed. It is the same policy that we in the service follow sometimes—in your own case, for instance. How surprised some of our men who know you quite well, without suspecting your real business, would be if they should learn that you are also an agent of the department! Of all those now at work south of the Rio Grande, for instance, only one, I think—Payne—is aware of your real position."

"None other that I recall—or, at least, that I know is now working in Mexico."

"No. None of our people now south of the border, except Payne, ever heard of you in connection with this office. Let us hope we may be able to keep our relations as close a secret for the next five or six years as we have been able to during the past five or six. Of course, the time might come on any case when you would have to give the big distress sign in a place where other agents were present; that happened once, as I recall it."

"Yes. In Manila. The number who know my connection with the department was increased that night by three."

"And all of them were promptly warned to forget—and promptly forgot."

Braxton's mind reviewed the near-tragedy, with himself as the principal participant, to which the chief had referred. After a moment he came back to the subject in hand.

"As to cost—on this Japanese note."

"Whatever is necessary. We *must* know what Carranza is saying to Japan, if it is humanly possible. Provide plenty of money; Universal Oil is expected to be shrewd, but not niggardly."

"And you think it possible that Carranza is proposing to Japan that, in the event of trouble on this continent, she ——"

"Let's not think about it at all. We might be right, and we might be wrong, and in either event thinking would do us no good if we didn't *know*. If it means the same as the special trip to Japan Gustavo Madero was planning when Huerta gave him *ley fuega*—you know what was in the wind then—we want to know it. If it means something else, innocent or not, we want to know that. We must have a copy of that note, if it can be secured. You can sail for Vera Cruz to-morrow."

A few odds and ends of detail, a dis-

cussion of finances, and the chief rose and shook hands.

"Don't trust the telegraph," were his last words of warning. "We cannot tell what cipher codes of ours may be in their hands. You know, for that matter, there are mighty few codes of any government that are not in the possession of most or all the others. It may be, by the way, that you will get this Mex-Japanese message in code of some sort. If so, bring it along as it is, and don't worry, unless it is perfectly easy to get a translation as well. We can probably decode it here or at the state department; if there is any cipher in use by the Mexicans that Payne hasn't sent along during the past three years, he doesn't know of its existence. Good luck!"

He threw open the door to the outer office. "Thank you for calling, Mr. Braxton," he said, in a formal, courteous voice that carried to the nearest clerks. "I shall have the matter looked into at the very earliest possible moment."

A fortnight in Mexico City, and now it seemed the task was almost completed. Unless some detail in the plans he and Leroy Payne had so carefully put into execution should fail, the secret note would be in his hands within twenty-four or, at the latest, forty-eight hours.

CHAPTER II.

"MUERTA LOS GRINGOS."

He looked at his watch. An hour yet before his appointment to meet Payne at the American Club. He rose, took his hat and stick from the waiter, and went out upon the avenue.

As he strolled toward the Zocolo, newsboys came running down the street. They were shouting raucously. Pedestrians stopped to buy their papers. Carriage folk also pulled up to the walk to purchase. An extra, Braxton noted, of the most rabid and sensational anti-American daily in the city.

He bought a copy and spread it open. Across the top of the first page, in type whose size and blackness would have done credit to any yellow newspaper in the world, New York not excepted, was a line:

AMERICANOS PREPARANDO PARA INVADIR MEXICO!

The "dispatch" that furnished the excuse for the black headline, he saw at a glance, did not warrant the caption. It was to the effect that Texas gringos were preparing to cross the Rio Grande at Juarez, Piedras Negras, and Nueva Laredo, and it was dated from Saltillo, which not only would be unlikely to hear of any contemplated invasion before other points, but, throughout all the revolutions, has been a prime source of fictitious war rumors.

Mexico City, he at once observed, was hysterical and easily excited. The extra sold quickly. Those who read it passed on the "news" by word of mouth. There were mutterings and gesticulations. A condition might easily arise that could become very unpleasant for Americans.

He did not think of this as having much bearing on himself. Of medium height, with black hair and eyes, and a tongue that rattled Spanish idioms as rapidly and correctly as though they were English, there was little chance of his attracting attention on the street as a gringo. On more than one occasion he had been in swirling, Yankee-hating Latin crowds, without feeling in danger or being in danger. He could easily pass for a Spaniard; had done so a dozen times. He felt, therefore, safely detached from the current of excitement that was pulsating through the throng.

Idly walking, he paused a moment before a jeweler's window and amused himself by noting the seemingly ex-

orbitant prices made necessary by the depreciation of Carranza currency. A sudden shout of warning, somewhere close behind him, made him turn quickly, just in time to witness a street accident of a kind not rare in any great city.

A Mexican of the peon class had started to cross the street in the middle of the block, dodging among the fast-moving vehicles.

A cabriolet of the characteristic Mexican style—wide enough to seat three passengers, with a pair of horses not educated to trot—was speeding past, the whip-swinging driver probably spurred by financial inducements to reach his destination in a hurry. Mexican speed regulations for drivers are admirably simple, being, in effect: "Drive at any speed you please, and on either side of the street you please, and around corners in any direction you please—but always bearing in mind that whenever an accident occurs, all the parties to it will be arrested immediately and punished, including the victim."

The peon's attention had been distracted in another direction, or he failed to gauge correctly the fast approach of the racing horses. As the warning went up from a dozen spectators, the pair was upon him. The driver threw his weight on the reins, but the feet of the horses slid.

What the peon did was lithe and quick, as an Indian might be expected to act. Realizing he could not get out of the way, he turned, placed both hands on the nearer horse's breast, and let the momentum of the animal's advance throw him to one side. This presence of mind would have saved him injury had not a big touring car at that moment started to pass the cabriolet.

The Indian saw the oncoming automobile, but could not regain his balance. He tried to whirl himself out of the way, as the driver of the car threw on his emergency brakes, and failed. The car struck him, knocked him down, and dragged him several feet.

Police efficiency, one governmental thing that is usually worthy of commendation in Mexico City, came rapidly into play.

One policeman had been in sight at the street crossing a hundred feet away; three more materialized from nowhere in particular within the next minute.

Of this quartet, one arrested the driver of the cabriolet, ordered its passengers to alight, pay their fares to that moment, and depart about their business, and settled himself in the cab with a curt command that he be driven to the nearest police station. Another made memoranda of the number of the automobile and the names of its occupants, and ordered them all to appear before officialdom. A third swaggered in the middle of the street, driving the accumulating crowd back to the sidewalks, and straightened out the jamming traffic in a jiffy. The fourth pursued the scratched and bruised Indian, who had rolled and crawled to the sidewalk, and was making shift to hobble away, placed him under arrest, and started him limping toward a cell.

With these four things accomplished —and not three minutes was needed to complete them all—the crowd brought its collective eye back to the spot where stood the two erstwhile occupants of the cab, their luggage at their feet, peering out to discover a vacant carriage, and fuming at the delay.

They were an elderly man with white hair, and a younger one with reddish hair, and the crowd took them for Americans.

"Thus rich Yanquis trample on the poor!" called a voice far enough back in the press that its owner was reasonably certain to escape the remaining policeman's eye.

"Rich Americanos! Gringos! They

trample on the poor!" The sentence spread from mouth to mouth. A more daring Mexican shouted half-heartedly, as though willing to take it back if unsupported:

"Muerta los gringos!" Death to the gringos!

The cry was taken up by others, less half-heartedly:

"Muerta los Americanos! Muerta los gringos!"

The policeman was at the side of the two men, who saw the threatening peril. The elder addressed him in passable Spanish:

"We are British subjects, my son and I. We are leaving the city. We wish a carriage."

The shouts of the crowd were gathering volume. The crowd itself was being steadily augmented. Braxton was jostled from his position before the jeweler's window by two men, probably the proprietor and a clerk, who had come running out of the store, and now set to work quickly to pull down and lock the heavy metal shutters provided to protect the show windows in just such an emergency. Other shutters in the neighborhood, he noticed, were already closing with an alacrity that testified to recent practice with street mobs, and appreciation of how speedily they can go into action.

Only the little policeman seemed oblivious to the gathering danger. Often in less turbulent days Braxton had admired the fine efficiency of the undersized, underpaid Mexico City police; again he felt appreciation of their calm assurance in time of trouble.

The officer spoke a sharp, reassuring sentence to the Englishmen. He turned and faced the crowd quietly, almost jauntily.

"Back!" he commanded sharply to those crowding in the gutter. They fell over themselves and milled, muttering and threatening, to either side.

He raised his left hand in signal to an approaching cab, containing one male passenger. His right hand rested lightly on the butt of his revolver, which hangs in plain sight outside the uniform blouse.

The cab stopped. "There is room for two more passengers," the policeman ordered. "Take them, quickly, to their hotel or station. You do not object?" he half queried the well-dressed Mexican in the carriage.

"Certainly not. Let us hasten, in the name of the saints!"

The Englishmen threw their bags into the cab, and fell over them to places on the wide seat beside the Mexican. The driver whipped up his horses. The little policeman, a sneering smile curling his lips, his hand still resting lightly on his pistol, waved contemptuously with his left hand to the crowd to disperse.

At exactly this moment, two doors down the avenue, a girl came out of a little store, the window of which was filled with embroidery and laces. She must have been ignorant of the disturbance, else surely she would not have faced it. She came out, saw the swirling, disappointed mob, and turned quickly to reënter the store. But the proprietor, who had accompanied her to the entrance, becoming suddenly aware of the danger, most ungallantly slammed the door, locked it, and pulled down an interior iron screen.

Braxton saw that she was obviously an American, well dressed, and good to look at, and that her hair was reddish gold. More than this he had no time to note, for the angry crowd, cheated a moment before, and having had time to think that, after all, there was only one policeman present, surged toward her. Again sounded the bay of the hounds:

"Muerta los gringos!"

They had swung in twenty deep between the policeman and the girl, and the little officer was pushing and shoving, snarling and threatening bravely

enough to get to her side, but making small headway in the crush. He got out his whistle and blew it shrilly. Already, however, Braxton had leaped in front of the girl, who had her back against a building, facing the hooting crowd, with white face, but a stout bravery in her bearing that won a flash of admiration from Braxton's subconscious mind. His conscious mind was busy with the problem of how best to help the girl without getting himself into a police tangle. He reasoned, in the second or two it took him to reach the girl's side, that she was probably in danger of no greater harm than insulting words. Help would come in time to prevent actual violence. A street crowd in Mexico is necessarily unarmed, except for the matter of small knives, and police reënforcements would be on hand shortly. He need not really mix into the situation.

Thus he reasoned. Then he acted in direct opposition to his reasoning.

He swung a hard fist into a dirty face that was grimacing too close to the shrinking girl, and as the owner of the face went toppling, held himself ready to repeat the dose as indicated by the necessities of the case.

"Keep away, hombres!" he shouted authoritatively, in his perfect Spanish. "You are mistaken! This lady is no gringo, but English. I myself know her. She is my friend and my family's friend."

"What does he say?" they asked on the outskirts of the crowd.

"Who is it that shouted?" demanded one shorter man, who was running about the outskirts, vainly trying to see.

"The gentleman. He has the manner of a general."

"What is it?" asked others. "What is it?"

"Don't you hear? The general says she is not a gringo!"

"Viva general!" shouted somebody. Many in the crowd caught up the cry. It is unsafe not to "viva" a general. One who failed to cheer might find himself under suspicion of having taken part in the riot against the general's friend.

They had begun to cheer and to fall back as the little policeman, more ragged of uniform than before, tore through the last restraining wall of humanity that separated him from Braxton and the girl. He had caught the cry of "general." The crowd, seemingly, had recognized a celebrity with whose face he was not yet familiar. After all, there are many generals.

Braxton smiled down upon the officer and spoke a word of commendation, such as a military man under such circumstances might have given a policeman. He did something even more to the point when he slipped into the officer's hand two bank notes, each bearing the denomination of one hundred pesos. Even in United States money they were worth four dollars, and the policeman's lot in Mexico City is neither a happy nor a prosperous one.

A sharp bark of command at the back of the crowd, and it opened, widened, and let through a trotting half hundred soldiers. At their head was a young captain, pale-faced, clean-shaven, neatly uniformed, with shining teeth and manicured hands. The uniforms of the fifty who followed him were tattered, and most of the men were barefoot, but they were seasoned fighters—Mexico City gets the veterans of the armies of Mexico—and their guns were held in a manner that denoted they would willingly use them.

The pale-faced young captain looked quickly from the policeman to Braxton and the girl.

"It is over. These people were excited and thought the lady was a gringo. She is of the English." The policeman made the explanation rapidly. "She is a friend of the general."

Before the captain could reply, Braxton spoke smilingly, yet with authority:

"Your name, captain?"

"Francisco Garcia."

"Thank you. I shall see your prompt arrival is reported where it may help you. And now"—he turned to the girl—"we will proceed."

The captain, who also realized that no one could be expected to know all the dignitaries of a shifting government even by sight, saluted. Returning the salute, and smiling courteously at captain and policeman, Braxton took the girl's arm and walked briskly along the sidewalk. The crowd, beginning to disperse, paid little attention to him or his charge. Already the captain was giving sharp commands, and the soldiers were falling in to patter back to what place of vantage near the center was being used as their barracks.

Throughout all the scene, the girl had not spoken. Now, as they drew out of earshot of the policeman, Braxton asked:

"Where shall I take you? We had better go there quickly, before anything else gets started."

The girl flashed a look of surprise at him. It had not occurred to her, any more than to the other participants in the incident, that he was not a Mexican. She had not heard him speak except in Spanish.

"I am stopping with relatives at the Hotel Presidente."

"We will leave the avenue at the next street. I don't always introduce myself as informally as this. My name is Braxton—Waite Braxton."

"An American?"

"Guilty!"

"But your Spanish accent! They were perfectly sure you were a Mexican. I speak the language; *I* was certain."

"Complexion, tan, and a boyhood partly spent in Spain. The combination makes it easy to deceive. Really no credit to me at all. We might go through here to the Avenida Dieziseis de Septiembre."

As they briskly crossed the avenue and turned in the side street, Braxton, without seeming to stare, gained his first comprehensive look at his companion. His first impression, that she was rather good to look upon, was heightened by this survey. She was, he thought, extremely restful to the eye.

She was fairly tall, of trim and rounded figure, and with a swing to her carriage that led him shrewdly to guess she could play tennis, and perhaps ride and swim well. About twenty-four he judged her to be, which would make her five years his junior. Her thick hair, as he had already noted approvingly, was a dark gold, full of glints of red, and the cheek that was within range of his vision was of that peculiar creamy whiteness that sometimes goes with hair of that tinge.

He had not seen her eyes. What color were they, he wondered? Blue, probably, or gray. He decided upon gray. They ought to be gray, anyhow.

"I haven't thanked you," she was saying. "Don't think I do not appreciate it."

He laughed lightly. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I don't think you were in any real danger. The little captain and his soldiers were there almost as soon as I was."

"It was dangerous enough," she replied. "Perhaps they wouldn't have hurt me much, but having one's clothes torn, or being pushed about by dirty-handed *pelados,* would not be especially pleasant."

It was a singularly cool attitude toward her recent predicament. Most girls—even self-reliant American girls—would be on the verge of hysteria after so harrowing an experience. He eyed her admiringly.

"You have nerve, Miss——" He hadn't intended this as a hint that he did not know her name, and hesitated, a bit embarrassed.

"Lynde," she supplied. "It shows my self-possession isn't as good as you think that I haven't told you before. Esther Lynde. My home is in Washington. Are you a Virginia Braxton?"

"We are a branch of the Virginia family. My people have lived in New York several generations, however."

The girl suddenly turned her eyes to him. He rather thought they were grayish blue. "I think I have read of you in the newspapers," she said. "You travel a great deal, don't you? You are connected with—is it Universal Oil?"

"A man cannot hide his identity these days," he laughed, "even under black hair, a tanned skin, and a Spanish vocabulary."

They approached the open entrance of the Hotel Presidente. "I should like to have my cousins meet you—Mr. and Mrs. Carson. They also will want to thank you for what you did," she said. "But they are out this afternoon."

"If I might call?" he murmured.

"Really, there's nothing else to do."

"Nothing—er——"

"Doesn't the rescuer of a maiden in distress always call afterward? You *couldn't* stay away. It would be contrary to all tradition."

"I knew it was that way in books, but there are so many things in books that aren't so. So the custom obtains in real life."

"The best authorities agree it does. You can bear it in mind the next time you go knight-erranting," she added.

"My excuse for ignorance is that I have been lacking in opportunities," he said earnestly. "I shall never overlook them again."

They were in the lobby, and she gave him her hand and spoke seriously.

"At about half after eight then," she said. "And I am truly deeply grateful."

He decided her eyes were bluish gray.

CHAPTER III.

UNDER FOUR FLAGS.

Leroy Payne sat before the roll-top desk in his inner office, on the third floor of a centrally located business block. In the outer room a stenographer of mixed blood, able to take dictation very competently in Spanish, and very shockingly in English, read a novel, and from time to time patted her hair complacently, stenographers being stenographers wherever their habitat.

The outer door bore the announcement, in Spanish, that Leroy Payne was the Mexican representative of the New York-Mexico Development Company, making a specialty of selling Mexican lands, and of managing them in the interests of United States owners. Such an occupation gave him the opportunity to do many things along lines of investigation without attracting attention or arousing suspicion. He could always decline clients on the ground that their work would conflict with other interests by which he already had been retained.

Investigation in New York, if any one ever desired to make it, would demonstrate that Mr. Payne was a graduate of Harvard Law School, a lawyer authorized to practice in the courts of New York, and the vice president of a real corporation, with offices in lower Broadway. The investigation would not have brought out, however, the additional fact that Major Simmons, the corporation's president, was also a valued agent of the secret service.

There had been enough bona-fide business conducted by the office in past days to cloak its real operations, and, while it was true that, since the procession of Mexican revolutions, Mr. Payne had bought no new lands for his

American clients, he, nevertheless, had ample excuse for remaining on the job in Mexico, in that things had happened on lands whose owners he already represented, calling for negotiations with the various governments as they held power.

Mr. Payne, on this spring afternoon, seemed no busier in his inner office than was his stenographer in her outer one.

He was a short, thickset, good-natured-looking young man, with thinning light hair, faint beginnings of what in middle age undoubtedly would be a double chin, and spectacles with tortoise-shell rims. Not at all a man who would be picked in a crowd as the secret agent of anybody.

He sat tipped back in his desk chair, his eyes fixed thoughtfully on a spot in the sky some miles beyond the glistening dome of the National Opera House. He was not thinking of the graft that has left the massive marble structure half finished, although something like twice the necessary amount for its completion has been appropriated and spent, nor of the great crack in its polished walls that an unusually heavy earthquake caused, nor of the National Opera House at all. He was not even thinking of that distant spot in the sky beyond at which he stared. His mind was over in the National Palace on the Zocolo, and he was wondering what a certain stout, dark-skinned, black-bearded assistant in the department of foreign affairs was doing at this exact moment. The gentleman in mind, one Florencio Calderon by name, and colonel by rank, had promised, if all went well, to call him by telephone at four o'clock, and it was now well past that hour.

The telephone bell tinkled in the outer office, and a second later there was a tap on his door, and the stenographer opened it. "The telephone, señor," she said.

"Bueno!" he called into the receiver. The voice of Colonel Calderon replied.

There would be no secrets told over the line, for Payne's stenographer probably was listening in his outer room, and the switchboard operator in the National Palace might be plugged in, with nobody knew how many others. All this, however, had been provided for.

"I am Colonel Calderon," came over the wire, in Spanish.

"Yes, colonel. How is your health?"

"Very good, thank you. I have on my desk a letter from you, Señor Payne, asking information regarding the unpaid back taxes assessed by the government against certain lands in Tamaulipas, whose owners you represent."

"Yes?"

"I have compiled the figures. If we could have a brief talk, I feel sure I could make the justice of the claim clear to you."

"At your convenience, colonel."

"You are anxious for the information quickly, your letter says."

"As soon as you can find it possible, señor."

"Yes. Well, I have it for you. I am to be detained here at the palace for some time, but if you could find it convenient to meet me this evening——"

"The pleasure will be mine."

"As my family is out of the city, I am stopping temporarily at the Hotel Presidente. Could you call—and at what hour?"

"Any hour you suggest."

"Suppose we say quarter of nine, or a little after. You might come right up, if you will. Room No. 81. It is on the third floor."

"Thank you. Between quarter of nine and nine."

"Adios, señor."

"Adios, mi coronel."

Payne permitted himself a sigh of relief and a smile. He looked at his watch, took his hat and stick, told the

stenographer he was going for the day, and set forth in the direction of the American Club.

Waite Braxton was already seated in a corner of the lounge when he entered. No other members or guests were within earshot.

The two men shook hands as though meeting by accident, for the benefit of eyes that might be watching, and Payne accepted Braxton's invitation to be seated with him and drink something cooling. Not until the waiter had brought the drinks and departed did they refer to the purpose of their meeting.

"Calderon phoned. O. K.," said Payne.

"He has it?"

"Evidently. He said he had 'the information' I requested. I am to meet him at the Presidente to-night. Room No. 81. For some reason he does not want me to come to either the palace or his house. Afraid of spies, I suppose. Well, here's to Broadway! You'll be seeing the old street again within a fortnight. I wish I could."

Braxton set down his glass and smoked for a moment thoughtfully.

"It will be in code," he said. "Calderon has no way of getting access to the key without letting others in on it, which he thought would be too dangerous. Also, he would have had to split."

"How did you happen to arrange that he should give the message to me instead of to you yourself? I didn't think to ask you Sunday, when you were telling me of the conference."

"It was his suggestion—partially. He said Obregon trusted nobody fully—that no attaché of the government knew when he was being spied upon. He had already met me once, and he feared, if he did so again, he might fall under suspicion. Of course, he is perfectly sure I am representing the Universal Oil Company in the matter, although neither he nor I mentioned the company by name. You see, there doesn't happen to be any official matter in his department that he could use as an excuse if he were asked to explain what business he and I had.

"So he asked me if there wasn't any one in the city that I could trust to act as a messenger—some one with whom the department had had correspondence or negotiations. I thought it over carefully and suggested you, saying we were personal acquaintances, and I knew you to be a trustworthy man, and that I thought you would be willing to act for me, the interests that you represent not being in any sense counter to those with which I am connected. He fell for this immediately, saying you would be just the man, because somebody or other had engaged you to file a kick about the new Carranza tax levies on lands, and that a meeting with you would therefore be easy to explain.

"It's exasperating that I couldn't put this thing through myself," said Payne, "but I told the chief in the report Williams carried out a month ago that the Japanese note was coming, and I didn't believe I could get hold of it. Calderon was about the only man we stood a chance of getting to, and while I feel sure neither he nor any other official suspects my connection with the government, the companies I represent are not big enough or sufficiently concerned with international affairs to be buying important secrets for their own use. Universal Oil is something different. It is expected to take a hand in all Mexican developments. And, right or not, most Mexicans would not expect the Universal to be especially patriotic."

"Universal Oil has come to be a big machine," said Braxton gravely. "A corporation has no soul. And yet I believe most big business men are at heart just as patriotic as anybody else. My father is a holder of securities in a great many corporations, but if such a

note as we presume this Japanese message to be were to come into his hands, I know he would take the first train to Washington with it, absolutely without regard to what the effect might be on his personal fortune."

"I have often wondered, if it isn't too personal, how much your father knows about your occupation, Waite, and what he thinks about it."

"He knows all about it. That is to say, he knows I am in the service. What I do he never asks, and, of course, I never tell him. As to what he thinks about it, he objected seriously enough when I first went into the work. It seemed to him—well, perhaps the word is 'undignified.' And thankless, he said. And offering no future. But I argued that I did not need a 'future,' in the money-making sense, and that the work was certainly no more undignified than picking up information in devious ways about rival banks and corporations, and that a young man in my position, with a love of travel and a taste for a little adventure, might do worse than serve his country."

"So he ceased to oppose you?"

"I was of age, he said, and he would not stand in my way. Do you know, I have always fancied the old man is rather—well, proud of me. He's a pretty hard man in business, and they call him 'Bull Braxton,' because of the way he roars down opposition—but they don't know him as I do. And you may remember that a Braxton signed the Declaration of Independence."

"I notice you didn't include, in his reasons for objecting, the fact that our trade is sometimes a little dangerous. I imagine, from what I have heard of your father, he wouldn't consider that."

"His war record was a fairly good one," replied Braxton, with a note of pride in his voice.

"Speaking of danger, do you expect to go back to the States alone?"

"Yes."

"That would be a pretty hazardous trip, if some of our little slant-eyed brethren were to get wise to what you were carrying."

"You're certainly right. They're a thorough little people. Are there many of their secret-service men here just now?"

Payne shrugged his shoulders. "Who can spot a Jap in government service? Tell me, if you can, the total Japanese population of Mexico City, and I'll guarantee the total of Japanese spies isn't any greater than that. Further than that, deponent saith not."

"Let us trust they get no line on us. Nevertheless, I promise to keep my eyes open all the way home for urbane little yellow men. I may ask you to ride down to Vera Cruz with me, so there can be a pair of us in case of trouble. Once out of Mexico, I think I can look out for myself. What time is your appointment with Calderon?"

"Quarter of nine or thereabouts. I suppose he'll have the copy ready to hand over in a hurry. Do I pay him? What arrangement did you make?"

"On the spot. Thank goodness, he doesn't insist upon gold, and I have the necessary cashier's check. I brought several, to fit various prices and contingencies. The colonel must be salting money in the States; he made no objection whatever to getting it that way. I'll hand you the check in my room, when we go to dinner."

"And I'd like to see you as soon as possible after the meeting, and turn the papers over. I hate to have the responsibility for them a minute longer than it will take to pass the buck to you."

"Shall we say here, at eleven o'clock?"

"All right. Where are you going to be earlier in the evening, if I should need to get you?"

"By a peculiar coincidence, at eight-thirty I am to be at the Hotel Presi-

dente. I have a call to make there—purely social."

Payne may have looked curious. "I met a young lady who is stopping there, this afternoon," Braxton explained. "Miss Esther Lynde. Know her?"

Payne's face registered interest. "Why, yes," he said. "If you don't mind, Braxton, who *is* Miss Lynde?"

"I don't get you. Is there anything—peculiar—about her?"

"Not peculiar. Mysterious, perhaps. I thought you said you knew her."

"No. I met her for the first time this afternoon." Very sketchily, and without taking as much credit upon himself as Payne felt sure he was entiled to, he recounted the circumstances.

"Then you cannot relieve my curiosity," said Payne. "I rather hoped you could tell me who the young lady is, and why she should visit Mexico City at a moment when most Americans with sense—especially young, good-looking, unattached ones—are making tracks to get out."

"Then she hasn't been here long?"

"Two or three weeks, I should say; perhaps a month. I have met her at various places. Dinners and such. Very attractive. Well traveled. Fluent linguist. Guarded by Mr. Carson and Mrs. Carson, who are—just Mr. Carson and Mrs. Carson, guard of honor for Miss Lynde. But I don't know anybody who knows any more about her than I do." He hesitated. "Unless it might be Von Arnoldt," he added.

"Von Arnoldt! Captain von Arnoldt! The——"

"Uh-huh! You know him, I see."

"We had a bit of a run-in two or three years ago in Buenos Aires, but he never knew my participation in it. What is he doing here?"

"Keeping his eyes open, as usual. I have my personal ideas that he has been doing some underground work in connection with this Japanese note, but just what you can figure as well as I. It depends on Germany's position, and we don't know what that is.

"For six weeks it has been common gossip on the inside that Carranza—or Obregon—was getting ready to dispatch a special ambassador to Tokyo with an important note. General Valdez is the ambassador, and he and his brass-bound staff left last Saturday for New York, en route to Japan. That rumor proved true. There has been another rumor that important negotiations are in progress with Germany, and that some sort of a note is to be sent there, also. This may be true, and it may not; no ambassador has been appointed, of that we are sure. So we do not know positively that there is to be a note to Germany, and if there is, we certainly do not know whether it is to be along similar lines to that sent Japan.

"Now, figuring that Von Arnoldt has something to do with this particular situation, we have three guesses—one about as likely to be correct as another.

"If Germany is to get a similar note to the Japanese message, perhaps Von Arnoldt came here to receive it; Obregon might not want to send a special messenger to Germany openly, with the submarine issue still hanging fire between Berlin and Washington. Second: If Germany is behind the Japanese notes, as is entirely possible, perhaps he came here to steer the working of it. Third guess: If the notes are not on the same subject, or if they are supposed to be similar, but Germany is afraid of the well-known and justly celebrated Mexican double cross, maybe Von Arnoldt is on the same errand that you are—trying to get a copy of the Tokyo letter. So there you are!

"Nominally, he arrived in Mexico City five or six weeks ago to represent some German mining interests that have

a concession in southern Coahuila. He is just plain Herr Arnoldt—isn't using either the 'von' or the 'captain.' By George, I don't envy him one way! It must be embarrassing, these days, for a German, who is serving his country under cover like that, not to be able to explain why he is staying away from home, with so much fighting going on."

"But what makes you think Von Arnoldt might know more than other people about Miss Lynde?"

"Nothing, really, except that they are together considerably. He pays her a good deal of attention, and she seems to like to be in his company. Nothing in the slightest degree unconventional, you understand, even by Continental standards. Perhaps it is merely that they are congenial. She speaks German like a native; lived in Berlin some time, I believe. And Von Arnoldt is a very able person. I fancy he attracts most women when he sets out to."

Braxton inspected an accidental smoke ring that was ascending from his cigar.

"She mentioned that her home is in Washington."

"Yes. That, also, led me to wonder——" Payne laughed shortly. "Lord, Braxton! What suspicious minds this game of ours develops. Here is a pretty American girl who hasn't seen fit to take us into her confidence—having met you for ten minutes, and me for perhaps an hour and a half in the aggregate. She associates, in an entirely proper way, with a German secret-service man. We have no reason to think she is aware he is in the service; in fact, for all I know, you and I may be the only living souls in Mexico outside the German diplomats who do know it. She lives in Washington, which contains a few hundred spies and three hundred and thirty thousand other people. So we begin to wonder if, perhaps, she isn't connected in some manner with our own interesting profession."

"Suspecting everybody has served us all well more than once," maintained Braxton. "But you are right. It can be carried too far. Miss Lynde did not impress me as being at all that sort, if you know what I mean. No, I should hardly believe it."

"Nor I," replied Payne. "I certainly have nothing on which to base any such belief. I was only—wondering."

Braxton blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling.

"I never liked that fellow Von Arnoldt!" he said.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE THIRD FLOOR.

At eight-thirty to the minute, Waite Braxton sauntered from the street into the Hotel Presidente, and requested a clerk to send his card up to Miss Lynde. He took a seat near the desk, not far from the bulletin board upon which is posted, for all who run to read, the names of all occupants of rooms in the hotel.

He noticed, as he passed the board, that the name of Colonel Calderon appeared there, assigned to room No. 81. Presumably the colonel could have exercised his governmental pull to avoid the operation of this police regulation, if he had wished. He was protecting himself by apparent frankness.

Casually glancing at the other names, Braxton observed that F. Arnoldt, of Mannheim, was also registered as a guest. The German was assigned to room No. 112, on the fourth floor.

Like most Mexican buildings, public or otherwise, the Hotel Presidente was built around a patio, or central court, which, in its case, was covered with glass, and formed the main lobby of the hotel. Standing in the center of the lobby, one could look up at the huge skylights, five stories above, and on all

sides the court was surrounded by balconies, off three of which opened rooms. The fourth side was occupied in the middle by the elevator and on either side by a staircase that circled about it.

On each floor, on the side opposite the elevator and stairs—that is to say, toward the front of the building—the balcony was very deep, and was provided with a library table and easy-chairs, while about the walls, filling the spaces between doors opening into guests' rooms, were cushioned seats. These balcony spaces served as the public parlors of the house.

The ground floor of the Presidente had but one entrance—the front. Not only the guests and the employees and the servants, but the groceries, the provisions, and the coal came in through that main entrance, which possessed a door of oak and steel that could be shut and barred at a moment's notice, making of the hotel, with its thick walls and high, barred ground-floor windows, something very like a fortress. Such construction is not unusual in Latin countries, where street riots are always to be reckoned with; in Mexico City it is the rule rather than the exception.

Braxton, who had never been in the Presidente more than three or four times, noted these things as he waited for the page to return.

The boy came back promptly and reported to the desk. At the clerk's signal, Braxton rose.

"Miss Lynde," said the clerk, "will be down to the second floor in a few minutes. Will you be good enough to wait there? The boy will show you." He added apologetically: "I regret you will have to walk up the stairs. Our elevator had a slight accident, and stopped running a few minutes ago. The engineer reports it will be all right in a half hour or less. In the meantime——"

Braxton nodded understandingly to the clerk and followed the page up the stairs. The balcony on the second floor was unoccupied. The boy gestured a smiling invitation to choose whichever seat looked the most comfortable, pocketed his tip, and returned to the office.

As Waite passed around the side balcony to the wider front one, he raised his eyes and observed that the elevator was stalled near the top of the shaft. The elevator door at the fifth floor was open, and the cage hung so that its top was at the entrance level. On the cage a man was working—engineer or elevator attendant evidently. He crawled out, picked up a tool of some sort and a handful of waste as Braxton looked, and returned to his tinkering. Braxton's impression, as he caught this glimpse of the workman, was that he was a Japanese. When he reached the broad balcony at the front, and selected a chair in a group of several, the elevator was outside his range of vision.

Across the shaft, where he could see the head of the first stairway and the foot of the second, there came into view a moment later a dark, bearded face, set above a round, heavy body. Colonel Florencio Calderon, puffing from the unwonted exertion, was climbing to his third-floor room to keep his appointment. He rested for breath a second at the head of the first flight, and continued out of sight up the second, without looking toward Braxton.

Perhaps five more moments passed, and down the stairs from the floor above came a woman dressed in white. Before she had descended far enough for him to see her face, Braxton knew it was Miss Lynde. There was an unusual swing and freedom to her carriage. He rose as she completed the flight, looked across the shaft to where he awaited her, and came to him around the side balcony.

She was hurrying, and as she extended her hand, she was somewhat breathless.

"I am afraid I have made you wait!" she exclaimed. "Not being on time is a fault I try to avoid. My cousins will be right down."

He murmured the usual bromides in such cases made and provided. Miss Lynde, in a simple evening gown, was even better to look upon than she had been in street clothes that afternoon. The reddish glints in her hair were emphasized by the electric light. There were spots of color in her creamy cheeks. Braxton noticed that the pupils of her eyes were dilated. He hadn't observed that in the afternoon, but then he had had little opportunity to study her eyes. With pupils enlarged, as they were now, he thought, and in the eveing, their color was neither gray nor blue, but of a deep pansy shade.

She was talking vivaciously. "I came by Cousin Mary's room, and told her she was late," she said, "and she replied they would be right down. Wasn't it a beautiful sunset? We drove out to Chapultepec. You have been there at sunset, of course? Ixtlacihuitl and Popocatapetl were in plain sight to-day. Who could believe those old sleeping volcanoes were eighty miles away? Have you ever been to Orizaba?"

Waite made monosyllabic replies as required, but there seemed little need for him to talk. She rattled on, touching subject after subject. He had not thought, that afternoon, that she was a young woman likely to be nervous in manner or speech; he would have to revise that opinion. She did not possess quite as much poise as he had expected.

She sat facing the stairway, and frequently turned her eyes toward it. "They are coming!" she exclaimed finally, and he rose with her and went forward a few steps to meet the Carsons—a quiet, prim, colorless little man of forty to forty-five, and a quiet, prim, colorless little wife of about the same age.

Mrs. Carson, who was "Cousin Mary," took Braxton's hand and said in a perfectly correct manner, with just the right amount of courteous emphasis, that she wanted to thank him for his service to Esther. Mr. Carson shook hands with equal cordiality, and added his thanks.

Then, with an air that was almost as though their duty for the occasion had been completed, the Carsons subsided into chairs, and Miss Lynde resumed her vivacious conversation. Braxton himself was a good talker, and he found his wits busied in keeping up with her shifts of subject. So nervous a brilliancy was a quality that surpassed him.

He was enjoying himself. Only occasionally does one meet a young woman who combines beauty of face, figure, and mind. Miss Lynde had them all to a marked degree. A most attractive girl!

The stairways were within the range of his eye. Into view, descending from the third floor, came dress shoes, highly correct dress trousers, a white waistcoat, and expanse of shirt front—and the face of Fritz von Arnoldt. The German was clean-shaven—the upturned mustaches that Braxton remembered as emphasizing his military caste when they had met in Buenos Aires were gone—but in other respects he had not changed. Erect, pink-cheeked, blue-eyed, of distinguished manner, he was a man to look at twice. Also, Braxton knew by experience, a man to consider very seriously as a factor in any international matters with which he was concerned.

As he crossed from the foot of the second flight to the head of the first, Von Arnoldt looked across and saw them. He raised his hat with pleasant cordiality, and Miss Lynde and the Car-

sons bowed. If Von Arnoldt recognized Braxton, if he even noticed him, he gave no sign, but continued leisurely down to the ground floor.

The talk ran on—of the sensational rumors of the intervention that were making possible such experiences as Miss Lynde had undergone that afternoon, of people and things in New York and Washington, of changes in Mexico City since the Madero revolution. Braxton lost track of the train of conversation for a few seconds, as Leroy Payne ascended the stairs and disappeared toward the third floor. Payne did not seem to glance in Braxton's direction.

Barely two minutes had elapsed, and Miss Lynde was saying something about the absurdity of paying twelve pesos for a bunch of violets in the flower market that has a reputation for being one of the cheapest in the world, when Payne came down the stairs. He was leaping—two steps at a time—and his face was startled and pale. He went on down to the ground floor. Why was he leaving so soon? Why was he in such a violent hurry?

A moment more, and Payne reappeared, returning upstairs. A clerk was hurrying beside him, and the manager of the hotel, a stout, elderly man, toiled behind. Then, after a very short time, there came two policemen, guided by an obviously excited page.

"There seems to be something unusual," ventured Mr. Carson mildly. "It looks as though the police were going to make an arrest."

"If we were in New York, we would be crowding to take a look-see," said Braxton, trying to speak lightly, although he could not but feel that whatever had happened was likely to have a bearing on his own fortunes. "Here it is usually better to allow the police to do their work without undue curiosity."

Miss Lynde was staring at the stairs. Her eyes were widened. For a moment she pressed a hand to the corsage of her dress. Seeing Braxton's eyes upon her, she dropped it.

"Isn't it exciting?" she said, and laughed—a little unnaturally, he thought. "Such things always set me fairly atremble."

He could not make it out. She herself had passed through a very harrowing experience that very afternoon, and he was willing to swear that when he had taken her arm to conduct her away from police, soldiers, pale-faced Mexican captain, and dark-faced Mexican mob, she had trembled not at all.

A buzz of confusion came from the floor below. Involuntarily they all rose and stepped to look over the balcony rail.

A squadron of police—not less than twenty men—was filing in through the single entrance of the hotel. The officer in charge was giving sharp, quick orders. No person was to be allowed to leave the hotel. No one should pass from one floor to another.

Policemen came running up the stairs. One stopped at the head of the first flight. The others continued on higher.

"Whatever it is, it looks as if it might be serious," said Braxton.

"Dear me!" remarked Mrs. Carson, almost placidly.

Mr. Carson was leaning over the balcony. He called over his shoulder:

"Esther! Here comes Colonel—— What is his name, Esther? He was at the Alburns' dinner."

"Colonel Mitze," she answered, identifying an alert, white-mustached man in full uniform, who had elbowed his way in through the door, and seemed to be making quick-pointed inquiries. "He is with the foreign-affairs department."

The new arrival exchanged a few words with the police officer in charge, and together they came up the stairs. At that moment the hotel manager, the clerk, Leroy Payne, and the two police-

men who had been the first to go up came down the second flight. They met Colonel Mitze and his companion on the second floor.

"Good evening, colonel," said Payne. "I am tremendously glad to see you."

"Good evening, señor. Step this way, please."

Mitze, Payne, policemen, manager, and clerk came around the side balcony to the place where Braxton and his acquaintances were standing. The colonel recognized Miss Lynde and the Carsons, and bowed abstractedly. He turned brusquely to Payne.

"Now, señor!" he said. "Tell me as quickly as possible, please. Just how did it happen?"

The American replied promptly and steadily:

"I had an appointment with Colonel Calderon at a quarter of nine o'clock or thereabouts, in his room. He had told me to come up. I did so. The door to the room was ajar. He was on the floor, dead. The knife was still in his heart."

CHAPTER V.

A VANISHED NOTE.

Esther Lynde, at Braxton's elbow, gasped audibly. Her face was white; her left hand was pressed to her side; her eyes, horrified, were fixed on Payne's face; she swayed.

"Hadn't you better sit down?" Braxton advised her solicitously. "I am afraid we cannot leave here for some minutes."

"I am all right," said the girl, getting control of herself with an effort. "It startled me—a murder so near us—I am all right."

Payne was going on with his brief story:

"I stepped into the room—just long enough to see that I could be of no help—and ran downstairs to notify the hotel people. They sent for the police and went back to the room with me."

"Was any one on the third floor when you went up?"

"No one."

"Did you meet any one coming down the stairs? I am informed Colonel Calderon had not been in his room more than ten or fifteen minutes."

Payne seemed to hesitate, to try to recollect, but only for a breath. "No one," he said.

Colonel Mitze turned to Braxton. "Who are you, señor?" he asked.

"My name is Braxton—Waite Braxton—of New York."

A flash of recognition lit the colonel's eyes. "I have heard of you," he said. "How long have you been in the hotel?"

"I came in at just eight-thirty. The clerk had me brought here."

"You have been on this floor all the time? Do you—did you know Colonel Calderon?"

"Yes."

"Were you here when he went upstairs?"

"Yes."

"Was any one with him—or did any one follow him?"

"He was alone. I didn't notice any one else going upstairs afterward until I saw Mr. Payne."

"I have been facing the staircase most of the time"—it was Miss Lynde who spoke—"and I do not recall any one."

Colonel Mitze turned to her. "You knew Colonel Calderon?"

"By sight, yes."

"And you also were here when he went up?"

She paused almost inappreciably. "Yes."

"Who has descended the stairs since then?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Carson came down."

Mitze addressed them. "Did you meet any one on the stairs, or on the third floor, or did you hear or see anything unusual there?"

Mr. Carson replied in halting Span-

ish: "I don't think we saw a soul from the time we came out of our room until we got here." In English he added, "Did we, Mary?" and then translated to her what he had said.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Carson. "It's hard to think. Esther came to the door and said she was coming down, and we followed as soon as we could. I don't remember meeting anybody, or seeing anybody."

"We are searching all the rooms on the third, fourth, and fifth floors," said the police official in charge, "and rounding up the servants. It isn't likely the murderer has escaped." He turned to Payne. "What was your business with Colonel Calderon?" he asked. "And how did you happen to go up without being announced?"

"I am the Mexican representative of the New York-Mexico Development Company," replied Payne. "We have charge of the business of a corporation —the Hacienda Les Esperanza—which has lands in Tamaulipas. There have been certain taxes against these lands to which the owners protested. I filed the protest with the state department, and asked for a speedy reply. Colonel Calderon telephoned me this afternoon and kindly offered to discuss the matter with me if I would call at his room here. He told me I should come right up."

The police officer looked inquiringly at Colonel Mitze. That officer spoke. "I happen to know that all this is true," he said. "I have seen the correspondence. I know that only to-day Calderon was preparing the figures to give Señor Payne. Furthermore, I was in Calderon's room when he telephoned Señor Payne and made the appointment."

Braxton sighed with relief. When Colonel Calderon so carefully built up this chain of circumstantial protection for himself, how little he realized he was proving the necessary defense for a man who might fall under suspicion of being his murderer!

The policeman took a few sheets of paper from his blouse and handed them to Mitze. "Would these be the figures Colonel Calderon was to show Señor Payne?" he asked.

"The same," replied Mitze, after a glance. "Where did you get them?"

"Our first act was to search the body. These were in the breast pocket of his coat."

Braxton, with an effort, repressed his desire to put the question that logically followed. But Mitze asked it:

"Were there any other papers?"

"None that seem to be important. An old letter or two. A small notebook with memoranda of appointments—including this one with Señor Payne, by the way. Nothing else."

"Had the body been robbed?"

"In his pockets were his watch, something over a thousand pesos in currency, and eighty dollars in United States gold. His studs and rings were untouched."

The police official, as Colonel Mitze seemed for a moment lost in thought, turned again to Payne.

"How long were you upstairs?" he asked.

Payne smiled and shook his head. "It's hard to say. Just long enough to walk up slowly, go into the room, turn around, and come down very fast."

"That is true," put in the hotel manager. "Señor Payne and I stood a moment conversing beside the desk before he went up. He left me, ascended the stairs, and—pronto!—he was coming down again."

"You can safely eliminate Señor Payne from your theories," said Colonel Mitze, with some impatience. "I tell you, I knew all about this appointment of his with Calderon."

The police official bowed. "It is my duty to exhaust all inquiries," he said.

A policeman came down the stairs

and approached his superior. "We have gathered all the servants in the house," he reported. "Most of them were in their rooms in the rear of the fifth floor. They are being taken to the ground floor in the elevator."

"When did the elevator start running?" the hotel manager asked his clerk.

"Kaju must have just got it fixed," was the reply. "I seem to remember he was still hammering above the cage when we ran upstairs with Señor Payne."

"This elevator man. Where was he?" asked the police official. "What was he doing?"

"At the top of the shaft. He had been working there an hour or more. It got out of order about eight o'clock."

The official turned to a policeman. "Bring the elevator man here!" he commanded.

At this moment the elevator passed the second floor, descending, filled with weeping, gesticulating, protesting servants of both sexes, herded by policemen. It ascended and made another downward trip with a similar load. Then it came up to the second floor, and the policeman who had received the order came forward with a short, wide-shouldered Japanese.

The man, who looked to be young—in his late twenties, perhaps—was in overalls, and very dirty. There was grease on his hands and grease on his face. Braxton, shrewdly eying him, and having some ability to size up people of that race, noted that his complexion was comparatively light and his head well shaped. He faced the police officer and Colonel Mitze stupidly.

"Your name?" demanded the officer.

"Kaju Kimohoto. Excuse. I do not speak Spanish so good."

"Where have you been the last hour?"

"Elevator is stopped. I make repairs. There." He pointed up and across the covered patio to where Braxton had seen him at work.

"See or hear anything unusual? See anybody down below—on the third floor?"

"No. I am at fifth floor. On elevator. I am making adjustment of shoes. It is small repairs. I do not need to call machinist. I am elevator man; make good small repairs. When elevator shoes need to be——"

"Enough! You heard no sound—no unusual sound? You saw no one running? Did not some one come up the stairs from the third floor, a little while ago, to the fifth floor?"

The Oriental's face was blank. He shook his head vaguely.

"I did not see. I did not hear. I am on top of elevator; I cannot see unless men pass me close. I am sometimes perhaps making noise with hammer; there are nuts that are to be loosened. Elevator needs to have shoes adjusted. It is small matter, so I can fix."

"That's all," said the officer. "Go wash your hands and face, and get back to the car. Maybe we shall want to see you again in the morning."

He turned to Colonel Mitze. "Will you come down with me while we question the servants?" he asked. The colonel nodded.

"Are we free to go?" asked Braxton. "Or is there any assistance we can give?"

The police official answered courteously: "Thank you, no. We will not inconvenience you further. If anything should arise that we need you—you," to the Carsons and Miss Lynde, "are guests here, I understand." To Payne: "I know where to reach you." He turned to Braxton. "And you?"

"At the American Club."

"Bueno! I wish you good night."

He and the colonel, followed by the manager, the clerk, and the other policemen, hurried downstairs.

"I think, if you will excuse me, I will go to my room," said Miss Lynde. She had recovered much of her self-possession, but was still paler than was natural. "It has been a strain. That poor man! He went upstairs, alive and well, and a few minutes later——"

"These are war times," Braxton reassured her. "And this is the capital of a country in revolution. We will leave you, then." He addressed Payne. "Walking toward the club?"

"I am walking toward the nearest place where I can get a strong, satisfying drink of American liquor," declared Payne. "It shook me up a whole lot."

As Braxton took Miss Lynde's hand to say good night and murmur that he hoped he would soon see her again under pleasanter circumstances, only a long-practiced habit of self-control enabled him to remain cool, smiling, and suave. Three or four times during the evening she had inadvertently pressed her left hand to her side. Now, as she rose, there protruded ever so slightly from her corsage the corner of a thick white envelope. This, of itself, would have seemed strange. But to this was added something more startling, if not sinister. The paper was stained reddishly. Not brown, as is the stain of old blood, but bright red, like new.

And she had told Colonel Mitze that she came down the stairs before Calderon went up.

Braxton and Payne walked briskly to the club. They did not discuss the evening's tragedy on the way; one could not tell what spy might catch a word.

The moment they found seats in a corner of the lounge, Payne made good his threat to fortify his nerves with stimulant. The waiter served the drinks and went his way. Then——

"You didn't get it?" said Braxton.

"No. I shut the door and went through his clothes like lightning—I appreciated the importance of getting out quick and giving the alarm before time enough should have elapsed for me to be suspected of it. And I found —exactly the papers the police found afterward."

"Then whoever did it——"

"Took the papers. And he wasn't robbed of anything else."

"It was quick work. The murderer must have been waiting for him, either in the room, or just outside, ready to follow him in. And a beautiful get-away."

"Braxton," said Payne, "the police don't know why he was killed. The state department doesn't know. But you and I know. Now, who did it?"

"We've got two guesses."

"You mean Japan and Germany."

Waite nodded.

"And that means the elevator man or Von Arnoldt. I didn't mention to the police, Waite, that I met Von Arnoldt at the foot of the first flight of stairs. He came down from the third floor after the murder was committed."

"Yes," said Braxton. "I saw him."

"Did Miss Lynde see him, too?"

Braxton hesitated. "I think so."

"But she said nobody came down from the third floor except the Carsons after Calderon went up. See here, Braxton! This is a twisted tangle. I never would expect Von Arnoldt to go quite as far as that, but you never can tell. Ought I to have mentioned meeting him, do you think?"

"If I did, I'd have mentioned it myself. No. If Von Arnoldt got those papers, we don't want them turned over to the police or the Mexican state department. Then the fat *would* be in the fire. We want him to keep them—until we can get them away from him."

"You mean?"

"If Von Arnoldt killed Calderon, or if somebody else went to get those papers for him, had to use his knife to make a get-away, and turned the papers over to Von Arnoldt, then Von

Arnoldt will be heading for Germany just as soon as he can, won't he? If he leaves Mexico, I'm going with him."

They sat in silence for several minutes. Payne finally spoke:

"Calderon whitewashed himself with Mitze, all right, and fixed himself a perfect defense in case he ever got accused of doing business with us, but *somebody* in the department knew he had copied that Japanese note."

"That might apply to either Germany or Japan. They're both mighty efficient."

Another period of silence. "If Von Arnoldt leaves for New York, you're going with him," Payne finally said. "All right! What had I better do? Now, I mean. To-morrow. To-night."

"Get one of your underground friends to check up the captain's plans. Find out when he is going, and how. And get me word, quick."

"I'll get busy, right away. Say, old man, I'm terribly disappointed. I thought we had it all fixed."

Braxton smiled grimly. "I'm some disappointed myself," he said. "But the game isn't played out yet." He rose. "I want to get off by myself and think it over. *Hasta mañana.*"

Hours passed before sleep came, and when it did, it was a restless sleep, peopled with the same problems that had kept him tossing wakefully. Sudden tragedy; policemen; an erect, distinguished, smiling Prussian; stalled elevators; an Oriental face peering over a balcony; a vanished secret note on which might hang the destinies of nations; and a beautiful girl, with golden hair and pansy eyes, pressing a hand to her side against a thick envelope, its corner stained—not brown, as with old blood, but red, as with new.

While Waite Braxton was vainly seeking sleep, and Leroy Payne was setting in motion the underground machinery of which he was the engineer, a little, wide-shouldered man, with the resignation of the fatalistic East in his slanting eyes, sat in his room at the top of the Hotel Presidente, composing a brief letter. It was in the Japanese language, but in Roman characters—not Chinese ideographs—as becomes the correspondence of a modern son of Nippon. When it was finished, he blotted it carefully, addressed it to an amiable Japanese who for years had conducted a curio store in the Avenida San Francisco, and mailed it. It read:

HONORABLE EXCELLENCY: With deepest expressions of regret I have to report that I have failed in the humble mission so honorably intrusted to me. I therefore beg your permission to make such reparation and amends as are becoming to a descendant of Samurai, which I shall do if I have not received your commands to the contrary before to-morrow night. Most deferentially I salute you.

CHAPTER VI.

VON ARNOLDT GETS A SMOKE.

On the ground floor of the Hotel Presidente was convened an informal court of inquisition. The officer of police presided, assisted by Colonel Mitze. Before them came servants, clerks, guests, visitors at the hotel. Each was examined as to what he had seen or heard that might have a bearing on the tragedy in room No. 81.

After an hour of diligent investigation, the sum of the information was this: Colonel Calderon had ascended to his room shortly after eight-thirty. Shortly before nine, Leroy Payne had called there and found him dead. The knife with which he was killed was a plain, ordinary knife, such as one Mexican out of any ten might be expected to carry. It had no identifying marks. There were no finger prints in the room; no bloodstains outside the room so far as had been discovered. Calderon had not been robbed.

That was all. In other words, after an hour of questioning, the police stood exactly where they had stood sixty minutes before.

Room No. 80, on one side of Calderon's, was assigned to a man and his wife, visitors from Guadalajara. They had left the hotel at seven o'clock, to dine with friends. Room No. 82, on the other side, was unoccupied and locked. Room No. 83 was Miss Lynde's, and No. 84 was occupied by the Carsons. Other guests, whose rooms were on the front of the third floor, were, without exception, absent from their rooms when the tragedy occurred.

There were among the servants two or three whose characters and records had become a matter of police knowledge; and although there was nothing to connect these in any manner with this crime, they were bundled off, protesting, to the police station.

Soon after ten o'clock the guard of police was relaxed, and the Presidente again came into possession of its normal management. Colonel Mitze shook hands with the police official in charge as that individual prepared to follow his subordinates back to headquarters, and said that on account of the lateness of the hour he believed he would telephone his family not to expect him home, and secure a room for the night there in the hotel.

He did this soon after. "Somewhere above the third floor, if you please," he smilingly requested. "I am not superstitious, but——"

"On the fourth?" suggested the clerk. "I can give you No. 114, on the fourth floor, front."

"Excellent!"

Colonel Mitze soon after retired. An hour later there came a cautious rap upon his door. He opened it quickly, to find Captain von Arnoldt upon the threshold.

"Good evening," said the German. "I wonder if you could accommodate me with a cigarette. I find my case empty, the stand downstairs must be closed long ago, and I am an unfortunate slave to tobacco."

"With pleasure," declared the colonel cordially. "Come in, señor. I should be honored if you would visit a few moments and smoke with me. I have been sitting in thought. The recent stirring events make me wakeful."

Von Arnoldt bowed, entered, and the door closed.

Colonel Mitze, however, made no move to offer his late guest cigarettes. He crossed the room to an open window, leaned out, and surveyed the fire escape below, above, and to each side. It was empty. He noted that a window was open in an adjacent room, whereupon he closed his own window and the wooden blinds. Von Arnoldt meantime had stood silently in the middle of the room.

Satisfied that they could neither be seen nor overheard by eavesdroppers, the colonel drew a chair to the center and motioned the German to another near at hand. He spoke cautiously:

"A strange coincidence, Señor Arnoldt, that I should have arrived here on my errand to meet you just after the death of my poor friend, Calderon. I noticed you were within hearing when I engaged this room on the same floor as yours. If you had not come to me very soon, I should have come to you, but I was waiting. I thought meeting here was better."

Von Arnoldt bowed. "I feared the incident had upset our plans."

"Only temporarily. We could not go on with them naturally, while the investigation was in progress. Besides, I hoped to be able to help get at the bottom of the mystery of his death. He was my friend. He has been my assistant since I entered the department."

The German's face expressed sym-

pathy, but he remained silent. Colonel Mitze sighed.

"Well, his sudden end, poor fellow, cannot be allowed to interfere with matters of state that have to be done." He unbuttoned his waistcoat and took from an inner pocket an envelope. "Here is the communication. You propose, I understand, to place it personally in the hands of the highest possible authority."

"The foreign secretary, at least. Perhaps the emperor," replied Von Arnoldt simply.

"Good! It is in Spanish. There was no way we could reduce it to any code that would leave it still in force as a communication between nations. There is a certain risk to handing it to you in such a form."

"No one shall see it until it reaches Berlin—unless I am dead," said Von Arnoldt gravely. "And, even if accident befalls me, I think no one will find it. I do not boast, colonel, but this is not the first secret message that has been intrusted to me—and the others did not fall into hostile hands."

"I know. We are familiar with your record, and the trust that is reposed in you in Wilhelmstrasse."

He handed the German the packet, which Von Arnoldt placed carefully in an inside pocket. Von Arnoldt broke the silence that followed.

"Is it permissible," he asked, "to tell me, for my personal information, whether this message is identical in contents with that which General Valdez is carrying to Japan?"

"That question, señor, is answered by the note itself. The form differs somewhat. They bear similarly on the same subject. You understand there must naturally be some divergence—Japan and Germany being at this moment on opposite sides in the present unfortunate hostilities."

Von Arnoldt rose to his feet. "I shall try to leave for Vera Cruz day after to-morrow morning." He looked at his watch. "No," he corrected, "to-morrow morning—it is already past midnight, and another day. Should I have any trouble getting my passports viséd, or otherwise in making plans, I trust your office will facilitate me. Be assured I shall not call upon you unless it is necessary."

"I think it will not be. Foreigners with clear papers are not having trouble leaving the country just now—not even Americans. However, you have only to get me word——"

"I thank you, colonel. And now, as I shall not see you again—at least on this visit—let me thank you for your courtesy and kindness. And will you express my sentiments of deepest consideration to your most distinguished chief?"

"It will be a pleasure. He would have done himself the honor to place these papers in your hands in person, but it was better that I, a subordinate—and not at the palace——"

"I appreciate the position perfectly. And so, my dear colonel, I bid you good-by, and hope the negotiations we have been honored in furthering will advance to the mutual advantage of our beloved countries." They shook hands and bowed deeply, in the Continental fashion. Then, from his own case, he took a cigarette, lighted it, and stepped to the door.

"You have given sleep to one who otherwise might have remained wakeful for who knows how many hours," he laughed, as he threw open the door. "What was it the American humorist wrote? 'A woman is only a woman, but a cigarette is a smoke.'"

"The pleasure, señor, has been mine," replied Colonel Mitze. "I wish you calm nerves and pleasant dreams."

Whether or not this wish came true, there was nothing in Captain von Arnoldt's appearance, as he appeared downstairs before eight o'clock the fol-

lowing morning, to indicate that he had not passed a comfortable night. He entered the dining room with his accustomed erect jauntiness, breakfasted heartily and leisurely, and then, at the hotel desk, announced to the manager that he would be giving up his room on the following morning, after which he engaged a cab and called at the railroad ticket office and upon the proper officials for the viséing of his passports.

He completed these errands at a little before ten o'clock. At ten-fifteen, Braxton, who had not fallen asleep until nearly daylight, and was busily making up for it, was awakened by Payne.

"Up, thou sluggard!" commanded his visitor. "While you saw wood, Rome burns!"

Braxton rubbed his eyes and sought to rouse himself completely. "Lord! Look what time it is!" he exclaimed. He threw water on himself, and his thoughts became coherent. "What's that about Rome burning? What's happened?"

"Nothing, yet. But my underground has just reported that our Teutonic friend takes the train for Vera Cruz to-morrow morning. There is a sailing the following day for Havana and New York. Something tells me you are about to take a long journey."

Braxton began to dress hurriedly. "It almost seems like leaving the job to go away with Von Arnoldt on the chance that he has that note," he said, after a few moments. "After all, what we are supposed to do is to get a copy of it—not stop Germany from doing so. I wonder if I am making a mistake. I wonder if I oughtn't to stay here and try to get another copy from some other Mexican than Calderon."

"I don't know from whom," confessed Payne. "And if I find there is somebody else that can be touched for it—well, it won't take you but ten days to get back here, and it's as easy to get into Mexico as it is to get out—sometimes easier."

"In the meantime, Leroy, it's a cinch you are safe in adding Mr. Kimohoto, of the Presidente, to your list of foreign attachés. He may have had nothing to do with that affair last night, but that complexion and forehead do not fit his apparent stupidity."

"Correct!" said Payne. "And there are a lot more of them. Make a list of Japanese residents in a foreign country, and you have a fairly correct list of Japanese spies. And the duke would become a dishwasher, if the elder statesman said so. You can't beat that! And, speaking of hard things to beat, how are you going to get that message, if he has it, away from Von Arnoldt? He's some able citizen, that hombre!"

"I don't know. Sufficient unto the day. If he leaves the boat at Havana, that's one thing. If he goes on to New York, that's something else again. I think I'd rather he went on to New York, and I've got a hunch he will. It is easier to get into Germany through Sweden than any other way, and there are boats from New York to Stockholm. And now I'm going to have two cups of coffee, *not* Mexican style, and hustle out to see about my tickets and passports."

"I'll see you here at the club about noon; perhaps my underground will develop some more information. By the way, Waite, do you often play a hunch like you're playing this one?"

"As a matter of fact, I don't very often play them at all," replied Braxton, seriously ignoring his companion's jocularity. "But the hunch I've got that that document Calderon had is going north on the boat with Von Arnoldt is very, very clearly defined."

Early the following morning, Braxton, accompanied by Payne to see him off, entered the railroad station and

prepared to board the train that climbs the mountains about Mexico City, and then, in a few hours, drops eight thousand feet down to the sea.

The details of preparing for the journey had taken nearly all his time the preceding day. He had called at the Presidente late in the afternoon, and asked for Miss Lynde or the Carsons, only to be informed they were all out. He left his card, with a brief penciling that he was leaving the city, and regretted not seeing them again. It was a disappointment; he felt singularly attracted to the girl, notwithstanding their divergent paths of duty, and the evidence of his own eyes and reason.

Now, as he stood in the station, he could not help thinking of her and wondering if fate would ever bring them together again. He hoped it would; grimly he thought that people in their business usually meet again sooner or later, if the Reaper spares them long enough. Witness, as illustration, his present journey just to be in the company of Fritz von Arnoldt, whom last he saw in South America.

From a carriage, preceded by a *portero* loaded with luggage, came Von Arnoldt, at this moment. He saw Braxton and Payne, and approached them, smiling.

"Good morning, Mr. Payne," he cried, in excellent English. "Am I to have the pleasure of your company down to the coast—perhaps out onto the bounding main?"

Payne shook his head. "I am sorry to say I am still condemned to exile from my home, my native land," he laughed. "My friend Braxton is going. Let me make you gentlemen acquainted. Mr. Braxton, Mr. Arnoldt."

"If I am not mistaken, we have met —some time ago," smiled the German, shaking hands cordially. "It was—in Buenos Aires, if I remember correctly. Yes. In Buenos Aires. About three years ago, Mr. Braxton. You were on a business trip, as I recall it. I saw you several times."

"I remember you very well, indeed," agreed Waite, with a proper degree of warmth. "*Very* well." He knit his brows. "I do not recall your business. You had interests in one of the German banks, did you not?"

"I transacted considerable business with several of them, although I was not exactly interested." Waite hoped he had succeeded in impressing Von Arnoldt with the fact that he had forgotten his connections on the South American occasion, which would also imply that he did not remember either his title of "captain" or prefix of "von." "You, as I recall it, were at that time with the Universal Oil Company."

"That's what it is to be connected with an octopus, Waite!" exclaimed Payne merrily. "You can't escape being identified with it. The only thing that has saved Braxton from being muckraked," he explained confidentially to Von Arnoldt, his eyes twinkling, "is his youth and otherwise good character."

The German laughed. "I had feared I should be lonely on my journey. This is a great pleasure."

Braxton opened his mouth to continue the pleasant badinage, but closed it again. Through the portal came Mr. Carson, Mrs. Carson, and Esther Lynde. Miss Lynde looked from Braxton to Payne, from Payne to Von Arnoldt, and back to Braxton again.

"Are you going to Vera Cruz, too?" she cried.

"Yes. Are you?"

Then they both looked at each other's pile of luggage and laughed, and Payne and Von Arnoldt joined in. Braxton thought she looked surprised, but not regretful. "It looks as though we might have, on a trip that I expected would be lonely, a most pleasant and congenial party," said the German. "I was delighted to learn Mr.

Braxton was to be a fellow passenger. Your presence makes the company ideal."

An official announced that the train was ready. The "exploration engine," which would precede the train to make sure that bandits, loosened rails, or dynamite should not interfere with its orderly progress to Vera Cruz, was at that moment leaving. A second train, which would follow the passenger, carrying a company of soldiers in case of emergency, was ready to start. The five entered a car together, bade merry farewells to Payne, and the train moved.

At just that moment the management of the Hotel Presidente was reporting to the police that Kaju Kimohoto, elevator attendant, had failed to appear for duty at the usual hour that morning. His room had been forced, and his body found there. The manner of his death was clear—that gruesome, ceremonial form of suicide known in his native land as hara-kiri.

CHAPTER VII.

AT SEA.

Quite without excitement the train ride to Vera Cruz proved to be. Bandits, if any lurked in the mountain pass through which they journeyed, reserved their dynamite for some more convenient season, when exploration engines and following troop trains should not be so interferingly in evidence.

The time schedule was considerably slower, and the train moved more cautiously than it was wont to do when Don Porfirio's rurales kept peace between the Pacific and the Gulf. And there were relics of war along the right of way—charred ties, twisted rails, here and there the metal of a destroyed freight car. From time to time, through the windows, they could see patches of the new vegetation that has been planted in tens of thousands of spots in Mexico during the past five years, and is the only flourishing crop in all the country in these latter days—the clumsy, rough-made crosses sticking in the ground, which bear not the simplest inscription, but declare, each one of them: "Here a man died!"

These things were there to remind the passer-by that war had been and was, but nothing untoward happened to bring it home to them. The day's journey was pleasantly uneventful.

Von Arnoldt proved a delightful traveling companion, and Miss Lynde was as bright, as sparkling, as vivacious, and as charming as Braxton would have expected her to be. What shock of nerves she had undergone two nights before had not left any noticeable effect. Appraising her at moments when she could not know she was under observation, Waite was unable to see that she showed the slightest sign of any burden on either mind or conscience.

Rather, he would have said her attitude was one of relief—an attitude that she frankly confessed before they had fairly left the railroad yards of Mexico City behind, although she credited her feelings to a different cause than he surmised was responsible.

"Thank goodness, we are leaving!" she exclaimed. "I thought it would be fine and adventurous to visit Mexico, and when Cousin Mary's interests made it advisable that she and Cousin Thomas should come in person to straighten them out, I bullied them into bringing me. But—— Ugh!" She shuddered. "The United States never appealed to me so much in my life as it does this minute!"

"We are not out of Mexico yet," suggested Mrs. Carson. "I wish you wouldn't exult so soon; it seems almost like flying in the face of Providence. For *my* part, if I had really believed sudden death was hanging around cor-

ners the way it is in Mexico, I wouldn't have come. And it might have cost me quite a bit of proppity, too," she added. From which last word but one Braxton identified her as certainly of New England upbringing. A queer character, he thought, to be wandering through a country at war, trusting for protection to a husband apparently as unsophisticated as herself, and a girl.

Then his mind came up sharp, with a shock, against the proposition that the Carsons and Miss Lynde were *not* alone, but under the protection of as competent an adventurer as traveled the Seven Seas. He had almost forgotten their association with Von Arnoldt.

The German more than once expressed his delight at so unexpectedly finding Miss Lynde his traveling companion. Both he and the girl, Braxton had to confess, acted this part with consummate skill. Each had seemed properly surprised at the presence of the other at the station, without in the least overdoing it, and there was nothing in their manner now to indicate that they had any common interest other than pleasant friendship.

There were no difficulties in the way of the party's embarkation at Vera Cruz, and the following afternoon saw them outside the harbor and heading across the waters of the Gulf.

Arrangements were made with the purser for seats at the captain's table, and the first dinner found Miss Lynde, Braxton, and Von Arnoldt there to eat it, a merry, laughing party. Neither of the Carsons were on hand. A sailor would not have called the Gulf swell rough that night, but a landsman might have; the Carsons were not good sailors.

Braxton, whose sea legs were always easily attained and held, experienced a feeling of pleasure when he learned that Miss Lynde was also immune to seasickness. That Von Arnoldt, too, was able to take his three to five meals a day, whatever the condition of the sea, or the shifting angle of the deck, was a fly in the ointment, but not a very big one.

In fact, Braxton felt rather gratified at realizing the German would probably be on deck most of the trip. It might furnish opportunity to learn where he had concealed the cipher which Waite did not doubt had long since passed from Miss Lynde's possession into his. That it might prevent uninterrupted walks and talks with the girl, Braxton also realized and regretted. Yet it could not be said he suffered very serious disappointment; admiration he felt for Miss Lynde, and a certain pleasure in her company, but if any deeper attraction had begun to exist, he was quite unconscious of it. He would have laughed incredulously, had some one with a gift for reading the future told him what spell was about to be worked by those two accomplished slaves of Cupid—Sea Voyage and Propinquity. Perhaps, after he had laughed, he would have set his mind and heart to resist the spell. This, however, as he was *not* warned, is something hidden away forever from all prying eyes in that filing cabinet of the Fates which bears the label: "What might have been."

By the passenger list beside his plate at dinner, Braxton observed Von Arnoldt had again suffered loss to his name. The last letter was missing—by the German's own act, without doubt—and he was no longer recorded as from Mannheim. "F. Arnold, New York City," was the name as it appeared on the ship's register. He had been speaking English exclusively—except when Spanish was necessary—since they left Mexico City. Now, on shipboard, he continued this, and in various other ingenious ways sought to convey the impression to strangers that he was entirely an American—of

German descent, clearly, but, nevertheless, an American.

"One cannot tell the prejudices even of the best-intentioned neutrals, in these days," he laughed. "There is no reason why a German should deliberately emphasize his nationality—especially on the high seas." From which chance remark was born in Braxton's mind an idea that incubated until it helped, some days later, to solve a most difficult problem.

In the test of wits that must be applied before the *Lampasas* should sweep past Sandy Hook, he felt he had one distinct advantage. He knew the personality and vocation of his opponents, while to them he was merely Braxton, of Universal Oil, an agent for big business.

But *did* he know this? He asked himself the question, very seriously, sitting alone late that night in a sheltered corner of the boat deck after most of the other passengers had gone to bed.

As to Von Arnoldt's trade, there was no guesswork. But Esther Lynde? He arrayed what facts regarding her he possessed. They were comparatively few, but they bore out uncompromisingly the suspicion that Payne had voiced when her name was first mentioned in his presence.

In brief, they summed up thus: She was a young woman of unusual self-reliance, unquestioned good breeding, and cosmopolitan training. She had entered Mexico at a moment when few women would have done so; her remark that she had done this because she thought it would be "fine and adventurous" could not be taken at its face value —it implied a lesser grade of intelligence than she obviously possessed. Her arrival in Mexico City had been coincident with the arrival of one of Germany's most able and experienced secret agents; they had speedily become intimate acquaintances; and she was departing from the country with him.

Last—and strongest evidence—was the incontrovertible fact that she and Von Arnoldt had been the only people, with the exception of the clearly innocent Carsons, to come down the third-floor stairs after Colonel Calderon went up them to his death, her unnatural confusion and emotion during the hour that followed, and the red-stained envelope carried in such untimely fashion in the bodice of her dress. This, plus the equally incontestable fact that, as regards her time of coming down the stairs, she had made a deliberate misstatement.

Braxton did not for the briefest second credit Miss Lynde with actual participation in the murder of Calderon. He would have staked his reputation on that. For that matter, he was inclined to doubt that Von Arnoldt had done the actual killing—the man was unscrupulous enough in the service in which he was engaged, but hardly an assassin. Yet who knew that the crime was the work of a deliberate assassin? Was it not equally probable that some plan to gain possession of the papers without violence had gone awry, and necessitated, as the only price of immunity from exposure, the sudden knife thrust? He believed whoever had gained the cipher from Calderon's pocket had very soon afterward intrusted it to Miss Lynde. Further than this, he did not believe her to be implicated. And yet he had to admit that in this feeling of confidence he was letting his heart rule his head.

He could find but one flaw in the indictment.

Why should a young American girl enter the service of Germany at a moment when she might have to choose in allegiance between that country and her own? Or, if she had entered that service when doing its work implied no lack of loyalty to her own flag, why

should she remain in it after its duties involved a choice between two nations, one of them a foreign one? These two questions were to be answered in most natural fashion on the following day; but at this moment Braxton could find no reasonable explanation, unless, indeed, Miss Lynde was only masquerading as an American, and he believed no actress in the world could portray the part so well, unless she were to the manner born. Besides, there were the cousins—colorless Mr. Carson, with his retiring inoffensiveness, and colorless Cousin Mary, with her Yankee talk of "proppity."

But who and what were the Carsons? Two days of close association with the party had clearly convinced Waite that Miss Lynde did not look to them for advice and consent as to what she proposed to undertake. On the contrary, she made the decisions and issued the orders—in the form of requests and suggestions, diplomatically put—and they did her bidding. Therefore it was a justifiable conclusion that they were mere companions of the girl—a necessary chaperon and the chaperon's necessary husband.

And must he count them as active opponents? Were they also in the service of the power by which the girl was employed? He doubted it. He questioned somewhat their actual blood relationship to Miss Lynde, while reproaching himself for letting his suspicions carry him that far, but he did not credit them with sufficient strength of character or intelligence to be playing the great game, except as passive and, perhaps, unconscious participants.

The missing cipher he felt reasonably certain was now in the possession of Von Arnoldt. Two problems presented themselves—to learn where it was and to gain possession of it. Not any more difficult, he thought grimly, than to ascertain the chemical composition of the rocks on the moon's surface and present samples of them before a committee of scientists.

Well, he had eight days and more. Unless the German should spring some change in his program—and Braxton could not see wherein that was probable—he was going through to New York. Eight days to plan and execute. And if everything else failed, he could, in a pinch, wireless the chief, and have the papers seized by the customs officials, although for many reasons, not the least of them the international complications, he would not do this unless every other scheme had been exhausted.

It was during the following forenoon that the one flaw in his indictment against Miss Lynde was proven not to be a flaw at all, and he received from her own lips the answer to his wonder as to how, at this time, she could consistently be in the same service as Captain Fritz.

The sea had fallen during the night, and at breakfast time the boat was almost on an even keel. Not even spray was flying across the bows as they sat —Von Arnoldt, Braxton, and the girl —in steamer chairs, on the shady side of the deck, breathing the balmy air of the subtropics, and watching the little twinkling waves break and spill their miniature crests as the steamship plowed on its course.

A procession of porpoises, a whole family of them, came plunging and diving in follow-the-leader procession toward the ship, and disappeared from view ahead of it.

"They will be playing in front of the bow," the German said. "Did you ever watch them from there?" Miss Lynde smiled a negative.

"It is very interesting," he assured her. "Suppose we go take a look-see?"

The trio climbed down the companion ladders, and made their way around the usual forward-deck obstruc-

tions to the very prow of the ship, where they could look down into the green water that the bow was sweeping aside.

There, sometimes not a yard ahead of the rushing bow, sometimes fairly touching it, were the porpoises. They leaped and turned and dived and squirmed, keeping just ahead of the ship, usually a foot or two under water, but often leaping out of it in curves of wondrous grace.

This is always a pretty sight, and a fascinating one. What passenger in tropical waters has not watched for hours the play of porpoises about a steamer's bow? Miss Lynde was delighted. Her companions, although the sight was not new to either of them, shared her pleasure.

"It is the very poetry of motion!" declared Von Arnoldt. Perhaps because they were out of earshot of any other passengers, or perhaps by sheer inadvertence, because it was the tongue in which the thought had formed, he spoke in German.

"One could imagine mermaids playing like that," Miss Lynde replied, using the same language with what seemed to be equal unconsciousness.

Braxton's eyes were on the leaping creatures below. "You speak German very fluently," he remarked.

"Indeed, yes," said Von Arnoldt. "Almost perfectly."

"There is no reason why I should not and every reason why I should," smiled the girl. "My mother was German, and I was born in Berlin."

CHAPTER VIII.

A WIRELESS STRATAGEM.

Six days, and nothing done. Nothing, that is to say, toward securing possession of the stolen cipher.

This was not because Braxton had not assiduously tried. The cash expenditure necessary to get Von Arnoldt's stateroom and baggage thoroughly searched had been no small matter, and bringing about this highly illegal performance had called for his best skill and diplomacy. But it had failed. Neither in the German's bags, nor hidden in his room, was any sign of the paper, and he had not placed anything whatever in the ship's safe, or checked any package with the purser. This did not surprise the American. He had not really expected to find the document; judging by what he himself would do under similar circumstances, he had not believed Von Arnoldt would have it anywhere but on his person.

So now his problem had become simplified, if "simplified" can be used to describe a problem that still seemed to have no solution short of assault, battery, and robbery by violence. For three days now since the searched stateroom, Braxton had been wrestling with it, considering scheme after scheme, and discarding each as fast as it formed because it seemed more wildly impracticable than the last.

During this time, however, he had not been moping about the decks, wearing on his face a reflection of the worries that were in his mind. He had participated in the life on shipboard like any other passenger, and enjoyed it. Perhaps it is not too much to say that there had been hours on end when his errand had been hardly more than a shadow lurking in the background of his subconsciousness. In fact, the last thought but one before he dropped off to sleep nights was often that he was neglecting his task; that if he were to apply himself more to studying it, maybe he would better find a way to accomplish it. The last thought but one, you notice. Somehow or other, night after night, the *last* thought was invariably of some incident or other that had for its central figure a graceful, firm-muscled girl, with creamy

skin, golden hair that flickered reddish tints, and eyes that seemed sometimes blue, sometimes gray, and sometimes pansy and violet.

Do not understand that Waite Braxton was consciously in love with Esther Lynde. He was attracted by her, admired her, tried to please her, and win the reward of friendly smile or comradely nod; he had no idea of loving her or trying to win her affection; the mere fact of their opposite allegiances was enough to keep his consciousness from this.

Nor was he any callow boy, to go following whithersoever a pretty face might lead. And the very rudiments of the service impress upon its young men the dangers of too close association with all fair damosels, most especially if they be under suspicion of serving some other government.

No, he was not in love with Esther Lynde. He was merely by way of sowing the seed that might later burst forth into such a harvest.

They ate at the same table, read in adjacent deck chairs through long, drowsy afternoons, took part together in the various simple games and diversions that break the tedium of ocean travel, did their mile constitutional about the deck—usually with Von Arnoldt as a fellow pedestrian—each pleasant evening after dinner, stood out under the stars together, talking of many things or falling into those understanding silences that mark the progress of friendship.

Von Arnoldt shared this friendship, but did not endeavor to monopolize it. It occurred to Braxton more than once to wonder if the German were in love with the girl, but he hardly thought so, although it was difficult ever to guess what emotions might lie behind the polished Continental manner. Nor did he think Esther was desirous of being more than friend of Von Arnoldt; he saw nothing to indicate it, at any rate. In fact, if he had been jealously analytical of her conduct, he could not have decided in fairness that she showed any preference for the society of either him or his professional rival.

So the *Lampasas* plowed on toward east and north, past Progreso to Havana, out by Morro Castle again into the sea, and at last toward the stars in the Big Dipper, on the last leg of the homeward cruise.

They lost some passengers at Havana, Mexicans who were seeking the nearest refuge in a Latin land, but they gained more than they lost, and the current language spoken became less Spanish and more English. Many of the newcomers were tourists returning from brief visits to Cuba. These included nobody who was known to Braxton, or who especially interested him or his companions. He, Miss Lynde, Von Arnoldt, and the Carsons remained a coterie sufficient to themselves.

It was at luncheon the day after the inevitable ship's concert that Braxton received the suggestion which he was to act upon a day later to force the German's hand. It was odd that he got it indirectly from the biggest bore at the captain's table. It was not, in this case, that wisdom proceeded from the lips of a fool. What the bore said was not at all wise; but a twist the conversation took because of his maunderings gave Waite his idea.

The weather was clear and calm, and Captain Steele was performing the duties that fall to the passenger master's lot when subordinates may be safely left to guide and control the ship. That is to say, he had ceased for the time to be a navigator, and had become proprietor, manager, and major-domo of a floating hotel. He strolled about the decks, making small talk with the passengers. He presided with grace and jollity at his table, making a few good jokes, telling a few good stories,

harmonizing incipient arguments with tact and diplomacy, and laughing genially at everybody else's witticisms, regardless of their excellence or vintage.

Pity the poor passenger captain at whose table sits the ass, the windjammer, and the bore! He must wish he could smite the fool where he sits, or be called to the bridge to wrestle even with calamity. A West Indian hurricane in the Straits, with the Bahama mud banks on the one hand and the coral keys of Florida on the other, would be a relief to the master mariner who for three days has had to approve the drivelings of the bore who thinks the Lord endowed him with wisdom.

This particular nuisance was a negative individual with a yachting cap, on his first trip outside the United States. One gathered, also, without his saying it, that his idea of the great West was Cleveland, Ohio, and that, if fate should ever take him so far south as Baltimore, Maryland, he would straightway become a professional Southerner, and yell louder than any real Southron at "Dixie" for all the remainder of his life.

A harmless person he was, who would have been inoffensive enough if he hadn't felt it necessary to interject his opinions into every conversation. "The gift of senseless gab," Mrs. Carson called it—a most expressive New Englandism.

When he gave Braxton the idea, he really said very little, because he was tactfully, but determinedly, shut off. The conversation had taken some turn that brought up the subject of flying fish.

"I saw, this morning," said the bore, raising his voice, and then pausing to observe whether all the table was giving proper attention, "a flying fish that propelled itself through the air a distance of at least twenty yards, or perhaps twenty-two or three. I have often observed them do ten yards, or thereabouts, but on this occasion I was able to get a line that measured it. I stood just forward of the smokestack ——"

"Do you think flying fish have any control of their direction when they are out of the water?" Miss Lynde asked the captain, as the bore paused to catch his breath. "Or do they just sail on the wind in the direction in which they happen to start?"

"I don't think they give a lot of thought to where they are going," Captain Steele replied.

The bore must have been going on, despite the interruption, for his voice rose: "And unquestionably a flying fish is the most beautiful fish in the world. I have observed——"

"I think a grout is the most beautiful fish," said a young New York girl.

"The fish have wonderful colorings at Kingston," somebody else put in.

"The true test of a fish's beauty is its taste," declared a well-to-do manufacturer, with twinkling eyes, who often said something when he spoke. "That being the case, I am divided between swordfish and cunners—those big cunners that you get on the Maine coast. They make my mouth water just to think of them."

"I cannot see," remarked the bore, frowning, "how anybody can think a swordfish is a handsome fish, although I must confess I have never seen them except in markets. Now, the flying fish——"

"What do you think is the handsomest fish, captain?" asked the girl from New York.

Captain Steele dropped his napkin and prepared to leave both the table and the discussion. His reply was diplomacy itself; not for seamanship alone had he been appointed to manage an ocean ferry.

"In the little town on the north English coast where I was born," he said,

"they had a song that might apply to that. It began:

"Of all the fishes in the sea,
The 'erring is the fish for me."

Perhaps the bore kept on talking; Braxton did not notice. Two sentences combined in his mind to give him inspiration. One was: "In the little town on the north English coast where I was born." The other: "There is no reason why a German should deliberately emphasize his nationality—especially upon the high seas."

That night, after dinner, he sent a note to the captain, asking to see him privately on a matter of importance. The messenger brought back word that he could come to the captain's room, back of the bridge and chart house.

"Captain," Braxton began. "You are an American citizen, of course, or you would not be commanding a ship flying the American flag. But you were born in England."

The captain bowed in silence, eying Waite speculatively.

"Your sympathies, so far as you can have any, are with the Allies, then, in the present war?"

"I am an American. I have no sympathies. What are you driving at?"

"If you were convinced you could, by one slightly irregular act, truly serve America—even though that act injured Germany—you would do so, wouldn't you?"

"See here, Mr. Braxton. I don't especially like that 'slightly irregular,' and I don't know what you're talking about. I'll listen to what you've got to say—if you'll stop beating about the bush. But I'll remark this: If you're thinking of saying something that is in any way against the interests of the United States, or proposing anything that a steamship master under the American flag might not honorably do, why, you'd better save your breath."

Braxton sized his man. He liked his looks and his talk. "In any event," he asked, "will you regard what I say as confidential?"

"I will if it is proper for me to do so, and if it isn't, you'd better not tell me."

"All right, captain. Listen!" Braxton leaned forward and talked rapidly. At first Steele maintained his appearance of aloof reserve. Then slowly he thawed. His eyes showed interest. He, too, leaned forward. He listened ten minutes, interrupting occasionally to ask a question, at the end of which time he was in possession of as much of the story as Waite thought it necessary to tell to gain the desired cooperation. Braxton had not, incidentally, even mentioned the name of Esther Lynde.

Then the government agent outlined his plan. Several times Captain Steele shook his head negatively. Braxton modified his suggestions to meet the objections. After a time he said:

"Really, captain, all I ask you to do is to allow your man to send the message anonymously, and that you and he keep silent about it, both during and after this voyage. You can do that, can't you?"

The captain considered. "Yes," he said, "and I will. Always subject—if you will excuse a sailor's bluntness—always subject to my finding out that you have deceived me. In which case I shall make it so damned hot for you that you'll wish you hadn't done it."

Braxton wrote a few lines on a sheet of blank paper, handed it to the captain, who read it slowly, and nodded, descended the stairs to the main deck, and spent the remainder of the evening in normal fashion. Long afterward, in the hours when all clear-conscienced passengers might be presumed to be asleep, the captain sent for the night operator from the wireless room. To that young man he gave definite instructions, coupled with threats.

Thereupon blue sparks quivered and zigzagged and ripped and crackled in the wireless room of the *Lampasas*. A young man in uniform, sitting with receivers over his ears aboard his Britannic majesty's ship *Middlesex*, on patrol ten miles southeast of Sandy Hook Lightship, adjusted his instrument to get the wave length, rattled a brief message, and then set out to write what came crinkling through the ether. The officer in charge of the *Middlesex*, a few moments later, was handed the following:

Captain Fritz von Arnoldt, German army, bearing secret documents, passenger on *Lampasas* under name F. Arnold, due to reach Diamond Shoals noon to-morrow, bound New York.

CHAPTER IX.

AN INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT.

Captain the Honorable James William Aubrey came hastily into the wireless room in person.

"Why isn't there any signature to this?" he demanded. "Who sent it?"

"I don't know, sir," replied the operator. "Some one kept calling 'British patrol,' 'British patrol'—in words, not by number, and not this ship by name, so it wasn't any of our people, sir—and finally I asked him what he wanted, without giving our position or number, of course, sir, and he sent this message. I tried to get him to sign it—asked him if he was the *Lampasas*—but he wouldn't reply, sir."

"Devilish funny!" grumbled Captain Aubrey. "See if you can get the *Lampasas* now, by her regular code number."

The operator consulted a book by his elbow. As he looked up from it and reached for his key he said:

"The *Lampasas* equipment gives the same wave length as the message I got, sir, and it sounded just about strong enough to be about ten hours beyond Diamond Shoals." A few moments later he exclaimed: "I've got him, sir!"

"Ask him if he sent us any message a while ago."

A short wait. "He says 'no,' sir."

"Ask him if he minds telling us whether he has a man on the passenger list named F. Arnold, and if he has, where Arnold hails from."

Another interval. "He says there is such a passenger aboard, sir, registered as from New York."

"All right. Thank him and tell him good night."

The British captain stood some minutes in the lee of the bridge, his brows wrinkled, thinking deeply. After a time he went below and into the senior officers' mess, where a thin, eager man, with young face and gray hair, sat eating his lunch before going on watch.

"Randolph," said the captain, "when you were naval attaché at Berlin, did you ever run into an officer named Von Arnoldt—a captain?"

"Von Arnoldt?" Randolph frowned. "It seems to me as though I did, sir. I seem to recall two of them—one in the artillery, as I remember, and the other on some sort of detached duty. It seems to me I never saw that one except in mufti, sir."

"That would be the man. Would you know him by sight?"

"I think so, sir. Youngish chap, as I remember—perhaps thirty-five by now. He was in Berlin a little while, and then off to some place or other. Some tropical place. Perhaps Africa, sir."

Captain Aubrey tossed the warning that had come anonymously out of the air on the table. "Read that," he said. "Then I'll tell you about it."

"What shall you do, sir?" asked Randolph, when he had absorbed the message and heard what meager facts the captain possessed regarding it.

"I'm going to ask permission to stop the *Lampasas*, and send you aboard to

look Mr. F. Arnold, of New York, over. If he is the man you remember in Berlin, and the chief is willing to take a chance on the international complications, we'll take him off. *And* find out what secret documents he's got. Let's see. We're about twenty hours north of Diamond Shoals at easy sailing. The *Lampasas* is about ten hours south of there. If we start down the coast within the next hour or two, we'll meet her easily some time to-morrow afternoon. Daylight, and both of us well outside the three-mile limit. I'll go and work out the message to the chief at once."

"Let's hope he says 'yes,' sir," said Randolph, pouring another cup of tea. "It's been beastly dull on the station the last fortnight, sir."

What little ground swell rolled that next noon was not enough to lift the *Lampasas,* which forged northward as steadily and smoothly as though riding the surface of a pond. To the balminess of southern seas had succeeded the tang of the north Atlantic in springtime. Passengers were all out on deck, enjoying the sunshine and bracing air, but tropical white had given way to heavy wraps, and steamer rugs were wound about the occupants of deck chairs.

Several groups, with field glasses, were standing forward, gazing toward a little, snub-ended ship, with stubby, frame-topped masts, which, being not a quarter the size of the passenger liner, felt the swell and rolled slowly at her anchor chains. They had come near enough so the spectators with the strongest glasses could make out the legend, "Diamond Shoals," painted in white, man-high letters across her sides.

No land was in sight, or would be for some hours. It is more than fourteen miles seaward from Cape Hatteras to where, at the edge of the shoals, the lightship swings to give its perpetual warning of danger, and serve as guidepost for craft that fare along the coast.

The *Lampasas* came up to the lightship and drew abeam. Not more than a half mile separated the moving ship and the stationary one; the passengers on the liner could imagine the expression of wistfulness upon the faces of the light keepers who leaned upon the nearer bulwark and waved their hands. Both ships saluted as the *Lampasas* came opposite.

The second officer, in charge on the bridge, spoke to the helmsman:

"Make her no'theast by no'th, half east!"

"No'theast by no'th, half east, sir!" replied the sailor at the wheel, his eyes not leaving the compass.

The *Lampasas* swung on her new course. Passengers chattered of home and landing and the customs; in less than twenty-four hours they would be docking in New York. Captain Steele, spyglass in hand, remained on the bridge. From time to time he stared through the glass at distant ships and smudges of smoke. It was approaching three in the afternoon when he lowered the telescope, shut its eyepiece with a snap, and set his lips in a tight line.

The time was at hand when he would learn whether he had served his country or committed a great blunder. Rising above the horizon dead ahead, under military masts that showed above trailing smoke, were the gray bows of a British cruiser.

The war vessel came about and headed northward as the *Lampasas* approached, then drew in closer to the American ship, and broke out a string of signal flags.

"They want us to stop and let them come aboard, sir," translated the executive officer, who had been deciphering the message from the international code book.

"All right!" said Captain Steele. He

stepped personally to the engine-room telegraph and swung it to "Stop." "Lower the port gangway!" he ordered.

As both vessels, riding side by side at a distance of barely five hundred yards, lost their momentum and came to a standstill, a launch dropped into the water from the *Middlesex* and came toward the *Lampasas.*

The passengers on the liner had been interested and curious spectators. Word that a warship was in sight had quickly passed from deck to saloons and staterooms, and every one had come out to see one of the vessels that they all vaguely knew were maintaining a patrol off the American coast. When the *Middlesex* came about and ran up her string of flags, interest increased, and with the stopping of the *Lampasas* and the lowering of the cruiser's boat, a feeling of mild excitement pervaded the company.

Braxton, since noon, had been keeping his eyes open for the approaching war vessel. He had felt reasonably sure the commander in chief of the patrol could not resist the opportunity opened up to him by the anonymous radiogram. Nevertheless, a great feeling of relief passed over him when the *Middlesex* finally appeared. From that moment he tried not to let Von Arnoldt out of his sight.

The strategy of his call for the British ship was somewhat involved. He was not at all sure the Britishers would go so far as to make Von Arnoldt a prisoner, with the possibility of thereby developing another "Trent" affair, but if they should do so, he was gambling Von Arnoldt would not take the secret papers with him. This would naturally mean that he would intrust them again to Esther Lynde. And the prime ingenuity of the stratagem lay in this, that Von Arnoldt would not know when the cruiser's boat approached whether or not he was to be apprehended. He would therefore dispose of the cipher *before* the boarding party arrived. Hence, if he observed closely enough, and had a moderate average of luck, Braxton believed he would know, before the closing of the afternoon's incident, exactly where to put his hands upon the package, and its present appearance.

The chance had to be taken, of course, that the German would risk keeping the cipher on his person in the face of possible capture. If this should come about, and if Von Arnoldt should be taken aboard the British ship, there still remained a possibility that England, gaining possession of the cipher, might be willing to show her friendliness for America by allowing agents of the service to have a copy. This, in view of the Anglo-Japanese *entente,* was a dubious possibility, and Waite did not seriously consider it. He was banking, really, on his judgment of men, and his knowledge of Von Arnoldt. The German was too good a craftsman to take so desperate a chance of the documents falling into his enemies' hands, when he could avoid it merely by handing them to the girl.

The *Middlesex* was in plain sight, coming to meet the *Lampasas,* when Miss Lynde came out on deck. Braxton, who had been watching for her appearance, joined her. A few minutes later, Von Arnoldt appeared. He looked quickly in the direction toward which all the passengers' eyes were turned. He saw Braxton and the girl at about the same moment, and came to them.

"A coast policeman, I see," he remarked pleasantly. "I wonder what they are doing so far south. My impression was that the patrol ships kept pretty close to Sandy Hook."

They discussed the approaching gray vessel idly, wondering whither it was bound, making guesses as to its name, speculating on its speed. The German naturally showed the same casual in-

terest as the other passengers, and no more. Not until the *Lampasas* stopped and the launch from the cruiser darted toward them did he have any reason to feel uneasiness. Then, although he could not possibly know that H. M. S. *Middlesex* was personally interested in him, ordinary common sense told him that any German aboard the liner might be in danger.

Neither his courtly bearing nor his pleasant smile disappeared. Braxton, scrutinizing him closely without seeming to do so, sensed a hardening of his eyes, a tensing of the muscles of his jaw, a little white line of determination that appeared at the corners of his nose. He stood, smilingly thoughtful, until the approaching launch was within less than a hundred yards, and the file of armed men as well as the trim, erect, gray-haired officer in the stern could be plainly distinguished.

Suddenly he raised his field glasses and studied the features of the British officer. A shadow that had in it something of fatalism flitted for a second only across his face. He shrugged his shoulders ever so slightly. Then, murmuring a word or two of apology, he turned quietly away.

Braxton thought he was about to go below, and was making ready to follow him, when Von Arnoldt, with his back to the group, stepped into a corner and began unbuttoning his coat. From the appearance of his back and the motion of his shoulders and elbows, Braxton judged he was going deep into the clothing over his breast—certainly inside his waistcoat, and probably inside his shirt.

When he turned to face them again, he was putting something in the outer right-hand pocket of his overcoat. It was dark in color, and for a moment Waite thought it might be a pistol; then he saw the upper corner of an oblong leather case, such as many government attachés use for carrying dispatches. Such cases, Braxton knew, are often heavily loaded along one edge with lead. He gathered this one to be so, as it sagged the pocket weightily.

Still smiling his attractive, courteous smile, Von Arnoldt came back ot their little group quickly, yet without noticeable haste. He lost no time, but touched Miss Lynde's arm. Obeying his touch and gesture, she drew a step aside with him. Braxton could hear a word or two of what he said—spoken in German.

". . . in danger, perhaps. One cannot tell. I have . . ." ". . . and keep it safe until . . ."

He saw Miss Lynde smile up at the German and nod, speaking a word or two that did not reach him. Von Arnoldt's hand came out of his pocket, bearing the case. He slipped it quickly into the girl's hand. She concealed it inside the front of her loose storm coat.

Von Arnoldt and the girl stepped back to where Waite stood looking down at the launch, which was now passing around to the other side of the ship. The conversation and transfer had not taken a minute.

Captain Steele met the officer from the *Middlesex*, and they went up the steps to the captain's room, the file of sailors remaining near the gangway.

Five minutes passed, while the decks buzzed with guesses, probable, possible, and wild. Then Captain Steele and the officer returned down the stairs, and stood for a moment on the starboard side, facing aft. Several groups were along the rail between them and Von Arnoldt. The gray-haired English officer, whose face was young and eager, turned to Captain Steele.

"You need not introduce me to Mr. Arnold, thank you," he said pleasantly. "I know him very well indeed."

Still smiling, he approached the spot where the German leaned against the bulwark, Braxton just behind him, the girl on his left.

"Captain von Arnoldt," he said clearly, "I have to ask you to return with me to my ship."

"How do you do, Randolph?" said Von Arnoldt, as pleasantly as the other. "I haven't seen you for a long time. And I don't think you can do it."

"Why not?"

"I am under the American flag, sailing from one neutral port to another—therefore on American soil. I call on Captain Steele for protection."

"I have already protested, Mr.—er—Von Arnoldt," said the captain, "but this officer says he insists upon taking you off. Of course, I shall enter the circumstance in the log, together with the fact of my protest, and inform the authorities as soon as I dock."

There was a murmur of protest from the passengers. "He can't do it!" was the tenor of their complaint.

The British officer blew a shrill whistle. Two sailors came promptly around to his side.

"I am sorry to put you to this trouble, captain," he said, bowing to Captain Steele. "I am carrying out my orders, however. Our respective governments can settle the matter at their leisure. I ask you to allow me to enter Captain von Arnoldt's stateroom—reserving whatever protest you choose, of course—and take his luggage with us. And now, sir," to the German, "we are holding our good friends off their schedule."

Von Arnoldt spoke to Captain Steele: "I shall expect you to bring this outrage to the attention of the German embassy at once."

A little, white-faced rat of a room steward, English if dialect spoke for anything, had been standing in one of the doorways between deck and saloon since before the *Middlesex* broke out her signals. At this moment his unneutrality manifested itself.

Edging around the knots of passengers to a point not far from the British officer, he squeaked:

"I s'y, sir! Just before you come abahd 'e give a big wallet, looked as if it might be important pipers, to 'er, 'e did!"

The steward's shaking finger was pointed at Esther Lynde. What happened then took not ten seconds.

"Quick! Give it back!" snapped Von Arnoldt, under his breath, and as Miss Lynde seemed to hesitate or not to understand, he snatched the case from her hand, which was holding it in the loose front of her coat. With what amounted to the same motion, so rapid that no one had a chance to stop him, the German flipped his wrist, and the lead-weighted black packet went over the side into the sea.

"Pig dog!" he gritted, in his native tongue, at the steward. Then, recovering himself instantly, he bowed suavely to Miss Lynde.

"Dear lady," he murmured. "May we soon meet again!"

He stood erect, threw back his shoulders, and smiled without a tremor into the face of the English officer, to whom he spoke in that gentleman's own tongue:

"I am at your service, Randolph," and under his breath he uttered a curse.

CHAPTER X.

SHATTERED SYMPATHY.

It was late—nearly midnight. For hours, since the interruption of their voyage by the *Middlesex*, the screws had been throbbing steadily. The sky had become overcast at sunset, and a storm was brewing rapidly out of the northeast, with promise of rough weather before morning. The *Lampasas*, heading into the wind, was rising and falling to the oncoming swell, with spray now and then breaking over her bows.

Sailors had long since gone about the decks, making everything fast in anticipation of a blow. They had taken in all the deck chairs save one, situated quite well forward on the lee side of the ship, which was occupied by a silent, muffled figure.

Braxton had been there ever since the rising sea had sent most of the passengers to bed, and the whistling wind had driven into the cabins the few that gave no heed to bad weather. An hour, two hours, had passed, and he had not moved. He was going over what had passed that day, over and over, and blaming himself. He had foreseen every contingency and provided against it—except one. Why couldn't he have thought that the German might consign his secret to the sea? Why hadn't he done something to prevent it?

When Von Arnoldt gave the dispatch case to Miss Lynde, Waite had counted his stratagem successful. For a few moments he had praised himself—patted himself on the back, he remembered with shame—esteemed himself to be a rather clever fellow. While he was watching the admirable nerve with which Von Arnoldt met the emergency, he was at the same time beginning to plan his next move, by which he should secure the papers from the girl after the German had gone. His *next* move! And that one so poorly planned and executed that Von Arnoldt ruined it with one flip of his muscular wrist!

Except when the ship smashed down into an unusually heavy sea, the deck, on the lee side where Braxton sat, was quiet. Somewhere aft of him a door opened, letting a shaft of light out across a procession of toppling whitecaps. It was a late player leaving the smoking room, and he heard the man's half-serious, half-jocular explanation of his departure to those who remained.

"No, sir," the voice was saying. "I'm going to quit and go to bed. I know when I've got enough. Me, I'm a rotten poker player!"

Some unintelligible repartee and laughter, in which the first speaker joined, followed. Then the door shut, and again there was silence.

"That goes for me, too!" declared Braxton to himself. "I'm a rotten player! I've gummed this game from start to finish. And now that cipher is at the bottom of the sea, and I've got to start back for Mexico City—if the chief will let me—and try it all over again. And all this time lost!"

He writhed in spirit as he saw himself making his report to the chief. Not that he anticipated reproaches, for in advance he knew there probably would be none. "Hard luck!" the chief would say, and plan with him to recoup. The chief would realize he had tried his best. But what good is a best that fails? "I'm a well-meaning young man!" he sneered, thus calling himself one of the worst of names in a world where deeds are measured by success.

He knew he could not sleep, and the rising wind and sea jibed with his mood. He was filled with humiliation and self-reproach. A tyro at the great game, he told himself, could have done no worse.

A figure came forward along the deck. It stood almost over him before he was aware of it.

"Mr. Braxton!"

The voice was Esther Lynde's. In a moment he was on his feet. She declined to take his chair. He stood beside her against the rail, still sheltered from the wind.

She had been unable to sleep. The impending storm, the exciting events of the day, some bit of unexplainable nervousness added to these, she said, made her wakeful. She had come out to walk about in the air. He gathered she had known somehow that he was still outside.

They braced themselves against the rail, swinging with the ship, and stood for a long time. For a while they talked but little. Braxton felt drawn to the girl by a new bond—that of sympathy. She, too, he realized, had borne a loss and a shock in the day's happenings. She, too, was suffering, that night, the pangs of failure.

By and by she began to speak of Von Arnoldt. She wondered what would become of him, whether Washington would set in motion the machinery of protest that would free him, or he was doomed to spend the remainder of the war in some British prison camp. She spoke of the package he had given her, and wondered—as was the natural attitude for her to take—what it contained that he guarded so closely, adding that, in intrusting it to her charge, he had merely said its contents were important to him, and such that he did not want them to fall into the hands of the British government.

Braxton talked these things over with her sympathetically. He felt she was in a mood not dissimilar from his own. She wanted to forget the disappointments the day had wrought, to get away from her thoughts of what might have been done.

He bore in mind, in talking with her, that she did not know he had been aware Von Arnoldt was an officer, and expressed a moderate degree of surprise that the German was now in active service, while saying he had presumed, from the man's carriage and manner, that in earlier years he had done his bit with the military establishment. He made sundry vague hazards as to what might have been in the weighted leather case. Because he felt she wanted comforting—and because, although the necessities of the game had made him do the thing that had brought about Von Arnoldt's capture, he, nevertheless, admired the German for a good player—he spoke most sympathetically of Von Arnoldt's plight, and did not mean it hypocritically.

They were singularly drawn together, that night in the gathering storm. Often afterward the recollection came back to him, with bitterness, of how softened he had felt, how comradely, how attracted by the softness and femininity of her—a woman a good deal alone and in trouble. He wanted to soothe her, to lessen her unhappiness. He did not forget the gulf of duty that separated them; he did not let his sympathy rob him of discretion or loosen his tongue; but he turned his back on the chasm, so far as he could, and thought of her as Her.

If only they served the same culture and ideals, how different, he thought, the future of both of them might be. And but for the gulf that he turned away from, but could not—must not—forget, he would have come near to telling her then that she appealed to him as women had not appealed to him before; for in his humiliation and chagrin, his need for sympathy and love, it had come to him on the wings of the wind that this was a woman of a thousand. But so long as he and she served such different masters, not only his tongue was tied, but even his heart.

Thus softened, he felt a fierce satisfaction in the rising wind and ever-increasing sea. They were together, a strong man and a strong woman, breasting it unafraid. He delighted in the plunges of the ship, which was beginning to buck the higher-rolling billows. He gave no heed to passing time. So long as they stood here together, things would go on, just as they were at this minute. When once they left the deck to go below, life would never be the same. He did not deceive himself; he could not continue to be pleasantly friendly with Esther Lynde, and nothing more. Hence, because more was out of the question, they would part on

the morrow, and he would make up his mind to forget.

A long, curling wave, higher and bigger than any that had come before, rushed down on the ship, which rose to top it, staggered upon its brink, and plunged headlong into the trough beyond. There was a jar and shiver as the bows impacted with the following wave, drove beneath it, and lifted shuddering to shed tons of green water.

Swinging to keep their balance, the girl and Braxton held tight to the rail before them. She reeled a little at the shock of the breaking sea, and he though she had lost her hold, and put out a hand to steady her. It touched her fingers. The contact was magnetic. For a second their hands clasped, then, almost rudely, he snatched his away. If he did not, he knew he should forget the gulf, throw down the barriers, and take her in his arms.

It was some moments after this that she broke the silence. Her voice was low, as though she, too, had felt the emotion that thrilled him at the accidental touch. Her tone was warmer, closer, than it ever had been before.

"Somehow—right now——" She hesitated for expression. "If you had an opportunity to do me a kindness, would you do it?" Before he could answer, she burst out impulsively: "I need a friend. Could you be one? Could I depend upon you?"

The appeal thrilled him. "Whatever I could do——" he said. There was no need for him to finish the sentence; the emotion in his voice spoke for the sincerity of his assurance.

She went on hurriedly, as though her words were forcing themselves to be spoken:

"I have something to do—it is very simple—and I am afraid. I don't know why, but I am nervous. I want you to help me. It is a little thing, but I——"

He could not see her eyes, but he felt them fixed on him.

"When they came so suddenly, this afternoon, and seized Mr. Arnoldt, and he had to give up whatever it was he had, it frightened me. I guess I haven't got over it. I am—somehow—timid, and I am not used to feeling timid. If you——"

She hesitated, then went on with a plunge:

"I have a little package of papers that are very important, very important indeed. If I were to lose them, it would be very serious. I cannot tell you how serious. I hadn't thought it possible I would be afraid to carry them, but there are the customs officials—and others; some one might open the envelope, and great harm might come of it, to—to the people I represent. That experience this afternoon made me realize what could happen if, by some accident, things of that sort should fall into the wrong hands.

"You have said you will do what you can to help me. Listen, Mr. Braxton! Will you take this envelope that I have, and keep it for me until after we are safely in New York? Will you? It is really a little thing—and yet I assure you it is an important thing."

Braxton's mind whirled, but he had to reply. He used language to conceal thoughts, saying the first thing that seemed a plausible remark: "You—you are not asking me to help smuggle something?"

"No. I give you my word it is nothing dutiable."

"Do you want to tell me anything more—as to the character of these important documents, I mean?"

She hesitated the length of time it took the ship's rail to swing through an arc of forty degrees.

"It is a—business matter," she said, in a voice that rang less true. "Yes, a business matter, but a very serious one."

Waite's words were all she could have wished, but his tones, also, had taken a different timbre.

"You honor me by trusting me, and I shall be glad to do it."

"I will give you the envelope to-night, when there will be nobody to see us—it is strange how nervous this has made me—and to-morrow, if you will, after the boat has docked, I want you to meet me just as soon as possible and return it. Say, in two hours after we have landed. I will go my way and you can go yours, after we have docked. I—I might be followed. If you were to return them on the pier or on the street, some one might see it, and something might happen. Then, in two hours, I will be——" She thought quickly. "Can you meet me at the Van Wouter?"

He answered affirmatively, with a word. He must not let her guess a single one of his thoughts.

"In that little reception room near the main dining room," she went on. "I will be there, two hours after we dock, whatever time that may be. We cannot set the hour any nearer than that; this head wind will probably delay us. And, oh, I thank you so much! It is foolish, I know, for me to be so nervous, but you are taking a great load from my mind."

He spoke with what naturalness he could assume, although he felt as one might who has been suddenly immersed in an ice-cold bath:

"This envelope. You have it? With you now, I mean?"

"Yes. When we go in out of the wind I will get it."

"It is getting too rough for comfort. And it is very late. Suppose we go in now."

For a second, in the darkness, she tried to scan his face, as some underlying change in his manner impressed her consciousness. But there was no outward difference in his bearing. She turned, and they made their way to the nearest door, holding firmly to the rail and each other against the increasing violence of the ship's rolling.

She paused with her back to him a moment after they had come into the narrow passageway, and when she faced him, there was in her hand a long, white envelope, as thick as might be necessary to hold a dozen or so pages of moderately heavy letter sheets.

She passed it to him at once, yet he felt as though, notwithstanding the circumstances, her fingers were reluctant to let the package go.

"Please put it in your pocket quickly," she said, "where no one can see it. It is absurd, I suppose—but all this evening I have had the feeling that some one was watching me, planning to steal this from me. Important papers, one can never tell what ends a rival in business will go to to secure them. But, of course, you know this better than I do, being with a big business concern yourself."

Waite bowed his acquiescence. He did not want to speak, to trust his voice. He hardly dared trust his eyes, the muscles of his face. It was with difficulty that he said the natural thing, and said it naturally:

"You may depend upon it I shall guard it as carefully as though it were my own. And—if we have no opportunity to speak about it in the morning—two hours after we dock I shall be on hand to restore it to you at the Van Wouter."

His hand steadying her, she walked to the door of her stateroom. There, in the gloom of a single low-candle-powered globe that lit the corridor, she looked into his eyes again. For a moment he thought she was going to say something of importance impulsively. Then she changed her mind, perhaps, and gave him her hand.

"Good night," she said simply. "I thank you very, very much."

Coming to his own stateroom, he entered, closed the door, and drew from his pocket the package.

It was a plain envelope of stout, linen-backed paper of an unusual size, a trifle larger than such envelopes usually are. Its face was blank, but on the back, across the flap, was written, in bluish ink, the girl's autograph. Fastened with glue to withstand the wear of long journeys, such an envelope is not easily opened. In fact, he noted at once, this one could not be steamed open at all without the process leaving its trace upon the signature.

Turning it over in his hand, he almost expected to see upon its corner a bright-red stain, now growing brown. This was nonsense, of course; the merest amateur could have been depended upon to destroy that telltale envelope and substitute another. But he knew, without the blood smear to identify it, what was inside this package. He was as sure in his heart, as though the contents lay spread before him, that the sheets bore rows and rows of Roman numerals, probably ten to the line, for in such form are practically all national codes. At last, gained in the most incredible manner, he had in his hands the cipher message that had sent Colonel Calderon to his death.

He buttoned the envelope inside his breast and went out on deck again. He wanted to think, and with the tumultuous riot of thoughts that were piling one upon the other in his brain, it was fitting he should thresh out his bitterness of spirit in the teeth of the driving northeaster.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BITTERNESS OF SUCCESS.

Braxton was not one of those fickle souls who, having gained a thing, no longer desire it. And yet——

For weeks he had concentrated his every faculty upon the securing of this message. Its acquisition meant vital things to the country he served. He had planned and schemed and devoted every power of mind he possessed solely to the end of getting this document into his possession. Less than two hours ago, because he thought he had failed, he had wallowed in the deepest depths of self-condemnation. Now he had succeeded—and success tasted more bitter in his mouth than failure.

His emotions during the hour they stood by the rail together came back to him; his sympathy, his feeling of comradeship, the effort he had been forced to make to keep from declaring his love. And all that hour, he now told himself unmercifully, she had been shrewdly playing to make him a cat's-paw.

Of how it had come about that the cipher remained in her hands he could only guess, and his mind worked dully as to that. There might have been two copies, but it would not have been beyond Von Arnoldt's cleverness to prepare an empty case to throw over the side in such an emergency as had arisen. Braxton remembered that Esther had concealed the black leather package beneath her coat from the time the German passed it to her until he snatched it back again to toss it into the sea. Who knew, when it came to that, that the case he had seized from her hand was the same one he had given her a few minutes before?

Why, on the eve of their entrance into port, she had now given the papers into Braxton's keeping was only too clear to him, as he reviewed the events of the day and built up the logical trend of her reasoning.

Neither she nor Von Arnoldt, when they left Mexico, had supposed any one knew they were German secret agents. Von Arnoldt's capture meant, to her mind, that some one had identified him and warned the British patrol —somebody, she would probably pre-

sume, back in Mexico. And if him, why not her? Was it not reasonable for her to think that warning *had* been sent out regarding both? A British patrol ship might take from a neutral vessel an officer of the German army; it would hardly dare interfere with a woman passenger. Would it not be the natural thing, then, that warning, in her case, should be given the United States authorities? And would they not seek to seize her papers when she entered the country, through a search by customs officials?

This, Waite figured, must have been her reasoning. Ingeniously, she had selected him, a well-mannered American, presumably chivalric, to bear her burden through the gates. To accomplish this, she had deliberately established between them the feeling of understanding that had well-nigh swept him off his feet. "And I fell for it," he muttered, "like a boy!"

He stood with set jaw full in the lashing wind. He felt terribly cynical, sophisticated, disillusioned—older by far and more experienced than he had ever felt before.

The ship's bell struck; two o'clock according to landsmen's time. From somewhere on deck there came, torn and twisted in the storm, the call of a lookout:

"Four bells and al-l-l's well, and al-l-l lights lit and burnin'!"

As though the ringing of the hour were a signal, a torrent of rain burst from the low-hanging clouds, while the wind increased and the ship seemed to settle herself to the night's work of shouldering her headlong way through the piling seas. Waite set his shoulders, shook himself, and turned to go below. He had made up his mind to put the matter from him; it was as though he shook himself mentally as he did physically. His pride came to his rescue. He would do his duty, and let the world go hang! The game, he tried to believe, was bigger than any woman.

He made up his mind to forget—and he knew in his heart that he never, never would.

If he had slept lightly, there were few marks of it in his face and bearing when he came on deck after breakfast. Even had he looked a wreck from sleeplessness, he would have attracted little attention; it was, on the whole, a weary and depressed-looking ship's company that straggled into view after the *Lampasas* passed the Narrows. Comparatively few had shown up in the dining room that morning. Many did not appear until the ship was gliding up the river to her dock.

Braxton had no opportunity for a word alone with Miss Lynde before they went ashore. She had been caring for the seasick Mrs. Carson, it appeared; both the Carsons, looking much the worse for wear, were with her as the boat approached the pier. He was glad of this. It took his best self-control, as it was, to meet her with his usual manner, but he felt, when the ordeal was past, that he had succeeded.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when he passed from the pier to the street. This left him until four to do the things he had to do before meeting Esther at the Van Wouter to return her the envelope in accordance with his promise.

A taxicab, the driver doing everything he could to make time short of getting arrested and losing it, bumped him across to the Van Wouter. He hastily engaged a room, and the moment he was alone in it, called by telephone a number that is not to be found in the telephone directory.

"Mr. Cameron, please," he said, when a voice at the other end had repeated the number, without otherwise identifying the location. Then, after a moment: "Mr. Cameron? . . . All right, I recognize your voice now. This

is Braxton. I am coming to see you. At your office. Right away. . . . And say! Can you have some clerks at liberty? . . . Oh, a whole flock of them. Eight or ten, if you've got them. . . . All right. Good-by."

He stopped at the hotel office to leave word that if Miss Lynde called for him in the reception room, she was to be informed he had gone out on an important business matter, and expected to return very soon after four. This was in case he should be unable to get back by that hour.

He went downtown in the subway, and got a taxicab from the exit to the office of the service. When he entered that building, it was with leisurely manner; it had to be remembered that but one attaché of the New York branch, beside Cameron, its head, knew his official identity. Word had been left in the outer office; he was taken to the inner one without delay.

"Take a seat, Mr. Braxton. Glad to see you," said the chief. Then, as they were alone: "What's broken? I gather you're in a tremendous hurry."

"You've said something! I'll explain later. First——" He threw on the table the sealed envelope. "Can you exactly match that envelope—in an hour?"

"I'm pretty sure we can; it is an American-made envelope, and a standard size, although an unusual one. We've got a lot of linen envelopes in the office—we might be able to match it right here. Wait a minute."

He stepped from the room, bearing the sealed envelope, and returned quickly with it and a plain, empty envelope in his hand. He passed them to Braxton. They were as alike as Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

"Great! Now, before we do anything else, have you got a forger handy that can duplicate exactly this signature across the flap?"

"I can have one here in half an hour —one of our women agents. She's a wonder with a pen."

Braxton took his penknife from his pocket. "Then we'll see what's in this —and if it's what I think it is, your clerks are going to get a chance to be mighty busy."

He slit the package carefully.

Inside were fourteen sheets of paper. There was not a word of decipherable writing. Each sheet bore rows and rows of Roman numerals, ten to the line.

"Here you are!" he said. "I want a couple of copies of this made—you'd better give one or two sheets to each clerk, to save time—and have it carefully read by copy, to see there are no errors. You see what it is, and if you haven't happened to hear where I've been, I'll tell you—Mexico City. For the love of goodness, don't let a drop of ink get spilled on these sheets, or a wrinkle get put in them that isn't there now. I want to get the copies ready to take over to Washington to-night, and I've got to get this original back into the envelope, your pretty little forgery performed across the flap, and have the whole business uptown in"—he consulted his watch—"one hour and five minutes. What are the chances?"

Cameron was already out of his chair, heading toward the next room. "If the subway doesn't cave in, or the trains break down, you'll have five minutes to spare," he said.

"And now," said Waite, when Cameron came back with word that the work of copying was already under way, and the expert penwoman had been sent for and would arrive in time, "will you get the chief on the private wire? After you've put in the call, I'll give you an idea what it's all about."

In the explanation that he made to Cameron, Braxton did not tell how he had secured the cipher message that was now being so laboriously and carefully duplicated. This was a detail an

agent would be unlikely to discuss with any one save the chief, and Cameron asked no questions, accepting such part of the story as Braxton saw fit to tell him. He had outlined his quest for the Japanese note, and explained that he had nothing more than suspicion as to what the message contained, and no way of reading it—that being a detail Washington could be depended upon to perform—when an electric buzzer sounded and Cameron picked up the telephone receiver.

"Here's Washington," he said to Braxton. "The chief will be on the wire in a minute. . . . Hello! Hello, chief! Cameron talking. Here's Eccles, chief! Eccles! . . . Yes. He wants to talk to you."

He pushed the instrument across to Waite.

"Hello!" called Braxton.

"How do you do, Mr. Eccles?" came in the chief's unruffled tones. "Glad to hear your voice."

"Same to you, sir. I have some papers that should interest you. I ought to be able to leave this evening with them."

"Plain or in code?"

"Code. I'm having copies made now. I don't know the translation, of course."

"Have you got to see me, or is your work cleaned up for the moment?"

"Why—er—I guess it's cleaned up. These papers ought to speak for themselves."

"Good! I'm going to ask you, if you don't mind, to put off your detailed report for the present, and keep on the run. Is there any reason why you can't leave New York right away—to be gone three or four weeks?"

"No. None whatever."

"It's mighty lucky—your getting in to-day. I've got some documents that must go to Stevenson. In France—you know where to find him. You and he know each other, and I haven't got another man handy of which that is true. Will you run over—there's a boat to-morrow—and put these into his hands personally? You know what he's doing, so you can appreciate the importance of the errand."

"Why, of course. But what about this other business? What shall I do with these copies?"

"I'll send Williams over to New York on the next train with the package for Stevenson. Shall you be at your home or the club? The Van Wouter? All right. Williams will be there to hand them to you in person. You give him whatever papers you have for me, and he will bring them over here on the first train to-morrow."

"All right, sir."

"That all?"

"All I can think of."

"All right. Good luck! I'm sorry I can't give you a minute's rest between trips this time. Good-by."

Waite replaced the receiver on the hook and looked at Cameron whimsically. "A mere matter of a three or four weeks' trip to Europe, starting to-morrow," he said. "And no chance for me to find out before I go what's in this cipher. Oh, well! It's all in the day's work. And I may never be told exactly what's in it, anyway—there are *some* things the state department has to keep entirely to itself, and I shouldn't be surprised if this were one of them. I wonder how those handy helpers of yours are coming on."

At three minutes of four o'clock Braxton entered the little reception room near the main dining room at the Hotel Van Wouter. Two minutes later Esther Lynde came in.

As he rose to meet her, he took from his inner pocket an envelope of linen-backed paper, about as thick as might be necessary to hold a dozen or so pages of moderately heavy letter sheets, and passed it to her with the air of one

who has been glad to do a courteous, but not very important, errand.

As she thanked him with what seemed to be deep and real appreciation of the service, she turned it over in her hands and glanced casually at the back. Across the flap was written, in bluish ink, her own autograph.

He murmured regrets that he must be hurrying away to keep an engagement. As she gave him her hand she said:

"I hope we shall meet again—some time."

"Fate will be unkind if we do not," he answered, with formal gallantry. He smiled his most pleasant smile. "It has been a delightful acquaintanceship."

He watched her as she swung competently down the street. Her eyes were no longer upon him, and he was no longer smiling.

CHAPTER XII.

ENTER UNIVERSAL OIL.

Twenty-two days later the *Indianapolis,* westbound from Liverpool, was reported as passing Nantucket Lightship. To Waite Braxton, reading in a deck chair, came an hour or two afterward a steward bringing a wireless message. It was dated from Washington, and signed simply by three letters, none of which was an initial of the chief's name. It read:

Immediately upon arrival arrange meeting between Eccles and Cameron at latter's office.

"Immediately," when the chief said it, meant exactly what it said. Braxton therefore telephoned Cameron from the pier, and followed his telephone message instantly in person.

"Welcome to our city!" said Cameron, the moment the door was closed. Then, laughingly: "Why the Old Cap Collier disguise?"

He referred to a professional-appearing beard, clipped on the cheeks, and growing to what would ultimately be a point, that was nearly three weeks old, and already looked twice that age.

"Oh, this?" grinned Waite, passing his hand over his chin. "I started it the day I left here. You see, going to find Stevenson, I traveled from London on doctor's papers, and I thought while I was about it I'd look the part. Then I let it stay on coming across; thought I'd keep it a while and see how I'd look. I fancy my friends will kid the life out of me for the next week, and I'll probably take it off again. Rather foolish idea, anyway, raising a beard when they aren't in style, and with summer coming on."

"I think when I get through talking to you, you'll leave it on," said Cameron seriously. "It just fits the program."

"What program?"

"Well, in the first place, the chief left yesterday to make a trip with the president, who is going to make some speeches in the Middle West, and he's going to be so worried for the next week over the president's safety that he won't have time to think of anything else, at least as regards details. These are dangerous days for a presidential trip.

"He wanted to see you, but couldn't wait, of course. He's got a job he wants you to do right away. So he sent for me to come over to Washington, and asked me to meet you on your arrival, express his regrets, and set you right at it."

"Not any more traveling, I hope. I haven't done anything else for the past two months."

"Not much traveling. About three days. But plenty of work on the other end of the journey, as I figure it."

"Break it to me!"

"San Antonio."

"Well, one gets bathrooms, good food, and human society in San An-

tonio. It *could* have been Port au Prince. What's up in Santone?"

"That's it! The chief hasn't been able to find out. But something. Something new."

"Some new revolutionary bee, do you mean?"

"I don't know. It's a new junta of some sort, but it's run by a different crowd. Not Cientificos; not Huertistas; not Carranzistas. We are sure of that. The boss of the crowd is named Pablo Sauceda, but the only line Payne has been able to get on him thus far is that he used to be a Villa general, and Villa now—you've heard about what happened at Columbus, New Mexico, while you were gone, I suppose?"

"Yes, and that at last we've gone across. But Payne? Is he in San Antonio now?"

"He's been there a little better than a fortnight. The chief ordered him up, and he came from Mexico City to San Antonio via Eagle Pass. Had a surprisingly safe trip, incidentally. But he hasn't been able to get at the bottom of the thing. Says there isn't a man concerned in it who isn't a Mexican. Payne speaks Spanish perfectly, you know, but he doesn't *look* like anything but a Yankee. This job calls for a man who can pass himself off for a don. Hence my remark that the new crop of alfalfa behind which you are endeavoring to hide might come in handy."

Braxton passed his hand meditatively over the stubble on his face. "Gee!" he exclaimed. "That sounds like some job! I suppose there are five or ten thousand Mexican refugees in San Antonio. There's a proud chance there isn't somebody in that crowd who knows me well, by sight at least! And it is the fellow who knows me by sight, and whom I don't know by sight, that is dangerous."

"Yes. It's likely to be a hard job, but the chief said you are the one man to tackle it. I fancy those refugees hang around certain hotels and clubs; you'll have to keep away from those places as much as you can, I suppose. However, I'm not trying to tell you what to do after you get there; that's your business. Besides, I'm no expert in Spanish diplomacy, you know. It takes all my time to try to keep posted on what is going on in little old New York. The chief said telegraph Payne when you're coming, and he'll run up the line a few hundred miles and talk over the situation. Then you'll be better able to judge how to go into the town, and what to do after you get there."

"All right," sighed Waite. "I'll go to it right away. To-morrow, if you think that is all right; I don't imagine the chief thinks it necessary for me to get out to-night."

"No. He said he would like to have you leave to-morrow, unless there was some important personal matter you wanted to get out of the way here, in which case the next day would do. And there's one more thing. It may be important, and it may not; take it for what it is worth.

"Five days ago Payne telegraphed that a Mexican named Andres Azcona, a member of this new junta, or whatever it is, had left San Antonio for New York, and asked us to get a line on him. Azcona came here according to schedule, and we kept track of him from the minute he arrived until he left—this morning. He was here two days, he saw one man three times, and nobody else, and he spent all the remainder of his visit in his room in the Beekman House, except for going to the theater one evening, all by his lonesome, and wandering for an hour or two afterward up and down the Great White Way—also all by himself."

"Who was the man he saw three times?"

"Jerry Stedman."

Braxton whistled.

"Old Jerry! Where?"

"Twice at the Universal Oil and once at Azcona's hotel."

"Stedman went to see him at his hotel?"

"Yes. It takes a pretty important visitor to make the old man do that."

"Um!" Waite thought deeply. "I guess it is just as well I don't have to leave for the Southwest before to-morrow night. There's a loose end or two I may be able to pick up here. You have telegraphed Payne, I suppose."

"Sure."

"I'll see what I can dig, and talk it over with him when we meet. You might send a code telegram to Payne, if you don't mind, asking him to meet me in Dallas. To-day is Friday; I'll meet him there—at the Hotel Adelphi—Monday night. Dallas is a good town for us to get together in; mighty few Mexican refugees get as far north in Texas as that. I'll be much obliged if you'll translate his reply when it comes and send it over. You can reach me this evening or to-morrow up to noon at my house. And give me the exact dope on what this Azcona did all the time he was in town."

"All right."

Braxton got up to leave, paused, and stared unseeingly out of the window.

"Jerry Stedman!" he mused, half to himself. "Maybe I won't have to lie doggo, cultivate whiskers, and dodge the bright lights, after all. Working in San Antonio and trying to keep off the main streets and away from the big hotels would be about as cheerful as a summer vacation spent in Vera Cruz. Well, I'll get along. Let me know when you hear from Payne, please."

He telephoned his father and found the old gentleman would be at home to dinner at eight, the usual hour. At eight-forty-five, when the servants had brought cigars and left the dining room, they ceased talking of casual things.

"Well, boy?" rumbled Mr. Braxton inquiringly. "How's it going? First I get a line from you from Mexico; then I hear that you landed into town one day when I was in Chicago, and couldn't wait; then you write a non-committal note from London; and now you tell me you're here to-day and gone to-morrow. If you worked as hard at my business as you do at yours, you'd make a hundred thousand a year."

"What's the use, so long as I've got more than I'll ever need? I *might* just be blowing money, you know; there are those who do."

"All right," said the old man. "We've threshed all that out before. I'm not bringing up the old argument—the most unprofitable thing in the world is continuing to fight after the fight is over. As a matter of fact, I'm not sorry, these days, that you're doing your share to try to keep things straight, although I wish you were in a business where, when you do a good job—and I fancy you do one once in a while—I could hear about it and brag some to the other old fellows. However—— Where are you going this time, if you are allowed to tell?"

"San Antonio."

"Border work, eh?"

"Well, San Antonio isn't exactly the border, but it's handy to it. I may get down on the Rio Grande before I come back; you never can tell where one of these trips of mine will wind up."

Mr. Braxton watched a smoke ring break itself against an incandescent in the light dome over the table.

"I hope, before this present trouble is over down there, we'll pick up that cursed border and walk about a thousand miles south with it," he said. "What is it somebody or other recently called Mexico? 'An international nuisance!'"

Waite knocked the ashes from his cigar before he spoke.

"I want to ask you a question, fa-

ther," he said slowly, "and I don't want you to answer it unless you are willing to let me make use of the reply—for the service. As the English constable would say: 'It is my duty to warn you that whatever you say may be used against you.'"

"Let's hear it."

"Is Jerry Stedman sending money down to Texas to be used for some angle of this Mexican trouble? And if so, what for?"

It was the father's turn to hesitate.

"I wonder how you heard about that," he finally said. "I didn't believe anybody knew it outside the syndicate."

"Then you are in the syndicate?"

"Yep. And I thought it was iron-clad, brass-bound, and secret proof. Yet my son lands in here from Europe at noon, and tells me about it at dinner. That is some organization you're tied up with, boy."

"I'm going to be perfectly honest with you, dad; it wouldn't be fair to be otherwise. I didn't know Stedman had sent money down to Texas. I only knew a Mexican named Azcona has been here to see him, and has started back. To figure that he'd come after money was a matter of adding two and two to make four; Mexicans don't come two thousand miles to see old Jerry to ask him what he thinks will be the price of oil next October. And before I ask you any more questions, I ought to say—in the strictest confidence, of course—that I may have to mix in, during the next week or so, with the gang this Azcona is tied up with. Having heard that, if you can give me any information I'll appreciate it. If not—why, *that's* all right, too, of course."

"This is a fine government!" the old man declared, with the explosiveness that had gained him his nickname, "Bull" Braxton. "It won't protect American capital in Mexico, and it butts in when American capital attempts to protect itself in Mexico. What we're doing is legitimate. We want to help straighten things out, so American investments in that country will be safe again, including our own."

"So you're helping along one set of saviors of the 'distracted republic,' as the president calls it?"

"'Distracted' is right. We're trying to get the mess over with. We want to see the mines opened and the railroads running and the oil coming out. We want to see Mexico safe for an American, as it was in the days when Diaz ran it."

"I'm not going to ask you how much money the syndicate has contributed, nor how much of the pot has been advanced to this Azcona, nor any other impertinent details. And I can appreciate just how you feel about conditions in Mexico; perhaps I agree with you more or less inside, although I'm not supposed to have any sentiments one way or the other. But there is one thing I wish you would tell me, and very seriously. I want to say I'm not sure it isn't as much to your interest as it is to mine for you to give me the straight of it. Perhaps more. Isn't it your idea that the only solution of the Mexican problem lies either in intervention or the old conservative crowd —the Cientificos?"

"Of course. Anybody who has watched things in Mexico for the past five years ought to know that—if he is a business man."

"If there were a chance that this money the syndicate is putting up—these sinews of war Jerry Stedman gave Azcona—were not going to the Cientificos——"

"What do you mean? It is."

"That's just the point. I have a pretty good reason for believing it isn't."

"Isn't? Then who the devil——"

"That I don't know, dad. But I have a tip that Azcona's crowd is not Cien-

tifico. If it claims to be, somebody is getting double-crossed. I might add something—if you'll lock it up in your brain when you hear it, and never let it loose."

"Sure."

"The leader of this new crowd is—or was—a Villista. I may be wrong, but I don't believe the Cientificos would pick him for such a job."

"Do you mean you think Jerry Stedman is getting double-crossed?"

"Not necessarily. It might be——"

"Me, eh? Well, it might. Such things have been done."

"Listen, father," said Waite earnestly. "I'm going down to San Antonio, and I may have to do something—I've no idea what, yet, because there's a whole lot about my errand I have to learn after I get there—that will hurt your pocket. If the syndicate is backing some scheme of Villa's——" He paused, reorganized his ideas, and continued:

"Whatever some of our big people may have thought of Villa a few months ago, just now he is a bandit, with a price on his head, and an American army chasing him. And if he is still living and on the job—you know there is a rumor he has been killed, but I don't believe it; the Carranzistas probably started the story, and are spreading it as an argument to try to get Pershing pulled back north of the border—I tell you there isn't anything he would do that wouldn't be to the injury of the United States. And if your associates are backing him, why, I'll probably be in the position of having to try to do something that will cost you money."

The old man rose from the table and came around it. He showed an angle of his character that would have surprised his business associates.

"Waite," he said. "If you find out, when you get down there, that our money is being used in any way that means one ounce of real injury to this country, I don't care whether somebody is double-crossing Stedman or whether he is double-crossing me—go to it and put a crimp in the whole gang. You know me, son! You know I think we've handled this Mexican situation wrong from soda to hock, and that I don't care a hoot whether what I do pleases the political administration or not—in fact, if the administration was pleased, I'd think I had overlooked a bet and was probably making a mistake. But hurting the country is another matter.

"I've got a good many hundred thousand dollars invested in Mexico, and I've just chipped ten thousand more into that little syndicate to chase after it. If I've been led to contribute any money with which to do my country harm, I hope I lose it! And if you're the one to make me lose it, under those circumstances, I'll be proud of you! *Hrrumph!* Let's you and me go to one of those tired-business-men shows."

CHAPTER XIII.

NEWS OF OLD FRIENDS.

"Therefore," Leroy Payne said, in Braxton's room at the Adelphi, "I made up my mind we must have somebody here that could try to get in with the crowd as a Mexican." He had been reviewing the same facts that Braxton had received from Cameron. "You seemed to me to be the one best bet."

"I could do that—perhaps—if there were nobody in the refugee colony that knew me. But I couldn't travel with the crowd two days before somebody would spot me as Braxton, and Braxton isn't a Spanish name."

"You could be a half-caste. You could claim your mother was Mexican."

"No. That wouldn't do, either. Somebody would take the trouble to look me up, even if they didn't already know."

Payne scowled gloomily at a picture on the hotel wall—a print of Homer reciting one of his justly celebrated pieces. "Well, I thought of all that, of course. But I can't see anything else to do that promises to get us the dope from the inside, and get it quickly enough. If I'm not mistaken, they're getting ready to spring something pretty sudden."

"What?"

"That's it. If we could find out, we could head them off. It's a big crowd apparently. Pablo Sauceda at the head, eight or ten or a dozen lieutenants, and a whole raft of subordinates. They keep coming and going, these subordinates, from all over south Texas, and every last one of them is a Mexican. I've tried to work some scheme to get some of these Mexicans to talk, but bribery won't land the lieutenants, and the men farther down are just hombres for the most part. They're mostly ignorant about just what they're up to, or else they've got a better reason than usual for not talking."

"Cameron wired you about Jerry Stedman?"

"Yes."

"Didn't that give you an idea as to a way I might go to work?"

"Why, no. Perhaps I'd my mind so filled with the idea that you would claim to be a Mexican and do a straight-sleuth act that I couldn't think of anything else. Say, Waite, it would be a shame not to pretend to be a Mexican with that complexion and hair of yours, and those bee-yewtiful jet-black whiskers."

"Luxuriant foliage, isn't it?" grinned Braxton. Then seriously: "Suppose I were to go to this Sauceda, tell him my name, and that I hail from New York, and ask him to look me up and find out who I represent. I don't tell him, mind; I just ask him to look me up. Trust a Mexican not to go at it directly. Trust him not to ask anybody in New York—at least, any American. Then where would he go? To other Mexicans, wouldn't he? And when he found a Mexican that knew me, what would the Mex say?"

"I can guess that one the first time. He'd say you were Waite Braxton, of the Universal Oil Company."

"Then suppose, when Sauceda had got that kind of a report on me, I told him I was here to represent the Universal—secretly. Wouldn't he believe it? And suppose, then, I told him I was in disguise, and wanted to work under an assumed Spanish name. Wouldn't he help me get away with it?"

"But why the assumed name and the Mexican nationality stuff, if Sauceda already knows who you are?"

"To get me in on a friendly basis with the rest of the junta. I have a suspicion—sorry I can't tell you what it is based on, but there's a matter of personal confidence involved—that, while Old Man Stedman is in on this play, Jerry doesn't know all that is going on. I've got it in my head that this Sauceda may not open his heart to me even if he *is* convinced I am a representative of the Universal. But he won't dare to hurt me, because the Universal at present is his meal ticket. And if he takes me more or less under his wing, he won't warn the crowd against me—outside of his closest followers—and I'll get a chance to do some digging around in the gang. Then, if somebody who knows me puts the subordinates wise to the fact that I'm not a Mexican, and they run to Sauceda, he'll tell them to leave me alone—that he knew it all the time."

"That sounds like convincing dope," declared Payne, after a moment's thought. "Yes, sir. Blamed if I don't think it has a mighty good chance to work."

They talked over the details, Braxton gathering such facts as he needed as to

the location of the new junta, the names of many of the men who seemed to be Sauceda's chief lieutenants, and descriptions of them, and the hotels and clubs which were their social meeting places. Sauceda himself had a small house on San Sebastian Avenue, he learned, which appeared to be the business headquarters of the organization. Two or three of his assistants lived at the Hotel Bonham; the remainder came and went, but mostly seemed to reside, when in San Antonio, in the Mexican quarter.

Then they planned where Braxton should stop, and a simple but effective code for getting word to one another that a meeting was imperative, and when and where they should meet in such an event. It was determined they should not appear together publicly. Payne was supposed to have left Mexico City, like many other Americans, until after the outcome of the Pershing pursuit of Villa should be determined, and to have taken refuge in the nearest large town to the border, and there was no reason to believe that any Mexican had ever suspected his connection with the service; nevertheless, it was in line with ordinary caution that they should not be seen in company.

Payne, it was agreed, should leave Dallas the next morning by one railroad line; Braxton by another. They thus would arrive in San Antonio the following evening on different trains, and at different stations.

With all these details settled, the two friends relaxed, and conversation drifted into more personal channels.

"Where have you been since I saw you?" asked Payne, at the first opportunity. "And I've been eaten up with curiosity to know whether Von Arnoldt really had that copy of the note to Japan, whether you got it away from him, and what was in it."

"I've been to France, running an errand between the chief and Stevenson. And I did get the papers, but the Lord knows what was in them—I don't."

Briefly he sketched what had happened on the *Lampasas,* up to the time Von Arnoldt threw his packet overboard. He touched as lightly as possible on the part played by Miss Lynde. When he had finished the story of the German's capture, he hesitated a second, then went on: "Either his partner had a copy, or she had the original, and it was a copy he chucked into the sea. At any rate, I had a bit of luck, her package got into my hands for a couple of hours, and Williams took a copy of it to the chief the night we landed. Then I went to Europe, and when I got back, the chief was away—and there you are! I'd like pretty well to know what was in that note myself. By the way, are there many Jap secret men in San Antonio?"

"Rather less than there used to be. A few years ago the town was swarming with them, you remember. Every town was that had an army post in it. They are more under cover now."

"And the other nations? Anybody there I know? It would be a good idea to have it in mind who to look out for."

"There's one fine, able representative of Germany there—and doing well, I gather. I was saving the news for a bit of a surprise after you finished telling me your *Lampasas* experience. Guess!"

Braxton frowned. "Germany? You don't mean that Von Arnoldt has——"

"No. Not Von Arnoldt. I fancy he is safely lodged at the expense of the British government. Sort of too bad; he's a fine, upstanding, nervy chap. No. But that's a warm guess." He paused to make his information impressive. "His beautiful, blue-eyed lady assistant."

"Esther Lynde?"

"Uh-huh. The same. As lovely as ever, and still busily engaged in making

profitable friends. I wonder if you ever happened to run into Henry Cook, when your work has taken you to San Antonio."

"Cook? Cook? I don't seem to place him. What's his business?"

"That's the point. It says 'Mexican Lands' on the door of his office. He's a nice young chap. Good looking, well dressed, owns a fast automobile, trots around with lots of girls—some that are in society and some that aren't—always has a smile for everybody, always has plenty of money in his pocket, and don't mind spending it, well liked and popular with one and all. Makes his money, as I said before, in Mexican lands. Only it happens I can't find anybody—and I've looked into the matter quite carefully—who ever heard of his selling any Mexican lands, or knows exactly where they are located."

Braxton waited inquiringly for the conclusion.

"Something set me to looking him up; I guess it was the speediness with which your little friend, Miss Lynde, made his acquaintance after she arrived a fortnight ago. I made the department quite a bit of trouble before I got through, but the result, it seems to me, is fairly interesting. Mr. Henry Cook, when he was born—in Stuttgart—was Herr Heinrich Koch, if it is allowable to call an infant 'Herr.' He has a gift for languages. His father is in the German consular service. Young Mr. Cook, I omitted to say, claims, whenever the matter of race and descent comes up, to have been born in New York of Swedish ancestors."

Braxton pondered this a minute. "And Miss Lynde?" he said. "You say she is working with this Cook?"

"Evidently. They're together a great deal. With the Carsons in the background, of course."

"Oh! So they're there, too."

"I fancy they're always where Miss Lynde is. She strikes me as being a person willing to risk almost anything short of breaking the conventions. And I'm darned if I don't wish some of our equally nice Yankee girls would be as careful as she is. The Continent has it on us in some things."

"What are they up to—Miss Lynde and this Cook? Have you any idea?"

"Not the slightest. So far as I've been able to find out, they haven't anything to do with this Sauceda game—and that's the job I'm assigned to. German activities is somebody else's hunt."

"Whose?"

"Haven't the slightest idea. I do know there's somebody on it—at least I suppose so from the chief's letter of instructions. He said I need not bother about Germans or Japs or any of the other people; just to stick to Mexican affairs in general, and this Sauceda job in particular. I haven't run into any of our people that I know, except the two or three fellows who are working under me, but, of course, that doesn't prove anything. I've been immolated in Mexico so long I hardly know anybody in the service, anyway, unless they've happened to be sent there. And there are always chaps, like yourself, that very few men even in the department know."

"Where is Miss Lynde stopping?"

"At the St. Francis. This Cook person lives at the St. Francis, too. Happy coincidence—like the one when she happened to get rooms at the Presidente, on the next floor to Von Arnoldt, eh? Speaking of the Presidente, we are sure now which of our international friends got those papers—but just who killed Calderon?"

"I wish I knew!" said Waite.

CHAPTER XIV.

BURIED DYNAMITE.

Pablo Sauceda was unusually tall for a Mexican, very deep of chest, and darker than the average mulatto, with

sharp, glistening, suspicious eyes, and a hard, cruel mouth. A man probably of almost pure Indian blood; a fighter of the Villa type. A much better educated man than Villa, however—it was noticeable at first hearing that at some time or other he had come under the influence of Mexicans who spoke correctly; very seldom, indeed, did he blur his b's and v's.

He received Braxton in the parlor of the little cottage on San Sebastian Avenue that served as his headquarters. There were two Mexicans sitting on the front gallery—doing nothing. There was a Mexican sitting in a rocking-chair under the fig tree that shaded the side window of the room in which Sauceda sat—doing nothing. Voices from a room in the rear indicated there were also other Mexicans within easy call. Sauceda was well guarded. Also, the chance of eavesdroppers learning what was discussed in that little parlor was practically nil.

The house stood midway of the block, in a spot well shaded by trees. One who turned to enter it was quite out of the glare of the arc lights that hung at the street intersections. It stood in the middle of a good-sized lot, which gave it satisfactory isolation, while at the same time it was within seven minutes' street-car ride of the very center of the city.

He greeted Braxton in the center of the room with a warm handclasp and a smile that showed firm, large, very white teeth, and offered him a chair. He wasted no time in nonessentials.

"In accordance with the request you made of me when you called last evening, señor, I have made certain inquiries," he said. "My friends inform me that Señor Waite Braxton is a representative of the Universal Oil Company. They also described you accurately enough to satisfy me you are the man—although they do not mention the beard, which, I presume, is of recent growth."

"Grown purely for the purpose of this visit to the Southwest," put in Braxton.

"Yes? So I have done what you asked me to do. I have found out who you are. Yes. That being the case——" He paused inquiringly. "Why? Why? Why?" he reiterated impatiently, as Braxton did not speak. "Let us not be mysterious. What does Señor Braxton, of the Universal Oil Company, wish with me?"

"I've come to sit into the game," said Waite.

"To what? What game? I do not understand. Explain yourself."

"You get me perfectly, general. I'm here to watch the wheels go round."

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders. "I do not understand what you mean at all."

"Pardon me, general, but if you will consider a little, I think it will come to you. It was hardly reasonable, was it, that our good friend, Señor Stedman, would not want to keep track of his, shall we say—investment?"

Sauceda sat perfectly still for fully a minute, his black eyes on Braxton's face, while Waite withstood the scrutiny smilingly. Then he shouted:

"Andres! To me, a moment, if you please!"

From the back room came the sound of moving chairs and a cessation of voices. The door opened, and a short, light-complexioned middle-aged man of neat, almost dandified appearance, stood on the threshold. He was stylishly dressed, his graying mustache was carefully trimmed, and his hair was parted in a line that went over the top of his head and down the back of it to his neck, being brushed on the back to both sides. He looked inquiringly from the general to Braxton, and back.

"Andres," said Sauceda, "have you ever met this gentleman before?"

The new arrival, entering and closing the door, smiled deprecatingly. "I fear I have not had that honor," he said.

"I introduce you, then, to Señor Waite Braxton, a representative of the Universal Oil Company. You are quite sure you have never happened to meet him—in your travels?"

The elderly man appraised Waite very sharply from head to foot. He spoke positively. "I think not. I have no recollection of it."

"It is true. I think you have never seen me," said Braxton, "but I think, Señor Azcona"—both Sauceda and the other looked more searchingly at him as he pronounced the name—"I think I can convince you that I have seen *you* quite recently. To be exact, a week ago yesterday."

"Indeed!" said Azcona. "It is possible; I was hereabouts at that time."

"No. You were in New York. I arrived from there yesterday. Would you like me to tell you where you were in New York—and why?" The Mexican bowed.

"You called twice Wednesday at the office of the Universal Oil Company—at noon and again at four. On the following day—one week ago yesterday—you were at the Beekman House. I was not present at your interview with Señor Stedman—it was without witnesses, as was entirely proper and necessary—but you will believe I was not far away when I mention that you left your room after the interview—room No. 672—and came to the elevator with him. The hour, you will recall, was five-thirty in the afternoon."

Azcona flashed an inquiring glance at his chief. "Is that right, Andres?" asked Sauceda.

"Exactly."

"Thank you. You may leave us alone, if you will—and thank you. We shall see considerable of Señor Braxton, I think. He has come to—how does he say it in the Texas draw-poker language?—to sit into the game."

When Azcona had shaken hands ceremoniously with Braxton and withdrawn, the general turned to the American.

"I see you are familiar with various matters," he remarked. "I suppose you do not object to my writing Señor Stedman regarding you?"

"Not in the least," Braxton replied, grinning. "But if you have had any experience with Universal Oil, and the methods of Señor Jeremiah Stedman, you know perfectly will he will not answer your letter. Señor Stedman is moderately careful to whom he writes, and what he says on paper. However, write by all means if you wish. He will be angry that you put anything about the matter in writing, of course, but he is angry much of the time, anyway. Not the pleasantest man in the world to get along with, as you undoubtedly know. Yes, he prefers conversations to letters, and sends messengers instead of messages—that is why I am here. But I cannot see why you should not write him if you wish. *You* are not afraid of Señor Stedman's bark. *You* are not in his employ."

"I am not afraid of any one. I shall write him," declared Sauceda judicially, and Braxton felt sure from his voice that he would not.

"You said," suggested Sauceda, after a moment, "that you had grown a beard for the purpose of this visit. It is your hope, then, not to be identified."

"I should prefer not to be. It is not to any one's interest that my New York associates should be known in this matter."

"Very true. And your plan?"

"With your approval, general, I shall be known hereabouts—except to yourself and your principal friends—as one of Latin blood. As you observe, my coloring is Spanish, and I have the language."

"Perfectly. You must have lived many years in—was it Mexico?"

"Spain. It occurred to me, while remaining here on this visit, that I might be known by an assumed name; in fact, I have already registered at the Hotel Edgewood under the name of Correon—Salvador Correon. I would thus attract less attention among those who assist you. Has the idea your approval?"

"It is a very good one." A brief pause ensued. "What do you especially plan to do? How do you desire to—to sit into the game?"

"In any way that is helpful. It is a week since Señor Azcona left New York? Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me what progress has been made in that time."

The Mexican replied readily enough. "The work of recruiting goes on. We have gained more than two hundred men in the week. This makes the total something over a thousand. It will be two thousand in a week; five thousand, perhaps, in a fortnight. We can move more rapidly now, with more funds for expenses."

Recruiting for what, Waite wondered. He must continue blindly. "And what number must be had before——" He left the question significantly open.

"We hope for at least ten thousand. Less than that would hardly suffice. Besides, we might as well continue to recruit until the rifles and ammunition are ready. We have the money now with which to buy them, of course, but since this little incident at Columbus the American government has again put an embargo on arms and cartridges crossing the border. It may be necessary, at the last, to smuggle them across. And there is no sense in gathering one's army and sending it over the river until the tools with which to work are there awaiting it."

So Sauceda was talking about raising an army. An army of Texas Mexicans, to go across the Rio Grande and fight for somebody. For the Cientificos, it would naturally be presumed, bearing in mind the bias of the syndicate, as his father had expressed it. He felt quite certain Sauceda was talking to him along the same lines that Azcona had pursued in talking with Jerry Stedman.

"You are scattering the enlistments, I suppose," he said. "In various towns."

"Oh, yes. Not too many in any one city or town—that would be to call attention of the Federal authorities. Throughout south Texas—here in San Antonio, in Barnes, San Pedro, Salado Counties, in the counties along the Rio Grande—all the way from Brownsville to Del Rio, and up from the border a hundred and fifty miles."

"And they are all Mexicans; there will be no American soldiers of fortune?"

"All Mexicans, every one of them. And we are raising them with the promise of only small pay, for the relief of distressed Mexico. These Texas Mexicans are intelligent, compared to the *pelados* below the border. They realize it is a terrible thing that has come upon their kinsfolk at home because of all these revolutions—this condition of confusion and anarchy. We are appealing to their real patriotism."

And now, beyond a doubt, Braxton knew that Sauceda was lying. An army he might be raising, and very likely was, but he was flatly falsifying as to the details. Hence, presumably, he was also lying as to the purpose; that, however, Waite had suspected all the while.

"As regards the rifles and ammunition——" Braxton began, with the idea of leading the Mexican to say more, none of which he was prepared to believe, when there came an interruption.

A street car stopped at the near-by

corner, and from it descended a Mexican, who hurried at a walk that was almost a run toward the middle of the block, where stood Sauceda's house. As he turned into the yard, Braxton heard his impetuous footsteps. Followed then his voice, the voice of a Mexican of the *pelado* class. He was calling, from some yards away, to the two men who sat on guard on the front gallery.

"Ho, friends!" he hailed. "I seek the general, quick! I am José Lopez—from Mendon. The dynamite that was buried——"

A quick step on the gallery was followed by a muffling of the words as though some one had clapped an extinguishing hand over the speaker's mouth. "Peace, fool!" growled an ugly voice. "Cease shouting from the hills! Sit and wait! wait!"

Sauceda had lifted his head at the interruption, but Braxton gave no sign of having heard. He had gone on with his question, asking where it was planned to have the war supplies delivered, and Sauceda was on the point of answering, when there came a knock on the front door. To the general's invitation to enter, it opened, and a very wide-shouldered man, with a broad nose and a disfiguring scar across his dark-hued forehead—a typical border bandit—stood in the opening, smiling a smile that was more sinister than a scowl.

"Pardon, my general," he said, "but you were to be reminded at nine o'clock that you had a long-distance telephone call. It is past nine." His voice was very soft, but it was the same ugly voice that had silenced the blunderer.

"It is true. I had forgotten. Thank you, Tomas." Sauceda rose and extended his hand. "I must ask you to excuse me, my friend," he said to Braxton. "We shall see much of one another, I hope. Come at any time. Always you are welcome."

As Waite passed through the door and down the steps to the walk that led straight to the street, he noted that, although the murderous-looking Tomas had now stepped inside the house, there were still two men on the gallery—as many as when he came. One was sitting, as before, in a chair. The other, his back against a veranda post, was squatting on his heels. This would be José Lopez, of Mendon, accustomed to squatting before a jacal, slow-brained, but excitable, messenger. He made up his mind to cultivate José at a convenient moment.

Mendon, county seat of Salado County, is less than fifty miles south of San Antonio. One who is preparing to raise an army that shall cross into Mexico, and be armed on that side of the border, has no cause to bury dynamite a hundred miles north of the Rio Grande.

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTAINS OF TEN.

Braxton gained additional information as to the errand of Lopez when he opened his newspaper the next morning. Carried inconspicuously on an inside page was this item, under a Mendon date line:

Manuel Ruiz, a Mexican farm hand, was blown to bits by a mysterious explosion on the farm of Tom B. Ezell, on the outskirts of town, yesterday afternoon. Ruiz was plowing with a pair of mules, and it is supposed the plow struck a package of dynamite or other similar explosive that happened to be in the ground a short distance below the surface. Other Mexicans working not far away heard the roar of the explosion, and found remains of the plow and the mules. The body of Ruiz was annihilated.

Mr. Ezell said last night he was at a loss to explain the explosion, as he had no dynamite on his farm, and had never known of any being buried there. The accident happened in a fenced lot not far from his house, where he decided to plow only yesterday morning. All the windows in his house were broken, and the shock of the explosion also shattered several windows in town, nearly a mile away. Sheriff Brown is conducting an investigation.

This supplied the details that Lopez undoubtedly had given Sauceda after Braxton had gone, but it shed no light on the subject of why explosives in large quantities had been buried in the near outskirts of Mendon. Braxton considered, as he ate his breakfast with the newspaper propped up before him, the various possibilities of the incident. He determined to make a visit to Mendon as soon as should prove convenient.

He was eating lunch alone in the Hotel Bonham, that noon, when two Mexicans were ushered to the next table. This of itself was not a matter to attract notice; the Bonham is a favorite hotel with Mexican refugees of the better class. Braxton would not have noticed them particularly, had not a scrap of their conversation come to him. One of them mentioned that somebody —he did not catch the beginning of the sentence—had "brought it from New York."

He noted then, without appearing to pay attention to the men, that they were both dark and of middle age. One of them was quite well dressed; he looked to be a city man. The other, while clean enough and neat enough, wore obviously ready-made clothes of a cut that had passed out of style some months before. His table manners, also, indicated he was unused to the ways of large hotels.

Their voices were subdued; only fragments of the talk came to Waite's ears. He heard: ". . . moving fast now." ". . . very soon, perhaps next week, if . . ." Then, "How many in your county?" and almost the entire reply to that question: "Twenty-eight, which means when each has summoned his chain, that three hundred and eight will . . ."

They appeared, soon after, to have changed the subject. At any rate, nothing reached Waite's ears that seemed to fit with what had gone before. When he left the dining room, they were talking very little on any subject, having just been served, and the Mexican with the ready-made clothes being an extremely earnest eater.

At nine that evening, Braxton called again on Sauceda, at the San Sebastian Avenue house. The darkly smiling Tomas greeted him from the front gallery, and ushered him into the same room in which he had met the former Villa general the night before. This time Sauceda was not alone. Across the oblong table in the center of the room sat Señor Azcona—and the Mexican of the noontime conversation who had said that his county possessed "twenty-eight," which would be multiplied by eleven with the operation of a "chain." Sauceda presented this man as Señor Escalera, of Somersworth.

The three talked with apparent freedom, from which Braxton felt sure he had been the subject of careful discussion among the Sauceda lieutenants, and that a definite policy of handling him had been determined upon. This policy might be expected to work so long as the only lieutenants he met were the intelligent and resourceful ones, and Waite felt an effort would probably be made to prevent his coming in contact with the others.

"I am glad you happened to come at just this minute," said Sauceda, when the introduction was out of the way, and Waite and Escalera had murmured their polite phrases of pleasure. "Señor Escalera, who came in to report his progress down in San Pedro County, had just asked me as to the number of enlistments throughout south Texas. I have no doubt you will be interested in the answer."

He crossed the room to a small safe, and took from a locked compartment a packet of papers. As he spread them before him on the table, Braxton saw at a glance they were lists of names, grouped by counties and towns, a

county name being at the top of each page.

Sauceda began to run them over, putting down the total number of names in each list. Bexar County, which contains San Antonio, led with something over two hundred. Counties near the river had from fifty to over one hundred names each. More northern counties averaged twenty or twenty-five, except Salado County, which had eighty-seven. Recruiting for the Cientifico cause would seem to be popular in and around Mendon.

Braxton did not doubt, from their appearance, that these were bona-fide lists of recruits, although he did doubt, very emphatically, that the said recruits had any intention of going across the border to fight for the old order of things that obtained before the downfall of Diaz. As Sauceda went over the sheets, one by one, and pushed them to one side, Braxton had opportunity to pick them up and glance casually through them. None of the lists contained any name, so far as he could see at a hurried glance, with which he was familiar, except that page which grouped the Mendon recruits in the Salado County division. On this he saw the name of José Lopez. That was to be expected. He looked quickly for Manuel Ruiz; the name of the annihilated one was not there. This also was in accordance with his expectations; any Mexican who had known about the burying of the dynamite would not have plowed into it.

When Sauceda came to the San Pedro County list he looked up inquiringly. "Nineteen," he said. "And you say you have——"

"Nine new names," responded Escalera, producing a paper and handing it across the table. "That makes twenty-eight."

Sauceda pinned the new list to the old and went on with his count. When he had finished, he added the figures that he had put down by counties.

The total of all the lists was nearly eleven hundred. Nearly eleven hundred Mexicans resident in Texas pledged to some undertaking to which each stood to bring ten more—some undertaking that might call for supplies of dynamite, and whose character must be kept secret even from those who were supplying the financial sinews; at least, if those contributors happened to be a certain New York syndicate. It was not far-fetched, Braxton thought, to presume the true purpose of the organization might be one that should be kept a secret from all good Americans.

Eleven hundred—times eleven! More than twelve thousand men, a fair-sized army! And some reason for keeping entirely dark the fact that these listed recruits comprised less than a tenth of the force that was being organized.

The count of the lists had taken more than a half hour. For some time after that they conversed in a desultory manner. Señor Azcona finally looked at his watch.

"Ten o'clock!" he said. "I was rather thinking of going down to the Madison Club and getting a refreshing drink—and, perhaps, after a little, a sandwich. Can any of you join me?"

Sauceda and Escalera hastened to say they had some personal matters to discuss together that would prevent their leaving. Braxton, seeing in this invitation a tactful way of getting him out from under foot, hastened to accept. He and Azcona bade the others good night and boarded a street car bound in town.

A members' dance was in progress in the ballroom of the Madison Club, and the seventh-floor dining room contained many people. Braxton and his companion found a small table at the side of the room, and ordered a light lunch and innocuous drinks. Their conversa-

tion was casual and general, with no reference to the greater matters in which they were concerned. Azcona was a smooth person, polished and well traveled. He talked entertainingly, but there was an oiliness to his courtesy that belied its sincerity.

A party of three or four young men rose from a table near the front of the dining room, after a little, and started toward the elevators. They were in evening clothes; obviously a part of the dancing company three floors below. One of them caught sight of Azcona, left his friends with a word of excuse, and came toward their table. He was a man of thirty or thereabouts, of exceptionally attractive appearance, a man of breeding, apparently, who had an air of sophistication. Braxton, as he approached, noticed these things as well as the up-to-the-minute cut of his clothes, and the tiny, toothbrush mustache above a mouth that smiled easily.

As he approached, Azcona said: "A friend. I will present you." He rose to shake hands with the pleasant-faced newcomer, and turned to Waite, who also stood.

"Let me make you acquainted with Señor Salvador Correon," he said, in Spanish. "Señor Henry Cook. Señor Cook is American," he continued, "but he speaks our tongue so much better than I speak his that we usually converse in it."

Señor Cook, whom Braxton at once identified from Payne's description as that dilettante trader in "Mexican lands," whose birthplace—as Heinrich Koch—was *not* New York, and who had a gift for languages, greeted Waite with engaging cordiality.

"Señor Azcona speaks flattery," he said, in Spanish almost as pure as Braxton's own. "As a matter of fact, his own English is almost without accent. Do you speak both languages, señor?"

"Oh, yes," assented Waite.

"I merely came over to pay my respects," Cook added to Azcona. "There is a large crowd dancing to-night. It is a very pleasant party." He addressed Waite again. "You are a stranger in San Antonio, señor?" Waite said he had been in the city once before. "And do you stay long?"

"Who knows?" Braxton smiled, shrugging with the "Quién sabe?" as a Mexican refugee might shrug at the same question. "These are days of uncertainty."

"That is true. Well, I am glad to meet you, and I trust we shall become better acquainted. Good night." The young man again shook hands with both, in accordance with the demands of Mexican etiquette, and strode blithely away, bowing to no less than a half dozen acquaintances before he reached the elevators.

"A very pleasant gentleman," surmised Braxton, following Cook with his eyes. "Is he connected in any way with—Mexican affairs."

"Only that he has business interests in Mexico—in Coahuila, I believe. He has many friends among the Spanish-speaking people. Among all people, I should say. Yes, it would be fair to describe Señor Cook as an unusually popular young man."

"He looks as if he might dance well. Is he as attractive to the ladies as he is to men?"

Señor Azcona smiled and shook his head slowly, as the middle-aged may do in discussing the attractiveness of youth. "Each day one sees him with two or three on the street," he said, "and each night with one at some dance or supper or in his car. He is catholic in his tastes—all beautiful women look alike to him. I fancy there have been broken hearts; he is a sad flirt. But no Don Juan. No. One allows one's daughters to be escorted by Henry Cook. And is it not pleasant to see such courtesy on the part of an Amer-

ican? Pardon me! But you also have it, so my phrase was not unfortunate; too many Americans are lacking in respect toward other men. Yes, Señor Cook is a pleasant young gentleman."

"I take it, since his business interests are in Mexico—and business interests in Mexico are not paying many dividends just now—that he is a man of some means."

"Undoubtedly, although as to that I have no knowledge."

After a little, Azcona glanced at his watch. "I had no idea it was getting so late!" he exclaimed. "It is past my usual bedtime."

Chatting, they went down in the elevator. At the ballroom floor, the car filled; it was midnight, and the dance was breaking up. Down on the ground floor, a dozen or twenty men and women were standing in the reception hall and the wide ladies' parlor, waiting for friends or for motors to arrive. Over the heads of a group of chattering girls, as he moved from the elevator toward the outer door, he saw Esther Lynde standing apart from any group. She was looking directly at him, and he thought he saw a flash of recognition pass over her face. He turned his head away quickly and passed through the outer door, talking steadily, and without much understanding of what he was saying, to Azcona. He did not look again in her direction; therefore, he did not see the smiling Mr. Cook step to her side a second after he had turned his head, bringing her cloak.

It annoyed him exceedingly that he should feel so confused and schoolboyish at the meeting. What did he care for one who had regarded him as merely a convenient tool to be used in the game she played? He said good night at the foot of the steps to Señor Azcona and set out to walk to his hotel. A tool! Yet she was very beautiful, and very sweet. Why couldn't she have kept away from San Antonio?

As her eyes fell upon his face—she could not believe he had seen her, else why should he have looked away?—she exclaimed: "Why, there is Waite Braxton!"

"I beg pardon!" said Mr. Cook, arriving at that second. "Braxton? Who is Braxton? I don't believe I know him."

"That very dark, distinguished-looking man just passing through the door—with Señor Azcona. He is Waite Braxton, of New York—I imagine you have heard of him; Braxton, of the Universal Oil."

Mr. Cook smiled. "He *may* be Waite Braxton, of the Universal Oil," he said. "But a half hour ago, when I was in the dining room, and was introduced to him, he was Salvador Correon, of somewhere in Mexico. Perhaps there is a striking resemblance."

"Correon!" she said. She adjusted her wrap and made ready to move toward the door. "Yes," she said. "A very striking resemblance, indeed. They could quite easily pass for twin brothers. It quite deceived me for a moment."

CHAPTER XVI.

A MAD PROGRAM.

Waite was up betimes the next morning, and into the Edgewood dining room not long after it opened. Seated at a table some distance away, his back toward Braxton, was a figure that looked somehow familiar. Waite studied it furtively; after a few moments the man turned his head to make some request of the waiter, and displayed a regular, stern profile of windbitten, weather-tanned skin, and singularly steady, cold eyes. Recognition came quickly enough to Braxton, and he shifted his position so as to turn his back to the other. When last he had seen that leathery face and those steady

eyes the man had worn khaki riding clothes and a high, peaked hat, and there had been pistols in the holsters on both hips. In ordinary street clothes, as he was now, he looked somehow smaller and less competent, but there was no mistaking him. He was Captain Robert Dalton, of the Texas Rangers.

Something over three years before, Dalton and Braxton had met on the Mexican border, and been thrown together more or less for a fortnight. Waite had been of some small service to the Ranger, and Dalton had also helped him in the task on which he was engaged, and they had forgathered socially a bit—had smoked and talked evenings, gone shooting quail one day, and once visited together the Masonic lodge in the little town in which they had their business.

The first impulse on Braxton's part had been to cross the dining room and renew the acquaintance, but Dalton did not know him as a government agent, and how could he explain his registration at the hotel under an assumed name? He hurried his grapefruit, drank a cup of coffee, and left the dining room while the Ranger was still at the table.

At a lunch bar downtown he ate a real breakfast, and before nine o'clock was on a side street, entering a large garage whose sign proclaimed that it was conducted by "Blossom & Reed, Auto Livery." He had once seen Mr. Blossom, and heard that gentleman talk; unless he had erred in sizing up the man, he felt he was just the person for the undertaking at hand. He wanted a good, trustworthy chauffeur, and he wanted to be positive the man could not understand Spanish.

Mr. Blossom, as Waite had noted through the window before entering, was already on duty in the office of the garage. He was a medium-sized, gangling fellow, with a roving Adam's apple, and china-blue eyes, whose age might be anywhere from twenty-five to forty. No well-traveled person could have possibly mistaken his dialect, which was down-East Yankee. As a matter of fact, Amos P. Blossom was born in Kittery, Maine, where his father worked in the navy yard, and learned the machinist trade at Saco. A trip to Texas as chauffeur for a consumptive millionaire and a shrewd appreciation of the possibilities of the tourist trade had anchored him in San Antonio with a partner from back home and a flourishing business.

Braxton addressed him in rapid Spanish: "I want to hire a good car and a driver for the day, to make a trip out into the country."

Mr. Blossom smiled deprecatingly. "Sorry," he said, in English, "but I don't speak Spanish—not any at all."

Waite shrugged his shoulders as though he, also, were handicapped by ignorance, and again spoke in Spanish, this time very, very slowly.

"I wish to hire a car and a driver," he said, "and I think you would like the job, because it will be worth quite a little money to you."

This, if Blossom could understand Spanish at all, ought to produce an acknowledgment of the fact. Unless Braxton had made an error in judgment, the liveryman probably still had the first dollar he had ever earned hidden in the darkest closet in his house, with a railroad spike on it to keep it from flying away; a job that would mean "quite a little money" would be open to discussion, at any rate. But Blossom shook his head and raised his voice, as though his prospective patron were deaf.

"Me—no—spik Spanish!" he declared. "I get that word *'dinero,'* but not another darned thing you said."

"All right," replied Braxton, in his native tongue. "We'll speak English then. What would you charge for a

car to be gone all day—to-day—to start right now? You to drive it yourself?"

"Gosh, mister! You surprise me. Honest, you do!" declared Blossom. "I thought you couldn't speak English at all. Say, if it ain't too much to ask, why didn't you talk English when I first said I couldn't talk Spanish?"

"I don't know; it didn't occur to me, I guess. I think in Spanish, you see."

"Uh-huh. Well, I don't drive my cars much myself, but I got a lot of good chauffeurs. I can let you have ——"

"I want you, personally."

Blossom's china eyes searched Braxton's black ones. "Where was you thinkin' of goin'?"

"Mendon, down in Salado County. Perhaps four or five miles beyond there."

"How many passengers? Them roads down Mendon way are certainly awful hard on the springs and tires."

"Just myself."

"Forty dollars."

"Forty dollars! Oh, I say! Thirty is about the usual——"

"Yeah! But this ain't no usual trip. If you want one of my good cars, mister, and you're especially fussy about gettin' a chauffeur that ain't goin' to understand what you say if you stop and talk to somebody in Spanish, why, the way I figure it, it's wuth a little more. Sometimes, once in a while, I've noticed there's a leetle risk goes with these trips on Mexican business. You see, I talk frankly, man fashion. Between you and I, I ain't specially stuck on these jobs. I've had one or two experiences, as you might say."

"What makes you think I don't want a Spanish-speaking chauffeur?"

"Mebbe it's just my mind. You think in Spanish. I think in Yankee. Get me?"

"I do," laughed Braxton, amused. "And at forty I expect to hire a good car, a competent chauffeur—yourself, and a close mouth."

"Mister," said Blossom earnestly. "I ain't never one of that talkin' kind. You can believe me or not, but the last time I took out a Mexican party, one of the gentlemen tried to rob me—with a pistol, too—and I never even told the police."

"Did he succeed in doing it?"

"Well, no, to tell you the honest truth, he didn't. But, golly! It was mighty unpleasant. I try to keep out of unpleasant jobs—unless they pay fairly well. I ain't no rough character, and up where I come from they don't believe in shootin', and all that."

"Mr. Blossom, you're hired," declared Braxton. "Blamed if I don't believe you would keep your mouth shut even if you did speak Spanish. And I have a feeling your company, to-day, is going to be worth the extra money."

"We'll be ready to start in fifteen minutes," said Blossom. "Jest as soon as I look over the gas and the tires." He turned away with a sigh. "Honest," he said, "the way the roads are down in that Mendon country, and the price of tires and gasoline the way it is now, I ought to charge you more. I won't make hardly a cent."

They had to pass through a part of the city's center before striking into the road that led southward toward Salado County. Two or three blocks from the garage they met a handsome, low black car, with two occupants, and Braxton was glad he had already donned the dust coat and goggles he had borrowed from Blossom. The two occupants were General Sauceda, late of the forces of Pancho Villa, and Henry Cook, San Antonio agent for Mexican lands.

Once clear of the city, Blossom settled down to a gait that combined moderate speed with comfort, plus a proper solicitude for springs and tires. It was a beautiful spring day—one of those

south Texas April days, when the mercury reaches eighty degrees in the shade, but an ample breeze prevents the heat from being noticeable so long as one remains in the shade. With the top up, motoring was very comfortable. The car rolled steadily on, over fair roads, through wide areas of mesquite and pear cactus, then across prairies where the Texas bluebonnet, as far in every direction as the eye could see, tinted the ground a brighter cerulean than the sky.

They passed without stopping through little villages that all looked alike—a principal street, with three or four stores, a few dozen one-story frame houses with perhaps an adobe building or two, a couple of corrals—and then on into the open country again. Darting lizards scuttled for shelter in the sand beside the road; ground squirrels and horned toads hurried ahead of them as though bound somewhere on sudden and important business; jack rabbits and cottontails scampered away at their approach; and once, on a rise not a hundred yards away, a pair of coyotes stood and eyed them curiously.

They did not talk much. Once, after a longer silence than usual, Blossom said:

"Say, mister! Of course it ain't none of my business, and I ain't tryin' to butt in or nothin', but you ain't happened to mention to me what your name was?"

"Haven't I?" said Waite absent-mindedly. There was a pause.

"I getcher!" remarked Blossom, quite without rancor.

Early in the afternoon, they reached Mendon, a pretentious town of six or seven thousand inhabitants, possessing an ornamental railroad station, several brick blocks, a cotton gin, two well-advertised real-estate additions, and a prosperous-looking little bank. Along the main street saddle horses stood drowsily, anchored in their places by psychology—the reins being dropped over their heads to drag on the ground at their feet, a procedure which usually convinces a south Texas horse that he is irrevocably hitched.

Braxton and Blossom ate substantially at a "short-order" restaurant across the street from the bank, after which Waite, by a few tactful inquiries at the post office, located José Lopez as being a sort of head man among the Mexicans employed on the farm of one Martin on the southern outskirts of the town. The Martin Farm, he heard, adjoined the property of Ezell, where the explosion had taken place. He also learned, to his satisfaction, that if he was desirous of finding Bill Martin, he had come on a bad day, Bill having but that morning taken the train for Santone.

They came upon Lopez, working, with six or seven other Mexicans, in a field bordered by the road, and Braxton summoned him to come to the car. He removed his hat as he approached; a dark-brown, soft-eyed, pock-marked man of fifty, of the peon type. A scar across one cheek, and two fingers missing from his left hand, bore mute witness that in his day he had been concerned in knife fights. This was a man who would probably be faithful to his associates in any conspiracy, but not one of much intelligence, and with no especial ability to think quickly in any emergency save a purely physical one. The course to pursue with him was to overwhelm him with authority, trusting to his natural awe of caste to overcome his caution.

"Put on your hat, José; the sun is hot!" commanded Braxton, in rapid Spanish, with the air of one who kindly condescends. "The driver of the car has no Spanish at all; therefore you can talk freely. Has Sheriff Brown learned anything yet about the dynamite?"

"The dynamite? Sheriff Brown? What should I——" José stammered,

swung off his feet by the suddenness of the question.

"It is all right. Perhaps you have forgotten me—perhaps you never noticed me—at San Sebastian Avenue. I have seen you. You are one of us. The general, I may say, speaks quite highly of you—although Tomas thought you shouted too loud when you came in night before last with the news."

A look of relief passed over Lopez's face; this stranger knew of that visit, and must therefore be trustworthy.

"Pardon my hesitation. One must be careful," he murmured. "What did you ask? About the sheriff? No. He rattles around, like corn in the tortilla stone before it is ground. There is none of the band who will tell. Perhaps some might wish to do so for money, but if they did——" He showed his teeth in a smile that was entirely pleasant, and made a motion with his right forefinger as though cutting his own throat. "No," he said. "They will not tell."

"And you have your ten?"

"Yes. Five of these are among them." He waved his hand to indicate the other laborers in the field, who were making only a pretense of work, and staring at José's aristocratic visitor. "Here are six, but one has a negro wife, and negroes will often tell the gringos what is afoot, so he has not been included."

"And you know your share of the work—when the time comes?" Braxton was groping blindly, but hopefully.

"Oh, yes, señor. I and my ten are to attend to the dynamite. The new supply has partly come in, and there will be more to-morrow. Have no fear!" He said it proudly. "We shall have it at the bank just on time, one hour after the telegraph message comes."

"And who takes it then?"

"Who but Mendoza? There has been no change in that, has there?"

"No. I only ask to make sure you have not forgotten. And what shall you and yours do then?"

"When the bank blows up, we loot." His tongue licked his lips. "We loot the money and leave the papers, and a one-hundredth of what we get shall be divided among the twenty-two—me and my ten and Mendoza and his ten. And the rest we shall take to the south when we go away, after the town is burning."

Braxton did not dare to ask who was to set the fires. How could they hope to accomplish so desperate a scheme in a town as large as Mendon? He fished sharply for more information.

"And the sheriff and his deputies? Can there be any mistake about them? There must be no hitch there!"

"No, señor. Trustworthy men have that in charge. When the bank goes up—boom!—they and the city marshal will come running from their houses, and our men will kill them very carefully at once. Of course," he said naïvely, "some of us must expect to be killed also; these gringos are good shots. But most of them will be too busy. They will start to come in town when the bank goes up, and then they will turn back again as their own houses begin to burn. Between these times, our people will have much time to loot. And the horses for the escape will all be stolen, of course, during the hour before, as has been planned."

Waite feared to go into the matter too far, and feared as greatly that he might miss some important admission. "You are sure they cannot telephone ahead to have you arrested in the towns to the south?" he asked.

"But how," asked the Mexican, "when all the wires have been cut, as is provided? And will not every other town to the south be having its own matters to attend to?" He paused a second, and a look that might be either

suspicion or fear came into his eye. "I do not understand, señor. You are one of them—at San Sebastian Avenue. How comes it that you must ask these questions?"

"To make sure you know the answers," was the quick and stern reply. "We take no chance of blunders being made by thick-skulled hombres. And so one more question: What provision is made as regards the soldiers?"

"Are they not far down on the border—and few? And will not Pancho Villa or the brave Luis de la Rosa come across the Rio Grande and attend to them? But the gringo soldiers will run anyway, and the government will not let them fight; it is afraid of Mexico. Now, as to the Texas Rangers, that is different. May the saints protect me from meeting Texas Rangers!"

"You did not get exactly what I meant," said Braxton. "I meant, not the soldiers along the border, but those back in San Antonio, at Fort Sam Houston. Let me hear what you are to do if they pursue you, so I may know you have the lesson well learned."

"Souls of the saints, señor! Are you making fun of me? How will the soldiers at San Antonio hear of what is happening in south Texas, with all the wires cut? And, if they did, what of it? Will they not be busy enough in San Antonio itself, with the banks blowing up, the city afire in so many places, and all the bridges dynamited?"

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Braxton, under his breath. "It is well, José. I shall report that you, for one, are surely to be depended upon. So now I shall go on. I have other captains of ten to see, and other towns to visit. Good day, José."

To Blossom he said, in English: "We'll be moving on." And, when they had passed beyond the hearing of Lopez: "Go through the town easy, so as not to attract attention, and when you get out in the country, hit her up for San Antonio as fast as you can burn up the road. Damn the price of tires and gasoline! The job will be worth fifty dollars for the day if you make it in three hours.

"They're mad! Absolutely mad!" he muttered to himself, as Blossom, without comment, gave indications that he purposed to earn the extra money. "But before the fools find out that they are fools, how many men they can kill, and how many women—— Say, Blossom!" he said aloud. "If you get there in two hours and a half, I'll make it sixty!"

CHAPTER XVII.

AN INVALUABLE ALLY.

Twilight had fallen, but it was not yet entirely dark when they rocketed over the brow of a hill and swept down its farther slope toward the city's lights. Waite espied ahead, under the nearest arc lamp, an isolated building, brightly illuminated, which, from noting it in the morning, he remembered as bearing the sign: "Steve's Last Chance Saloon."

"Stop at the barroom," he said to Blossom. "I want to use the telephone."

"All right," agreed the chauffeur, beginning to slow down. "But I got ten minutes yet to make the center of town in two hours and a half, and I can do it. If you go to stoppin' to telephone, seems as if you ought to take out the time it takes, or make some such allowance, don't it?"

"You've earned the sixty. And maybe, when I get through talking, I'll want you to stick on the job some time longer—hours, perhaps. You can do it, I suppose."

"Sure thing! I ain't one of those fellers that don't appreciate getting a good customer. Take your time, mister!"

The telephone in Steve's Last Chance was a wall instrument, with no provi-

sion for privacy, but the plans Braxton had laid with Payne for calling him in time for emergency provided for such a contingency. Therefore it was a perfectly innocent message that would have been overheard if any one curiously listened. When he and Payne, who, fortunately, happened to be in his hotel room, had finished a brief exchange of commonplace remarks, they had in reality made an appointment for a meeting an hour later, at a definite place.

"You can take it easy from now into town," said Braxton, as he climbed back into the seat beside Blossom. "We've got to be out near Hot Wells an hour from now. In the meantime, if you know some short-order place between here and there, we'll stop off and get a bite to eat. There's a chance I'll want to use you pretty late."

An hour later a Hot Wells trolley car stopped at a dark corner two miles from town, and Leroy Payne alighted. As the car went on, he waited to let his eyes get used to the darkness, and then walked confidently toward an automobile that stood beside the road, a hundred feet away.

"Here we are!" called Braxton, in Spanish, as he approached. "Get in. We'll ride slowly and talk as we go. Speak Spanish entirely; the chauffeur doesn't understand it."

He instructed Blossom to drive leisurely—anywhere—and the liveryman picked out the direction that would be least hard on the tires, and kicked in his clutch. Sitting with Payne in the tonneau, Braxton went over, as rapidly as was consistent with clarity, the startling results of his day's fishing expedition.

"And there it is! Ab-so-lutely crazy, and yet undoubtedly true! And as near as I can make out, they plan to pull the thing off within a few days. We've got to stop it!"

"It sounds too insane to be possible," exclaimed Payne. "If I didn't know you, I'd be tempted to turn back to the large and ornate group of buildings on the left, which we passed about five minutes ago, and which is the Southwestern Asylum, and have you examined. As it is—— Whew! It's some contract to head off a scheme in two or three days that has eleven thousand men in it, and includes the wrecking of all the towns in south Texas."

"I've been turning it over in my mind ever since we left Mendon. We've got to get the men at the top—the men that are going to send out the telegraph signal. If the signal doesn't go out, the uprising falls flat."

"That means we must gather in Sauceda and all his first lieutenants. And we've got to get that list of recruits you saw at Sauceda's house—those captains of ten. We won't be safe until the sheriff of every south Texas county is rounding them up and putting them where they can't set off their powder mines."

"But first we have to learn exactly what the plot is. What, for instance, are they planning to start here in San Antonio? 'When the banks begin to blow up, and the city is afire in so many places, and the bridges are dynamited,' Lopez said. An uprising like that, in a city of a hundred and twenty-five thousand people, with efficient police and sheriff's department, would last about two hours, I figure, but think what harm could be done in one hour—or a half hour, for that matter!"

"We've got to get hold of one of the ringleaders and third-degree a confession out of him. Can we do it?"

"I don't believe there's a man in the crowd but would face it out. We could threaten him, but he wouldn't believe it. These Mexicans don't believe any Yankee means what he promises, anyway."

"It's a pity we aren't working with some Texas Rangers. A greaser is

more afraid of those sixty or seventy Rangers down on the border than he is of the whole United States army."

"By Jove! I've got it!" cried Braxton. And in English he spoke to the chauffeur. "Turn around and drive like blazes for the Edgewood Hotel!"

"*Now* what form has your mania taken?" demanded Payne.

"What a chump I was not to think of it! Captain Bob Dalton, of the Rangers—do you know him?"

"I've never seen him, but, of course, I've heard of him. Some man, they say."

"He's at the Edgewood, or at least he was there at breakfast time this morning. If we can get him—and I've thought of the other end of the combination, too; the man that is to be made to squeal. Azcona!"

"I don't know but you're right."

"I feel sure of it. He's not so young as he used to be, and he's a fop; I don't believe but what he's a physical coward. And he's away inside on this thing. Knows every detail of it. Yes, sir! He's the man!"

"It's worth trying, at any rate. But first find your Captain Bob."

They drew up before the Edgewood, a quiet hotel with a family patronage, some little distance from the center of town. "Wait for us," Braxton commanded the chauffeur. "Come on, Leroy. If he's in the hotel let's not lose a minute."

Captain Dalton, to their great relief, was in the hotel and had gone to his room, a Ranger's life outside the cities having a tendency to give him the early-to-bed-and-early-to-rise habit. Waite wrote two or three lines on a card, signed his real name and his alias to it, and sent it up. Word came promptly back that Captain Dalton would like to see Mr. Correon and his friend in his room.

Dalton had not gone to bed, and was waiting to greet them in the door, dressed except for his coat. When the boy who showed them up had vanished around the corner of the hall, he closed the door, shook hands with them, and motioned them to seats.

"I'm certainly right glad to see you again," he said to Braxton. "Let me see. It must be more'n three years since we went to see the Third, that night, down in Mawnin' Star Lodge."

"Payne happens to be one, too," said Waite, "but we haven't got any time to talk about lodges, much as I like to most always. See here, captain! I've always been told a Texas Ranger can be absolutely depended upon not to tell anything he runs onto in the course of his work—anything that is nobody else's business, I mean."

"He gets so into the habit sometimes," drawled Dalton, "that he don't talk about even the things it wouldn't do any harm to spill. If you mean can I keep a secret—I can."

"There aren't a dozen men in the United States know this one," said Braxton earnestly. "I am an agent of the United States secret service. So is Mr. Payne; he has been located in Mexico City a number of years. It is as important his identity should not be known as my own."

Dalton's eyes went from face to face. "Of course that explains, now, why you-all beat it out of the dinin' room without sayin' 'Howdy,' this mawnin'," he remarked.

"I didn't think you saw me."

"I 'lowed you didn't want me to when you hitched your chair around. But I'm right glad to get the explanation. When I asked the girl, and found out you was travelin' under a greaser name, I didn't know what to think about it. I gather this call is on some matter of business. What can I do for you?"

"One of the most important things a Ranger captain ever had a chance to do for the people of Texas."

"That's quite a statement. All right. I'm goin' to try to do it. Shoot!"

Braxton put the captain in possession of the story. Dalton listened intently, without interrupting. His face hardened perceptibly when the tale reached the point where Lopez outlined the Mendon program.

"Another 'Plan of San Diego,'" he commented, as Waite paused.

"I heard something about that, but there wasn't much about it in the Northern papers," said Braxton. "It was nearly a year ago, wasn't it?"

"Started in July, last year. The scheme was to organize an uprising among the Texas Mexicans, seize ranches and little towns along the border and a hundred miles north of it, bring across an army of bandits under a yellow-toothed hound named Perez, and annex the south half of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California to Mexico. That's all! A Villa scheme. This sounds like another. Since that bad hombre got petted and told he was a human bein' by a few trusting white men, he's thought he was another Napoleon."

"Were you on the border during the 'Plan of San Diego?'"

"I was, and a nasty mess they made for us for a while. One of my men got Perez in a fight one night. That put a stop to it in my section—that and various other things that happened to the Mexicans that were mixed up in it."

Braxton resumed, and repeated what Lopez had said about the plan to terrorize even San Antonio itself. Dalton smiled grimly.

"What a proud chance they'd have to get away with that!" he exclaimed. "We've been lookin' for 'em to think up something of the sort for a year—and fixin' to take care of it. There's enough guns and ammunition over in the courthouse right this minute—and men sleepin' handy—to put down a riot within half an hour after it got started. Only after that it would be a hell of a bad time in Santone for five or ten thousand Mexicans!"

His face set harshly. "If it wasn't for the twenty or thirty or fifty folks the greasers would kill before they began to pay the reckonin', I'd almost feel like lettin' 'em start it. It would be a lesson that would do every hombre in south Texas good. I don't know but I'd feel like lettin' 'em start it even though they did kill a few good men—if it wasn't for the women. However—— Of course, we ain't going to. And we've got to bust this scheme so far as the little towns to the south of us go. Some of those towns have ten Mexicans to one white man. All right! What do you want me to do?"

Braxton and Payne outlined to him their idea as to the possible vulnerability of Azcona, if the right kind of pressure were applied. Captain Dalton agreed their idea was a good one.

"You fellows want to be present when I dig down into his soul?" he asked.

"I do," said Waite. "It would probably be just as well if Payne weren't. They don't know him at all. And I don't want to appear as anybody but Braxton, of Universal Oil. Azcona knows me that way. I was thinking perhaps you could arrest me, too."

"That ain't such a bad idea. See here! You go find Azcona. Start somewhere with him—anywhere away from the refugee bunch. I'll hunt up one of my boys—there are two of 'em around town somewhere, and I ought to be able to find one in less than an hour—and take you both in. Where will you be with him?"

"He's usually out to Sauceda's house at this hour. Suppose I find him there and get him to walk across toward the Madison Club. I'll ask him to have lunch with me. You could be on Ryder Street, along there by the bridge."

"Good business! And you?" The

captain, all energy and resourcefulness, turned to Payne. "What was you plannin' to do?"

"I thought I'd be gathering my men —I've got three in the city—and put them to watching the San Sebastian joint. And getting ready to make the pinch of the crowd when we get to it. I can't personally make the raid, you know; it would give me away, and make me useless in the future."

"You can count me and my boys in on that, too, of course. I suppose it will be too late when we get through with Azcona to start anything out there to-night?"

"We'd better wait until to-morrow," put in Braxton. "It is my idea to catch all the lieutenants together, and all those that are in town usually show up at Sauceda's between eight and ten."

Captain Dalton stood up and began strapping on a belt that lay on his bureau; a belt containing many vicious-looking .45-caliber cartridges and two holsters, one hanging low on the right, and the other high on the left. Two long revolvers lay on the bureau beside it; he thrust them into the holsters and reached for his coat.

"Get your greaser and come down by the back of the Madison Club," he said sharply. "And put up your hands quick when I mention it, along by the river. We won't hurt you, of course, but when I make a bluff, I like to make a good one. Temporarily you'll be a prisoner, and I'll treat you as such. Maybe the play will lay so you can help me prod this Azcona's memory better in that capacity than in any other."

He looked around the room, adjusted the hang of his belt, and hitched the right-hand holster a little farther forward.

"Well," he pronounced. "I reckon we're all set. Let's go!"

Esther Lynde and Henry Cook had dined at the Madison Club that night, and taken a cool ride afterward in Cook's fast car, accompanied by Mrs. Carson. Mr. Carson was awaiting them on their arrival at the St. Francis, a little before ten, and the four sat for a few minutes on the long outdoor loggia of the hotel. Then the Carsons went to their room, and Esther and the popular land agent remained on the veranda.

They talked a long time, in voices that did not carry to other ears. Finally they sat alone. The girl, looking at her watch, and exclaiming at the lateness of the hour, rose to enter the hotel.

"So," she said—she was speaking in German—"it will be quite soon."

"Within less than a week. And then —our good Washington friends will have something else to do with their ammunition besides sending it to Europe."

"I wonder if they really *will* intervene?" she said, half to herself.

"Can even Washington do anything else?"

In her room, Miss Lynde opened a trunk and took out all the trays. She pressed a spring, and a section of the bottom of the trunk opened, disclosing a small volume printed on sheets of the thinnest India paper.

For an hour, then, she sat at the writing desk, laboriously transcribing a message by the aid of the book. When it was finished, it contained a seemingly meaningless jumble of words.

She wrote at the top a name and address in Washington, on a street occupied entirely by private residences. Then she looked in her purse to be certain she had enough money with which to prepay the message, shook her head as she consulted her watch and realized Mr. Carson was long since in the land of dreams—and telephoned for a taxicab. When it came, she ordered the driver to take her to a telegraph office. It was but four blocks distant, but the hour was after one.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AZCONA SHOWS HIS TEETH.

The chauffeur threw on the self-starter as Braxton and his two companions came out of the Edgewood. Waite climbed in beside him, and the others entered the tonneau.

"Mr. Blossom," said Braxton, "this is Captain Dalton, of the Rangers."

The automobile man turned to shake hands cordially. "By golly! I'm sure glad to make your acquaintance, cap'n," he said. "I've be'n hearin' of you off and on ever since I come to Texas."

"You can drive up to San Sebastian Avenue," said Braxton, "and let me off somewhere along the 500 block. I'll walk from there," he added, to the others. "Then I want you to take Captain Dalton wherever he wants to go; you're under his orders until further notice. By and by, perhaps, there will be a little excitement of one sort or another. Perhaps you'll see me getting arrested. That will——"

"Say, mister, I ain't going to get in any trouble—any fightin' or anything of that sort, am I? I'm a pretty peaceable feller, you know, and I——"

"No. It will be Captain Dalton that will be arresting me. I don't expect to put up any fight."

"Cap'n Dalton? Oh, I see. I swear, but this is gettin' to be an excitin' town to live in! When I first come down here, I thought it was goin' to be wild and woolly, and it wa'n't, and now I've got used to its bein' quiet and peaceable and——"

"Sure! That's the way life is—one surprising thing after another. And you're getting paid, among other things, to forget what happens, you remember. You're under Captain Dalton's orders, after you leave me. Do just what he says. Don't ask me for any instructions, or even act as if you had ever seen me."

"I getcher! I guess it's all right, or there wouldn't be a Ranger in it, would there? I've heard that——"

"And now we'll start for San Sebastian Avenue—pronto!"

The task at the Sauceda house was absurdly easy. Azcona was there, with one or two others, and Braxton said he had nothing in particular on his mind except to ask what progress was being made in the recruiting. Sauceda gave him the information, and they sat and smoked, talking of various unimportant things, until the hour was nearly up. Then Waite proposed to Azcona that they walk to the Madison Club, a distance of not more than a half mile, and Azcona accepted cheerfully. So they came sauntering through Ryder Street, two blocks back of the Madison Club, toward where an automobile stood in the shadow.

As they came under the illumination of a street light a block away, two men who had been standing near the automobile started walking to meet them. The pair separated as they neared Braxton and the Mexican, so that it was necessary to go between them or step out into the middle of the street.

Then, as the two pairs came close to each other, Azcona found himself suddenly seized in an iron grip, a pistol waved menacingly from him to Braxton, and a curt voice, not loud, but emphatic, commanded:

"Put up your hands! Both of you! Quick! And not a sound! You're under arrest!"

Braxton threw his hands above his head instantly. The man who held the revolver, and who was on his side, looked in the darkness to be steady and competent, and as the long barrel of the Colt waved from him to Azcona, Waite recalled that a Texas gunman always has his finger pressed on the trigger as he draws his pistol, and holds it from being discharged only by the pressure of his thumb on the hammer.

He hoped this young Ranger had a strong thumb.

Captain Dalton had seized Azcona's right wrist at the moment he gave the order, and, a fraction of a second later, he had twisted the man around, searched him, and taken an automatic pistol from under his arm and a nasty-looking knife from the back of his neck. The struggle prevented the Mexican from calling out, but as he realized he was disarmed he found his voice.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "This is some mistake. I have done nothing."

"Ranger service!" replied Dalton briefly. "And no mistake. You are Andres Azcona and this other hombre is Salvador Correon, alias Braxton. Get in!"

He pushed Azcona toward the auto. "You first, Carl!" he ordered the young Ranger. "We'll let Mr. Azcona sit between us. You"—to Braxton—"get into the front seat beside the driver, and remember there's a pistol pointing at you from in back, and if you start to make any get-away it'll go off. And I usually hit what I aim at."

A second later Blossom, evidently in pursuance of instructions previously received, started the car and went spinning northward.

"Look here, Ranger!" exclaimed Azcona, after a moment. "You're not heading toward the police station."

"I reckon you're right," replied the captain.

"Where are we going?"

"Taking a little ride."

"But—I've got rights, under the law. I demand to be taken at once to the police station and allowed to offer bail. I demand to see your warrant. Those are my legal rights."

"Maybe," said the captain. "Maybe. But we ain't going to the police station quite yet. We ain't going to give any Mexicans hanging around city hall a chance to run and tell your pals you're pinched. And as regards the warrant—all in due time."

"But I demand——" His voice rose. *"Oh!"*

"I'll twist it harder the next time you start telling me what you demand. And if you don't lower your voice, I'll gag you!"

The car, its occupants now all silent, spun out through the suburbs and into the North Loop Road. Two or three miles along that highway they rolled, and then, on the top of a rise, came to a prosperous farm of two or three hundred acres, with well-kept grounds in front of a handsome, rambling house. The car turned in through ornamental gateways.

"The Ridge Hill Farm," said Captain Dalton to nobody in particular for Braxton's benefit, "belongs to my brother. His wife happens to be away, so he didn't mind if we made his garage our headquarters for the evening. Nice little farm he's got. Nearest house is more than half a mile away."

Azcona, straining his brain for the best method of handling the situation, essayed a weak jest. "Fine place for a murder!" he remarked cuttingly.

"You've said something!" replied Dalton, in so cold a voice that the Mexican shuddered.

A lamp was lighted in the house, and a man a few years older than the captain—somewhere in the late forties—came out on the gallery.

"That you, Bob?" he called. "Got 'em?"

"Yep. Is the garage all ready? They're a pair of bad hombres."

Their host led the way to a good-sized frame building, and lighted a large hanging lamp. He stood back then and surveyed the prisoners, who were being led in. He was coatless, and had provided against contingencies by strapping on his own holstered .45.

The garage had been built to accommodate three automobiles, and but one

car was in it, so there was plenty of room. Dalton placed two chairs several feet apart. "You sit there!" he ordered Braxton roughly. "You there!" to Azcona. "Now I'll talk to you first."

Ranger Carl took up a position behind Azcona's chair. Dalton removed his coat, and stood before the Mexican.

"We won't waste any time in preliminaries," the captain said. "You're going to tell me about this scheme you hombres are trying to put over. Come on!"

Azcona was silent.

"Come on!" growled the Ranger more insistently.

"I demand to see your warrant, and to be taken to the police station, and to have an attorney. And I demand ——"

Smack! Dalton slapped Azcona's face. Not a very hard slap; not a blow that could possibly injure him; a slap that swung from the elbow only and contained none of the strength that the captain's rippling shoulder muscles could have given it.

"Come on! And come clean! Lying won't do!"

Azcona, at the blow, tried to leap to his feet, but Ranger Carl, behind him, pushed him down by the shoulders. The Mexican looked from left to right, at Braxton, and at the hostile faces of the two Daltons. He wet his lips.

"This is cowardly!" he cried. "Three to two, and all of you armed! I have always heard the Rangers——"

Dalton threw his right hand out from his side. "I'm going to hit you again!" he warned.

"I give you my word it is an innocent thing," Azcona hastened to say. "Merely some refugees forming a club to——"

Smack! The blow was no harder than before. "This ain't no torture chamber, like you greasers would be using if conditions were reversed," said the captain. "But you're going to tell me the truth. When you don't, I'm going to slap your face. It don't hurt much now; just makes you mad. But it'll hurt like the devil along about an hour from now—unless you get sense and tell things straight. Now! What's your game?"

"I—I've got to tell!" exclaimed the Mexican to Braxton. "Well—I suppose it comes under the head of conspiring against a friendly power, although my lawyers will argue that. The fact is we are making plans to help the Cientifico——"

Smack!

"Curse you, I'm telling the truth!"

Smack!

"My hand will last as long as your tongue will," said the captain. "Listen here, hombre! There's just one way to stop me standing here and slapping your face, and that's to come through."

"Well—we are gathering together men in a few of the southern counties to"—he looked from side to side, like one who is hunted and seeks a way of escape—"to—to get ammunition—and dynamite—to send across the border to——"

Again Dalton's hand struck. The Mexican's eyes glistened venomously. "You see, I know when you're lying," remarked the captain. "But I think you're going to lose the habit shortly."

"I'd rather be killed fighting!" snarled Azcona in Spanish, and made a leap forward in a mad attempt to reach one of Dalton's guns. But the strong hands of Ranger Carl caught him from behind and forced him back into his chair, and as he writhed and struggled there the captain slowly, methodically, and without the slightest passion, slapped his face four times.

"You see, you ain't going to get any chance to die—either fightin' or otherwise," Dalton said. "You're just going to sit right there and get your face slapped—over and over and over and

over—until you come clean with the whole scheme."

It was rather sickening, like abusing a child. Waite had never seen anything just like it; he hoped he would not again. Yet he realized the Mexican was not being seriously hurt—would not be. And before his mind came a picture of the men and women and children that would suffer when the signal flashed over the wires across south Texas, and he no longer hated the procedure. The end justified the means.

For perhaps ten minutes this went on. Azcona snarled and fought. Then he wept and begged. And finally his spirit broke, and he told the story from beginning to end. Not all at once; many times, before he had finished, the Ranger's hand swung against his cheek, but after a while even a threat of it sufficed.

It was, indeed, a mad plot that he disclosed; mad, that is to say, as regards what it proposed to accomplish, which was the seizure of south Texas, but not entirely mad from the standpoint of the men behind the scheme, who did not expect it to actually succeed in that respect, but did believe the uprising would force intervention and thus serve their personal fortunes.

It was a Villa plan. At least Azcona believed it was, on the authority of Sauceda. Villa had everything to gain by it and nothing to lose. If indeed it succeeded—if the insurgent Mexicans could seize and hold even for a few days some fairly important Texas towns—then Villa would be a national hero in his own country. If it failed utterly, yet towns were burned, banks looted, and men and women killed on such a wholesale scale, as had been planned, presumably the United States would enter Mexico—and again Villa believed he would be the gainer as the one about whom his fellow countrymen would rally.

The plot involved no less than twenty cities and towns, and in each the program was similar to that which Lopez had outlined at Mendon. At a signal there were to be fires, killings, and looting. Along the border an attempt would be made to hold the towns permanently; farther north the plan was to escape to the south with the stolen property.

But it was in the south Texas metropolis itself that the scheme had been most carefully worked out. In no other way could the Villistas so well gain their ends as to have it go forth to the world that they had struck terror, if only for an hour, into the hearts of the city gringos in San Antonio.

And this was the scheme. At two o'clock in the morning three or four serious fires would be set in widely separated parts of the city. The firemen and certain of the police would thus be occupied. Ten minutes later at least one bank—perhaps two—would be partially wrecked by dynamite, although in San Antonio the plotters had little expectation of actually getting at the contents of the vaults. Coincident with this, the electric-light station would be put out of business, telephone wires inside the city and all telegraph wires leading out would be cut, and an attempt would be made to seize the Federal arsenal. There are nearly thirty bridges across the winding San Antonio River; these were all to be destroyed by dynamite simultaneously, to hamper police, firemen, and troops from the army post.

Before morning the raiders would all escape and set out for the south; at least so the subordinates were being told. Azcona confessed that he and Sauceda's other lieutenants did not expect many San Antonio raiders would escape alive from the city, but the fact that those who took part would be killed before morning would not alter the incalculable damage they would have done and the prestige they would

have gained for Pancho Villa before the Americans got the upper hand. He admitted also that neither Sauceda nor any of the higher men at the junta expected to participate in the uprising; they were all planning to leave the city just before it started.

They had gathered their funds in various places. A very little had come from Mexican sources. Much had been contributed by the New York syndicate. A smaller amount had been given by "certain business interests"—Azcona sobbingly insisted he didn't know their identity until Dalton finally believed him —who were represented in San Antonio by Mr. Henry Cook.

And the signal for the uprising, unless something should happen in the meantime to make postponement advisable, was to be given three nights later. The form of the telegrams that were to be sent varied; copies of the innocent-appearing messages that should mean fire and explosion and death were in Sauceda's safe.

The story was at last told, and Azcona sat shrunken in his chair, a dishevelled, trembling, whimpering wreck.

"Now, sir!" Captain Dalton turned to Braxton. "We'll hear from you. You're with the gang of financiers that's putting up for this pretty little orgy of murder, as I understand it."

"Captain," said Waite earnestly, "I give you my word of honor I didn't know it. I ask you to believe that I am a good American; I couldn't be a party to a plot like this. They told me it was a plan to back the Cientificos in Mexico. I have every reason to feel sure they told my principals that, too. It was this man who came to New York. He saw the financial interests."

"Yes," said Azcona, "I saw them. Old Jeremiah Stedman, with his smug face and his talk about the vested rights of capital. Of *course* I told him the Cientifico story; nobody would expect me to tell the truth about it. And of course he knew I was lying. If he didn't, he was a fool. He knew I was lying, and I knew he knew I was lying. He wants his rotten money to be protected in Mexico, and he's willing to shut his eyes to how it's done. If this thing had gone through and brought about intervention, he'd have been satisfied enough, never mind how many men got killed in Texas. He'd have lifted his eyes in pious horror when he heard about it, but he'd have been satisfied just the same—until he found out intervention in Mexico didn't mean conquering Mexico."

Braxton ignored Azcona, playing his own part. "Captain," he said, "I may have violated the Federal law in getting mixed into this, but I ask you to believe me, as man to man, when I say I had no part in this plot. I'm no associate of murderers!"

"You!" Azcona fairly screamed. His veneer of courtesy was worn down to the truth beneath. His eyes were bright with concentrated bitterness. His lips were drawn back, so that his teeth showed even at the corners of his mouth. Cowed, beaten, overwhelmed, facing a prison term, and after it a knife thrust in the dark, should his confederates learn who had betrayed them, he flamed with the hatred of race for race. "You are no associate of murderers! No! And you are not fit to associate with men, either!"

His words fell over one another, mingled with sobs. The man's nerve was broken, and he let himself go wildly, saying with his lips exactly what he felt in his heart.

"We have called you Yankees children of dogs—we Mexicans—and pushed you off our sidewalks and spit in your faces, and you would not fight! We have flooded your mines and wrecked your machinery and confiscated your lands, and you would not fight! We have tortured your men and

stolen your women and killed your children, and you would not fight! We have crossed your borders and raided your towns and burned your houses and shot your people in your *own* streets—and you would not fight! If we were to blow up half Texas, you would watch and wait to see if we really meant it. You're a pack of white-livered cowards, and every man in the world with red blood despises you—and ought to! By all the saints, I hope when they get time after the Great War, some nation of real men—I don't care which—comes and wipes your hypocritical, money-grubbing race off the face of the earth. *You* to act contemptuous of *me! Pah!*" He spat on the floor at his feet.

"That'll be about all for now," remarked Captain Dalton decisively. "I can't exactly say your sentiments are news to me, but at the same time I don't admire to hear 'em—so I won't any more."

He turned to his brother. "Willing to take your automobile out and do a little piece of work for the State that'll keep you up all night?" he asked.

"Shore thing."

"Take Ranger Carl and this frothin' hombre up to Austin. Have him locked up," he said to Carl, "and kept *incomunicado* until I send word to the contrary. And then come right back. I'll take care of this other prisoner myself."

CHAPTER XIX.

FACE TO FACE.

"Into town!" ordered Braxton, as Blossom looked to him and the captain for instructions after Azcona had departed, handcuffed, in Carl's charge. "It's nearly one o'clock," he said to Dalton, as they got under way. "Is there anything more we can do to-night, or had we better get to bed and start early to-morrow?"

"We could get at the sheriff and chief of police, but I don't see that it won't keep just as well until mawnin'. They'll be busy enough the next two or three days; no need of breakin' their rest. You're in charge, of course. Just how are you fixin' to bring about the round-up?"

"We want to get all the gang we can, when we make the raid, but it is even more important, it seems to me, that we get that list of names and those telegraph forms. I'm afraid, even after we make the arrests, somebody that we miss might send some of those messages. If Sauceda had planned to use the same form for all the towns, it would be a simple matter to warn the telegraph companies and stop them, but with a different form for each local leader, all reading innocently enough, it would be impossible. The telegraph companies can't hold up every message filed with them that happens to be addressed to a Mexican name in nearly thirty cities."

"Your idea, then, is——"

"Some plan whereby Sauceda will get no chance to destroy those papers after the raid begins. It wouldn't take a minute, you know. And I don't see any better way than for me to be in the house there—with him—when the arrests are made. If necessary, I can prevent him from burning them or tearing them up. I hope I won't have to do anything that will identify me, but if I have to, why I have to. I don't think it is advisable for me to see the sheriff or the police, either; Payne's man—the one that will be in charge of the raid—will take care of that, and I'd be mighty well pleased if you would go with him. If I can get through the row without being known, Payne's man will arrest me with the others, just as you did to-night."

"That reminds me. When Payne left me this evening, after you had gone to get Azcona, he asked me to tell you he would file a telegram to your

chief right away, telling him what was going on."

"Good! Now, as to to-morrow. We shall want your help, of course, and the help of the sheriff and the police, too. It will have to be a quick raid—a good-sized crowd of officers swarming in from every direction and jumping the gang. Not enough to fall over each other, of course, but enough to make a fight useless. The more men we have, within reason, the less chance of somebody getting hurt."

"I wouldn't hesitate, if it was necessary, to take in that whole crowd with two other Rangers."

"And you could do it undoubtedly. But you might have to kill somebody."

"I should expect to," replied the captain darkly. "That's why Mexicans have got respect for the Rangers. We're watchful, but we don't do much waitin'. However, you're the boss."

"Payne will have three men. You and your men make six. My idea is to ask the sheriff and chief of police for four each. That will give us more than a dozen men to arrest probably not more than seven or eight—ten, say, if we're in big luck."

"Plenty. And, if you don't mind, I think I'll order two or three of my men that are near enough to get there into some of these towns where they've got the most hombres on their lists—Mendon, for instance, and a couple of others. I'll send one man to each place, and he'll be there in time to help the sheriff make the round-up when you telegraph 'em the names. There'll need to be a little pressure applied in each town, too, to these captains of ten, to find out who the ten are. Lawdy! There's goin' to be so many greasers in some of these here little jails within the next three or four days that their arms and laigs will be stickin' out of the windows."

"Friend," said Waite to the chauffeur, who had been driving with eyes dead ahead, but his ears fairly wriggling with what he was overhearing. "Both Captain Dalton and I like that pretty little badge you wear in your coat. Where did you get it?"

"Master Hiram, No. 222, State o' Maine," replied Blossom promptly.

"We like the way you listen and don't talk. Can we depend on you to help us out a little to-morrow night—that is to say, to-night? It's morning now."

"Yes, sir, you can," declared Blossom. "Surest thing you know! Of course you understand I ain't no fightin' character. I don't want to get into no trouble, be in any shootin' scrapes or anything. I always be'n a man of peace, as you might say. But anything I can do to help you gentlemen out—and I gather from what you say I'm helpin' the government out, too—I'm with you. And I won't overcharge you none for the automobile, either."

"Fine! Well, I want you and the car about half past eight o'clock, at the Edgewood. You'll take me out near a place on San Sebastian Avenue and wait on a side street, just around the corner, until the captain or I tells you to do something else." To Dalton he added: "We'll use the car for prisoners, perhaps, and we may seize a lot of stuff we'll want to take in a hurry to the Federal Building."

The chauffeur nodded. "I'll be there, Mr.—— Oh, excuse me!"

"Braxton," said Waite. "Of New York. And I'm also known more or less around here as Correon."

"I getcher! I ain't exactly sure just what kind of a deteckative you are, but you're a Yankee, and you're after a bunch of Mexicans. Say, gentlemen! I've be'n around quite a lot, and I figure on tryin' to be liberal and broad-minded, but I don't *like* 'em. I hate to say it, but rich or poor, white or black, I can't get used to thinkin' of 'em as *folks*. Well, I'm mum! Silent

as the grave, as the feller says. You can bank on me, Mr. Braxton. And it's be'n a pleasure to meet you."

They were running, now, into the business section of the city, on the farther side of which lay the Edgewood. "I suppose we might as well go to the hotel, then, and get to bed; there doesn't seem to be anything else to plan tonight," said Waite.

"I'd like to stop first at the telegraph office, to send those wires to my men telling 'em to hustle for those towns where they'll be handy when we need 'em."

Commerce Street was directly on their way, and Blossom turned into it. The wide thoroughfare lay practically deserted before them, under the electric lights. Its stores and office buildings were dark, save where two telegraph offices, side by side, sent out brilliant splotches of light across the sidewalk. In the distance a policeman stood chatting with a night watchman who had come out of a high building and was sitting on the curb. Near at hand, in front of the telegraph office which Dalton sought, stood a taxicab. Blossom drew up behind it, and Captain Dalton alighted and went ahead and in through the doorway.

Nervous from the events of the night, Waite said something to Blossom about getting out to stretch his muscles, and climbed to the sidewalk to walk back and forth. As he came abreast of the taxi he saw, through the telegraph-office window, the Ranger captain, busy with pen and blanks. He stood idly looking in, his face full in the glare of the light that streamed from the interior.

Then he was conscious that a woman had turned from the desk and was coming out through the door, and that it was Esther Lynde. In a twinkling they were face to face, not six feet apart.

If he had wanted to turn and run away, he could not have done so. He realized he stood almost literally in the limelight. It would be absurd that she had not recognized him; he must make the best of it and act as naturally as he could. In the fraction of a second given him in which to make up his mind, he had no time to wonder what the girl was doing at that hour of the morning in a telegraph office.

He forced a look of pleased gratification to come over his face, and took a step toward her, raising his hat and extending his hand.

"Why, Miss Lynde!" he exclaimed. "This is indeed a surprise and a pleasure!"

The girl, at sight of him, had paused almost imperceptibly, then come on. There was no responsive smile on her face.

"How do you do?" she said. Her face, he thought, was a little white, and her eyes—they looked very dark in this light—were strained. She looked into his eyes, then down at his still extended hand, then back into his eyes again. And she did not take his hand, nor did she speak further.

He realized suddenly that he was blocking her way, and he stepped back, lamely fumbling in his mind for the right thing to do and feeling very young and somehow in the wrong. Then, as something seemed necessary to be said and she remained silent:

"This is—— I don't understand. Excuse me if I have offended in any way, but I——"

He hesitated, feeling he was not saying the right thing, but entirely at a loss as to what the right thing might be.

"You have done nothing to offend me personally," she said, with slow, precise coldness. "It merely happens that since I saw you last I have learned what you really are. So I do not care to shake hands with you. That is all."

He stepped back still farther, helpless for words. He could think of nothing to say, so he bowed with as

much dignity as her own. She moved on to the waiting taxicab, entered it, and it whirred away. When Captain Dalton emerged from the telegraph office five minutes later Braxton was walking up and down the sidewalk with his hands behind his back and his head bowed, and not until the Ranger spoke to him a second time did he come out of his abstraction.

It was clear enough. Somehow she had learned of his connection with the service, and she hated him for it. Well, it was a price he must pay for serving a different power than she. Their brief, congenial acquaintanceship was over, and for all time. Ships, they had been, that passed in the night and spoke each other in passing. He had told himself, ever since that bitter hour when he faced the gale on the *Lampasas,* that he and she could never be anything to one another, not even friends. And yet, down in his heart of hearts, he had hoped—but hope was now dead and buried.

Then it came to him that if Esther Lynde knew who he was, so also, in all probability, did Henry Cook. And only the day before he had seen Cook and Sauceda together.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RAID AT SAUCEDA'S.

Immediately after breakfast Braxton, Dalton, and Payne got together to plan their day. Payne had already set his three men to work, and had secured the coöperation of Ellery Marsh, a Federal agent permanently located in Texas and known to the San Antonio officials, to take active charge of the raid. Marsh and Captain Dalton went to call on the chief of police and sheriff, and reported, an hour or two later, that those officials, as was to be expected, had joined enthusiastically in their plans. It was decided to make the raid at exactly nine-thirty o'clock. If lieutenants of Sauceda visited the house and left it before that hour, each would be separately followed and quietly arrested when he had reached some place where no rumor of the incident could get back to the junta in time to warn the others.

Braxton, through sleepless hours, had wrestled with the problem of whether or not he ought to change his plans because of the sudden knowledge that Esther Lynde had discovered his identity. He could not think, however, of any way to do so and still make certain the lists of names and the telegraph messages would not be destroyed. If Sauceda knew who and what he was, and he were putting himself in danger by going to the house, that was a chance he must take as part of the day's work.

At two in the afternoon Sauceda called him on the telephone to ask him if he had any knowledge as to the whereabouts of Azcona. He had anticipated some such inquiry and prepared for it. So he replied:

"Señor Azcona? No, general, I have not seen him to-day. I haven't happened to drop into the Bonham."

"He is not at the Bonham. Where did you leave him last evening?"

"At the corner by the Madison Club."

"You had taken supper there?" That they had *not* taken supper there could be quite easily ascertained.

"No. When we reached the corner by the club Señor Azcona said he was feeling a bit tired and thought he would go on to his hotel if I would excuse him. So we said good night."

"He did not sleep in his room at the Bonham. The clerks do not remember his coming in."

"That is odd. He especially mentioned to me that he was going to his hotel. Perhaps he had some matter—some matter of business—that he did not wish to mention."

"I am quite sure he did not. I am in his confidence. We had an appointment for this morning, and when he

did not appear I called the hotel. He certainly did not go there."

Braxton's tone was solicitous. "He may have been taken ill or met with an accident. Have you called the hospitals?"

"No, but I shall—at once. Thank you, señor."

"When you find him I wish you would let me know. There are so many automobile accidents these days, and he might be unconscious. I shall be quite anxious until I hear."

He heard nothing more from Sauceda during the afternoon. At eight-thirty Blossom, clearly excited with anticipation, was at the Edgewood, and Waite drove away with him. Captain Dalton had already gone to meet the sheriff and chief of police, who were going to lead their men in person.

He stopped the car on the nearest side street to the house of the junta, where Blossom was to await further orders. Then he strolled leisurely around the corner, passed the inevitable guard of two on Sauceda's front gallery, and entered Sauceda's front room at nine o'clock. He observed, as he went up the walk, the usual Mexican rocking in the chair by the side of the house under the fig tree.

A young lieutenant named Ramos, whom he had seen once or twice, was with the general. Braxton introduced the subject of the missing Azcona himself, asking if he had yet appeared.

"No," said Sauceda. "And it is very strange. I have telephoned all the hospitals. No one of his description is unconscious or delirious in any of them."

"The police?" Waite's tone was inquiring.

Sauceda shrugged his shoulders. "Hardly," he said. "Inquiries in that direction might not be profitable. Nevertheless, we have investigated through friends who are at times able to get information at headquarters, and they cannot learn that he has been the subject of any police report."

"I feel solicitous," said Waite. "He seemed in good health and spirits when he left me."

"We are sparing no pains to get track of him," Sauceda assured Braxton. The matter dropped there.

Waite had thought out a very plausible suggestion as to getting rifles smuggled across the border in various places, if a continued embargo on arms should make it impossible for them to be shipped across openly, and after a little he launched into an explanation of his idea. Sauceda and Ramos listened with more than respect. In fact they both agreed his scheme sounded very reasonable and were disposed to adopt it. He had foreseen this; so long as their Cientifico army plot was purely imaginary and they had no intention of running guns across the river, one plan to do it was as well worth agreeing to as another.

And this brought the discussion to a point where it would be well to know how many men could be depended upon in each of the border counties to assist in such a smuggling plan as Waite was proposing. He asked, in an entirely natural manner, to see the lists.

Sauceda took the papers from the safe, the door of which was open. It was twenty minutes after nine, Waite noticed, when he got the sheets in his hand. He now had possession of the lists of captains of ten, and he had no doubt the telegraph forms were in the safe; there could hardly be any reason for them to be anywhere else until the night of the uprising. His remaining task was to talk against time for ten minutes.

He did not attempt to note any of the names on the lists, or otherwise to do anything that might arouse suspicion, but merely proceeded to tabulate a total of the members of the band in each of the border counties. In dis-

cussing this, he listed as a border county one that is a hundred miles north of the river, and had to be set right with the help of a map. And he lost track of his totals at one point, and had to go back and eliminate a county whose members he had counted twice.

While this was going on Ramos excused himself and went into the back room, where his voice could be heard in conversation with others. Five or six minutes had elapsed when some one came up the walk onto the gallery, and after a subdued conversation Tomas knocked at the door.

"A friend—Lopez, of Mendon," he announced. "On immediate and important business."

"After a little!" frowned Sauceda. "Just now I am engaged." He glanced significantly at Braxton, who had not looked up.

"Even so, my general, I think you would see him—and even now," replied Tomas, and, turning, brought Lopez into the room and stood beside him, closing the door and standing with his back to it.

"A thousand pardons!" apologized Lopez, while Braxton kept his face averted as much as he might without losing sight of the position of Tomas and the newcomer. "I am disturbed in my mind. I think and think, and fear perhaps I should report. So I come on the train——"

"Cease this wind of words!" commanded Sauceda. "Can you not wait a little? There is no train back to Mendon to-night. Wait outside!"

"But I have told this good friend," insisted Lopez, indicating Tomas, "and he says I should *not* wait. Was it right that I reported so fully to the man you sent—about the dynamite and the plans for our great night's work?"

Sauceda's face set in so vicious a glare that the man shrank back, frightened. "What man?" he demanded.

Too terror-stricken to speak, Lopez, twirling his hat in his hands and wetting his lips, looked from Sauceda around to Tomas by the door, and from Tomas to Braxton. Waite moved his feet back slowly to enable him to rise with one leap, and measured the distance to get his back against the wall. For a second only Lopez stared into Waite's face. Then——

"This man!" he cried. A look of relief passed over his face. "I see he is indeed all right, as he said," he breathed. "I feared, as I thought and thought, and put together what I had reported to him yesterday——"

Sauceda was staring through narrowed eyes at Waite.

"What is this, señor?" he asked, and there was suspicion, fear, and, above all, menace in his low voice.

"Shall not those who are spending the money know that it is being well spent?" demanded Braxton. He had only one minute more to gain, if the raiders were exactly on time. "I am merely sitting into the game, as I announced."

Sauceda considered this and him, and there was an ominous pause. It was broken by a sharp tap at the window back of Sauceda's chair—the window that looked out on the rocking-chair under the fig tree. The lists were all under Braxton's hand, where they could be gathered with one clutch.

The general opened the window instantly.

"There are men!" said the guard outside the window. "Eight or ten, or maybe twelve. All gringos! They look as if they were all coming here."

Before Sauceda could begin to form his answer the door into the back room opened and Ramos stood upon the threshold.

"There are men on the other side of the fence back of the garden," he said. "Two or three of them."

The front door came open without the customary knock, and the com-

panion of Tomas came in. "Men coming!" he exclaimed. Neither of the other guards had raised his voice in giving the warning; neither did this one. Their voices were hurried, but soft. "Gringos!" he added. "Many of them!"

The man just outside the window, under the fig tree, gave an exclamation and disappeared in the direction of the back of the house. "Stop!" cried a strange voice in that direction. There was a pistol shot, a yelp of pain, a succession of cries. Voices raised in confusion came from the back room, into which Ramos had vanished at the shot, slamming the door behind him as he went.

As quickly as he had entered the house the second guard from in front dashed out, and José López, of Mendon, followed him. Their feet sounded on the gallery as they ran toward its end and leaped for the shadow that lay between Sauceda's house and the next one. Sounds of a struggle followed.

All these things took perhaps ten seconds, during which Braxton sprang to his feet, the papers containing the list of names in his hand.

Sauceda kept his head. He leaned across the table. "Quick! Those papers! To me!" he commanded.

Waite stared dazedly at the general, without comprehension, as though overcome with panic. He backed away a step or two and looked from door to door. His hands, clutching the lists, shook. He seemed paralyzed by fear.

"The papers! In your hand! Give them here!" Sauceda demanded again. He measured the distance he would have to cover to get around the table to take them by force and the time it would take to do it. The steps outside were coming very close to the gallery.

Tomas, smiling his smile that was more sinister than a frown, his eyes on the general for orders, locked the front door, took out the key, and dropped it in his pocket.

"Take them, Tomas!" cried Sauceda. "Destroy them!"

Waite could not fight them both and retain the lists. Just beside him the door of the safe stood open. With almost one motion—for Tomas was covering the distance between them, crouched like a football tackle—he threw all the papers into the safe, slammed the door, and spun the combination. As he stooped to do this, Tomas was upon him.

"It is done! They cannot get them now!" he cried, hoping to deceive both Mexicans into thinking he had misunderstood the general's meaning. But Tomas did not seem to hear, and as he straightened to meet the rush he saw the Mexican had drawn a knife and was swinging it as he leaped.

Waite got the man's wrist with his left hand and tried to draw his automatic from his hip pocket, but Tomas was equally quick and also seized his right wrist.

"Kill him! He was with Azcona! He went to Mendon! Cursed gringo spy!" Sauceda was snarling. Out of the corner of his eye Waite saw the bandit general dragging open the table drawer.

His grip on Tomas' wrist was slipping, and the Mexican was using all the leverage of his powerful shoulders to force the knife downward and inward. "Kick in the door! Quick!" somebody shouted outside.

At a distance, but almost as though it were an echo of that command, a voice cried in Spanish: "They are Rangers!" Then several things happened so close together that afterward Waite could hardly array them in their proper order.

Tomas, by a sudden violent effort, threw Braxton back across the safe, and tore himself loose. Surprisingly, then, as Waite expected the drive of the

knife, the Mexican turned and dashed for the open window behind Sauceda. His fear of the Rangers had weighed the scale in the American's favor.

The door jarred, gave, and at the second attack came crashing in.

Sauceda got the table drawer open, and his hand came into view above it holding an automatic pistol. He fired at Braxton point-blank.

As he pulled the trigger, Tomas, leaping toward the window, collided with his arm. The bullet went wild. Sauceda cursed and swung the gun back to fire again.

Captain Dalton, from the doorway, flipped his pistol from his holster and fired from the hip twice, so rapidly that the two reports sounded almost like one. Sauceda bent forward at the waist as though he were hinged, and the automatic went clattering to the floor as he sprawled forward across the table. He lay as he fell, motionless, his face grotesquely twisted to one side.

Coincident with the Ranger's shots came the leap of Tomas out through the window. He cleared the sash and landed on the ground beneath. He ran. There was a shot outside—two more. "Damn! I missed him!" cried a voice.

As the last of this succession of incidents took place, Braxton was straightening up from the top of the safe, across which he had been hurled two seconds before by Tomas.

The raid was over as quickly as it had begun. Waite looked mechanically at his watch. It was twenty-eight minutes of ten.

For the benefit of the Mexicans, Braxton was taken out a prisoner by Dalton. He joined in the yard a sad company. Seven it numbered—only Tomas had escaped.

While still inside, Waite had found opportunity to apprise Marsh, the Federal agent in charge, of the location of the lists and presumably of the telegraph forms. Officials searched the house, taking all papers. Presently an express wagon drove up and men began to load the safe, to be taken to the Federal Building and there opened. While they were at it the coroner came to view the body of Sauceda.

Then a patrol wagon drove up, and the officers began to herd the prisoners toward it.

"This man," declared Captain Dalton harshly, indicating Braxton, "was standing over the safe when we went in. He may know the combination. I'll take him along with me to the Federal Building and see if I can make him remember it."

The others were taken away, and the captain went with Waite back into the house, where Ranger Carl and a policeman remained in charge to give the curious crowd that had collected a chance to partially disperse. After a time they went out of the house by a back door and over a fence toward the side street where the automobile waited.

As they came up to it they were surprised to see two men there, where they had expected to find only one. One of the pair was half sitting, half lying, on the floor of the car in front of the driver's seat, groaning, cursing, and threatening. The other was standing over him, from time to time brandishing an enormous monkey wrench.

"Tomas!" exclaimed Braxton.

"I think he's a bad Mexican," sputtered Blossom, still waving the monkey wrench in dangerous proximity to the man's head. "He come runnin' out through this alley back here, wavin' a knife, an' jabbered something at me in his lingo, and then he said I had to drive him somewhere or he would kill me. He was goin' to steal my automobile! What do you think of that?"

"Why didn't you shoot him?" asked Dalton.

"Shoot him? Goodness, Mr. Dalton, I don't know nothin' about a pistol. I

got one at home, but I don't never carry it in the automobile. I used to, but I got so worried havin' it around loaded that it bothered my drivin'. No, sir. I just smashed him a few with this monkey wrench. The first swipe made him drop the knife. I guess mebbe I broke his arm."

"To a hospital, in the name of the saints!" protested Tomas. "This incarnate devil has murdered me!"

"I don't know what he's sayin'," said Blossom earnestly, "but I'm awful glad you've come. Gosh, I be'n scared! I ain't no rough character, you know. I never fight. I don't even know *how.*"

CHAPTER XXI.

TWO SURPRISES.

At ten o'clock the following morning Braxton shouted "Come!" to the knock at his door, and Payne entered. Waite had not left the room since he entered it after midnight. It had been agreed, before he went to bed, that he had best remain in seclusion; it would not do for him to be seen at large by Mexicans who might be aware of his supposed arrest the evening before. He had eaten breakfast in his room, had celebrated the day by removing his beard and saluting as an old friend his clean-shaven face in the mirror, and was impatiently awaiting some report from the activities of his associates.

"Everything is going great!" declared Payne at once. "Ramos has come through with a confession that backs up Azcona's, and there'll be more before night. There isn't a thing to keep you here; you can get out on an evening train."

"It would be bad if I had to come back for the trials," said Braxton.

"No fear of that. Neither you nor I will be needed. Until then the Mexicans who know you will suppose you are awaiting trial in some other prison, or perhaps out on bail. When the trials come off I will have Marsh start a rumor that certain New York financial interests put enough pressure on Washington to get you released."

"I suppose, after I left you last night, Marsh gave copies of all those telegrams in the safe to the different telegraph companies?"

"Sure! Not one of those messages could be sent now, even if it were filed, and even if one of them happened to get by I imagine the bad hombres to the south of us are having their hands too full to-day to pay much attention to it. I heard from Dalton a little while ago; he is going to meet us here as soon as he gets time. I gathered from his laconic remarks that his boys and the sheriffs down below are gathering in one magnificent harvest."

Payne took from his pocket a plain, unaddressed envelope.

"Here is a letter for you," he said. "Came in my mail from the chief this morning."

Waite opened it. The note was in the chief's handwriting, but bore neither address nor date, and the three initials that were signed to it were the same three—none of them an initial of the chief's name—that had appeared at the bottom of the radiogram Waite had received at sea, instructing him to forgather immediately with Cameron in New York. "Excuse me," he said to Payne, and read:

MY DEAR FRIEND: I have just returned from a little trip with a quite well-known gentleman, who has asked me to write you expressing his personal appreciation of services rendered in connection with a certain note of which he has seen a copy. He wants me to say to you that as soon as you have returned from your present visit to the Southwest he would like me to bring you to his home, in order that he may thank you in person.

It will interest you to know that the note to which I refer was along lines similar to a former one that was to have been carried to the same parties several years ago, but the delivery of which was prevented by a seri-

ous accident to the messenger. The plan which it proposed was a very interesting one, but became useless once we were known to be aware of it. And I can inform you that word already has been unofficially communicated to certain energetic little people that we know the contents of the message, and the plan that was afoot has been thereby ruined.

I hope to see you as soon as your present business is completed.

He handed the letter to Payne. "'Along lines similar to a former note that was to have been carried to the same parties several years ago,'" quoted Payne, when he had read it twice. "Similar, that is to say, to the message Don Gustavo was about to take as special ambassador to Tokyo when Huerta put an end to that by killing him. And we've put Japan wise, unofficially, to the fact that we are onto the game. Well, I can readily see how that would ruin the whole scheme, as the chief says. Japan had to make the first move, and it had to look innocent. She cannot make it now that she understands the United States will know exactly what it means. And the part that Germany was invited to take cannot be done unless Japan has first started things. So it looks, thanks be, as though the whole business were pretty well blown up."

"The chief seems sure of it, and he naturally is in touch with the state department," said Waite.

Captain Bob Dalton knocked and entered. There was a satisfied smile on his tanned face, and his eyes glinted with cold jubilation.

"Remember what I said a couple o' nights ago about laigs and arms stickin' out of the windows of country jails?" he inquired, as he shut the door. "I reckon from what reports I'm gettin' they've done got to that stage already. I guess before night they'll be figurin' on buildin' additions. It's shore some round-up!"

"It seems too bad we had to leave you and Marsh to do all this work," said Braxton. "That's the penalty of having to keep our identity secret. We start lots of things, but we can't be present at the finish."

"As far as I'm concerned, you needn't worry about its bein' too bad," exclaimed the Ranger. "I certainly do appreciate you fellers invitin' me to sit into the game with you that-a-way. Nothin' could have given me greater pleasure."

Waite took a train that night for the North. In order to avoid possible identification at the railroad station he had himself driven by automobile to New Braunfels—the next good-sized station north of San Antonio—and boarded it there. Payne, by the chief's orders, was to remain in San Antonio to secretly oversee the continuing round-up.

He had plenty of time, before he reached Washington, to review in his mind that last meeting with Esther Lynde, which the excitement of swift-moving events had temporarily pushed into the background. The wound, he found, was very fresh and sore. Why, when he had met the woman that he knew to be the only woman, had fate played him so scurvy a trick? He tried to be philosophical, but philosophy does not come easy at twenty-nine. This bitterness of spirit dampened the elation he otherwise would have felt over the successful completion of his two latest tasks, and it was in no especially cheerful frame of mind that he arrived in Washington and found word awaiting him at his hotel that the chief had made an appointment for them to call at the White House that noon.

The president was gravely cordial, and expressed a sincere appreciation of his services, congratulating both him and the nation that he had done his share to prevent a situation that in time might have developed a desperate crisis. When Braxton and the chief came out

upon the avenue, Waite was glowing with satisfaction and justifiable pride.

As they passed through the corridors of the building in which are the offices of the service, there was a woman in the hallway ahead of them. She turned a corner and passed out of sight without looking back almost at the moment Waite saw her, but there was no mistaking that figure and carriage. Braxton grasped the chief's arm.

"Did you notice that young woman?" he asked. "The one who went to the right?"

"I saw there was one. I can't say I observed her very closely."

"Chief," said Waite earnestly, "have her watched. Immediately. This probably means some leak right here in the office. Her name is Lynde, and she is a mighty competent German secret agent. I wonder how she got here so soon; I thought I left her in San Antonio. She must have started for here about the same time I did by a different road."

The chief unlocked a door, and they passed into his private office without going through the outer room. As the chief closed the door he asked: "What is her name, did you say?"

'Lynde. Esther Lynde."

The chief had his finger on a push button. An attendant opened the door from the outer office.

"Fairbanks," said the chief, "there is a lady in the building named Lynde—Miss Esther Lynde. I think she went into Mr. Harrison's room. Bring her here at once, please."

"Really—I—I don't want to interfere, but—really—she's too clever—altogether too clever—for you to learn her business by putting it up to her sharp like this," Waite protested. "And, chief—as a personal favor—I—I've met Miss Lynde. Don't be too hard on her."

"We'll see," replied the chief shortly. He waved his hand toward a chair, and began to study an accumulation of memoranda on his desk. Braxton sat down. Not more than three minutes elapsed and the door opened. "Miss Lynde, sir," announced Fairbanks, and Esther stepped into the room. As she caught sight of Waite, who had risen, her face was a study in conflicting emotions, surprise predominating. "Why—I didn't know they brought you here!" she exclaimed. "I thought you were in——"

The chief, sitting at his desk, interrupted her. "Do you know this man?" he asked sharply.

"Yes, sir."

"Who is he?"

She hesitated, and when she replied it was in a low voice, as though she were reluctant: "He is Waite Braxton, a representative of the Universal Oil Company." Her voice fell still lower: "And—a member of the conspiracy to bring about the uprising in south Texas."

"Willing to get Americans killed to help along a financial game, eh?" said the chief most surprisingly. "Almost as bad as being a traitor?"

The girl looked helplessly at Waite, and back to the chief. "That is true," she almost whispered. "But—he must have been terribly tempted. I feel sure if you could take that into consideration—could be as merciful as possible, under the circumstances——"

Braxton's jaw had dropped at the chief's words, and for a moment he was speechless. Now he stammered: "Why—how—you don't——" But the chief motioned him to silence, and there was an odd expression on his face as he said:

"That's very kind of you, Miss Lynde. You will be glad to know that Mr. Braxton, just before you came in, asked me not to be any harder on *you* than I had to be."

It was the girl's turn to look blank. "Hard on *me?*" she repeated.

"Exactly. It seems you are a very

dangerous German spy." The chief sprang to his feet briskly and addressed them both, and he was smiling. "I guess it is time one set of incognitos in this office got stretched a little," he said. "Miss Lynde, valued member of the department, let me present Mr. Braxton, equally valued member."

"You a——" Both of them said it in chorus, and stopped. "But——" Again they spoke the same word together. Then they stared at one another like a pair of newly met Dromios. And then suddenly they laughed.

"Sit down, both of you!" said the chief, resuming his chair. "There are quite a number of things you ought to enjoy talking over together, and as I haven't seen either of you for two months you can save my time by telling me certain things in each other's presence. For instance, how did it happen that you both got copies of the cipher message to Japan? You," to Braxton, "sent me one copy by Williams the night before you left for France, and you," to Miss Lynde, "sent me exactly the same cipher by Carson on exactly the same train."

Braxton was the first to answer. "Well, I'll be blessed! I——" He grinned at the thought. "I stole it from Miss Lynde." To her look of mystification he added: "I had the envelope opened and its contents copied between the time we arrived in New York and the time I had to meet you at the Van Wouter." Then his mind flew back to the first time he had seen the cipher in her possession, and the smile left his face. "But you? How did you get those papers from Calderon —and when?"

"I didn't get them from Calderon," she replied. "I didn't even know Calderon had them—until afterward. My work in Mexico City was to keep track of German activities; I've been on that sort of duty ever since I entered the service two years ago. My education in Germany especially fits me for it, I suppose."

"But you had those papers when you came down from the third floor of the Presidente that night, just after Calderon was killed. I saw them. The corner showed in your bodice."

"Goodness, that was careless!" exclaimed the girl. "But the whole thing was terribly upsetting. I never was more shaken in all my life."

"Let's hear about it," suggested the chief.

"When you learned that Captain von Arnoldt was on his way to Mexico City and sent me to keep track of him," she said, "we got rooms in the same hotel as he. It wasn't possible to get them on the same floor at that time; Captain von Arnoldt was on the fourth floor and the Carsons and I were on the third."

"Excuse me," interrupted Braxton, "but are the Carsons also——"

"Yes. That is to say, they are attached to me when I am at work. They are really my cousins—quite distant ones. They don't have much work to do except make my presence on a case plausible and keep their own counsel, and they do both perfectly well.

"That night in the Presidente I was nearly through dressing when the page brought up Mr. Braxton's card," she continued, addressing the chief. "We had become acquainted that afternoon; he rescued me from a nasty little street riot. I sent word I would be down in a few minutes and finished dressing. Then I turned off the electric light in my room and stepped to the door. Evidently I had neglected to close it when the page brought up the card; it stood open the tiniest crack—perhaps an inch.

"Outside the door was a balcony that encircles the patio. There are seats around the sides, between the doors of the rooms—seats with movable leather cushions. The lights were on over the

balcony. Of course I could see what was going on there, while a person outside, my room being dark, would not even notice my door was ajar.

"I had reached the door, and was just on the point of opening it, when a door in the wall at right angles to mine opened and a man came out quickly and shut it behind him. He was crouched and hurrying, as though there were something back in the room from which he wanted to escape. I saw then that it was the Japanese elevator man. There was no reason why he should be coming out of a guest's room, and where at first I had seen him by accident, from that moment I had my eye to that crack in the door, watching him.

"He made two soft-footed leaps toward the railing about the patio, and looked cautiously over. Then, tiptoeing very carefully, he set out to walk around toward the stairs. He had something in his hand—something white. At this moment Cousin Mary came to her door, took hold of the knob and it sounded as though she were coming out. She told me afterward that she had started to do so and had gone back to wait because Cousin Thomas wasn't quite ready. At any rate, she didn't open the door.

"At the sound the Jap turned and ran directly toward me. I suppose he thought he was going to be discovered, and made up his mind not to have the cipher in his possession if he should be arrested. He came to the wall seat, not two yards from where I stood, tucked the white package under a cushion, turned like lightning, and ran to the stairs and up them two steps at a time. The moment he had disappeared I stepped out and got the envelope—on general principles; mysterious papers in Japanese hands might prove worth having. Then I saw there were fresh stains on it—bloodstains. I realized something serious had happened behind the door of room No. 81. All the more reason to expect the envelope might be important.

"With the possibility of some crime so near me, it was advisable that I get off that floor just as quickly as I could. I didn't dare take the time to go back to my room to hide the envelope, and I feared a search of all the rooms, anyway. So I called to Cousin Mary that I had gone on without them, and hurried down the stairs. That explains how nervous I was when Mr. Payne announced that Colonel Calderon had been murdered. I saw the Japanese again when the police were questioning him; he had plunged his hands into grease to hide the stains that must have been on them. I imagine he went back to recover his hidden papers later, and found them gone.

"After you and Mr. Payne had left that night, I opened the envelope and found it contained what was apparently some sort of national cipher. I burned the envelope, of course. The next morning Captain von Arnoldt told me he had decided to sail for New York. So I came with him—until the British took him off the ship—and brought the papers with me."

"But why did you intrust them to me?" Braxton asked.

"Because I was nervous that night. Von Arnoldt had lost *his* papers, and I felt as though some one were watching me. You were strong and competent, and would not be suspected of having them, and I felt I could trust you. Didn't I explain all that to you when I asked you to take them? Well, I found a message in New York from the chief, sending me on an errand to Montreal, so I sent them over by Cousin Thomas. Then I went from Montreal direct to San Antonio, and I've never heard yet what they were. Was it an important cipher?" she asked the chief.

"So important that Braxton went from here to Mexico City especially to get it at any cost, and the Japanese

secret service, learning somehow that Calderon had been bribed to make a copy, killed him to keep the message from reaching us. I told the president two people were responsible for our securing the note. He thanked Braxton this noon; I have an appointment for him to thank you to-morrow at eleven."

"Was your mother German—and were you born in Berlin?" asked Braxton.

"My mother's grandfather fought in the Revolution," she smiled. "But the rest of it was almost true. Berlin—Massachusetts—is only about fifteen miles from Worcester, and I was born in Worcester."

"You went to San Antonio, then, to——"

"Get acquainted with German secret-service men—or rather one very popular young German secret-service man. I thought I never would get him to tell me, much as he likes the flattering attention of young women. It took a terrible lot of anti-Allies talk, I can assure you. He wasn't really back of the uprising, of course; just encouraged it as a matter of general policy. I telegraphed the chief what they were planning—but I forget; *you* were on that, of course."

"You both seem to have got the facts regarding it at just about the same time," remarked the chief. "The telegram saying Braxton had uncovered the scheme reached here a little before midnight one night, and yours, Miss Lynde, about four hours later."

He rose, and his face was severe, although one who knew him unusually well might have discovered the trace of a twinkle in his eyes. "There is one thing neither of you has explained," he said. "And I'm afraid it is going to prove pretty hard to do so."

"What is it?" they both asked together.

"How——" He spoke impressively. "How does it happen that in all your reports to this office neither of you found it necessary to mention the pernicious activities of the other? I do not recall that either of you has even written the other's name."

Waite felt the color rising to his cheeks. He glanced sidewise at the girl; her face, too, was flushing.

The whir of an electric buzzer proved a welcome diversion. "Excuse me a minute," said the chief. "I'll be back shortly."

They had risen to their feet. She was slowly polishing a corner of the chief's desk with the end of one middle finger, as though a little spot there needed to be dusted. Her eyes were following the motion of her hand.

"If I had only known!" he breathed.

"I almost told you—that night on the boat when I gave you the papers—at the door of my stateroom," she said. "I don't know what came over me that night; it was all I could do to keep my secret."

"Look up a minute! What color are they?" asked Waite.

She raised her eyes, and what she saw in his made her drop them again. "What color are—what?" she asked faintly.

"Sometimes they seem blue and sometimes gray, and sometimes they are like pansies. Which is their real color? Now that we can be—friends again I have to now. I *have* to, Esther."

Her reply seemed quite irrelevant. "I like you a lot better without those horrid whiskers," she said.

A moment or two later the chief opened the door and stood on the threshold. For just one second he scanned them through his spectacles; then, smiling to himself, he turned, went out again, and closed the door softly. They neither saw nor heard him.

Bonita

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "Sunny Mateel," "The Amazing Tenderfoot," Etc.

A tale of Overland Red in the lusty days of free range and unfenced activities. Romance transports him from middle age to the anticipation of youth; and as he sleeps in the saddle and dreams, there comes to him on the swift and silent wings of memory the unforgetable adventure of Bonita's Christmas.

IN his younger days, Overland Red was a bit quicker on the trigger and a bit slower to condemn questionable exploits than in later years, when experience had mellowed him and time had broadened him both in body and vision, tingeing his curly red hair with a few silvery reminders of erstwhile toil and stress in the outlands.

Even after he had ceased to pack two guns and ride the high trails, many said he was still a fighter, but his close friends knew him for a man of peace and illimitable pleasantry. His once keen, almost acrid, wit had softened to a broad and benevolent humor. And as often as not, when riding to town from the Moonstone Rancho, he chose the shady side of the trail and rode slowly, living over again the vivid romance of his youth, dreaming reincarnated daydreams, his physical being subconsciously alert, but his mental vision lost in far reaches of hill and valley, cañon and mesa.

The chance coyote limned sharply on the hilltop sky line no longer evoked that lightning turn of the wrist and the peremptory whang of his .45; jack rabbits leaped away at the clatter of his pony's feet, frequently turning to sit up and gaze at the placid figure riding the faint horizon trails and the misty hills of his earlier meanderings.

Overland Red had become a well-to-do and law-abiding citizen, free-handed, hearty, and a stickler for the proprieties—as observed on a cattle ranch. He still carried a service-worn revolver in a shoulder holster, and still wore chaps when riding—habits he could not overcome, despite the times and the manners. The casual observer would have taken him for a wealthy cattleman of most ordinary proclivities, never dreaming that the big, jovial rider was the once-renowned Red Jack Summers of the lusty days of free range and unfenced activities.

Romance occasionally tugged at his heartstrings. At such times his keen blue eyes would twinkle as he reached for tobacco and papers to roll a cigarette leisurely with one hand and dream, perchance, of a Southern mesa sprinkled with an unexpected powdering of snow, and of a Christmas Day cherished as a vivid spot in the rather bleak monotony of an Arizona winter.

The December breeze was cool and welcome. His pony moved at an easy running walk that wore down the long,

winding miles to the far-seen valley. Red rode, with one hand on the fork of the saddle, as comfortably as though he had been seated in a slowly moving rocking-chair. A rabbit shot from a clump of greasewood. The horse, usually dependable, snorted and reared. Red swayed to the leap and grinned. Then he brushed his hand across his eyes, felt for tobacco and papers, and rolled a cigarette. They entered a notch in the hills. The high walls of Moonstone Cañon shadowed pony and rider. The air grew chill. The wind, dying away in the silent, rock-strewn cañon, no longer stirred little whiffs of dust at each step of the horse. Overland Red glanced at the sky and nodded at its peculiar dun-gray coloring. "Snow," he muttered. Yet there had been no snow on the Moonstone for many years.

The pony slowed to a careful walk. The cañon cleft narrowed to a strip of hazy blue. Overland closed his eyes that the memory of a past incident might take clearer outline.

That his horse should turn and plod up a barren, sandy trail to a mesa never mapped within the confines of California did not surprise him. It was an Arizona mesa, strewn with ragged tufa and dotted with bunch grass. Buttes of extravagant shapes and sizes reared their wind-worn citadels against the far horizon. The air was no longer the balmy breath of California, but the keen, thin air of the high mesas. Glancing down, he was not astonished to observe that he now wore white Angora chaps; that his horse was not the big bay of the Moonstone Rancho, but an active, quick-stepping pinto that tossed its head as the foam flecks danced in the sunlit air. Overland's right hand went to his hip and touched a "quick-draw" holster. He smiled. "Ought to be another," he said in his dream. And most casually he glanced at his left hip, from which hung another gun. Romance had transported him from middle age to the anticipation of youth. He was curious to learn whether or not the adventure which he knew must follow would keep accurate pace with his dream memory of it. And even as he slept in the saddle and dreamed—in the brief few minutes in which his pony worked cautiously down the ragged cañon-trail—there came to him on the swift and silent wings of memory the unforgetable adventure of Bonita's Christmas.

Six feet of sinewy endurance; a face lean, keen, and strong, tanned to saddle color; curly red hair, clipped close—vivid against the wide, rolling brim of a new Stetson; a flaunting, dark-blue neckerchief, and, dominating all, the glance of clear blue eyes, alert and mirroring a rich vitality—Red Jack Summers, at twenty-two, was nothing if not colorful. His poise was the poise of one never anticipating action but always ready for it. He rode loosely and easily. The pinto cayuse flashed from side to side as he loped through the low chaparral of the mesa. Silver gleamed on bit and bridle rein. Starred conchas twinkled on saddle and tapaderos. Tied to the saddle was a gay-colored serape that swept the pony's flanks.

The little cow horse swung tirelessly toward the distant rim of the western hills. Sixty miles away, lost in the far horizon, the town of Perral lay somewhere in that blue monotony of haze-blurred ranges. Sixty miles of sunlit silence. Plenty of time for a man to think uninterruptedly.

Overland hung the reins on the saddle horn, and, reaching back, untied the serape. From its fold he drew a handful of color, a vivid silken shawl of black barred with crimson and gold. He crushed the fabric in his gloved hand and released it, allowing it to float and flicker bravely in the breeze.

An end of the floating color brushed his lips and he smiled. A flame of red ran to his temples. Even in the empty expanse he felt ashamed of what he considered a display of sentiment, for as the shawl had touched his face he kissed it. Slowly he rolled the wavering silk in the serape and retired it.

Meanwhile, the pinto loped steadily. He knew his destination and concentrated upon it. Mile after mile strung out behind him, yet in the unmarked emptiness the horse seemed to be loping upon a giant treadmill that turned slowly beneath his hoofs. The hills were less hazy, but appeared to be no nearer. Red Jack Summers drifted into a speculative soliloquy and talked —presumably to the pony:

"Now, a fella can't get away from hisself nohow. Or mebby from the other fella what's watchin' him day and night. Some folks call the other fella 'God.' Mebby they're right. For, sure enough, the other fella keeps the books and don't miss nothin'." He gathered up the reins and stood in the stirrups, gazing at the far hills. "And Lonesome Land is the last place to ride—if you're aimin' to get away from comp'ny. It's like a hoss. Travelin' single, he thinks too much, and sometimes reckons he's gettin' tired. Put him along with another hoss or two, and he'll go lively to the finish. There's sure more inside of a man than he reckons on. And that other fella that whispers, 'Do so!' or 'Don't do such!' sure has a big job on his hands—specially with me. Now, I had to jump three different towns for killin'—in straight gun fight—clean! Why? 'Cause the other fella inside of me kep' a-tellin' me there'd be more killin' if I stayed. Was I scared of that? Nope, I reckon not. But I sure was scared of what the other fella could tell me nights—when I got to thinkin' of killin' I could 'a' got along without. They sure is somethin' runnin' things—and folks. Only folks is mostly ornery and not willin' to be run. Now, a fella what's sometimes got to kill to live is in bad with hisself. And here I be, fannin' it lively right into Perral, knowin' I ain't got no business there, 'less I go heeled and keep my gloves off both hands. The folks has took to callin' me 'Red,' and it ain't all 'cause I got that kind of hair, either. But I reckon I'll let them worry—not me."

He sat back against the cantle and eased his pony down a sandy slope. "The Bar-O trail runs in here somewheres. We're makin' right good time, Sarko."

The pony mechanically lengthened out to a lope again. Occupied with his soliloquy, Overland failed to notice a rider who loped along a trail converging toward his own. At the angle where the trails met, he pulled up and turned. The man riding the big black gelding spurred up and drew alongside. Overland's eyes hardened. He was angry with himself for having allowed any rider to approach so close without having seen him. Moreover, he knew this rider, and the rider knew him. And Bonita, the velvet-eyed Mexican girl of Perral, knew them both. Overland nodded. "Mornin'—stranger."

The other's eyes closed to aggressive slits. "Why, mornin', buckaroo! Ridin' my way?"

"Nope. Think too much of my hoss to ride your way. But I aim to ride the same trail."

"Uh-uh! I hear Perral's got a new sheriff."

"And you a-ridin' that way! Well, now!"

"Sun ain't botherin' yo're eyes any?"

"Nope. But sometimes I get careless about lettin' strangers get close up. But the Bar-O trail never worried me none."

The other grinned. "Yo're a good talker, Red. So's most preachers."

Overland ignored the taunt. Veiled by the seemingly innocent remark was the inference that he said more than he was willing to back up with action. Yet he felt that he had given the Bar-O rider a fair excuse to declare himself. An old hatred for the other burned up in Overland's eyes, but the word "preacher" had given a twist to his thoughts. He smiled broadly. "You said it, Simms. Reckon you ain't forgettin' that to-morrow's Christmas, eh?"

"Same as you. Thought I'd fan it over to town and see some friends. I got friends in Perral."

"So? Well, you need 'em—everywhere."

Simms jerked his pony back. Red Jack Summers also pulled up. The men faced each other. Red smiled. "Go get it! I'll allow to give you time to get your gun loose, and then I'll get you—and you know it."

Simms blinked as Red pulled tobacco and papers from his pocket and rolled a cigarette—with his right hand. This was an open challenge, and an insult. But Simms knew his man. He reined round and spurred his horse.

"Hey, Simmy! To-morrow's Christmas. What's your hurry?"

Red's voice was jovial, his face serene. "And that's the answer," he said, as the Bar-O rider swung his quirt. "He allows to get me some day—and he gets a lovely chance right here. But he goes and gets mad—which is plumb wrong for a gunman. And now he's takin' it out on that hoss of his. Funny how some folks got to get mad afore they can kill."

The Bar-O rider glanced back. Overland made no attempt to overtake him, but rode at an easy lope until Simms' pony was a dancing dot on the horizon.

That Simms would be first to greet Bonita troubled Red not a bit. "Like takin' a chaser afore the drink," he told his pony. "Simmy is the chaser this trip—and the real thing, which is me, comes later."

As the hills grew bolder, Red noticed that the northern sky was overcast—yellowish-gray where it had been clear blue. He nodded to himself and urged his pony.

Noon found him munching cold meat and bread. The horse, unsaddled and dragging a rope, nibbled at the bunch grass. Red determined to give his horse every chance. There was a new sheriff in Perral, and Red had yet to learn just what kind of man the new sheriff was.

The sun burned down to the western hills. The pony quickened its stride as the town loomed through the afterglow of sunset. A turn in the road, and Red saw Simms' horse tied to the hitching rail of the Shell-out Saloon. He rode past, glancing at the swing doors. At the livery stable he dismounted and fed and watered his pony himself. Then he left him, saddled and bridled, clinked across the street, and entered the sheriff's office breezily. To-morrow would be Christmas Day. Red earnestly desired to keep the peace that he might fully enjoy the society of the velvet-eyed Bonita. There would be feasting and dancing. Then he wished to ask a momentous question of the girl, and, despite his fondness for excitement, he did not wish to celebrate his proposal with unnecessary vehemence. "Christmas ain't the Fourth of July nohow," he told himself.

The sheriff greeted him, stepped to a back room and brought out a bottle and glasses. Overland grinned. Evidently this new sheriff was a man of sense and sympathy.

"Well, just one—for luck," said Overland, tipping his glass. "And, say, sheriff, what's the prospects of my strollin' around this here sky town without havin' trouble? Reckon you know how things set here with me."

"Glad you spoke of it, Summers."

"I reckon Simms has been talkin'."

"Yes, he rode in a few hours back. Tells me I could expect you. He's talkin' now, over to the Shell Out. He's mentionin' your name frequent."

"Uh-uh? Well, I'm right sorry."

"So am I. To-morrow's Christmas. What do you say to leavin' your guns with me?"

Overland pondered. Finally he spoke: "Nope, sheriff, it can't be did. 'Cause why? Well, folks would say I was dodgin' chances. But I'll hang 'em up with you if you'll get Simmy to do likewise."

"Simms is drunk. If you say the word, I'll jug him."

"Nope, I don't say her. I come peaceful and not wantin' trouble. But I ain't hidin' out."

The sheriff, a much older man than Red, smiled knowingly. He appreciated the other's attitude; knew him for a man of absolute courage; and, moreover, the name of Bonita, mingled with the town gossip of both Simms and Red Summers, influenced the sheriff to use all the tact he possessed in keeping the men separated. He knew that Red had enemies in town, and few friends. He surmised that in the event of a quarrel Simms would have many partisans eager for an excuse to kill the two-gun man. He knew also that Red Summers would exact a heavy toll before he was finally subdued or killed. "The dance tunes up at eight," he said suddenly.

"All right, sheriff. I'll sure turn these here over to you afore I hit the floor." And he touched his holsters. "I'll be ramblin' down to the Shell Out. Nope! Thanks, but I ain't drinkin'—this journey."

Sheriff Scott watched the young man swing down the road and enter the saloon. Then Scott rose, and, stepping out, locked the door of his office. He hesitated, glancing up and down the street. Then he trudged toward the western end of the town, where the Mexican adobes lay dotted against the hillside.

He entered Bonita's home and asked to see her. She came, radiant, smiling, but her smile faded as she recognized the sheriff. Scott, toying with his sombrero, spoke to her in Mexican. It required all the resources of his limited vocabulary to explain the situation to her—and especially his responsibility. Bonita, naturally flattered by his appeal, was at first inclined to make light of the matter. But the sturdy sincerity of the sheriff finally won her to consider his plan. Watching her eyes, he launched his final argument: "If they mix, señorita, they'll sure be two funerals—puttin' it mild. And you can save 'em both"—and he laughed—"and take your choice later. I reckon a live husband is better than a dead lover, any time or place. Mebby they'll be a dance over to the Encinetas tomorrow."

Bonita laughed. *"Si!* My cousin, he make the grand *baile.* I go!"

Scott wiped his forehead. The session had been warm, from his side of it. He sighed heavily as he rose. With Bonita absent at the Encinetas Rancho, Christmas in Perral might still be a day of unruffled gayety. And Bonita's most natural coquetry led her to hasten that she might arrive at her cousin's rancho in time for the Christmas jollity.

Red Jack Summers had sense enough to know that he acted rashly in entering the Shell-out Saloon. But that peculiar pride of the man who packs two guns would not let him do otherwise. In Arizona, in those days, one gun was as much a part of a man's habiliments as his hat. Two guns, however, were a silent and open challenge. They advertised the gunman, even as the battered ears advertise the pugilist.

Simms was at the bar when Red entered. It is an almost invariable rule that a contemplated challenge between men of the outlands is preceded by an invitation to drink. Red, being the later arrival, was invited by Simms to have something. He declined the bottle pushed toward him, but accepted a cigar. The crowd in the room were most naturally surprised. The acceptance of a cigar under the circumstances was significant. The gunman was not taking any chances. Simms argued that Red was afraid to drink. This idea grew as he consumed more liquor. Overland chatted with the townsmen and ranchers and ignored Simms, who stuck close to the bar. Presently the Bar-O man stepped up to Red, whose back was turned, and touched his shoulder. Red turned slowly, smiling. Simms stiffened. "Want to sell that cayuse of yourn?" he queried.

"Nope. I got use for him."

"Oh, all right. I was lookin' for a plumb gentle hoss to give to a lady—one what is old and safe."

"Uh-uh! Well, that's the kind of a lady to give a hoss to, Simmy. He'd sure git used right."

The bartender, from his vantage ground of safety, laughed. Several spectators wanted to laugh, but refrained. Simms scowled. "You kin talk better with your mouth than you kin with yore hands, hombre."

Overland ignored the animus of this arid impeachment. He turned and asked the assembled company to name their individual tastes. Their tastes were peculiarly similar. Again Red took a cigar. Then, with deliberate movement, he unbuckled his guns and passed them over the bar. "I come peaceful," he said, and, turning, strode from the saloon.

"He's shore tied Simmy's hands," said a lounger to a companion.

"Which is luck for Simms," was the retort.

Red strolled down the street, entered the stable, and secured his gift for Bonita. He passed on down to the end of the town and stopped at an adobe. The door was opened by a plump Mexican woman, who greeted him cordially. He entered and glanced round. Evidently Bonita was attiring herself for the dance. She was not there to welcome him. The Mexican woman made coffee and tortillas. Red maintained a questioning silence as he ate. Then he rolled a cigarette and gave his parcel to the señora. "For Bonita," he said.

"*Si, señor.* Bonita, she mak' *pasear le tiempo* to zat—what you say—Encinetas Rancho. Beeg dance, señor. She ees com' back *poco tiempo—mañana. Si.*"

"So? *Muchas gracias, señora.* I reckon I'll fan it over that way. Simms and me was expectin' to go—but I don't see him around here."

"He ess come—and he go."

"Oh, so he sized up the layout? Well, adios, señora. See you later."

Red departed. His genial smile was gone. His stride quickened as he neared the Shell Out. Pushing through the swing doors, he asked for his guns. Simms, half drunk, laughed. "Gettin' his nerve back," he remarked.

Red heard, and the bronze of his cheeks deepened. He buckled on his guns and walked up to Simms. Those leaning along the bar moved away gently. "I'm givin' you one more chanct, Simmy," he said, and, turning his back square on the other, marched out.

The trail to the Encinetas Rancho lay north of the town along the foothills. Red rode at a lope, occasionally disciplining the active pinto, who seemed disposed to swing toward the home trail. A star pricked the velvet wall of the night—then another and another. A faint breeze out of the north fluttered the scarf at Red's

throat. He knew that Bonita's cousin lived at the Encinetas, and the thought did not please him. The cousin was a lithe, handsome Mexican, known as a good rider and a man of courage. The Encinetas Rancho was a well-to-do homestead. Aside from the horse he rode and the guns he packed, Red possessed nothing save a reputation. His reputation varied as an earning power according to the peace or stress of the times and his habitat. He had often pictured Bonita as the angel of a peaceful existence wherein figured a homestead and cattle of his own. He believed that with her as his woman, his days of wandering would cease. Yet when free from her presence, her vivacity, and dusky beauty, he had misgivings. He was yet too young to thoroughly know himself—a veritable Ulysses of the outlands, seeking adventure and excitement as a subconscious outlet for his vigorous vitality and his love for the romance which he lived, yet knew it not.

Such thoughts as these occupied him as he rode. The breeze increased to a low-voiced wind that spun stray clumps of tumbleweed across his trail. The air grew chill—indeed, too chill for the season. Slowly the light of the stars dimmed as a yellowish haze blanketed the north. A cold, keen flake settled on his cheek. He brushed it away, gazing at the sky. Again he felt the sting of a snowflake, and another and another. A mile farther, and he shook a tiny rift of snow from a crease in his gauntlet. Around and about him the earth grew gray and then blank white.

Suddenly he reined up and glanced back. He could see nothing; but his horse sniffed the thin air and rolled a startled eye. From behind him came the muffled pound of a running horse. He drew his pony across the trail and waited. Gazing back into the night, he fumbled with his gloves. When the dim outline of a raider appeared, Red was barehanded. Even as the running horse swerved and passed him, he knew that it was Simms, although the other bent low in the saddle, heading into the storm like a running moose, looking neither to the right nor left.

"But he sure seen me," said Red. "And he's sure aimin' to kill that good hoss of hisn."

That Simms had passed him did not bother Red in the least. But the fact that he had ignored him in passing wrought upon his slow-burning hatred for the other. He drew on his gauntlets and spoke to his horse. "Looks like I got to do it," he murmured. "And to-morrow is Christmas."

The idea of turning back never occurred to him. He felt so absolutely sure that Bonita was his for the asking that Simms seemed rather more of a joke than otherwise. He was filled with that perilous optimism of men of his type, masterful, courageous to a fault, and buoyed up by the natural egoism of abundant health.

Through the glimmer of snow came the slow sun. He knew that he must be close to the Encinetas.

Against the hills, in an arroyo, stood the ranch buildings, strange in their blanket of white. Even as Red shook off the numbness of the night's ride, he beheld two figures coming toward him. He reined up. It was Simms and the girl. Red's face went white, and then flamed. Huddled on her pony, Bonita rode close to Simms. As they neared the solitary horseman, she put her hand on Simms' arm. He turned to her and laughed, jerking his thumb toward Red.

Like a statue, Red sat his horse, gazing at them. They passed him, neither glancing his way. He reined his horse toward the rancho, rode up, and dismounted. Despite the bitterness in his heart, he had a thought for the pony, which he fed and watered. Then he

knocked at the door and was admitted by Bonita's cousin.

The dance was over. Wicker-covered wine jugs littered the room. Here lay a sombrero, and here a quirt, or gun. The cousin greeted him unsteadily, gestured toward the table, and, throwing out his hands as though to explain his inability to entertain, shambled to a bedroom. Red surveyed the premises thoughtfully, nodded, and helped himself to wine.

Simms was asleep in the adobe in Perral when Red returned to that town. It was the day after Christmas. The streets were deserted. Puddles of melted snow lay in the hollows of the road. The air was keen with the tang of the northern hills. Tying his horse at the Shell Out, Red marched up the street. As he passed the sheriff's office, the sheriff nodded from the window, rose, and came out. "Goin' back home?" he asked pleasantly.

"Yep. But I got some business here first."

"They're married," said the sheriff.

Red nodded. The sheriff scratched his head as the other passed on down the street. "I reckon he don't kill a married man," he muttered.

Bonita saw Red coming, and she awakened Simms, who sat up and ran his fingers through his rumpled hair. She gestured toward a back room, but Simms shook his head. "It's got to come—and I got to see it through," he said, reaching for his gun and jerking it from the holster. "Lemme do the talkin'."

The girl clung to him. He shook her off and strode to the door as Red knocked.

"Mornin', folks," said Red genially. "I heard the glad news, and I comes to congratulate the lady."

Simms gazed with blurred eyes at the rugged form before him. "Got a present," said Red; and, thrusting Simms aside, he entered the room. The señora, standing in the bedroom doorway, began to chatter in Mexican. Red waved her a greeting and asked for his parcel. She brought it timidly. "For you," said Red, and he untied the package and presented the gay silken shawl to Bonita. "And here's hopin' you'll have all the good luck to spare."

Then he turned to Simms. "Hombre, I could 'a' killed you twict and got away with it easy. Folks here knows you give me plenty excuse. But somethin'——"

Bonita, to the surprise of those present, suddenly buried her face in her hands and sobbed.

"Cheer up, lady. It might be worse. I was mistook—that's all."

And he turned and passed through the low doorway. The girl ran to the door. "Jack! Jack!" she called. But he strode on, head up and eyes fixed on the east.

She turned on Simms. "You say to me he was drunk—in thees Perral—dat he don' come——"

"That's all right, Bonita. I got *you.*"

As Overland Red reached for the reins of his pony, a mist blurred his eyes. Slowly the pony faded and he was facing the little country post office of Moonstone. A thin film of snow lay on the ground. The postmaster, glancing up, came to the door. "Howdy, Mr. Summers! Got a skid of mail for you. What do you know about snow in this country?"

Overland grinned. "Thought I felt a change in the cañon. First snow I ever seen this far down the hills."

The postmaster nodded. As Red shook the snow from his gloves and swung off his horse, a squat figure wrapped in a faded serape passed him and entered the post office. The postmaster followed her in. Overland sat gazing at the doorway. When the woman came out, he noticed that around

her thick neck was twisted the faded strands of a once brilliant scarlet-and-black shawl. He stiffened and brushed his hand across his eyes. Then he dismounted and swung into the post office. A bulk of letters and parcels occupied his attention as he sorted and arranged them. Presently he glanced up. "Who was the Chola woman what just left?"

"Her? Oh, that's the wife of the new section foreman. Come in to get some grub for Christmas. Broke, and asking for credit, but I hear her man is no good. Some says he used to punch cattle over in Arizona before he come here. Liquor has got him, I take it."

"Uh-uh! What's his name?"

"Simms."

"Any family?"

"Ain't his woman enough family? Yep, got a whole string of kids from knee high to man size. Whole outfit's no good, from what I see."

"So? Wanted grub—for Christmas, eh?"

"Yep. I'd like to trust 'em, but you know how it is."

Overland nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I know. I been broke myself. Just put up, say, ten of sugar, ten of apricots, a sack of flour, side of bacon, couple of cans of bakin' powder, two bits' worth of chilis, a couple pounds of butter, five pounds of them fancy cookies——"

"Yes, sir. And what else?"

"Oh, tie the stuff up in one of them there red blankets. When you git it roped, send it over to the section boss with the compliments of Jack Summers. Or—hold on! Send it over to Mrs. Simms, same way."

"Yes, Mr. Summers. Is that all?"

"Let's see. You might put up a couple of pounds of candy for the kids. That's all."

The postmaster smiled. "Always heard that the old-timers was the freest-handed gents a-going. I guess this stuff will come handy. But I guess that ole Chola dame ain't starving. She's as big as a box car, just rolling in fat—and that homely!"

"That what?"

"Er—homely. Didn't you see——"

"Never mind that. And lemme tell you somethin': Don't get to judgin' folks by what you see outside. What folks is is sometimes a long ride from what they was. And just to make it interestin' and Christmaslike, put up, pound for pound, another order of stuff like I said—and charge it to yourself."

"For them?"

"For them. It'll do you good. It done me good already. And lemme tell you—it ain't like it used to be in the ole days. But if you want to do business with the Moonstone Rancho right regular, don't go to speakin' careless about *anything* wearin' skirts. Sabe?"

"I—— Why—are they friends of yours?"

"Nope—neither of 'em. But this here snow kind of set me to thinkin'. No use talkin', but a touch of snow puts some edge to that Christmas feelin'. Go out and make a few snowballs and throw 'em at yourself, compadre."

The postmaster laughed nervously. "All right, Mr. Summers. And I'll say the stuff is from you?"

"Well—hold on! You needn't to say it's from anybody. Just see that they git it—pronto!"

"And ain't I the ole fool?" queried Overland of himself, as he rode homeward. "I come clost to gettin' mad when I made Jones ante up—but it won't hurt him any. Reckon it was the scarf that done it. And that used to be Bonita. Gosh-a-mighty, but the other fella what is watchin' inside sure knows his business! If I had the nerve to think that the old Marster takes any notice of us humans a little bit, I'd say the other fella was Him. I dunno."

It's Bad Luck

By H. C. Witwer

Author of "Pretty Soft," "Once Too Often," Etc.

"Any time you dump over the salt you want to make that a perfect day! You want to get to the office in time, have both ears wide open when the boss calls, pass up the pinochle tourney at the corner ale parlor, and stay in with the wife!"

SAY! Did you ever see a guy in a restaurant stop packin' in the eats for a minute, look around like he was figurin' on runnin' out on the waiter, and then flip somethin' over his left shoulder?

Know what he was doin'? He was hurlin' a little salt over his south arm because he'd just spilled some of it on the tablecloth!

What d'ye mean he's nutty? He's *careful,* that's all!

Listen! Any time you dump over the salt you want to make that a perfect day. You want to get to the office on time, have both ears wide open when the boss calls, pass up the pinochle tourney at the corner ale parlor, and stay in with the wife! You know, ever since Cain and Abel got in that mêlée over a dame or the box score or whatever it was—spillin' salt has been bad luck. It means before the day is over somebody is goin' to speak harshly to you.

I'll lay seven to ten right now that's what started the fracas in Europe. One of them king guys probably knocked over the salt shaker while he was tryin' to reach across the table in front of his wife for the mustard—and zowie! They're off!

I ain't exactly what you could call superstitious. Of course I know that findin' a pin is good luck and laughin' in a graveyard is bad, comin' back for somethin' you forgot is disappointment and an itchin' hand's a sign of money. I believe in them things like everybody else does because I never seen none of *them* signs fail. Know what I mean? They're right in there hittin' one thousand in the old sure-thing league all day long. And then there's a few more like openin' an umbrella in the house, gettin' out of bed on the left side, laughin' before breakfast, and puttin' on the left shoe first. You can always figure that them things means bad luck is comin' to spend the week-end with you.

But, as I say, I ain't superstitious. Know what I mean? I don't believe in dreams or nothin' like that—unless I dream of fire, and of course that means hasty news, or if I dream of bein' bit by a snake it's a cinch some friend is goin' to stick one over on me—and there's a few others. But, you know, *they're* the real thing—none of that superstition stuff; get me?

I been lookin' after box fighters for a long time—there's only one guy I know that's been in the game any longer, and he's the bird I'm goin' to tell you about. I think he was in David's corner when the boy knocked out that big bruiser, Goliath. If you get this guy when he's right and ask him, he'll admit it. When I knew him, though, he was a fighter and a good one at that; if he hadn't been I wouldn't

have known him. I handled him for about a year, and durin' that time I got the full course on this superstition thing.

He was old Steve H. Superstition himself, that guy was. Every little thing that happened had a special meanin' to him; yes, and if nothin' happened, *that* meant somethin', too. You couldn't stop this guy when it come to believin' in signs; he knew 'em all and he lived by 'em. Of course he was just a poor, ignorant simp, because everybody knows there's nothin' to that stuff. Unless like now laughin' in a graveyard and whistlin' in a theater, which, of course, is bad luck. But I never fell for this *superstition* thing myself.

I'm goin' to call this fellow Kid Worth, because he's still around the corners here, and what's the use of knockin'? Anyhow, a name don't mean nothin', unless it happens to have thirteen letters in it, and that's bad—— But to get back to this superstition thing. I ran across the Kid out in Denver. I won't tell you what year it was, because as long as I can hide my age what's the use of me makin' you think I was on hand at the Battle of Gettysburg? Now, the Kid is different; he likes to seem old. He's the funniest guy I ever met. He'd sooner be called pop than handsome, and when people ask him is it true Washington carried a cane and does he remember in which hand, he throws out his chest like a department-store carriage caller.

The day I met him we fought a one-round quarrel in our citizens' clothes and on the main promenade of Denver. It was stopped by the police after I had outpointed him a mile. On the level, when the traffic cop run up I had the Kid holdin' on and lookin' around for a referee so he could claim a foul and have the thing ended.

The brawl started like this: I'm walkin' down the street in one of them rainstorms that make you think the angels is stagin' a swimmin' tourney and somebody has ripped the plumbin' out of the sky for a joke. The water is comin' down in seventy-gallon lots, and there's a wind blowin' that makes it some trick to keep on your feet. I'm there with an umbrella, and I'm tryin' to stop it from becomin' a cane as the breeze is twistin' the cloth away from the framework. I'm gettin' the breaks and holdin' it together for about three blocks when I see a guy come through the doors of a restaurant like he's goin' for a doctor. He was a good, speedy guy, but the waiter probably thought he was holdin' back, because he sprinted up behind him and drop-kicked him into the gutter.

I walk over to the victim and help pull him to his feet, gettin' practically no help from him. He was short and chunky, and looked more like a drowned rat than anything else.

"What was that guy tryin' for—a field goal?" I asks him, noddin' back to the restaurant.

He looks at me, and says, down in his shoes somewheres, speakin' confidential to himself:

"I never seen it fail!"

"Never seen what fail?" I inquires.

Instead of answerin' me, he takes a flash at the sky, and remarks:

"I *knew* it would happen!"

"That makes you win your bet, then, don't it?" I says, thinkin' I'll fall right in with him and be as nutty as he is.

Then he seems to realize he ain't alone. He looks me over very careful, like he was goin' to buy me or somethin', and then he edges in under the umbrella.

"I guess you think I'm crazy," he begins, winnin' his guess. "But you *look* like a regular guy, so I'll give you the works. D'ye know why I got eased out of that joint just now? I spilled some salt!"

"Did you spill it all?" I says.

"Wait a minute!" he interrupts.

"There ain't no laughs in this. You know what spillin' salt means, don't you?"

"I never been in that beanery myself," I says, "but——"

"I see," he butts in again. "You don't know nothin'; that is, nothin' about the different signs. It's probably a good thing you met me at that. Whenever you accidentally spill salt it means you're goin' to have a fight."

"What kind of a joint is that?" I says, lookin' back at the restaurant. "Who——"

"Will you let me tell this?" he breaks in.

"Shoot!" I tells him. "Let me have it. But let's get away from the wet. Get under no more than half of this umbrella, and I'll take you to my hotel. I got some old scenery up there that might fit you in places. Or would you like to go back and finish that lover's quarrel you and that waiter had?"

"No," he says, comin' in out of the rain and shakin' the water off his coat. "No—I don't want no part of that waiter! He ain't to blame, anyhow; he couldn't help doin' what he did. I started it by spillin' that salt."

"What do they do to you in there," I asks him, "if you tip over the sugar —shoot you?"

"Nope," he come back, as serious as a life-insurance doctor. "Sugar don't mean nothin'. But salt does. Any time you spill salt you're goin' to have a fight, unless"—he stops right in the rain and points his finger at me—"unless you throw some over your left shoulder right away."

"Suppose," I asks him, "suppose, instead of spillin' salt, you drop a little beef stew on the floor by mistake. D'ye let some of that go over your left shoulder, too?"

"You better let me tell you this," he says; "it'll do you a lot of good. I'm in that joint, eatin' a steak, see? Well, a swell-lookin' dame breezes in and draws a position right across from me. Honest, she was a knock-out, and naturally I'm gettin' an eyeful. I'm puttin' some salt on the meat just as I turn around, and, instead of hittin' the plate, I let a few grains go on the floor. You can figure how I felt when I seen that. I knew right away I'm goin' to get into some kind of a jam before the meal is over. Of course the only thing to do then was to throw some salt over my left shoulder to stop the comin' mix-up. So I pick up the little trick bottle they got this stuff in and shake it over my left shoulder just as the waiter is passin' the table. He was a tramp at duckin', and some of it hit him in the eye."

"D'ye mean to tell me," I says, "that guy throwed you out on your ear just because a little salt hit him?"

"Well, you see," he explains, *"when the salt hit him it was in the shaker!* I had got a little butter on my thumb, and the thing slipped. This bottle was heavy, and when it took him in the eye he went down and for a minute he was as cold as a winter mornin'. When he comes to life he makes a rally, and—well, you saw where I finished."

I'm still laughin' at this when we turn a corner and come to a store with a big awnin' in front of it, and there's a lot of citizens standin' there out of the rain. The Kid grabs my arm and stops me just as we're goin' past.

"Put that umbrella down!" he says. "Don't you know you can't go under an awnin' with an umbrella up?"

"Why not?" I asks him.

"I'll bet your first name is Stupid," he says, "and I know why they called you that, too. Don't you know that raisin' an umbrella under an awnin' is a certain sign of disappointment?"

"Oh, lay off that stuff!" I comes back, gettin' sore. "Your salt story was all right, but the umbrella thing is more than I can take. Come on!"

With that I grab him by the collar and shove him along under the awnin'.

He makes a wild grab for the catch on the umbrella, so's he can lower the thing, and misses it; but he don't miss me! I got it on the nose, and went back on my heels. That was enough for me—to think that this guy would slam *me* after I rescued him! So, without waitin' for him to figure out anything else that was bad luck, I crossed my right on his chin.

I guess the waiter and him must have belonged to the same lodge at that, because he let the biscuit shooter bounce him without a come-back. But with me it's different. He puts his head down and comes in with both hands. I drop the umbrella, and in a minute we were slammin' each other to a fare-you-well. The bunch that was standin' under the awnin', out of the rain, lost interest in the weather and crowded around to watch the battle. The Kid's defense was about like Belgium's, and in a couple of minutes I was hittin' him every place that showed and it looked like I would make him quit in a round. I uppercut him, and he goes down on his knees, and then somebody that probably was bettin' he would stay the limit runs for a cop. When the gendarme comes up the Kid is takin' a long count and a guy in back of him is callin' him a yellow dog in one breath and pleadin' with him to get up and mix it in the next. I heard afterward he lost a buck on the Kid.

The cop looks us over and decides to take us both to the cooler for stagin' a mill without a license, and in another few minutes we're in one of them little trick jitney patrols, on our merry way to what looks like six months' hard, indoor trainin'.

The Kid is sittin' away up in front on the wagon; I'm next to him, and there's the cop on the end. We ain't got even a prospect of gettin' away. While I'm thinkin' up some new jokes to tell the sergeant, so's I can get to a telephone and try for some bail when this joy ride winds up, the Kid jumps up all of a sudden, dives past me, and over the cop's legs. This here constable knew more than what was the capital of the United States because, without even leavin' his seat, he winds up and lets his club go at the Kid. He put a lot of stuff on that slice of wood, and I never seen no better control in my life—he was certainly in mid-season form. The club takes the Kid on the back as he straightens up, and down he goes again. It was the third time he had taken a dive that mornin'; he reminded me of a seal.

The cop reaches over and picks the Kid up.

"I telephoned in to the sergeant," he remarks, slammin' him into the seat, "that I'm bringin' down *two* guys. That's how many I'm goin' to have when I get there. Do you make me? If you or this other tramp try any more get-aways, I'll bend a gun over your bean!"

I eased back farther in my seat.

"Old pal," I says to the cop, "I ain't a quitter. No matter what this guy does you can count on me to stick to the party to the last bell."

The Kid looks up and snarls at the cop:

"Take your hands off me, will you! I ain't tryin' to leave; I seen a pin on the floor of the wagon, and I picked it up. That's the first good luck I had in a week, and I ain't goin' to let it get away from me."

"What d'ye mean good luck?" says the cop.

The Kid looks at me as much as to say: "Get this poor, ignorant boob!

"Why, you poor simp!" he sneers at the cop. "Listen! 'See a pin and pick it up and all that day you'll have good luck.' "

That was too much for me.

"Ha! Ha!" I hollers. "Here's the next verse: If you spill salt, don't stop to cry, but pop the waiter in the eye!"

"What are you guys?" the cop wants to know. "Nutty?"

"You may think it's funny," says the Kid, sittin' back in his seat and turnin' to me, "but if you hadn't put that umbrella up under the awnin' we wouldn't be in this jam."

"Well, we're in it all right," I answers, as the wagon draws up outside the local Bastile, "and I hope that pin you found is goin' good to-day, because if that's good luck we're goin' to need it."

When we get inside, the copper leads us through four halls, six rooms, and down a couple of stairways.

"Where are we goin' now, captain?" I asks the cop, as he keeps on weavin' through this mystic maze and draggin' us after him.

"To see the sergeant," he says.

"Has he got much of a start on us?" pipes the Kid, puffin' up another stairway.

"You better save that comedy for the warden," says the cop. "I don't think you'll be so noisy after a few weeks in the coop."

"I don't see no cells here," the Kid whispers to me.

"They don't need none," I says, "because once you get inside here you might as well have drawed life from the judge. If a pitcher had the twists and curves this place has, the club owners would be fightin' for him in the streets. I'll bet the painters that fixed this joint up when it was built is still wanderin' around here lookin' for an out."

Further discussion, as we say at the hotel, was cut off by us bein' finally dragged in before friend sergeant. This guy was sittin' at a desk that looked more like an altar than anything else. There was a candle at each end, with a green globe over it, and a plate of flowers in the middle. The sergeant was there with a foot or so of hair on his chin instead of his head, and I'll bet he was breakin' up kids' crap games at the inauguration of Washington. He looks at us while the cop leans over the trick desk and ruins our reputations, and, from the sergeant's face, that copper must have claimed we burned the orphan asylum. Finally he motions for me to step to the rail.

"Slip me that pin," I whispers to the Kid; "it may get us off with ten years."

"It won't do *you* no good," he whispers back, shakin' his head, "because *I* found it. You got to find your own pin."

"But I can't go lookin' for one now," I shot in his ear, while the sergeant is rappin' for me to come hither, as they say. "Hurry up and——"

"You don't never want to *look* for one," he comes back. "You got to find it *accidental* or it's no good."

I would have slammed him then and there, but that's what they had pinched us for, so I laid off and stepped up before the sergeant. Before he could get set I had cut loose with the first page of a plea that would have took the boys out of the trenches, as Henry Ford says. I guess it was because we had the pin in the party, because, after he had bawled us both out, the sergeant turns us loose. The cop looked like his flat had just burned up; I never seen anybody so sore on another guy for bein' a success as that copper was on me.

The pin is still workin' good, and we luck our way back through them rooms and halls, and pretty soon we're outside in the rain again. Then I find out I have left the umbrella leanin' up against the sergeant's throne.

"Wait a minute!" I tells the Kid. "I'll be right back."

He grabs me by the shoulders.

"Where are you goin'?" he says.

"I left the umbrella in there," I answers, "and I'm goin' back to get it. I'll bet the sergeant and his trained cop are matchin' pennies for it now."

"You're goin' *back!*" yells the Kid, glarin' at me. "What's the matter with you? Don't you know that to go back after you started from a place is sure disappointment?"

"Say! Look here, friend," I says, "I don't want to go to the mat with you no more to-day, but if you don't stop spoilin' my afternoon I——"

"I don't know how you been gettin' by since they dropped you from school," he butts in, like he's disgusted with me, "for you are about the most stupid guy I ever saw. You seen what took place when I spilled that salt, you noticed what happened when you put that umbrella up under the awnin', and you watched that pin I found keep us from bein' railroaded to jail. Yet you want to go back after that umbrella when you know it means we'll have more bad luck."

"Well, what's the matter with your pin now?" I says, tryin' to humor him. "What's the matter with *that?* Has it laid down on you or——"

"Never mind about the pin," he shuts me off; "that's got to last us all day."

"Fine!" I comes back. "Gimme it and I'll hold it in my hand while I'm askin' for the umbrella."

He don't say nothin' for a minute, but stands there frownin' in the rain. Then he says, kinda slow and doubtful, like he's givin' himself the worst of it:

"It might work at that; go ahead, take a chance. But be careful and don't pass between two people on the way in or you'll jinx us for fair."

Say! He passed over that pin like it was set with four-carat diamonds!

I got the umbrella all right, and when I come out again the Kid is standin', with his eyes shut, mumblin' to himself, and people are bumpin' into him and apologizin', thinkin' him blind.

"What's the matter now?" I asks him, when he don't pay no attention to me. "Have you got somethin' in your eye?"

He shakes his head quick for me to keep quiet. Seein' his lips movin', I lean over and hear: "Ninety-six, ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine, a hundred."

Then he opens his eyes.

"I just seen a load of hay pass while you was in there," he explains, "so of course I had to count a hundred and make a wish."

"What did you wish?" I says. "That you wasn't crazy?"

"I wished I could get a fight in this town; that's what I wished," he says, "although I shouldn't have told you. I'm liable not to get it now."

"You wished you could get a *fight!*" I yells. "What d'ye mean you *wished?* You ain't got no kick comin' so far to-day, have you? As far as I've seen that's all about all you've done. You're what they call a glutton for punishment, ain't you?"

"As usual," he says, "you don't get me at all. I might as well tell you now that I'm the lightweight champion of Redville, North Dakota. Some day I'm gonna be lightweight champion of the world and points north. I come on here to get a fight, and my manager run out on me. He got sore because I wouldn't fight a guy that was the seventh son of a seventh son. You know what a chance you got of beatin' them guys, don't you?"

"I don't blame your manager for leavin' you flat," I tells him. "He's probably gone to look for some pins, and he's afraid to come back after he started because it's disappointment. Now listen to me! I guess that pin you found is in there tryin' at that, because I happen to be a manager. There is just an outside chance that we can both have some good luck. If I get you a fight, will you be ready to box whoever I sign you with?"

"If you don't do it on a Friday, yes," he says. "I never start nothin' on Friday because it's bad——"

"All right," I shuts him off. "Come on up to the hotel and we'll fix up a contract."

We don't pass no more awnin's on the way to the hotel, and we get there without meetin' any more signs of good or bad luck. I start up to the desk to register this bird when all of a sudden he stops dead.

"Let's get out of here right away," he whispers. "Quick!"

"Heh?" I says, starin' at him. He's tremblin' like a guy under a cold shower.

"Come on, will you!" he goes on, pullin' at my sleeve. "Do you want us to be jinxed for the rest of the week? Look at that guy standin' back of the desk!"

"What's the matter with him?" I asks. "That's the clerk; he looks human to me, an——"

"He's cross-eyed, you boob!" hisses the Kid. "If he looks at us, we're through."

Say, this bird was beginnin' to get on my nerves! Know what I mean? I grabs him, threw him into the elevator, and jumps in after him.

"Sixth floor!" I yells to the chauffeur. "Let's go!"

And we went.

When I get the Kid safe in my room I make him sign a contract callin' for a forty-per-cent cut of his income for the next twelve months. All I got to do is see that he makes it. Then I lock him in and stand outside the door.

"I'll call for you in a couple of hours," I tells him through the keyhole. "I'm afraid if you go walkin' around, Pawnee Bill will cop you away from me. I'm goin' out and get you a fight, and if I find any pins I'll bring 'em back and we'll split 'em between us."

"Be sure the point is turned away from you before you pick them pins up," he yells after me as I get in the elevator, "because if they ain't it means a broken friendship."

He was poor, eh?

I had a few dollars in my left shoe, and I took them out so's they'd be ready to work for me; then I got busy. I went out to Herman Doyle's place first. Herman had a road house away out on the edge of the town, where about a dozen fighters were trainin', and after half an hour's elocution I get permission to bring my find out there to work. Then I go to the newspapers and give the Kid a record that if he had made it there would be crowds followin' him in the streets. I got one more call to make, and that's on Jake McCoy, who's got a stable of hams that start nearly every night and run second every time they fight. The champion of the lot had once gone four rounds shadow boxin' with himself, and then he saw one of his own swings in the mirror, forgot himself, and took a dive. You know how hard it is to get rid of a habit. The colors of the outfit should have been yellow.

I picked out the worst one of the troupe and match him with the Kid. We get on in a preliminary bout the next week, and the Kid stops this tramp with a punch. The next week we fight another one and win in three rounds. Then we get a star bout with a guy called the California Cyclone.

I found out how he come by that name in the first round, when he jumps from his chair, tears across the ring, and floors the Kid with a left hook to the jaw. The Kid stayed down so long I thought he had got stuck to the canvas, but he got up before the referee, who stuttered, reached ten. The Cyclone bounced him twice more before the bell rang and stopped the massacre, and the crowd was in hysterics with joy. When the Kid comes to his corner he motions for me to lean over.

"I'm goin' to have trouble with this guy," he says. "He's lucky. He's got a mole on his right shoulder."

"Yes," I comes back, swingin' the

towel over him, "and he'll probably hit you with it in a minute. He's slammed you with everything now but the bucket. What do you care what he's got? We'll stake him to the mole. I got a wart on my nose and you got a hay-maker in your right hand. Go on, get mad now, and start somethin'!"

The Kid takes a long drink from the water bottle, and shakes his head.

"I wish I had seen that mole or known somethin' about it before this fight," he says. "I'd have had more sense than to meet this guy. You know yourself what a mole on your right shoulder means, and——"

Bang! goes the bell.

The Kid stalls around the ring, and the Cyclone starts right in to end the thing. I guess his mole was tryin', all right, because in a minute he's got the Kid in a bad way again and rockin' like a ship in distress. He took three wallops at the Cyclone and missed him from here to Peoria, and after that he just kept close and hung on until the crowd run out of things to call him. He just did last out that round, and when he gets in the corner he looked ready to call it a day. While we're workin' over him he turns to me and says:

"If you only looked that guy over before you signed me up; but, no! You go right ahead and—— Aha!"

He stops all of a sudden, elbows me away, and looks at the floor.

"Gimme that hair!" he yells.

I look down, and sure enough there's a hair layin' in a crack of the floor. I bend down and pick it up.

"Is it red?" hollers the Kid.

It was black, but I got a quick flash.

"It is," I says.

He leans back and laughs out of his battered face.

"That settles it," he grins. "This guy will be soft for me *now*. I got him faded and jinxed his mole. If you find a red hair, it always means——"

The bell cuts him off, and he's in the middle of the ring waitin' for the Cyclone. He don't have to wait long, because the Cyclone took a runnin' start and just simply threw a right swing at the Kid's jaw; but the Kid laughs out loud and stabs out with his left like a bullet, takin' the other guy on the chin and sendin' him back on his heels. The surprised look on the Cyclone's face was funnier than anything you ever seen in the movies. He didn't get no time to figure it out, though, because the Kid is on top of him like a tiger, shootin' out lefts and rights like they was comin' from a machine gun. The Cyclone reels around the ring, tryin' to clinch, but you try to throw your arms around a buzz saw and you'll get an idea of what he was up against. The crowd has the tip-off, and they're on each other's feet, screamin' for a knock-out. They got their wish when the Kid jabs the Cyclone's arms away from his face and hooks him with his right.

This here Cyclone was just comin' to life when we left the clubhouse.

Well, we win a half a dozen more quarrels, and then we get an offer to fight the lightweight champion ten rounds in New York. It was to be our first start in the big league, and it meant about ten weeks of hard trainin', so we just move up to Herman Doyle's road house and I hire three or four good boys to help ready the Kid.

The first day he shows up at the camp he's got a black cat under his arm which he claims followed him out from the hotel, and which he swears is a sure sign of good luck. The next day he blows in with a hop-toad, two beetles, and a rabbit's hind foot. Couple of days more he fails to appear at all, and I go all over Denver lookin' for him. I finally bring up at one of them high-class junk shops, where they sell you anything from Napoleon's nail file to a piece of Noah's ark. I

hear the Kid's voice through the door just as I was goin' past.

"Gimme a dollar's worth of them Brazilian lucky beans," he's sayin', "and I guess you better wrap up that leopard's eye, too. Then I'll take that thing you hang around your neck and——"

I hurries inside the store, and there's the Kid with about a dozen clerks around him, pushin' and shovin' each other aside, while he is lookin' over all this what—not, as they say. When he sees me he yells:

"Hey! Come on out in the back yard! They got a lucky wishin' well here and——"

"Have you quit the fight game?" I asks him, shovin' my way through the clerks.

"Heh?" he says. "Why—what's the matter?"

"I was just wonderin'," I tells him, "whether you was figurin' on havin' that cat and the beetles and the hop-toad fight the champion instead of you. What d'ye mean by runnin' out on me like this? I got a lot of guys up at the camp waitin' for you to start trainin' and payin' them five bucks a day, while you're goin' around shoppin' for magic rings and stuff like that."

"Ain't it a whole lot better," he says, "if I have a layout like this for good luck? How can this guy beat me when I got all this stuff tryin' for me? You take one of these Brazilian lucky beans, for instance, and put it in your left ear while you're fightin', and nobody can——"

I seen the clerks hidin' their faces behind their hands like they just thought of somethin' funny, but is too polite to laugh out loud.

Well, I finally drag him away and get him out to the camp, where the first thing he does is to fix up a room with this junk. The whole gang out there is wise to him, and one of the handlers buys a paper of pins and sprinkles them all over the floor, so's the Kid can find them. Another one leaves a horseshoe outside his dressin'-room door, and a panhandler offers to show him a nest of four-leaf clovers for five bucks. With all that I keep him workin' hard, though, and finally we start for New York.

The first night we're on the train the Kid wakes me up about twelve, and when I look over the edge of the berth there he is all dressed and with his suit case in his hand.

"Hurry up and get your clothes on," he whispers. "We got to get right off this train."

"Don't it stop at New York?" I asks him, sittin' up and rubbin' my eyes.

"Don't gimme an argument!" he says. "It may never reach New York. This train is doomed!"

"What d'ye mean doomed?" I asks him, reachin' for my shirt.

"What do I mean?" he shoots in my ear. "I'll tell you what I mean. The number of the engine is 1313, the conductor is cross-eyed, they throwed my black cat off the baggage car because they claim he bit somebody, a guy is shavin' in the next stateroom, and he breaks a mirror, and the left side of my nose has been itchin' for a half hour. Ain't that enough?"

"Plenty," I says. "It's a wonder they let them take this train out. Still, they got couplin' pins on all the cars, and maybe you could slip out over the tender and give the engineer a handful of Brazilian beans and one of them beetles."

"All right," he pipes, droppin' the curtain of the berth. "You can take a chance, but not me! I'm goin' to get away from here myself."

I grab my overcoat and put it on over my pajamas. Then I swing down from the berth and run up the aisle after the Kid.

"Hey, wait a minute!" I yells after him, as he tries to open the vestibule door. "You can wait till we make the

next town, can't you? What are you goin' to do? This thing is doin' sixty miles an hour now!"

"I don't think this train will get to no more towns," he comes back. "It's only dumb luck it got this far. I ain't goin' to stand here riskin' my life argying with you. I'm goin' to get off before it's too late."

And he makes another break for the door.

I grabs hold of him and yells for the porter. People commences to stick their heads out through the curtains of their berths and ask us do we think we're home and why don't they keep the rummies in the smokin' car. The porter comes runnin' in with the cross-eyed conductor.

"What's the matter with you guys?" growls the porter.

"Just a minute!" I says, turnin' to the conductor and holdin' on to the Kid. "What's the next station?"

"We're roundin' the Horseshoe Curve now," he answers, lookin' at his watch, "and we're due at Clover Crossin' at four-eleven—that's just about forty-four minutes from now."

"Horseshoe Curve, Clover, four-eleven-forty-four!" I yells at the Kid. "Can you beat that combination?"

"I can't," he admits, "and that's good enough for me. I'll stay."

He throws his suit case up in the berth and goes back to bed.

The next day I hunt all over the train for him at breakfast, and I can't find him. Not only that, nobody has seen him, and I come near passin' away then and there. He's gone to the dinin' car and spilled some salt, I tells myself, and, rather than take a chance on what's goin' to happen, he's left the train. I go through the dinin' car for the third time and see a little door up at the far end I hadn't noticed before, so on the off chance I go through it. The first thing I see is my fighter.

"You got to take that ladder away from there or I'll knock you," he's sayin'. "You don't think *I'm* going to walk *under* it, do you?"

The cook is on the other side of him and the ladder, and he's got a stew pot in his hand.

"Ah can't move that there ladder, boss," he says. "It's against the rules. You-all will have to crawl under it if you want to git out. I done tole you when——"

"Don't gimme no argyment!" yells the Kid. "Drop that pot and take this ladder away from there so's I can get out or——"

"What's the excitement?" I says, buttin' in at this point.

"So you finally showed up, eh?" snarls the Kid, turnin' around on me. "Well, it's about time. I'm in that car there, packin' in the eats, and one of them waiters brings me a cup of coffee with *two* spoons in it. I ain't quite sure what that means, but I know it ain't nothin' *good*. Naturally I wallop him, and he runs in here to get his gang or somethin', and when I follow him in this guy puts up that ladder in back of me, and the only way I can get out of here now is to walk under it. You know what that means. Can you picture me walkin' under a ladder and bringin' all that bad luck on my head?"

"Can't you move that ladder?" I says to the cook, who's watchin' for a chance to bean the Kid with the stew pot.

"You heard what Ah said!" he comes back, takin' a fresh hold on the weapon. "That there ladder is put there to keep passengers out from the kitchen, and it's against the rules to move it. If your friend here feels like riskin' his life, let him git sassy, that's all!"

"Do you make that?" yells the Kid, dancin' up and down on the other side of the ladder. "He ain't going to move it. Why don't you wallop him? You can't miss him from there."

"You best not take your fr'en's ad-

vice too serious, white man," butts in the cook, grabbin' up a plate with his other hand. "Ah ain't no Jess Willard, but Ah must say Ah can protect mahself if need be."

"I'll go get you a beetle," I tells the Kid, backin' away, "and you can take that and the leopard's eye you bought in Denver and hold one in each hand. Then you can walk under the ladder and it will be all right."

Just then another dinge steps out from behind the stove, and as soon as the Kid sees him he lets out a yell.

"That's the guy that give me the coffee!" he hollers, and takes a punch at him.

I grab the cook's arms before he can get set with the stew pot, and the other dinge goes back of the stove again, with nothin' but the top of his head showin'.

"Gimme a chance, gennlemen," he says. "Ah ain't no fighter. Ah ain't nothin' but a waiter, thass me! Ah only showed mahself from this yere trench because Ah thought Ah heard somethin' about a leopard's eye."

"You did," I says, "and——"

'Well, sah," he cuts in, comin' halfway out from behind the stove, "if you gennlemen would like somethin' for good luck that's got a leopard's eye left at the post, Ah got it. This yere charm will keep off smallpox, landlords, divorce, fire, and all the evils of the barbarous time. It's sure to bring good luck to the wearer and bearer and——"

"What is it?" asks the Kid. He's no more interested in it than an undertaker is in death.

"Right yere, sah," says the waiter, reachin' in his pocket and pullin' out a little roll of tissue paper. He unrolls it, and a thing that looks like a coffee bean rolls out in his hand.

"There we are!" he says. "The greatest charm that was ever worn by human man! A genuine muskrat's tooth!"

"Let's see it," says the Kid, reachin' out his hand.

The waiter passes it over, and the Kid takes it like it's a thousand-dollar bill. He looks it over carefully, and then turns to the waiter.

"Is this a sure-enough charm for good luck?" he asks him.

"They tell me Washington wore one of them things around his neck when he was runnin' for president," comes back the dinge. "Yes, sah, if that there don't bring you good luck, you can get your money back at any time. Jes' ask for Sam."

"What d'ye want for it?" says the Kid.

"Well, sah," the waiter tells him, "Ah ain't money mad, an Ah'll be reasonable. Ah done paid eight dollars for that there charm in San Antone, and the next mornin' Ah gets mah salary raised. But as long as you-all has been so nice to me on this trip Ah'll let it go for a five-dollar note."

The Kid is reachin' in his pocket when I figured it was about time to horn in.

"Here!" I says to the waiter. "We'll give you a quarter for the thing if you'll take the ladder away so this guy can get out."

"A quarter!" he yells. "Why, Ah wouldn't sell nothin' for two bits. Ah can *borrow* two bits and——"

"Give it back," I tells the Kid, "and I'll call the conductor."

The cook loses interest in the deal and turns to the stove.

"Am I goin' to git a chance to cook somethin' here this mornin'?" he says. "This here ain't no salesroom and——"

"Gimme the two bits, boss," says the waiter, "and if your fr'en' will keep his hands where they won't do me no harm, I'll move that ladder."

I take the Kid out and keep him where I can see him without a field glass until we get to New York.

The night of the battle we start

downtown in an auto, and in the back we got the Kid's entire layout of charms. There's the leopard's eye, the two beetles, the hop-toad, the muskrat's tooth, the rabbit's foot, the Brazilian lucky beans, and another black cat the Kid had picked up on the street. He met a hunchback bootblack at the railroad station, and he's got him along, too. Every now and then he turns back and looks at the menagerie in the back of the car and says: "I don't see how I can lose!"

From the mob outside the clubhouse it looks like everybody in the State will be at the ringside, and as we're fightin' on a percentage it seemed like we're goin' to get bean money for a year. I'm feelin' pretty good myself, but the Kid looks about as happy as a guy with a jumpin' toothache in front of a closed drug store. I catch him shakin' his head and mutterin' to himself as we start upstairs for the dressin' room.

"What's the matter now?" I asks him. "You look like a hired pallbearer. You can stall this guy off for ten rounds and you got a good chance of bouncin' him. You know what that means."

"Did *you* notice it, too?" he says.

"What?" I asks.

"The cops around the outside of the club," he answers. "You seen them bulls keepin' the crowd back, didn't you? They was six on one side and seven on the other. I counted 'em."

"Well, what of it?" I says. "That's enough, ain't it?"

"What of it?" he hollers, stoppin' dead on the stairs. "Seven and six is *thirteen,* ain't it? That's fine stuff to run into right off the reel, ain't it? I'll bet it'll be my luck to draw a cross-eyed referee!"

"Well, you got all your charms and stuff with you, what d'ye care?" I comes back. "If you got them good-luck things all ribbed up and readied, and they don't lay down on you, you ain't got nothin' to worry about, have you? Let them pull a cross-eyed referee. As long as he can count he can have chicken pox and it won't bother me."

"Why should it bother you?" he says. "You're goin' to be *outside* the ring, ain't you? I'll bet if he does do any countin', he'll be standin' over me when he starts. I wouldn't be surprised at nothin' the way they're breakin' for me now."

I finally force him upstairs to the dressin' room and get him inside. There's another room right next to it, and in a few minutes we hear somebody movin' around in there. Whoever it was was feelin' pretty good, because he starts to whistle a lively tune.

The Kid is gettin' into his ring togs, and at the very first note he stops short and drops the bandages on the floor.

"D'ye hear that?" he says to me.

"Sure," I tells him. "Go ahead and get ready. That's only one of the preliminary boys who's goin' to fight a set-up probably and——"

"That's got to be stopped right away!" snarls the Kid. "The idea of a guy whistlin' in a dressin' room; he must be nutty. They'll probably be a fire here to-night after that. Hey! Lay off that mockin'-bird thing in there, will you?" he yells over the transom.

The guy on the other side stops for a minute, and then goes on whistlin' a little louder than before. We hear his friends in there laughin'.

"Can you beat that?" the Kid wants to know, slammin' his fist down on the table. "That tramp in there probably don't know that whistlin' in a dressin' room is the worst thing anybody can do. That'll bring bad luck quicker than anything. Stop that whistlin'!" he breaks off, and yells over the transom again.

The guy in the next room misses a note long enough to laugh, and then he goes right on where he left off.

"Are you goin' to stand for that?" bellows the Kid, turnin' on me. "That guy will just about jinx me out of this fight. Go in there and choke him, will you?"

"Aw, come on, Kid!" I says. "Let the boy alone. Get ready—and let him whistle if he wants to; he may have just got married or turned down by his girl or somethin'. We got a date outside in a couple——"

The guy next door starts some fancy notes, and opens up with a little more stuff in his whistle.

"Hey, cut that out!" shrieks the Kid, dancin' around and poundin' on the wall.

"Pull in your ears, stupid," yells back the guy on the other side, "and you won't hear it."

It was about the first time I ever seen the Kid ravin' mad. He flings his shoes on the floor, and before anybody can grab him he's out the door and in the next room.

"Go get him quick!" yells Spider Riley, one of the handlers. "He'll go in there and beat that boob up, and we'll all get in Dutch."

I was thinkin' the same thing myself, so I jump for the door and dashes for the next room just as a guy I recognize as one of the club managers comes runnin' up. From the noise that come over the transom you'd think it was a battle royal between wild cats.

"Are you ready?" says the manager. "The referee's been in the ring for ten minutes, and the crowd is yellin' murder. What are—— Hey, what's comin' off in there?"

"Nothin'," I says, tryin' to stall him away. "Where's the champion?"

"Heh?" he says, comin' up. "Why, he's in *that* room there and——"

"Good night!" I yells, and shoves in the door with my shoulders.

The first thing I seen is what looks like a race riot. Two guys are standin' head to head in the middle of the room, sluggin' each other, and six others are tryin' to pull them apart and gettin' the worst of it. One of the gladiators suddenly jumps away and swings his left from the floor. It takes the other battler over the heart, and he went down so hard I figured he'd wind up in the basement.

I didn't need but one flash to see that he was two things—out cold and Kid Worth!

"All right; I'm ready," sings out the champion, blowin' his nose and startin' for the club manager, who looks like he's got an attack of heart trouble.

The guy that run the club tried three times to talk, but nothin' come out of his mouth but funny little noises. It was so quiet you could have heard a gnat cough.

"I'll be down in three minutes," goes on the champ, lookin' from one to the other of us and reachin' for his shoes.

"Don't hurry, you big stiff!" shrieks the club manager all at once. "That guy you just put away is the bird you were goin' to fight to-night. What were you doin', rehearsin' up here?"

"That other guy is a great actor if they was!" pipes some guy, lookin' down at the Kid, still cold on the floor.

The champion collapses in a chair, and I run over and lift up the Kid's head just as he opens his eyes.

"You wouldn't listen to me!" I yells in his ear. "You big ham—that guy you mixed with was the champion!"

"What?" he says, sittin' up. "Well, what d'ye know about that?"

"What do I know about it?" I hollers. "We come all the way to New York to fight this guy, there's eight million people outside waitin', and he knocks you cold in the dressin' room! Why, you——"

"Didn't I tell you that bum would jinx us by whistlin' up here?" he says, sittin' up straight. *"Didn't I?"*

The Phantom U-Boat

BEING THE PERSONAL NARRATIVE OF A MODERN PIRATE WHO BECOMES OWNER OF A MONSTER SUBMERSIBLE

Transcribed and Edited by ROY NORTON

Author of "A Caravan of Mystery," "The Plunderer," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF OPENING CHAPTERS

Sea rover, adventurer marine engineer, it was a gift of good fortune when the *Sea Fox* was sighted by Thomas Harding. He had been shipwrecked with Jack Masters and some of the crew of the ill-fated *Marion*, and they were in a bad plight when the *Sea Fox* was discovered. It was a huge submarine cast upon the shore of Iceland—a submersible of advanced type and splendid equipment. Her crew of Germans had, through some chemical accident, been asphyxiated. Harding and Masters, together with their rough and motley companions of the *Marion*, bury the German victims, and begin to experiment on the undersea boat. Both Masters and Harding are clever at machinery and know a lot about navigation. Between them they get the U-boat in working shape. Their fellow castaways enter the plan eagerly, and they man the submarine. The object is to salvage the *Sea Fox*, offering it to the German government. With this purpose in mind they set out for the neutral port of Bergen, Norway, where they hope to open profitable negotiations with the Imperial government.

(In Four Parts—Part Two)

CHAPTER V.

I DOUBT very much if the original crew of the *Sea Fox* was any better than the one that drove her eastward by night and day without cessation. I strengthened my hold on it by degrees, hammered it into shape with words—not blows—and drilled it to a state of automatic perfection. I gave the men, individually and collectively, my reason for this, telling them that nothing but accuracy of discipline could bring our venture to anything like success, and impressed each man with his individual responsibility. There was but one case of anything bordering on insubordination, and that, after all, was nothing more than a case of disrespect for Jack. We were, as usual, running completely light at the time when I heard a sudden shout, and a man ran from below to the deck. Through the grease on his face I could see marks of conflict as I looked down at him from the superstructure bridge. Hot after him poured a half dozen men, who swarmed upon him and struck and pommeled before I could interfere. I jumped down to the deck and thrust them aside, but not quickly enough to save him from two or three heavy kicks after he had fallen.

"Stop! What does this mean?" I demanded angrily, and the man's assailants fell back and respectfully saluted.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," replied one of the men, stepping in front of the others, "this swab shot his mouth off when he came off watch about Mr. Masters. We're the police committee,

This story began in the December 7th POPULAR.

and we're punishin' him good and plenty."

"Police committee! What do you mean by that?" I asked, somewhat puzzled.

"Well, sir," the man said, "when you and Mr. Masters let us in on this job and acted so fair with all of us we elected both you and him officers. Then we got together and agreed that we'd crucify any sea lawyer or lubber that shirked or shot his mouth. This man here——"

"That will do," I interrupted, and for a moment was thoughtful. A blind man could have seen that the men of the crew themselves were the most effective instrument I could have for discipline, and yet to have the crew actually taking into its own hands all right of trial and punishment might lead to rather serious results. I helped the fallen man to his feet, while thinking what I had best say.

"Men," I said, "I'm much obliged to all of you for a loyalty and support that I hadn't quite expected. But I do think that it would be a lot better if the police committee was to report its findings to me before acting on them. How does that strike you?"

By this time the deck was pretty well filled with nearly the entire crew. I caught sight of Jack's head sticking up through the hatch, and he grinned and winked cheerfully, as if appreciating my dilemma.

"But suppose you decided, sir, that whoever we sit on ought to get it?" queried the leader.

"Then I should have the right to say how he should be punished, and your committee could carry it out."

"That's all right, sir, but maybe you'd not give it to the swab hard enough," objected the spokesman.

"Hard enough? We can't afford to have a man thumped and kicked till he can't work, can we?" I demanded. "We're short-handed as it is, and if a man goes to the sick bay it means more work for the others, doesn't it?"

The committee scratched its head and cogitated, and there were sundry nods of approval from other heads of the crew who clustered in the background.

"Then how in the devil are you going to punish a guy that cuts up nasty?" asked another member of the committee.

"That's easy enough," I declared, with inspiration. "We'll log him after the committee has reported what he did, and how seriously he has offended, and none but a good-conduct man gets his full share of what we get out of it in the end. The fines imposed shall be taken out of the offender's cut and divided up with the others."

I waited for them to talk it over, and encouraged them to do so. It was almost amusing to see how seriously they mumbled and whispered and wagged heads. And then they agreed.

"How much do you fine Bill?" demanded the leader, pointing at the first culprit aboard ship.

"Nothing. He has been punished enough by your way, if Mr. Masters is satisfied," I said.

Jack's voice came from the hatchway, and he climbed out.

"Oh, it's all right as far as I'm concerned," he declared. "Bill's not a bad fellow. We all get hot sometimes. If I'd known about this police-committee business, I'd have fought for Bill."

I never saw such open-mouthed astonishment as was indicated by the faces of that crew, and particularly by the man Bill, who, for a moment, gasped, fidgeted, and then advanced straight across the intervening space and stuck a grimy fist, with an open palm, toward Jack.

"Mr. Masters, sir," he blurted out, "I got just what was coming to me—part of it! I'd like to have you either

take my hand or slug me, and I don't care much which it is, so long as you take my hand afterward. I've been a——" And I can scarcely repeat all the choice epithets he applied to himself.

Jack cut them short by taking his hand and giving it a good, firm clasp.

"That's all right, Bill," he said, rather short of words himself. "It's off the log with me. You're all right. You're a good man, and I'm for you. If ever you get a kick coming over anything I say hereafter, you come straight to me and talk it out. We're both men, aren't we? I'm no better than you, but I've got to have things done my way if they're to be done right. You see that, don't you?"

Bill, ruffian that he was, almost blubbered as he took the proffered hand and turned away. He took refuge by turning to the police committee and saying: "You chaps did just right. It was coming to me. And I'll say this, that if any of you fellows think I'm not talking on the dead level, let him watch me from now on. Mr. Masters is white—clean through and through. That goes for mine after this!"

My crew forgot discipline and committees, and cheered loudly. I had to permit it and take refuge by a curt order as I climbed back to the tiny bridge and Jack disappeared like a jack-in-the-box down the hatch. And thus ended the first and last work the police committee were ever called upon to do as far as my knowledge goes, although it was whispered to me that on two or three other occasions they tried men, so strict became their sense of discipline and their anxiety to support authority.

The days passed easily enough in a rather uneventful round. I made it a rule to dive at least once a day and run submerged for an hour to thoroughly accustom the crew to that phase of our work, but as far as heavy weather was concerned there were days when there was not sea enough to make the tiny bridge on the superstructure vary or roll to a half degree, and when the Diesels could work straight through a fifty-hour stretch piling up power in the accumulators or secondary batteries. We had so thoroughly overcome all difficulties with the storage system that it proved flawless, and yet we were in no haste and did not force the *Swimmer* to speed. We passed the distant coast of Iceland in all its bleak dreariness, and were well down toward the Faroe Islands before we sighted a craft of any description, and here we sustained a warning of certain dangers of carelessness in this wise:

Both Jack and I and a young fellow called Williams, but speedily known as "Wires," had utilized all our spare time learning telegraphy. Williams had been an amateur telegrapher on land, and had shown such quickness of perception that we had resolved to make a first-class wireless operator of him and had relieved him from all other duty. Now the submarine wireless installment on the *Swimmer* was connected with antennæ under water, but Wires became so fascinated with his study that, being a rather ingenuous sort of youngster, he asked and gained permission to rig a wireless above the bridge also for experimental work. From this we proved that we had a mean range of fully three hundred miles by checking up against the wireless station at Iceland, and also that our system was an improvement on any that we knew, inasmuch as we could receive and probably send with equal facility while submerged or awash. We could prove the former, but evidently Wires was eager to test the latter question, and did so without asking permission.

The result was that after we had passed the Faroes he intercepted a message one day, and promptly cut in with

"Who are you?" The reply was, "Who are you?" Whereupon Wires, in a spirit of hilarity, promptly answered, "Submarine U 34." And after a time was asked: "Where are you now?"

Jubilating over the fact that he had been able to send a real wireless message and take a reply, Wires proceeded to say that we were off the coast of Cuba and gave a random longitude and latitude that was intended to be palpably fictitious, but here enters the freaks of the subconscious mind, inasmuch as Wires, in making that random guess, had no idea that he was giving what had been our approximate position on the day previous, the figures of which had clung to his subconscious memory.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, the time I deemed most convenient for my daily study of wireless, I went below and found Wires with the receivers at his ears and relieved him, intending to throw in the practice short circuit and work with myself to accustom my ears to deciphering the sound. Before I could effect this my ears apprised me of the fact that some one was within reach, and I caught, slowly and painstakingly hammered out, as if addressing an amateur, "Stop kidding. You say you are off Cuba, but position given shows you off Faroes. How about it?"

I jerked the receivers from my ears and stared at Wires, who, caught in his mistake, promptly turned red and stammered. I went after him, and he confessed.

I am afraid that for a few minutes I was so angry that I said several things to him that were not entirely necessary, winding up with: "And so, you see, Williams, you put the whole British fleet on the alert, and if we get overhauled and sunk, you are to blame. Also you make it about ten times as hard for us to run into Bergen without attracting attention. All through your confounded stupidity!"

He looked so contrite and hurt that as I replaced the receivers and listened, I had time to think it over. The ship, whoever she was, continued to repeat her message with persistency, proving that she hoped to get us to betray ourselves by further communication. I did not answer, and, to tell the plain truth, was rather complimenting myself on the fact that I had progressed this far with my own studies. It struck me that if I, a mature man approaching young middle age, should be so gratified by that knowledge, Wires, being scarcely more than a boy and aged about twenty, could not be expected to exercise the caution and judgment of an older head.

I gave him a kindly talk, explaining the dangers brought about by his carelessness, and ordered him to stick to his post for fifteen hours as a penance, and, considerably perturbed, went on deck and gave orders for a stricter watch, on the ground that we knew that we were within wireless touch of some ship. I new that the boy would not answer any other call, and it was well that he did not, because for more than six straight hours his communicant kept trying to evoke a reply from him, even by going to the point of ridicule and abuse. On his reporting this, I that night doubled the watch on the bridge, and Jack worked the Diesels overtime to charge our storage to its full capacity that we might be prepared for all emergencies. We slowed down to make certain of this, barely preserving headway, and it proved well that we did, for just at dawn I was called and notified that a ship had been sighted off to the west-southwest.

I had gone to sleep fully dressed, and ran to the bridge. There was no doubt that she was a cruiser, and, a few minutes later, we made out that she was accompanied by at least two destroyers. You may believe me that I knew the efficiency and alertness of the British

navy too well to take any chances. All that most of those commanders need is a smell in the morning air to set them off like hounds on the scent, and quite frequently they bring their game to bag.

I sprang the emergency call, and, inside of very few minutes, the bridge deck was cleared, ventilators all closed, and the conning hatch whirling down into its socket. We made a pretty good record of submerging on that nice morning, and also made our longest run thus far in full submergence and at full speed. I did not come up until dusk, and then did so very cautiously while standing with my eyes glued to the periscope in the control cabin. It is a very uncomfortable thrill until one gets hardened to it, that waiting for the first peep through a periscope when danger is around. In that respect a submarine or submersible is helpless, inasmuch as she may come up within a comparatively short distance of an enemy that may have, by luck or chance, already located her by the telltale swirl of the waters, and be waiting to pounce upon and override her. The *Swimmer,* as is now quite widely known, was armored heavily enough to withstand even the fire of a 3.5 gun; but suppose that a heavier gun was in waiting or that a destroyer, with its reënforced ram, should be on watch? I know some authorities claim that there are submarines that can submerge to a depth of sixty feet in sixty seconds, but—"I'm from Missouri," and know that we couldn't, and I consider that I have commanded as fine a submarine as ever went to sea. Also I knew another thing, that, with our displacement, despite our huge bulk and armor, we could be run down, though in that running both a destroyer and ourselves might be sent to the bottom for a longer stay than I cared to make.

On this occasion, however, the sea was untenanted when we emerged; but Wires had completely robbed us of our sense of security, and from then on all of us were keyed up to the pitch. Perhaps the lad did us a good turn, after all.

It was on a night of brilliant moon, when the lazy swell had been broken by a nor'-nor'west wind into whitecaps which raced, yellow-crested, across the seas, that Tinker had me called for our first sight of a Norwegian beacon. We decided to lay to until morning, and floated quietly on the waves, although off in the distance we could make out dimly the shapes of warships and the lights of neutral ships. At dawn I sent for Olaf, and he took my glasses and stared long and steadily before giving an opinion.

"Bergen," he said, wasting no words.

"Then," said I, "if you are still confident that you can take us in, and that this is as good a time as any, we shall dive."

He considered for a minute, and then suggested: "I think it safest for us to dive and run in to a point about five miles up the fiord, then lay there on the bottom until night. What time do we have the moon, sir?"

"By ten o'clock."

"I can bring her in to the place where I think we should go better by moonlight."

"Then here goes," I said, signaling for all hands to stand by.

We drove and ran by compass slowly and at such a depth that we could be certain of safety until long after we had passed beneath the watching ships at the harbor; ran so quietly that our screws could scarcely betray us, though some of the lurking watchmen might have submarine microphones adjusted to their ears, and at last, when Olaf gave the signal, settled down to rest and put out our automatic anchors. Save for a diminished watch, all hands slept as we lay there on the bottom of the sea, surrounded by cold blue waters and warmed by electric radiators. The

ships that, twenty fathoms above, swept over us, were of no more concern than the fish that doubtless nosed our steel hull curiously and swam away when there was nothing more to learn.

CHAPTER VI.

When we emerged, at a few minutes past ten o'clock, nothing inimical could be observed through the periscope, nor through the ports of the conning tower, which we left closed, inasmuch as we proposed to make this last and most dangerous lap of our long journey awash. Far away, on the edge of the steep eastern cliffs, the yellow rim of the moon was heralded by a spot of increasing light, bringing all that towering range into silhouette. There was something very subduing in the still beauty of the night through which we must venture.

I called Olaf into the conning tower that, like the tower of all submarines, is scarcely commodious for one man, and myself took charge of the innumerable recording instruments, telegraphs, telltales, and emergency levers with which, in case of crisis, I could open the ballast tanks and submerge.

"We must come across and under that high point there, sir," Olaf said, pointing, and there was nothing in his voice to indicate the strain of nervous tensity that I myself sustained. "We must go up that side, close to the shadow of the shore. If we don't, the moon will show us up at the next turning."

I gave the signals, and we crept at a snail's pace across the fiord, but even then it appeared to me from the aft ports that we were kicking up a terrible fuss and a wake that should betray us to any chance watcher. For an instant I feared my pilot had lost his head, for he seemed intent on ramming the base of the cliff before he called a change of course when he was a stone's throw from their black bases. I had no fear of the water on that side, inasmuch as the charts had proved to me that the greatest battleship ever built could safely have sailed at the very base line; but I was fearful that Olaf might have forgotten some of his youthful knowledge of locality, or that we might meet some boat downward bound. I expressed some of this latter fear to my pilot, who turned toward me and grinned in the half light.

"If we do," he said, "they will be just as anxious as we are to keep from being seen! unless it's a coast-guarder, and they are most likely to be met higher up."

His confidence was so sure that I began to enjoy this voyage in the shadows, which, when the moon came higher, was of marvelous beauty. I did not know it then, but we were traveling up an estuary that in peace times had been the delight of those who toured to the out-of-the-way places on that coast. Sometimes we ran straight and true for miles, then came to abrupt bends and turns where, up to the last instant, no way seemed open. We would drive at what appeared to be an impenetrable wall, the very end of the fiord, to find another way opened as if by magic, and a moonlit stretch of serenity, broidered with light and shadow.

"Times have changed none," my pilot said, as if to himself. "Had we come along here at, say two o'clock in the morning, the patrol boat might be out, if it happened to be her night of the week. As it is, we are alone."

After a considerable journey, he suddenly turned and said: "I think we had best stop, sir."

I rang down, and waited for his further instructions.

"It is safe for us to come clear up now, and I will handle her from the roof bridge."

I doubted the wisdom of this, but

could, perforce, do nothing but trust to his sagacity. I emptied the tanks, and, when the long back of the *Sea Fox,* with its stripped deck, shining and moist, was clear, we opened the ports, the conning-tower hatch, and rigged the extra steering wheel and signals on the roof navigating bridge. Olaf took the wheel in his own hands, and again we moved forward, but at a higher rate of speed until we had crossed the fiord, skirted the moonlit bank for a time, and then he signaled for slow speed, and we began to crawl. We entered a narrow branch of the fiord, where the walls were so close that they seemed sliding past the sides of the *Sea Fox* while she stood still. We twisted, turned, and wriggled our way, to come, at last, to a tiny bay, and there, in the moonlight, could be seen a small wharf, and a score of houses—barely more than stone huts—perched on a narrow beach at the very foot of high cliffs.

"We must have a boat, sir," said my pilot, relinquishing the wheel.

I did not question, but ordered one of the collapsibles out, and waited for his next wish.

"And if you could come along, sir, we could pull her in ourselves and—see what we can find out. If there are any of the old ones left——"

For the first time he was betraying doubt. I slipped my pistol into my pocket before I entered the boat with him, and privately told Jack and Tinker to be prepared for any emergency and to keep a close lookout for shore signals.

To all outward appearance the village was asleep, or deserted, when we landed on the creaking wharf, that I noticed was without lights of any kind. We crossed this ancient structure to the shale of the beach, our feet crashing and clumping and the echoes coming back like musketry from the cliffs behind. Olaf advanced unhesitatingly toward one of the largest houses visible, and thumped vigorously on the door.

"My cousin," he explained to me, between thumps, and then, getting no response, called a name and a sentence in his own tongue. Instantly a voice answered from inside, asked a question, and I heard Olaf pronounce his own name and some other explanation.

The door came open a crack; a man, bearded like a viking, held a candle toward Olaf, who grinned and submitted to the scrutiny; and then the door was widely opened, the viking dropped the candle on the table, and he and Olaf kissed cheeks in true Norse family fashion; from another room two other men came, who greeted him, and these were followed by two women, who shrank back and hesitated when they saw that Olaf was accompanied by a stranger. They all shook hands with me in a rather bashful way, one of the women brought out a jug and some thick glasses, and we sat down. Being unable to take any part in the conversation, I could but watch their faces and listen to their exclamations of astonishment and curiosity as Olaf evidently recited his tale. Frequently they looked at me with glances of respect, so I presume that Olaf did me a little more than justice. Once they put out the light lest a stray gleam shine outward, and all went outside, where Olaf pointed out the shape of the *Sea Fox,* lying dimly visible in the inlet. I observed with satisfaction from her outline that apparently the entire crew were on deck and watching the shore. There was further talk, and I was beginning to be a trifle bored by my position when Olaf suddenly turned to me and said, in English: "As I understand it, sir, you want to get to Bergen?"

"Yes, and without attracting any attention, if I can avoid it."

He translated, and there was much more talk.

"When?" asked Olaf.

"The sooner the better."

"All right. To-night, then," he said; but that was sooner than I had expected. I debated mentally whether I could make all necessary arrangements before asking at what hour Olaf proposed to start. There was another long conversation, and then he turned and outlined a plan.

"We can do it in two ways, so that you will not attract attention. One would be to go now and slip down with the early tide, as we did, landing at a place we know, from where we could walk into the town by a country road. The other would be to go boldly, in the daylight, on my cousin's fish boat; but if you did that, it would be better for you to go dressed as a fisherman."

I had no objections to that, and said so.

"My cousin's boat has auxiliary power," Olaf went on. "She has a heavy oil-burning engine. Very heavy, in fact, for a fishing boat." He grinned and gave a solemn wink, that I did not fail to catch. "My cousin is a very thrifty man. When the fish are not running, he trades up and down the fiord and gathers pickled fish and country produce in exchange for the little stock he buys from Bergen merchants, and also"—and again he winked that mirthless wink—"some certain other things that our countrymen like to trade for."

He stopped and scowled thoughtfully at the candle and added: "As far as our own people go, they ask no questions. And, when we get to Bergen, you might be a deaf-and-dumb man and I can do the talking. My cousin says that Bergen has become so important since the war broke out that the German government has a sort of special consul here, with a lot more authority than they usually have, because——" He abruptly stopped, and, I think, asked permission from his cousin to tell the reason why, and also reassured him that I would prove worthy of confidence.

"Because," he said, again turning to me as if he had not hesitated, "there are many things happening here of which the Norwegian government is not aware, such as supplying certain German submarines with supplies!"

I was inclined to believe that this was highly in our favor. It indicated that whoever the German consul might be, he was a man of more than ordinary authority, and was kept pretty well informed of the movements of submarines on that coast, at least. He would, therefore, be the ideal man with whom to deal. The more I thought over it the more elated I became. I gave a prompt decision.

"That being the case, Olaf," I said, "we will go down in the daylight tomorrow morning. As far as I can see, the only authorities we have to fear are the Norwegian ones. We would undoubtedly be classed as a German war vessel, and seized and interned until the conclusion of the war, which will not satisfy our purpose at all."

"Quite true, sir," he assented, and translated what I had said to his cousin, who nodded a vigorous confirmation.

A half hour later, after some further planning, Olaf and I pulled off to the *Sea Fox* in his cousin's boat, and with our own in tow. I informed Jack of the plans made, and the collapsible was pulled on board. That there might be no chance of our being caught napping by government patrols, it was decided that the *Sea Fox* must submerge and rest on the bottom until the next midnight, when, if she saw a light displayed in the house I had visited, he was to know that we had not returned, and should then submerge again until the midnight following. Olaf and I then rowed back to the wharf in his cousin's skiff and stood in the shadows of a

pile of nested boats until we saw the *Sea Fox* disappear from sight. I was given the spare room in the house, and was now so certain that our adventure was going well that I slept until aroused for a homely toilet and a hearty meal. Clad in a rather smelly fisherman's outfit furnished by my host, I went with him down to a heavy but businesslike boat, where I went aboard. I found Olaf there, whispering mysteriously to two other men who made up the crew, and who gave me a wide-eyed stare of inspection, and touched their caps.

I had thought the distance much longer than it was until we dropped noisily down the fiord, propelled by our engines. I did not until then appreciate how difficult had been Olaf's task of piloting in the night, and how many curves he had taken to keep in shadow and avoid chance of detection. Nor had I appreciated the natural beauties of that wonderful, mountain-embraced strip of steel-blue water. The time passed very quickly, and, long before I had expected it, we churned round a sweeping curve and came to the busy docks, where at least a score of boats similar to ours were discharging fish and produce. Our arrival attracted no attention whatever beyond the friendly shouts of those who knew our skipper and his crew. Ostensibly he had come to Bergen to lay in some trading supplies for an upward trip; so we speedily left the boat in charge of her two men, and sauntered up through the quaint old streets of the city. I could readily believe from what I saw of the water front, and the general air of industry, that it was the most important commercial seaport on the west coast of Norway, and I understood, too, from the number of men in uniform I saw on the streets, that the garrison maintained at the cape fortifications had been augmented now that this country had prepared to defend its neutrality.

Our skipper stopped in a hallway and held a mumbling talk with Olaf, who said: "My cousin thinks it best that he does not go with us to the German consulate. Men who go there are sometimes watched—particularly if the Norwegian coast guards are not fond of them!"

"Good," I replied. "We can find it. You know where to meet him when we are through with our business?"

That point arranged, we separated, and Olaf and I made inquiries to find the consulate. We found it in the residential district, where a very fine house, surrounded by exquisite gardens, betokened the presence of some German official of far more importance than one might have expected in such a post, although Bergen has between seventy-five and a hundred thousand inhabitants. From the flagstaff in front fluttered the Prussian eagles, and, on entering, we saw that a portion of the spacious lower floor had been turned into a series of offices.

There were at least a dozen attendants, clerks, and secretaries, as well as two door tenders, whose civilian clothes could not conceal the patent fact that they were well-drilled and well-set-up soldiers of the kaiser's army. They barred our way and asked if we had an appointment. The fact that I answered them in German, however, caused them to show us a little more consideration. I did not ask to see the consul, knowing that to do so would probably delay us. All I wished was to get past the door. We were finally sent into a waiting room, where, for a long time, we watched others come and go before a clerk came out and asked us our business.

For a few minutes it seemed to me that this haughty youngster might prevent us from seeing any one but himself.

"His excellency has no time to waste on fishermen," he declared petulantly,

and this time I adopted the right attitude with him. I laid my hand on his shoulder until the fingers sunk in, and commanded him.

"You go in at once," I said, with my face less than a foot from his, "and tell his excellency, and no one else, that there are two men here who wish to see him on business of the highest and most confidential nature, and that they decline to give their names. Now go!"

I gave him a shove that threw him halfway toward the door, and, by my very lack of respect for him, I presume, convinced him that we were certainly something more than fishermen, despite our garb. I have observed this truculence toward inferiors and cringing toward superiors to be a characteristic of not only a certain type of Americans, but also prevalent among Germans. In any case, a bold front is the one to assume, as was proven by the rather prompt return of my young man who, in a very subdued manner, informed us that we could see the consul within a very few minutes. Eventually we were conducted through one large office where two men wrote rapidly, through a little antechamber, and then into the august presence of the consul himself. He sat with military stiffness in his chair, and, though surrounded with a warmth of luxury, was himself as cold as a piece of Trondhjem ice. He bored us through with that unblinking, blank stare that is carefully drilled into a Prussian officer and expresses neither fearlessness of soul nor complacent self-confidence. To some it is embarrassing; but I was not in the least disconcerted, and, I fancy, gave him a little better than he sent, inasmuch as his pale eyes finally flickered and veiled themselves.

"What is it you wish?" he demanded, without show of courtesy, and, somewhat to Olaf's perturbation, I think, I calmly, indeed, almost ostentatiously, got a chair for myself and dropped my rough cap on the floor before replying.

"We came here to ask what salvage your government would pay for the submarine boat called the *Sea Fox*," I said bluntly.

The effect was peculiar. Mask it as he tried to, I saw the consul betray a most puzzling and intense interest. His hands suddenly tightened over the arms of his chair, and his head jerked forward a trifle, while his eyes opened wider, and this time were not blank.

"I have never heard of such a boat," he declared, after apparently thinking over the nature of his reply before speaking, and I knew then and there that he lied. "The boats of his imperial majesty are invariably known by class letters and numbers," he concluded.

"Not when they are experimental boats of such formidable and unknown qualities as to necessitate the utmost secrecy on their initial trips," I asserted.

For a full minute he shifted his eyes to the window and stared out over the garden. A minute is a long time in which to sit and think. I did some of it myself, and concluded that I had best be on guard; that I had stumbled into something whose importance was so highly esteemed and carefully guarded by the German government that it might prove a dangerous secret; that this was no case involving a mere negotiation for salvage, a dickering for the highest price, and a surrender of the vessel that we shipwrecked men had recovered, improved, and brought to this neutral port.

"What do you know about the *Sea Fox?*" demanded the consul, so quickly, as he abruptly swung his eyes on me again, that I was convinced he had hoped to take me off guard.

"But you have assured me there is no such German boat," I parried, and

he flushed, knowing that I had called his attempt.

His eyes dropped; and he put a none too steady hand out and toyed with a tiny paper cutter in the shape of a Prussion sword that lay on his polished desk.

"That is scarcely an answer to my question," he said.

"Nor have you answered the first one I formulated," I retorted. "I asked you what your government would pay for the salvage of its submarine experimental boat called the *Sea Fox.*" I laid emphasis on my words, and paused to let them sink in, and then added: "The boat to be delivered into your hands, at—at a stipulated place within reason."

It was his turn to smile at me, a mere flicker of his eyes. He had caught my one stammering hesitancy.

"Well, suppose we will say, for argument's sake, you have her here——"

"I have not said so," I interjected. "I asked what salvage would be paid for her at a stipulated place."

"Which indicates that you have her in seaworthy condition," he said. And now I knew more than ever that I was dealing with a cool, dangerous man, whose brain was not of the lagging order.

"You cannot expect me to guarantee her seaworthiness," I said. "All that your government can reasonably ask, or do, is to state what price it will pay for the *Sea Fox,* landed at a point within reason, which predicates the possibility that she is seaworthy."

I think perhaps the consul concluded that his task might not prove so easy, for again he gazed abstractedly out of the window for a long time, and then, as if to render me more nervous by the wait, got up and walked to it, and impolitely turned his back on us. He walked deliberately back, leaned across his desk, and, almost glaring at me, snapped out: "You are an Englishman!"

"I am not!" I retorted, with equal vehemence. "I am an American."

Instantly he came back at me in flawless English: "Have you anything to prove that assertion?"

In English I replied; but he had me at a disadvantage, inasmuch as I had no proof whatever of my nationality:

"One does not have to prove his nationality when he submits a proposition to salvage."

"You are no fisherman, regardless of your clothes," he added, still speaking English. It was weak.

"Of course I am not," I retorted. "The exigencies of my situation make it necessary for me to observe secrecy in any negotiation I may undertake. Would you prefer that I come here with a silk hat and a trumpeter, shouting aloud through the streets that I was on my way to return to Germany the submarine on which she had experimented, and that might prove to possess unprecedented powers?"

"And if you are a sailor," he declared, after he had recovered from that jolt, "you are not a common one, but a man of an educated and trained mind."

I did not reply, preferring to leave him questioning. With a rare change, that proved him to have been schooled in the German style of diplomacy, he suddenly altered all his tactics, and leaned back and laughed with a great assumption of heartiness. I might have been deceived had he assumed this rôle in the first instance; but he was too late.

"Of course I know something about a boat called the *Sea Fox,*" he said. "But it is not always wise to say too much until one is certain to whom one talks. Is it? Eh? But you speak a very fine German, friend. For a time you almost fooled me."

"I won an honor in my class," I stated, which was but the truth.

"A very good German, indeed. Come, let us get down to brass tacks, as some of your countrymen used to say when I was—attached to Washington. Where is the *Sea Fox,* where did you find her, where is her crew, and exactly in what condition is she?"

"I am glad to hear you admit there is such a boat," I answered, readily enough. "I found her off the coast of Iceland, with her dead crew aboard. What do you think she would be able to do if perfected?" I concluded with a burst of vanity that I now regret, but it was not for myself that it was voiced, but more that credit should be given Jack Masters and the scientist-engineer Wirtz, who had solved the problem of modern storage batteries.

"What can you make her do?" he countered so quickly that I was again on guard.

"What salvage is she worth to you, in gold, if she can do all she was believed capable of doing?" I asked, avoiding the giving of information as readily as he.

He swung his massive head toward Olaf, who was still standing helplessly, and listening with open mouth.

"Wouldn't you like to sit down?" the consul asked, in friendly manner, as if for the first time aware that Olaf was still standing. Instantly Olaf touched his forelock with a man-o'-war's man's salute and said: "Thank you, sir."

"I suppose you are a partner in this enterprise, are you not?" asked the consul, eying Olaf steadily.

"Whatever the captain says is good enough for me, sir; I can't interfere, sir," and he spoke it all with that devilish cockney accent of the East End of London, where he had learned the tongue!

"What part of America do you come from?" asked the consul, with a great pretense of politeness, and poor Olaf, who dared not admit that he was still a Norwegian subject, stammered, pitfully mumbled something about New York, and twisted his cap.

I began to see the trend of the consul's question, and was annoyed with myself for letting Olaf come with me; but it had seemed necessary. I stopped this line of question by interrupting.

"It seems to me," I said, "that the question of nationality or who, or what we are, does not at all enter into this. I insist that we are here to make a fair-and-square offer of salvaging the submarine *Sea Fox,* and should like to know what the German government is prepared to offer."

"My dear captain," suavely replied the consul—and I took note of the way he emphasized the title—"it is very essential to my government to know where you have the *Sea Fox,* and in what condition you propose to turn her over to my government's representatives. If she is seaworthy, and in good condition, it would be far better for you to turn her over to a German crew that I might possibly provide, and accompany her to Swinemünde, on the Baltic, where you could make the best of terms."

"No," I said flatly, "I decline to consider that proposition. We deal here. Why not make us an offer?"

He considered that for a long time, and, as if the problem were one requiring careful action, fell to walking almost absent-mindedly backward and forward in his room. That he did consider the question important was established by the fact that when a secretary tapped on the door and opened it, thrusting in a cropped blond head, the consul brusquely swept him away with his hand and a curt order that he was not to be disturbed. I watched his peregrinations, hoping from some word or movement to gather together the causes of his reluctance; to know what he was striving for, to see how strong

a hand he played. I saw him lift his head and move a little faster, as if he had come to a determination, and then he stopped and faced me, and held out his hand with that same pretense of frank friendliness.

"This is a matter that I shall have to take up with Berlin," he said. "For I am, after all, but a consul—a mere consul—in this place. I have not much authority of my own. It is a naval matter, of course, and—where did you say the *Sea Fox* is now?"

"I did not say," I responded, accepting his hand and ignoring the fact that it was about as warm and friendly as a shark's tail. "I asked what price would——"

"Yes, yes! I'll ask and find out about that," he said, as if I had not just again declined to answer his question. "I'll communicate at once. Could you call here—say—to-morrow, at this same hour?"

He consulted his watch slowly and steadfastly, as if it required a mental calculation to compute the time of day, and, when I said "Yes," promptly made a memorandum on a tablet that lay on his desk.

"Very well," he said, smiling and straightening his shoulders, as if more accustomed to uniformed collars than loose civilian garb; "I shall see that you are admitted at once, Captain——"

"Roberts," said I, preserving my identity.

He made another memorandum of the fictitious name I had given him, and, with a very strained graciousness and air of friendliness, bowed us to the door.

CHAPTER VII.

We found Olaf's cousin in the rear end of a water-front inn, and I was impressed by the manner of his finding. Olaf came in and mumbled something to the proprietor, who, clad in an apron that had some time been white, was serving drinks to numerous men of the sailor type, and I saw the proprietor cast a scrutinizing glance at me before he disappeared in the rear. A little later he appeared in the dark passageway, and, still out of sight of the men at the tables, nodded to Olaf and made a gesture.

"We are to wait here," mumbled Olaf, and proceeded to buy some drinks. We sat at a table to drink them, and watched the patrons of the place, most of whom appeared to be mere idlers, until Olaf's cousin appeared and led the way into the street.

His boat, the *Norskman*, had been burdened with several bales and boxes during our absence.

"Trading goods!" explained Olaf, with that same surreptitious wink that was so eloquent.

I thought it best not to appear too curious, so said nothing during the homeward journey. The fiord in daylight appeared almost populous. There was a constant stream of small craft ascending, and descending, up to the point where we turned off for our own inlet, but when we entered it we were at once in a lonely little water of our own. It was a veritable retreat. I wondered, as we passed over the spot where the *Sea Fox* lay at rest on the bottom, if Jack and the crew were asleep, or if they listened to the sound of our screw above them.

We were waiting on the end of the wharf at midnight, when we saw the first disturbance of the water begin, then the swirl and curl, as first the periscope and then the top of the conning tower lifted out of the water, like some sea monster come from the depths to stare about. We were aboard within a few minutes, and telling Jack and the crew of what had taken place.

There was vast disappointment aboard the boat that our deal had not come to a speedier conclusion, and it was voiced, although respectfully

enough to avoid offense. I sympathized with all of them, for, if any one believes that a submarine, no matter how luxurious and commodious, can be other than a steel prison when men are confined to it for weeks, he has never been aboard one. And here our fellows were not only debarred from going on land, to move freely, but compelled to remain submerged about twenty-two hours out of twenty-four, and therefore cut off from the open air. Worst of all, the negotiations might last a full week longer.

The crew fell to talking among themselves as they lounged about the deck and looked longingly at the moonlit shores; and Jack, Olaf, Scruggs, Tinker, and I were going over the situation, when the Norwegian gave a start and pointed down toward the entrance to the little harbor. A boat was coming in, much to our alarm. I was about to call the crew to quarters, when Olaf laid a hand on my arm.

"It's all right," he said. "That's my cousin's boat; but something has gone wrong with him."

"Gone wrong?"

"Yes, sir. The fact is—I don't know as I should tell it, but you may as well know—he started out a while ago to supply a German boat with fuel and supplies."

"Then that means——" I started to say, but saw Olaf shake his head dubiously. The boat came steadily up until she was almost abreast of us, and then Olaf hailed in a voice that was softened to a mere call. His cousin answered, and the engines stopped. The way of the boat brought her to within a few yards of our own, where she lay on the still water. They talked for a minute, and Olaf turned to us.

"My cousin has had a narrow escape. Government patrol boats are out down toward the mouth of the fiord. Had he not been warned by a boatman he keeps down there for such emergency, he would have blundered into them. It's hard luck, all right. If the patrol happened to come here at any time and catch his boat loaded to the gunnels with that kind of stuff, it would be——" He snapped his fingers and shook his head to indicate calamity.

"Hang it all!" I exclaimed to Jack. "He's been mighty decent to us. Here's a way where we can play even. We can take his cargo and pay for it out of the ship's money. The consul can have no kick coming merely because we bought supplies. In fact, if we come to terms, he might be thankful to us for turning her over in full form, and pay more salvage for that very reason. Eh?"

"Sure as you're a foot high!" my partner answered. "Let's take 'em!"

"It would be a big help to him if you did," asserted Olaf, who had been listening with some eagerness.

"Then tell him we will take all he has at the prices he would have been paid by the German commander," I said, and Olaf translated the message across the water.

The estuary was so still that we actually moored the boats together for the transfer, and the smuggler was the first to come aboard and shake our hands. He babbled in his own tongue.

"My cousin says he is grateful—that he is already suspected, and therefore likely to be watched—that for you to take his cargo makes it certain he will not be caught—that he thinks it best to work fast," Olaf translated, in jerky sentences; and I lost no time in giving the necessary orders. All of us fell to and worked with a rush, and it was a pretty sight. Most of the men were stripped to the waists as they warmed up, and the moonlight shone on their sweating backs and quickly moving muscles as they brought barrels aboard, attached them to the intakes, pulled empties away, and stove in their heads that they might be weighted and sunk,

or carried boxes of provisions below, through the forward hatchway. There was not a supply in the lot that had not been specially packed to fit the requirements of a submarine, whose hatch space is necessarily limited.

I will admit that the prices I had to pay were pretty steep, but I have not the least doubt that they were exactly the ones that Olaf's cousin would have received had he delivered his goods to their intended purchaser. Moreover, I did not particularly care if he did make a big profit, because the German government should and must pay.

We stood on the deck in the moonlight, and Olaf's cousin was preparing to cast off. My men, who had reclothed themselves, stood watching him enviously, when I recalled how hard they had worked and how obedient and willing they had proved themselves.

Impulsively I called to Olaf's skipper cousin to hold a moment, and then spoke to Jack:

"Say, it looks pretty tough to keep all the men here this way. Why can't we give some of them shore leave? What do you think?"

"I think it's a good idea," he said promptly. "There's no use in all of us being cooped up there on the bottom day after day for perhaps a week or ten days. Tinker and I can submerge her and bring her to the surface again just as well as fifty men could. But do you think we dare let 'em loose?"

"Not here, in a little place like this," I said; "but maybe we could arrange it with the skipper."

I called Olaf, and told him what we proposed to do, and he held a long conversation with his cousin.

"My cousin says that if they can be depended on, he will take them ashore, stow them away below early in the morning, run down to a place we know where they can be landed, and they can walk to Bergen. Then he can pick them up in the evening, and bring them back."

"Good. Tell him I will pay what is right," I said, and Olaf patiently translated.

I called the crew up abaft the superstructure and laid it down to them.

"If you men could give your absolute word of honor that you'll stay dead-cold sober, and keep your mouths shut, I will arrange for a day on shore," I began, and they threatened to forget the necessities for silence and break into a cheer, but I checked them.

"For Heaven's sake, don't yell!" I commanded. "We can't afford to take any chances whatsoever until we're in the clear again! That's why I insist that if you do go ashore to-morrow no man is to take a drink. He might talk too much."

"That's quite right, captain!" asserted Scruggs. "And the police committee will see to it that no man does, if you give us shore leave. How about it, boys?"

Their protestations lacked nothing of fervency.

"Then get below and clean up," I said. "Look as decent as you can. You're supposed to be merchant sailors off some Yankee smoke boat."

Olaf talked with his cousin again, and the latter said he would return in two hours, when he thought it would be best to start; but he was puzzled how the boat could submerge with but two men aboard when told that this was the number to remain. Olaf explained, but the skipper shook his head stolidly.

"How much does she draw?" he asked, and I told Olaf her depth when on the surface.

More talk followed, and Olaf said: "He says why not take her to a place he knows—a grotto—and let her stay there? She will be safe, and he trusts that the two men left will not touch anything they find there."

Full of sympathy for Jack and Tinker, I assured him that the boat was better on the surface than resting on the bottom of the sea, and also that it gave the *Sea Fox* a chance to remain open during the day. Another long conversation ensued, that was participated in by the members of the skipper's crew, and a watch was frequently consulted. I began to wonder what the hitch was, before Olaf explained:

"The place they go to is deep enough at any time, but only a small boat can come out at low tide. I can take you in at any time, and you can come up inside, but he wants the men to agree that they will forget all about it after they leave here. You see, it's not known by anybody but a very few men of this village. They don't tell their wives, even. My cousin and his crew say you have proved to be white men, and they trust you, but they don't want any one to know about this place."

I took my usual recourse, and talked to the crew. I think I had a blunt eloquence that night when I gave them a man's talk on being loyal and square to any one who was loyal and square to them. And it worked. They gave a few more words in attestation than I can tell you. The skipper of the smuggler stood behind Olaf at the wheel, and his vessel slowly followed astern when we turned on the power, and ran farther up the inlet, until it narrowed to a point where the rays of the moon barely penetrated. The skipper said something to Olaf at a moment when it appeared to me we were about to butt our nose into the cliff, and Olaf signaled to stop the engines. We drifted slowly toward the glistening face of the cliff before we came to a full stop, and the *Sea Fox* lost way.

"We shall have to submerge to about eight fathoms, sir," Olaf said, and I gave the order, taking a chance on his proven skill.

Then for a minute we went slowly ahead. Once I heard her rub, and I think, from the vehement remarks they interchanged in their native tongue, that Olaf and the skipper were both annoyed and frightened, and then, slowly, we emerged and lay quietly on the surface. I looked about. It was darker than black velvet. The moon's rays no longer cleared the blackness. Olaf picked up an electric torch from a convenient shelf, and we opened the conning-tower hatch, and climbed on deck. He waved it aloft, and I saw that we were in an immense cavern, whose roof gave back stray reflections, where surface moisture had crept through fissures.

"Over there," said Olaf, pointing with his torch, "we pass out."

He extinguished the torch, and, even as I looked, I saw a boat silhouetted against a bright spot in the background, its rowers stooping low to avoid the rocky roof. The torch flared again, and the rowers came alongside. The crew came tumbling up from below, and took turns in being transported to the smuggler's boat outside, where, out on a lark, they stowed themselves away like sardines in a tin. I left on the last trip and felt sorry for Jack and Tinker, who were doomed to spend the day in idleness.

Most of us napped on the way down to the place where we were to be landed, and there again we came to a trial, for we had to scale a cleft in the rock to a little, wooded plateau, after which, we were assured, there would be some more climbing, that would bring us out on top, barely three miles from the outskirts of Bergen.

With the seaman's habit of catching naps when possible, we all tumbled to the patch of grass in the copse and slept. The sun was high when the first man aroused, and, with Olaf in the lead, we resumed our march. We made our way, in groups, but keeping sight of one another, to the smuggler's inn,

where we took up nearly all the landlord's dining room, and had a very late breakfast. I felt liberal now that we were so near to real money, and invited all hands to be there at three o'clock in the afternoon for a dinner at my expense, so confident was I of forthcoming success. I felt as if we were about to separate and scatter out to the seven seas after our common vicissitudes; that the end of our adventure was in sight; that my command of the *Sea Fox*, with its attendant responsibilities, was almost terminated. I was actually saddened by the thought when Olaf and I bade the crew good-by and hastened away to the consulate.

This time there was no difficulty in reaching his excellency. We were immediately ushered in, to receive a cordial greeting. He shook hands with each of us, as if we had become friends. He was urbane and smiling.

"I am sorry," he said, after his greeting, "that I have had no reply to my queries, save an acknowledgment of receipt, and the assurance that we shall be able to quote figures late this evening." He threw his heavy, white hands upward in a gesture of annoyance. "War time renders it difficult for all of us. It takes hours to get a reply that in ordinary moments would be answered by a prompt 'Yes' or 'No.' I am sure you appreciate the difficulties, captain."

He swept away any lingering distrust I had by his sheer loquacity and friendliness. He pulled open a cabinet at the side of the room and tendered a drink, asking us to name our choice.

"What's yours—or, 'What'll you have?'" he asked, with a laugh, and added gayly: "You see, I did not neglect my study of your colloquialisms while resident in your magnificent country. Sometimes I sigh for those old days when I was so much younger, and regarded Washington as my home. Ah, you Americans are a wonderful people. Your great men are so frank, so outspoken, so sincere. European diplomacy strikes one as foolishly obscure, and needless, after one becomes acquainted with your blunt, straightforward methods. You do not drink? Very well, you can do me the favor of smoking. I am rather proud of my cigars. They are the best I have ever smoked. Fine, as you say in America!"

He offered us an open box of Havana cigars; and, somehow, I had a flash of real intelligence that made me pause to digest it.

Why was it that his excellency, the consul of his imperial majesty of Greater Germany smoked cigarettes, handed us an unbroken box of Havana cigars, lighted one himself, and then carelessly threw it aside and lighted a cigarette? Somehow it seemed like the action of a man who was dissembling. And why this outburst of camaraderie without cause? A salvage operation does not imply a mushroom friendship, and I judged by his cold attitude on our first audience that he was hardly the man to become cordial in one meeting. He smiled with his lips, and not with his pale eyes, that were always hard and bright. The smile did not extend above the corners of his lips and nostrils. Moreover, there was about him a nervousness of enterprise that had not been apparent on our previous visit. He consulted a desk pad, on which were scribbled appointments, excused himself, as if perplexed by one of them, and passed into another room. I wondered why he had not summoned one of his numerous secretaries if he wished information, and looked at Olaf, who was staring absently at the window. The wait was extended, and I got to my feet and looked idly out of the consulate window on the garden below, trying to resolve into something cohesive the little discrepancies that had, perhaps oversuspiciously, registered in my mind.

When I looked around, Olaf was standing beside the desk, calmly going through some papers in a desk basket on the consul's desk. I had not time to reprimand him, for we heard voices outside, and were seated when the consul returned.

"I find," he said, "that I have appointments until my dinner hour, captain, and guests to dinner. It is awkward. Very awkward! For I suppose I shall have to act as entertainer for at least an hour or so after the conclusion of our meal. Doubtless you are eager to get the matter of the *Sea Fox* settled immediately. I know how you Americans hustle, you see. Of course you are stopping here, in the city?"

The flash of his eyes told me that he had resorted to his old shallow attempt at surprise.

"Of course," I answered. "Where else, pray? The interior of Norway has few hotels."

"Then would it be asking too much of you to return here at—say—ten o'clock this evening? That makes it certain that I shall have received a reply to my very urgent inquiries."

"Ten o'clock it is," I said, arising, and again he conducted us to the door.

We trudged a long way down the street and came to the business section before either of us spoke. Olaf broke my chain of thought by suddenly stopping and looking at me with his lazy blue eyes, that somehow no longer looked so stupid to me as they had prior to our last few days' association. I was learning that under this mask of stolidity was a keen mind.

"Well, what do you think of him?" he asked.

"I scarcely know. He has done nothing that was unreasonable, and yet —little things! Trifles. Why?"

"I've thought the same," he said quietly. "That man's up to some game. Why ten o'clock to-night? That's a late hour for a big German official, when he might as well have said: 'Come to-morrow, because I may not have an answer until late.'"

"That is true," I admitted. "And, yet, this is no ordinary transaction. In the first place, he knows our demand is going to be large. Next, he wants to know exactly what we have to deliver, and in what condition, and where. Next, I've an idea that he wishes to get credit from his kaiser for an exceedingly adroit piece of work, because William Hohenzollern is liberal in rewarding those who serve him well. And, last of all, neither the consul nor the German government desire anything so much as secrecy regarding their possession of such a boat as they think the *Sea Fox* might prove to be. In keeping that secret is their strength, inasmuch as they propose to make submarines their chief naval aim, and cannot hope to conquer at sea unless their submarines prove capable of handling the British navy. They know that they haven't a dog's chance at sea unless the submarine does make good, because, argue as any one will, it's a dead open-and-shut fact that Britain does rule the seas, has the best navy in the world, and more trained and competent sailors than any other nation can possibly have in less than twenty years' hard work."

I had been arguing to myself, trying to bring my own conjectures to a head through the sound of my own voice; mumbling my words there, at a street corner, while busy men passed to and fro.

"They've got to have that submarine," I said, when my companion did not immediately respond. "And they've got to pay our price."

"But suppose they won't pay until they get possession of the boat?" Olaf insisted, in his slow cockney drawl.

"Then they shan't have her until they put the money up in the hands of some third party," I said.

Olaf shook his head and stared absently at the pavement. I saw that he was opposed to any condition but cash in hand.

"You don't trust the consul?" I asked.

"No, I don't! He's too smooth. He's up to something."

I laughed derisively.

"He doesn't dare attempt anything irregular," I declared. "We are big enough to hold our own. We've got the whip hand of it. He will probably try to get something for nothing, but we can beat him at his own game. I don't trust him, either; but he has got to come to our terms."

Olaf still shook his head, then consulted a battered old silver watch, and said he thought it was time for us to have that dinner with our crew. I was neither depressed nor in high fettle when we resumed our walk to the smuggler's inn. In fact, I was absorbed in thinking over what sum I could reasonably declare my minimum.

We found the crew waiting for us, and they were duly sober. I was rather proud of those chaps and the way they kept their pledges. I bought the dinner from the ship's funds, and it wasn't a bad one, either, save that the light German claret was our strongest libation. I told them that I would meet them at the inn that evening at some time between eleven o'clock and midnight, and that they were to wait for me, and then asked Olaf to go with me to purchase a list of articles that Jack had asked me to get. Out in the street he turned back, saying that he had forgotten to tell the men that if any of them needed an interpreter he would get them a safe man from the inn.

"Go ahead," I said. "That is thoughtful of you, all right. They should have somebody they can trust to pilot them round. I'll pay for it."

And he hastened back into the low-ceilinged, dingy, oak-beamed room where he had dined. I began to be restless before he appeared, but he was filled with apologies. He said he had arranged for a man to go with them and show them the sights, and diverted my thought by calling attention to some of the strange sights that can be seen in that Far Northern city. He borrowed money from me to buy a magazine gun, saying that he had long wished to make a present to his cousin. I offered him one I had in my pocket, that I had found in the *Sea Fox's* cabin, but he scorned it because it was slightly rusty.

"No, when I make a present to my cousin," he said, "it must be no second-hand thing."

And, smiling at his stubbornness, I watched him buy an expensive pistol and some cartridges, wondering, in the meantime, how much the skipper-smuggler would appreciate such a weapon, and whether he might ever have occasion to use it. He bought a small electric torch for his own use and thrust it into his hip pocket. He bought sweets that he munched in the streets, and a concertina, that he tested with much skill and carried around with him under his arm. Evidently he was enjoying himself. But, despite our dallying, we rang the consul's bell at exactly ten o'clock, and were immediately received.

CHAPTER VIII.

The room was very brilliantly lighted. One caught such strong reflections from the glass chandelier above the consul's desk that each article upon the latter lay as upon a mirror of black. The heavy curtains had been carefully drawn over the two windows in the apartment and over the French doors leading to the garden. The place impressed one with somber elegance and—conspiracies.

The consul beckoned us to chairs; but Olaf, blundering and awkward, did not take the one pointed out to

him, but crossed to another, in front of one of the windows, sat heavily down on it, first hung his cap on the back, then, as if ashamed of this discourtesy, removed it, carefully rubbed off the chair standard as if to free it from contamination, and put his cap on the floor. The consul smiled a trifle beneath his upturned mustache, and addressed himself to me after he had dropped into the big, ornate chair behind the desk.

"Well, what price have you decided would be fair for the *Sea Fox,* delivered to us here, or at a place we may name conveniently near here?"

We Americans have the reputation abroad of being rather keen when it comes to bargaining; but I don't think that ordinarily I am. If the submarine had been mine, individually, I should have probably named a ridiculously moderate price, but the fact that Jack Masters and all that crew had so blindly trusted me and left affairs in my personal care, made me a bit of a booster. Also I knew that we had perfected her, which was worth considerable, and, furthermore, she was more valuable to Germany, in her fight, than any naval implement in her possession. The combination made me bold.

"We regard her as worth just five hundred thousand dollars in American gold," I said quietly.

The consul's eyes grew round, he elevated his eyebrows, pursed his lips as if to whistle, and then leaned his head back from his stiff, rigid shoulders and laughed.

"Did you say five hundred thousand, or five thousand?" he inquired, with mock politeness.

Very calmly I repeated the figures.

"And I suppose," he said dryly, "that you wouldn't take a cent less?"

His manner was as annoying to me as any manner could have been. He was not only patronizing, but jeering. He was not only jeering, but he was totally insincere.

"Not a cent less."

"And I suppose, also, that you can deliver her here, if I ask it, in perfect running order?"

It was on the very tip of my tongue to say "Yes," but he spoiled it by adding: "With her original crew intact, eh? And any experimental defects of construction she might have had completely remedied? Also with a guarantee that she is the original *Sea Fox?*"

I did not answer. I was amazed by his attitude. I could not in the least conjecture what he was aiming at.

"You choose to make a joke of this," I said coldly. "But you are making a grave mistake, I assure you. You are not dealing with intellectual cripples. We care for neither your jokes nor your patronage. Personally I have no wish to prolong this affair. Why don't you say what you are prepared to offer? You doubtless know by this time where the *Sea Fox* was built, what it was hoped she could do, and what she originally cost, don't you?"

"Do you?" he asked, stiffening in his chair and dropping his air of good nature.

"Some of it—yes."

"And you would like, Captain Roberts, to know the rest of it, wouldn't you? That part that you don't know?"

"I should be interested, certainly."

His eyes suddenly narrowed and flashed. His hair, close-cropped and gray, appeared to bristle. His body tensed in the chair, and he brought a fist banging down on the top of the mahogany desk with such force that the bronze inkstand and ornaments thereon rattled.

"You English are fools!" he roared. "You never can understand that the German is so superior to you in intellect that he laughs at you—derides you—and is only amused by your silly blunders. You thought you could

come here and get information. Bah! Look at this!"

He jerked a consular telegraphic form from his desk, transmitted in code, and with a copy of the meaning attached. He handed it to me, and I read:

Sea Fox proved failure. Undoubtedly sunk in North Sea maiden trip. Collapsible bearing her name and sailors' belongings found, together with one body of crew. How did spies learn of her importance? Get information at all cost.

"If I could prove to you——"

"You can prove nothing!" he thundered. "You can ask no questions! You must and shall answer my questions, and if you don't I shall not hesitate to use force—you —— English swine!"

Now, I have never been accustomed to submit to abuse. I'd rather fight and lose than submit to it. Also, although I can ordinarily control my temper, there are times when I cannot. To sit tamely and have this big, egotistical bluffer jump on me that way and attempt to shut me up like an impertinent schoolboy dressed down by his teacher was a little too much.

"I'm neither English, nor a fool!" I retorted hotly. "I'm not a spy nor a pretender of any sort. You will allow me to say, whether you wish it or not, that you yourself are one of the biggest asses I have ever had the misfortune to meet. I've known many intelligent Germans, highly intelligent, and I'm amazed that your government should have selected so stupid a fellow as yourself to represent them. You'll make me do something? Rats! You can't make me do anything I don't wish to. Try it on, and then, after you get as much sense thumped into your thick skull as an American schoolboy has, we'll resume our talk about salvage."

I had said more than I intended to, being rather intoxicated and elated by the play of his features. I never saw a man so astonished, so shocked, so paralyzed by the unexpected. He went white, red, and purple. He gurgled, stammered, puffed, and spouted, but some slight touch of sanity returned to him, some hesitancy of caution and cunning.

"Can you prove that you are an American?" he demanded.

"I don't have to, to you," I replied; and then he laid his hand on the table.

"You'll have to before you go," he announced. "You are on German soil when you are in this consulate. I accuse you and your confederate of being English spies, and shall hold you until I am convinced to the contrary."

"If you try that on, you will prove yourself a bigger fool than I took you to be, which will be going considerably," I said.

He accepted my challenge with surprising agility, considering his age and size. He appeared to leap from his chair without using his legs, and, before either Olaf or I could intervene, had reached and jerked a bell cord by the side of the mantelpiece. Instantly the two doors of the apartment opened, and four men with sabers rushed in.

I knew at once that we were in for a fight, and, furthermore, that his excellency proposed that it should be a noiseless one, because otherwise his underlings would have been armed with better weapons.

But his men were not afraid. I give them credit for that. Nor was he without the same sort of courage that makes a bull try to butt a locomotive off the track; for, before they were well in the room, I had my gun pointed at his abdomen, and threatened: "If you undertake to stir this mess up, it's a cinch there will be one dead man in this room, and that will be you. On the first move they make I'll let you have it, as sure as you're a pig-headed slob! That goes!"

I said he was brave. He shouted in German: "Don't mind me, men! Seize him!"

His men shut the doors behind them and started forward. My finger, quite willing and determined, was already pressing the trigger that would have certainly meant his death, when the big French doors came open with a smash, thrusting the curtains aside, and, pell-mell, itching for a fight, and recklessly intent on rescuing Olaf and me, the crew of the *Sea Fox* charged into the room. It was over in a moment. Olaf seemed to be in command, and shouted hoarse orders. A chair came crashing down on the consul's head, felling him to the floor. His soldiers went down, and would have been kicked and beaten to death, I am sure, had I not with difficulty dragged my crew away.

"Sorry, captain," said Olaf, in his cockney-chopped sentences, "but we talked it over and thought it best to keep an eye on this bloke. You trusted him, sir, but I didn't take it for mine. The torch through the window was the signal that we needed help."

I knew then why he had bought both gun and torch, but it was a sorry mess. All chance of a deal with the government represented so stupidly by his excellency was gone. For a moment I thought that he also was; for he lay where he had fallen, with a rather nasty scalp wound, and very still, his arms outflung and his dress-shirt front liberally stained an ugly color. I feared each instant to hear servants battering at the door, and the fact that none did leads me to believe that his excellency had cleared them off for the evening lest his work assume too ugly a character. However, we took no chances.

"Boost up on one another's shoulders and cut these bell cords carefully," I ordered. "Look sharp there, some of you, and gag these gentlemen."

In a jiffy the bell cords were down, all five of the defeated well bound, and we were ready to clear. I took a last look at the consul. His eyes fluttered open, and, if the baron could have carried out what he threatened by their expression, my shrift would have been extremely short.

"Clear out, men," I said sharply, and then, as an afterthought, I scooped all the papers from the baron's confidential tray, thrust them in my pocket, switched off the lights, and ran out into the shrubbery. I had no further idea at the time than that of furnishing the consul further ground for believing that I was, in truth, a British spy. The theft of the papers might help to throw him off the real scent, a vital hope with me now that it was certain we had a powerful enemy against us.

"We must get back aboard the *Sea Fox* and clear out of this at once," I said to my men when we were outside the consulate grounds. "Lead the way, Olaf, and all of you scatter out until we get clear of the town, so we shan't attract attention. We'll join up outside the place. But keep moving!"

Olaf, Scruggs, and I took the advance, and it was very fortunate for us that Olaf knew the district so thoroughly, for he led us over a route so direct, though obscure, that within a few minutes we were clear of the last house, and waiting for the others to close up. I took count and found that all were there before we moved on.

"Well, boys," I said, crestfallen and disappointed by my failure, "I've balled the whole thing up! The deal is off as far as salvage is concerned."

"And it wasn't his fault, either. I know. I was there. We were dealing with a swine, who started to play crooked from the minute we first met him. I'm still for the captain!" Olaf exploded, and gestured as if to defend me.

"Good for you, lad. But you don't have to tell us anything about the skipper! His word still goes for us," Scruggs exclaimed.

"And if it had not been for Olaf," I added, "we'd have been trapped like a pair of weasels."

"That's just what he was afraid of, sir, when he came back to the restaurant and told us, after you left. He told us how to get there, and that we was to be there at ten sharp, and to keep quiet unless we saw a flash from a window. We didn't want you to come to no harm, sir, because there ain't one of us that don't say that you've treated us white, clean through!" exclaimed another.

There was a rumble of approval, mixed with some rather profane emphasis, from which sounded Scruggs' voice, saying: "And if the captain didn't pull it off, nobody could."

Somehow the unqualified and unhesitating support of these chaps did more to buck me up, as I stood there in the gloom, a very disappointed and discouraged man, than anything else could have done. I couldn't put it in words; but what I did try to say, and couldn't, they seemed to understand. I got away from a very awkward and embarrassing situation by emphasizing the necessity for haste. Bergen had me terrified. It had been a port of hope that failed. There was no telling how much the consul knew, how soon the hue and cry would start after us, nor what charges he would bring against Olaf and me to get us helplessly in his power. Aside from motives of revenge, he could scarcely let us get away and keep face with his home office. He would leave no effort undone to apprehend us, I was convinced.

We hastened forward silently, and in single file, over a hill path. Sounds were magnified, and sight was magnified. Away below us I heard the clearing blasts of a steamer, hoarse and heavy—some ship sailing away from this spot that to me was unlucky. I envied her commander, and, looking back over my shoulder saw the lights of Bergen laid out in long lines, the riding lights in the harbor, and far, far away, the beacon leading to the cape.

I trudged along with my angry thoughts and discouragement. I thought how disappointed Jack would be when I came trailing back with a story of defeat, like a whipped hound with his tail between his legs. Here was an end to all his dreams that he had confided to me—dreams that required money for their realization.

He had more dreams than I, and better ones; for there was a woman in them, friends in them whom he wished to assist, his own inventions to be worked to fruitfulness. Mine were—well—of no similar consequence; because there was no time limit fixed for their realization. Why, there was scarcely a man of the crew that had not indulged in air castles, and told, with seaman's candor, of what he proposed to make his future. Oddly enough, those born in cities craved farms, and those born on farms craved all sorts of ridiculous city enterprises. I heard a lot from that little navigating bridge in the calm nights when we were running on the surface and headed for Bergen, that had become a Bagdad where dwelt a caliph wise and generous who would freely bestow fortune. I was pretty bitter, I can tell you!

We scrambled down the steep paths of the cliff to the copse where we had slept that morning, through it, and down the cleft, and found Olaf's cousin waiting. He was excited and distressed. He poured forth a mumbled, rapidly told tale to Olaf, who turned to me.

"Captain," he said, "the consul has had us followed. Probably yesterday, when we were there. I don't know

what charge he laid, but to-day there was a government patrol boat in the inlet, and its men came to my cousin's house and asked many questions. They asked if two men were stopping with him, and described us. He told them 'No,' but they were not satisfied until they had gone down and found his boat moored to the wharf, and they went over her from stem to stern. Then they searched his house and the outbuildings. My cousin asked what the two men were wanted for, and was told there was a charge made against them, made by the German consul. They asked my cousin if he had not brought them up the fiord in his boat last night, and fortunately he said 'Yes,' and that he had taken us as passengers and landed us at Bjornsen's Point; that he knew nothing more; that we had paid him for the passage, and that he had asked no questions. They went away as if they were not quite satisfied."

"Humph! His excellency was playing a stronger and more skillful hand than I thought him capable of! Was taking no chances at either end. Is it safe for your cousin to take us back?"

Olaf grinned and glanced at his kinsman, who was stolidly watching us.

"You can bet he plays safe. Wait till I ask him."

They exchanged a few sentences, and Olaf transmitted: "He came down here in broad daylight and saw the patrol boat at Bjornsen's Point. To show that he had nothing to be afraid of, he pulled up alongside and pointed out the path he saw us take—or said he saw us take. Then he sat and smoked a while and talked with the men aboard, and came on down here. But that's not all. Before he left the inlet he made arrangements of the sort that those smugglers up there can make, which is that if it's unsafe for us to run in there to-night, we will have to land somewhere else."

"Old chap seems to be a bit of a fixer himself," grunted Scruggs, who had been listening.

"And he says we had best get aboard at once," added Olaf.

We tumbled into the boat and stowed ourselves into the bottom. She swung out into the fiord and began thrashing upward at what I took to be a pretty stiff turn of speed for such a craft. We were still in the main fiord and at least two miles from the inlet, I should say, when the skipper, who had the wheel, suddenly let rip what sounded to me like a good Norwegian oath, and motioned the engines down. At the same time he swung her hard over, and I heard Olaf say, as to himself: "Twin lights! Something urgent up!"

We came to a stop within two or three yards of the shore, and a man's voice hailed cautiously. I think he must have asked for a line, because the man for'ard promptly threw one, and we were slowly pulled to shore. Olaf, the skipper, and two men on the beach talked rapidly for a moment, then Olaf called me, in a quiet voice, as if fearing to be overheard at a distance, and said: "All out, captain, please, and—hurry!"

We scrambled ashore, and the last man had to leap because Olaf's cousin had already started his engines and was swinging away toward the middle of the fiord, and the broadest moonlight, as if courting inquiry.

"A government patrol boat, one of the big ones, with a dozen men aboard, is laid squarely across the entrance to the arm," Olaf said. "They have been there since dusk. They are—what's that?" he interrupted himself, at a sound coming up the fiord.

We heard the barking explosions of a high-power craft, striking, reverberating, and echoing from the cliffs as if not one, but a flotilla of boats, was tearing up the fiord from Bergen at full speed.

"Take cover, men, quickly!" I shouted. "Out of sight with you!"

In a moment it would have been almost impossible for any one to suspect that a human being was anywhere near. The echoes from the walls increased to machine-gun volume, and suddenly, around a bend, a long ray of white light shot shoreward to the opposite side, then swept back and flashed coldly over our hiding place, flickered against the clump of firs, then shifted direct ahead and pinned itself on the craft we had so lately abandoned. It was for all the world like a moving picture, and we could distinctly see Olaf's cousin calmly lounging over his wheel and smoking. Then we made the outline of a long, high-powered craft, and could see the huge wave curling forward, to be spread in other waves in her wake. In the moonlight the crests behind appeared to be chasing her angrily, and intent on capture. We heard a loud command, and saw Olaf's cousin phlegmatically stop his engines. And, as suddenly, the pursuer reversed, stopped her racing headway, came alongside, and her engines were also stopped. The stillness following the last of the echoes was thick enough to cut. The water carried her commander's voice as only water can carry sound. Olaf mumbled a steady translation:

"You are the *Norskman,* aren't you?"

"Yes. What do you want?"

"This is coast-service boat C-11, on his majesty's service. You must answer my questions. Who have you on board there?"

"No one but myself and the regular crew," Olaf's cousin promptly replied.

"You are the man who took two men to Bjornsen's Point yesterday, aren't you? Or, that is—you said you did?"

"Well, if I said so, lieutenant, I did," Olaf's cousin somewhat hotly replied.

"Then where are they now?" demanded the officer.

"How should I know? I said I landed them yesterday at the Point. Why? What about them? Are they wanted?"

"Yes, for being dangerous British spies who to-night broke into the German consulate, tried to murder the consul, stole all his papers, and got away. There was a gang of men with them, and—— We've got to come aboard and search you!"

"You're welcome," replied the skipper, and then, jocosely: "Put out some fenders, so you won't scar my paint!"

Remembering the dingy black sides of the *Norskman,* I could appreciate the joke. The boats drew closer together, and we saw men scramble aboard the smuggler. We could no longer hear their conversation.

"They are searching her," muttered Olaf. "And they certainly think it pretty important to nab us. They wouldn't have sent what I know is one of the fastest boats in the harbor if ——"

"We've played in luck, anyhow," I interrupted. "It might be that some of the consul's servants returned very soon after we left. Then, of course, all he had to do was to telephone an alarm to set them on us. If they are there to-morrow——"

"To-morrow?" Olaf rolled over on his side and faced me.

"We can't wait till to-morrow, captain. They have been anxious to catch my cousin napping for a long time, now. The guard won't be taken off that arm until every house, every cranny, every foot of that cove has been searched. And if they find the entrance to the grotto at low tide—well, it's prison for my cousin, and if the *Sea Fox* isn't out, it's ten to one she gets caught! There's a pretty powerful gun aboard that last patrol—and

——" He turned back to get a view of it, and called my attention.

The patrol boat and the smuggler, side by side, has started their engines and were going away, together—up the fiord.

"Detained him!" I exclaimed.

"Just that," Olaf said quietly.

I got on my knees and watched the two boats out of sight, and was much distressed.

"We must hurry, now," Olaf said resignedly. "I doubt if we can make it over the top and down to the mouth of the grotto before the tide turns, as it is."

In a sudden burst of annoyance I called the men to listen, and put it up to them straight. "Boys," I said, in conclusion, "I don't know how you feel about it, but, as for me, I'm in favor of getting back there at once, and, while we've got time to work, cleaning out all the smuggling evidence there is in the grotto. We can't afford to let a fellow that has got himself in danger by helping us go to jail because we didn't help him."

There was no disagreement in their assent, and we almost ran up the steep hillside. At times we had to climb, and any lot of men in less fit physical condition would have found the pace impossible. We had no breath for words. We scrambled and climbed upward and slipped and slid downward until we came to a rocky jut some seven or eight feet above the water's edge, and were told by Olaf that this was the arm of the fiord.

"Right down there, at that little black spot," he said, pointing, "is all that is left of the opening to the grotto. It will be closed in a half hour or less. Any one who wants to get in will have to swim. The tide is with him."

"Good!" I declared. "All of you that can swim or dive, say so."

There was but one man, Scruggs, who could do neither, and yet he wished to take his chances with the rest.

"I can take him on my back, sir," Olaf said.

"Then you two go first," I ordered; and they slid into the water.

The crew followed them. I went last, and, when I struck the entrance, bumped my head before I had gone five feet, then turned on my back, to get my lips up to the air, and finally had to dive blindly, thrusting forward to feel my way, and wondering if my lungs would crack from pressure before I could find an opening. I am more than an average swimmer, but I knew what it was, that night, to fear drowning. I came bang up against something harder and smoother than rock walls, and my heart gave a leap, for I knew it was the hull of the *Sea Fox*. I rose to the surface, and for several seconds fought for breath. I must have turned out of my course and swam many yards farther than necessary to reach this point; for already I could see, by the light of a lantern, the crew on the beach of the cave, some distance away. Olaf was talking to them as I struck bottom, and, dripping like a water spaniel, joined them. We took count. All were there.

Just as I was about to swim off to the submarine, to climb aboard and arouse Jack and Tinker, a light was switched on in her conning tower and a head appeared.

"Thought I recognized your voice, Tom," Jack called out. "Been listening here for ten minutes to try to find what was up."

"Ask him, please, sir, to turn on the searchlights and throw them this way," Olaf suggested; and in a few minutes the cavern was filled with light.

I stared around me, but could see nothing beyond a small nest of dories just above the water's edge. The two smugglers who had led us over the

hills and had been talking to Olaf, quickly got some lanterns from places where they were concealed and led the way to a second grotto. It had casks of spirits and of perfumes, bales of silk and merchandise, and all sorts of odd parcels, none of which bore a revenue stamp. I was doubtful about some of the casks passing through the *Sea Fox's* hatches, but, fortunately, she had decks and hatches more or less on the Lake plan of construction, and in but one or two cases was it necessary to broach a package to stow its contents. We worked with a will, and it was, to say the least, a picturesque scene, like an old painting of buccaneer days. The smugglers planned to transport the entire lot of contraband to another hiding place, some few miles up the main fiord, provided we could effect this worthy task.

All hands were aboard, and we submerged. Then came the trying, strained time when, with Olaf at the wheel, and the smugglers to assist him, we backed slowly out of the grotto at a fair depth for a distance, took a greater depth, swung cautiously round, and moved forward. We had not even scraped a side, so thorough was the knowledge of the Norse sailors as to depths and directions in that arm of the fiord. We must have been thirty fathoms down at the point where we passed under the patrol boats that had been sent to apprehend us and the *Norskman.*

We halted at a place indicated by Olaf's friends, and cautiously came to the surface until the periscope exposed our situation. We were fortunate to find no craft in sight, and now ran for a while awash, and standing by to submerge in case of danger. The signals to slow down, then to come fully to the surface, then to stop the motors, were gratefully received, and I felt the air through the open ports and hatches and climbed up to see where we were.

We were actually alongside a wharf, and several fishing boats were fore and aft of us, their masts rocking in the swell caused by our arrival, for all the world like agitated fowls.

One of Olaf's countrymen ran heavily up the beach to a house, and, before we could get half the contraband out of the *Sea Fox* to the wharf there were a dozen men to assist us. A cask or bale could scarcely touch the stringers before it was being hurried away from our sight. Two rowboats had pulled out immediately and were on watch, above and below the place where we were, to give the alarm in case any craft appeared. It was like clockwork, and our part was accomplished in a surprisingly short time. We bade hurried good-bys, sent many messages to Olaf's cousin, and were again submerged and headed downstream before Olaf spoke.

"Well, sir, you have saved my cousin. They can get no proof against him now. Thank you, sir!"

"You mean he saved us," I retorted. "That is, so far!"

He seemed to consider my reply for a moment before he replied: "We shall get clear the fiord, at any rate. I can take her out to sea, all right. And after that—it's up to you, sir."

His phlegm and imperturbability were admirable. There was neither discouragement nor regret in his tone, although he knew, as well as I did, how badly our first venture had failed, and how badly we were beaten. He may have conjectured my predicament, for I knew not which way to turn, once we were in the open sea. It seemed a grotesque situation for a ship's master to be in. Here we were, practically owners of the most marvelous craft the world had ever known, manned by a crew that was as competent for its work as any crew that ever went to sea, fully supplied with everything we required, thanks to Olaf's cousin, and

yet burdened with something that we must sell if we were to ever profit. In sheer desperation and inability to decide, I gave the course when we were clear of the cape with its fortifications, and the course was to be off into the unfrequented waters of the North. Sea routine was on again, and the watches set. We were heading to the waters of Nowhere for a breathing space in which to consider and lay new plans. We were not as well advanced as on the day we turned our bow toward Bergen, for now we had made an implacable enemy out of our natural market.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE JANUARY 7TH ISSUE.

Able Seaman Pegg

By Berton Braley

ABLE SEAMAN PEGG is an ordinary jacky,
Full of health and vigor, as a jacky ought to be;
Servant of his Uncle Sam, not anybody's lackey,
Slave of regulations, yet a spirit bold and free.
Broad across the shoulders, with a chest that's like a horse's,
Neck that's like a column and an arm that's like a leg;
Proud that he's a member of the country's naval forces—
That's the dope on Able Seaman Pegg.

Able Seaman Pegg in his locker has a letter
Written by Josephus, and it tells him "Attaboy!"
(Saw a woman drowning and he risked his life to get her;
When it comes to danger, Pegg is anything but coy.)
Does he prize that missive? Well, there's not a chance to doubt it,
Yet if you would see it you must go to him and beg;
Keeps it under cover and he never talks about it—
"Aw, it's nuthin' much," says Seaman Pegg.

Able Seaman Pegg wouldn't take a prize for beauty;
He's no little angel, and he has his fling ashore,
Yet he comes back steady-eyed, ready for his duty,
Gunnery or holystone or any other chore;
Full of pep and ginger as a brother of St. Vitus,
When it's fight or frolic he is game to shake a leg.
Say, it's good to know we have—should some nation fight us—
Fifty thousand more like Seaman Pegg!

One Christmas

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "Landlubber's Luck," "The Fiddling Kid," Etc.

By no means a typical Sinclair story. Something quite different. It's about a man who worked surrounded by money, continually under its influence; money in a sense was the keynote of his existence. Because he pondered too long on the possibilities that lay in the dollars he almost missed a merry Christmas.

CHARLIE BROADSTONE spent six hours each working day of the week within an inclosure of bronze latticework with money in bills and gold and silver all about him. It was there in bulky packets and slender, in rolls and piles, in drawers and racks and pigeonholes. He was No. 1 paying teller in the Citizen's National Bank in a western Illinois town—which, for reference purposes, may be known as Cornville. An alias does not come amiss now and then to even the most respectable of towns.

Broadstone had practically grown up in that neighborhood. He was thirty, and the Citizen's National had absorbed him at the impressionable age of nineteen. In analytical moments he sometimes reflected that the bank had a mortgage on his future.

But that thought did not disturb him. In fact, a good many thoughts which have caused other men much uneasiness had never troubled him—up to a certain point. He worked surrounded by money. All his calculations bore upon money. He was continually under the influence of money; its power, its visible tokens were forever passing through his nimble fingers in gold and in printed certificates. Money, in a sense, was the keynote of his existence, money in its various forms of interest and principal, of discount and loan and overdraft and advance.

Yet it had always failed to impress him as being of such tremendous significance; such vital significance as it seemed to hold for many of those who daily passed and repassed his wicket. Broadstone's attitude toward money, in so far as he was consciously aware of an attitude, was of its being so much material to work with, material of a certain intrinsic value, a necessary part of the machinery of commerce and exchange. He had ambitions, too. He would not have been paying teller in the Citizen's National at thirty if he had lacked the spur of ambition. But he had never looked upon money, upon the folds and packets and piles of currency that he handled every day in his bronze cage, with the hungry eye and itching finger of acquisitiveness—not until he met Ada Storr.

Ada was a home product, like himself, only of different strata. That is, she had been prior to their acquaintance. But economic pressure in one of its various manifestations had played hob

with Ada's prospects. Otherwise Charlie Broadstone would scarcely have had the pleasure of gradually passing with her from acquaintance to a state of feeling that commonly afflicts young people when they reach a certain degree of intimacy.

They had reached the point of planning to be married when his salary justified such a move. One would naturally suppose that the salary of a bank teller—even the teller in an institution of no greater scope than the Citizen's National of Cornville—would be sufficient for matrimonial purposes. Yet Charlie Broadstone could never quite see Miss Storr properly fitted in the setting his hundred dollars a month could provide.

Ada's father had come a financial cropper some two years earlier, so complete and final a crash that he could not bear contemplation of the ruins—and so blew out his brains. Whereupon Miss Storr was swiftly deprived of comparative affluence, found herself compelled to forego a lot of things which she had always taken as a matter of course. This unpleasant circumstance put her all out of joint with the social circle in which she had carelessly gyrated when her father was a prosperous merchant.

Being a young woman of some spirit, she did not dissolve in tears and despair. Pride spurred her to action. Through the kindly offices of a friend she eventually secured a position which kept her fed and clothed after a fashion.

But she never ceased to chafe over things she could not help. She continued to crave all sorts of things which were now beyond her reach. She envied the women who could dress well. She hungered for luxury as a cat hungers for milk. It made her discontented, spoiled the taste of the simple pleasures that did come her way. The manner of her upbringing had spoiled her for the sort of life she had to lead. A certain standard of living, once acquired, is hard to let go. She wanted a great many things she could see no way of getting by her own unaided efforts. Marriage, she was quite worldly-wise enough to know, offered the only possible solution. But none of the young men numbered among her acquaintance were overburdened with either cash or prospects.

Charlie Broadstone was the likeliest of the lot. To do Ada justice, she had a genuine affection for Broadstone, a feeling entirely apart from any consideration of expediency. If he had been a grocery clerk at fifteen dollars per, she might have cared just as much for him—but she would never have thought of marrying him. Even after they were definitely engaged, their marriage was a distant possibility, contingent upon a substantial increase in his salary. That very uncertainty had a profound psychological effect upon Broadstone himself.

It never struck him that his pretty, intelligent fiancée laid more stress on financial ways and means than anything else. So far as his future was concerned, he could gauge it accurately enough. It had taken him a year of apprenticeship and ten years of constant application to work up to a hundred dollars a month. It would take him another ten years to double that. By the time he was forty-five—barring accidents, sickness, and so on—he would be in line for more rapid promotion, bigger money. He was fairly certain of that. He knew his business, knew how to make himself valuable.

But the prospect of a decent salary and position by middle age did not solve his present problem, and it was a problem he wanted solved. The mating instinct had overwhelmed him. When that emotional state sweeps a man, he finds small solace in what is slated to happen ten or fifteen years

ahead. He is wrapped in the now, his soul on fire with it.

So that Charlie Broadstone, while he was gloriously happy in his love so long as he could shut everything else out of his mind, was beating his head against a wall of adamantine facts a good deal of the time. They couldn't marry and maintain a home on what he got now. Ada said so, and, when Broadstone reduced it to cold figures, he regretfully agreed. They covered sheets of paper with lists of rent and fuel, groceries and light, incidentals. They had to dress. They could never quite get a margin on the right side. It simply couldn't be done on a hundred dollars a month. It could be done in one way only—they could marry and keep on working, and board. But that outraged Broadstone's ideal. He wanted a home; he wanted his wife to be mistress in her own house. But he did not see how it could be done.

He knew other fellows who had married on a salary equivalent to his. Some of them seemed to be contented enough. But there were some whose ménage affected him like a nightmare, worry and bills and children were chronic. Even those who appeared contented enough weren't getting on. His own case, he always said to himself, was different. Ada was different. She had been used to better things. She was entitled to better things. That was how she affected him. He even felt a queer, chesty glow that a girl like her should love him. Broadstone didn't rate himself highly. He didn't know what a steady, clean-cut, likable sort of a fellow other people generally took him to be. The monthly and yearly routine of bank work doesn't tend to give a man an inflated opinion of himself—he has to struggle too hard and too long for every inch of ground he gains.

And so, from a calm indifference to the currency he handled every day—a tithe of which would have made every one of his little air castles take substantial form—Broadstone began to hate the sight of it, of the money in bank notes and coin that surrounded him—to hate it, and resent its insolent flaunting, to want it himself. Yet he did not dream of appropriating it to his own uses. It was still a part of the financial machinery with which he worked, the tools of his craft, so to speak. Only he saw now more clearly what there was about it that brought a gleam to the eyes of those who sometimes gazed through his wicket. It was eminently desirable, indispensable even, a mighty lever in a man's hand.

Ada Storr furnished him with a new angle of vision in this particular. They were sitting, one evening, on the veranda of the house where she boarded. The arc lights that flashed along the main streets radiated in all directions from the upstanding bulk of the Citizen's National. The bank loomed over the town just as it loomed over Broadstone's career.

"It's a shame that you handle thousands of dollars every day and can't have a few hundred when we need it so badly," she murmured. "Can't you loot the safe, Charlie?"

He laughed a trifle nervously. It jolted him, that remark.

"I suppose I could," he observed dryly. "Only looting it and getting away with the loot are two different matters."

"I would, if I had a chance," she said snappishly. "I think a man who robs a bank should be highly commended. Banks are inhuman, anyway. Look what they did to dad. They picked his bones like a lot of hungry dogs."

There was a measure of truth in this, as Broadstone knew. Storr, senior, had got into deep water, and the banks, the Citizen's National included, took advantage of his situation. That sort of thing, however, had always appeared

to Charlie Broadstone as the logical outcome of poor business judgment—on the other fellow's part. It was a sort of business ethic that was current. The bank, a sort of soulless, disembodied business force, could consistently do things that in an individual would seem terribly harsh, even vindictive. That his own bank had profited largely by Storr's ruin had been a mere incident. It did not seem so purely incidental now. Why, it was the same as taking *her* money.

He thought about that the next day a good many times as he paid out sheafs of currency. His fingers went about their ordinary duties with mechanical precision, but his mind ran on money—the bank's money—which he was handling as a grocer handles beans and coffee. Here were thousands upon thousands in gold and silver and notes working away silently, creating daily, yes, hourly, new wealth for men who already had more than they needed. He recollected that Mr. Murdock-Smythe, the chief stockholder, had that very week bought a new limousine; that Beardsley, the president, had a hundred-thousand-dollar house in course of construction. He could name a lengthy list of stockholders taking big dividends as a matter of course. Yet he, a ten-year slave of this wealth-creating machine, could not command sufficient pay to give decent surroundings to the daughter of a man this very machine had helped despoil.

A swift surge of vindictive feeling swept him. He hated the Citizen's National. Hated it the more because it loomed over him arrogant and powerful, rich, impervious to any assault he could make upon it, a veritable Colossus embodied in granite and marble, stuffed and garnished with gold.

Would it be a crime to rob that smooth-working, inexorable money mill? No, he said bitterly. Only, it couldn't be done.

He took it for granted that no appropriation of bank funds was ever successfully accomplished—save by the board of directors! Still, he began to speculate idly on how it *might* be done. That money spread yearning arms to him, touched him deeply with its potential power to solve all sorts of difficulties. He nursed a vision of Ada Storr beautifully gowned, a warm, human jewel in the kind of setting gold would provide. When he thought of her, he could almost discount complete defiance of equity, of the law, as well as his personal code of honor. There were other phases of even successful embezzlement which he could not discount, because his imagination could not visualize to him clearly the state and condition of being a fugitive.

This train of thought, once set in motion, would not be derailed. It kept running in his mind during his off hours, tantalized him sometimes in his dreams, troubling him most of all when he stood within his bronze lattice cage and tens and twenties and hundred-dollar bills passed into their respective assortments through his deft, trained fingers.

He went out for a walk with Ada Storr one Sunday afternoon late in October. He was rather silent, preoccupied. They traversed several blocks of street and entered a small park, lying a few squares from the business heart of the town. The grass there was dry, withered. The leaves were drifting here and there, a yellow litter on the turf. The trees were growing gaunt of limb, standing about like denuded skeletons, since the autumn winds stripped them of their foliage.

"What a dismal place this is getting to be," the girl complained. "If we could just be transported to a Florida beach—or somewhere."

Broadstone mumbled some monosyllabic response. She glanced up at his face.

"What are you thinking about so hard, Charlie?" she asked.

"Money," he said briefly.

"The one thing we need and haven't got," she said pensively. "And can't get."

"I could have got a fair-sized bundle yesterday," he drawled, trying to make his tone seem jocular. "I could have walked out of the bank with forty thousand dollars. I had it in my keeping for some little time. None of it would have been missed before Monday. I could have been two thousand miles away by then."

"Forty thousand dollars." She seemed to let the words slip caressingly off her tongue. "We could do a lot with forty thousand dollars. But then, of course, they'd catch you. They always do, don't they?"

"Nearly always," he admitted.

They walked on a little way silently.

"Why don't you devise some way of doing it so that you couldn't be detected?" she said, at last. "It's no crime to rob a bank—if you can get away with it."

"Would you take a chance with a man who appropriated funds like that, Ada?" he asked, very soberly.

She looked at him sidelong, her fingers tightening on his arm, thrilling him with the quick intensity of the pressure.

"I'd take a chance on *you*," she whispered. "*Could* you do it?"

"Yes," he answered bluntly. "I've figured out how it could be done—successfully. A man in my position—you know—has opportunities. Suppose I did? I'd have to be very sure of you. You might develop a conscience."

"I? About an institution that helped ruin my father?" she declared scornfully. "No. I'm not afraid of tainted money. If we had it, enough to live as we want to live, I don't think I'd worry about how we came by it. I notice other people don't. No, I haven't any conscience about money. The lack of it hurts me more directly. It drives me wild if I want to spend one miserable dollar, because I have to scrimp and save for a week to make up. But it would be terribly risky for you, wouldn't it, Charlie? Where would you go and how would you manage—afterward?"

"I have a plan—I've thought it all out," he said, under his breath. "But I'd have to be sure of you, Ada—very sure."

"You can be, Charlie," she said eagerly. "I'll go anywhere, any time; do anything you ask. Anything that promises the least chance of bettering ourselves. Oh, you don't know how sick I'm getting of this. Every one I used to know has drawn into their shells. Without money we're less than nothing. I work—I've worked steadily nearly two years. How long have you given all your time and thought for just about the barest sort of living? And there's nothing else ahead of us. We just exist. If we married on your salary, it would be the same; scrimping along, eternally managing, trying to make something out of nothing, counting nickels till we're gray, being respectable and dull and sordid. Life like that isn't worth living."

She looked up at him with a gleam of admiration in her dark-blue eyes.

"I didn't think you were bold enough to even consider a stroke like that, Charlie," she went on. "I didn't. Do I surprise you by my readiness to—to grasp the idea? It'll be risky?"

"Rather," he said. "Very risky. One can't make omelets without breaking eggs. It can be done. In fact, those things are easy enough to do. The risk is afterward—getting caught. The Banker's Association never lets up on a defaulter. Still—I don't mean to be caught. I've been thinking. I'm tired of the treadmill, the lack of opportunity. You don't know how tired.

I've asked for a raise, and they just put me off. And I want you, Ada. I'm sick of waiting and waiting. I want you to have a chance to live decently, to be something more than a mere penny-counting housekeeper for me. I want to be something more than a mere minor, money-reckoning machine for other people. Nothing but money will get us anywhere. There's only one way for me to get money. And the only difference between my method and the business method is that my way will be abrupt and illegal, where theirs is devious and within laws that have been made to fit their ends. Will you do exactly what I tell you, act absolutely as I may find it necessary for you to act, Ada?"

They had reached a comparatively secluded portion of the park, made so by a thick, semi-wild growth of low thicket. They were hidden from all the surrounding rows of houses. The girl put her arms around his neck, kissed him passionately.

"Absolutely," she whispered. "Try me and see. You know I love you, Charlie. I'll play the game with you. I don't care whether it would stand ethical consideration or not."

"All right," he muttered recklessly. "I'll do it. I can."

She kissed him again.

"When?" she asked breathlessly. "And how?"

"There'll be a considerable wait," he said grimly. "I'm not going to make any false motions. I know the ropes, you see. The best time will be at Christmas—less than three months. As to how, I don't think I'll tell even you that; not now, at any rate. When I'm ready, I'll make a clean-up. That's all. I have a plan in mind that will put any pursuit all up in the air. When the time comes I'll coach you where you must go and what you must do. We will, of course, have to get clean out of this country. Other bank defaulters have made errors I don't intend to make."

They moved along. Debouching from the park, Ada's fingers released that clinging grip on his arm.

"Won't it be fine, Charlie?" she mused. "A new country; you and I together; money in our pockets."

Broadstone nodded. His expression did not perceptibly change. And he scarcely spoke a dozen sentences as they walked to Ada Storr's boarding place. She had promised to play the piano for some aspiring vocalist at four-thirty.

Broadstone left her at the door. When he set off down the street, he walked slowly for half a dozen blocks, an absently thoughtful look upon his face.

Then all at once he squared his shoulders defiantly, and drew a long breath, like a man who has definitely accepted some sort of challenge.

II.

After all, it was remarkably simple.

The moment for which Charlie Broadstone had patiently waited and planned with an eye to every contingency came on a Friday afternoon, at closing time. Saturday was Christmas. The Citizen's National would stand hushed and inactive behind its locked doors until Monday morning. He would not be there on Monday. But his absence was properly provided for. He had deliberately foregone his annual vacation in September so that he could ask for the Christmas week off. It had been easy to secure that privilege.

He felt reasonably sure that the real reason of his absence would not be discovered until his return was due. At the worst, he could positively count on three days' start. Enough—with his course as laid out. He did not delude himself with the idea that he could get

easily and quietly out of reach. He did not nurse any false sense of security. He knew that every step he took would ultimately be traced—but only to a certain point. He proposed to leave a tolerably plain trail just so far, then vanish completely into thin air. He meant to give the inevitable pursuit a genuine start in the wrong direction, not so much with the purpose of eluding it, as of baffling it altogether. He had worked out every detail of this to a nicety. He felt very sanguine.

And so, two hours after the bank closed its doors for the day, Charlie Broadstone walked down the broad granite steps, between the polished marble pillars of the façade, with thirty thousand dollars of the Citizen's National funds concealed about his person.

A ledger keeper and one of the other tellers came out with him. The other teller boarded in the same house, roomed across the hall from Broadstone. They walked home together. Broadstone had his grip packed. He was ready as soon as he changed his clothes. An hour later, shortly before the dinner bell rang, he rapped at his fellow teller's door, wished him the joys of the season, gave him a cigar, and, suit case in hand, went off downstairs, whistling.

As he strode down the street which led to the station, he found himself all at once coping with a peculiar sense of unreality. He could not rid himself of the feeling that he was, after all, simply on a week's vacation, that the New Year would find him traversing the same street, nodding to people he knew, as he was doing now on every block, that he would be returning to the interminable round in his bronze cage. Only the cold finger of his reason pointed out that if he ever walked that street again it would be as a prisoner, a fugitive returning in the toils of the law. He shuddered involuntarily when he remembered that the county jail and courthouse lay at one end of that long avenue, the railway station at the other.

He quickened his steps a little. The packages of bills, stowed in various pockets, became swiftly a well-nigh intolerable burden. The people he met seemed to look at him with more than ordinary keenness. That, he said to himself testily, were nerves, imagination running amuck. But it disturbed him.

Another unreckoned factor disturbed him also. Now that the thing was done, now that it was too late to reconsider, to draw back, he looked about him at this place where he had spent all his years since boyhood, with a sort of numbed regret at leaving it in such a fashion. There had been a fresh fall of snow that afternoon. Night had come with a clearing sky. The stars gleamed in a sky brilliant with frost, vieing with the long rows of arcs that marked every street bisecting the main thoroughfare. All the shops blazed with light, festooned with evergreens from distant woods, gay with bunting and colored lanterns, thronged with purchasing, laughing folk.

To-morrow there would be sundry small packages, containing simple gifts, arriving at his rooms. People would be dropping in or calling him over the phone to wish him a Merry Christmas. At the Christmas dinner, which had become an annual function with the unmarried members of the bank staff, the fellows would be saying: "Well, Charlie Broadstone's sure missing something to-night," just as they always said about an absent member. Yes, there were many things it cost him a pang to leave. He knew that now, wondered why he had never felt that way about it before, why the place and the people thereof should suddenly have become such an important factor, why he should recall friendships that he valued, good opinions he esteemed.

When he turned on the coach step for a backward glance at the streets, it seemed incredible that he should never come back again, that in a week or less he would be the scandalized talk of the town, an embezzler, a thief!

He shivered again. When he found a seat in the coach, and sat down, there was a thin film of sweat gathering on his temples.

He had a ticket to a town which indeed lacked little of being a city, some seventy miles distant. Ada Storr was waiting for him there. It was part of his plan that they should divide the loot, and, while she took refuge upon the Pacific coast, he should put his pursuit-misleading scheme into effect. Ultimately he would make his way to a distant point in northwestern Canada, and, when he was settled there, she would join him. It had all been weighed and worked out in his mind, with every care for details.

That was Broadstone's trouble, a mind for details, and the imagination which would not permit one to escape him once his mind began to concentrate upon any given problem. Now that the last irrevocable step was taken, a new angle of vision seemed to have been bestowed upon him, in which a variety of distressing details, all related to the environment from which he was lawlessly departing, nagged at him insistently.

But the thing was now an accomplished fact. By an effort he shook off the retrospective mood, tried to dwell on what lay ahead, in sheer self-defense against those too vivid backward glimpses which assailed him in a manner he had failed to anticipate. He had expected to leave that all behind gladly—in a glow of reckless self-satisfaction—to go away with the feeling that thirty thousand dollars and Ada Storr was a dual prize worth going any length to secure.

He reached his destination in about three hours. He walked a certain distance uptown, mingling with a festive crowd bent on Cnristmas shopping. Turning into a cross street, two blocks westward along this brought him to a hotel. He registered under an assumed name, was assigned a room.

A casual glance over the previous day's arrivals on the register told Broadstone all he desired to know. Ada Storr was there, likewise under an assumed name, according to their mutual plan. A bell boy showed him to his room. Ten minutes later, noting that the hallways were clear, he mounted to the next floor, and tapped at the door of No. 210. It opened at his signal, and he slipped in.

The thought struck him disagreeably that already his every movement was becoming furtive. For a criminal, Broadstone was handicapped with too ready a spirit of self-consciousness. He had never been aware of it until now. He had not expected to be harassed by a sense of guilt, to come under the shadow of constant apprehension, of a dumb, useless regret.

Some similar psychological change seemed to have overtaken Ada Storr. Broadstone saw that almost as soon as he entered the room. She closed the door quickly behind him. The window shades were drawn. Her normally exuberant expression had changed to strained soberness. But there was something else behind that tenseness, a subtle something that Broadstone could not name—not at first. She kissed him, clung to him as if he were some sort of refuge. There was nothing lacking in the warm eagerness with which she flew to his arms. They stood holding each other close for a minute. Then, with a sigh, the girl's arms relaxed. She sank into a chair, brushing back a vagrant lock of her thick blond hair with a weary motion. Broadstone seated himself facing her. Her eyes, purple-black in the

glow of the chandelier, never left his face.

"Did you," she asked, in a strained whisper, "did you——"

"Yes," he answered, in the same hushed, furtive tone. "I got thirty thousand dollars."

She hid her face in her hands. Broadstone scarcely seemed to notice her action. He plunged his hand into an inner pocket and took out a thick sheaf of United States gold certificates, drew a like packet from another place about his person. They were all in bills of large denomination.

"Here's some of it," he said. "Money to burn. More money than I could get hold of in thirty years of salary earning."

There was no life in his tone, no note of achievement. He made the statement as if it were a rather commonplace and uninteresting fact.

He looked up from the packages of bank notes and saw that Ada Storr was crying. He stared with troubled eyes at the quiver of her shoulders, the silent heave of her breast, the clenched hands pressed tight to her mouth.

He moved his chair over and put his arms about her.

"Why, Ada," he said. "I thought you'd be glad. What's the matter? Are you afraid? There's nothing to be afraid of. Not yet, at least."

She struggled with herself for a minute or so. When she regained a measure of composure, she drew his face down and kissed it tenderly. Then she began to speak.

"I'm not afraid," she said. "Not in the way you mean. I'm—I'm simply—oh, I don't know how to put it. Since I came here yesterday, and sat here, waiting for you, I've done nothing but think, think till my head is spinning. Out of it all, two or three things seem to stand very clear. I've been a fool—worse than a fool—and my folly has got you in a position that gets more terrifying the more I look at it. Charlie, Charlie, I wish you hadn't taken that money. I wish we didn't have to run away. I wish—oh, my dear, I wish——"

Something choked her, and she laid her tear-wet face against his coat, and her fingers shut down on his arms with a convulsive grip.

Broadstone gulped.

"Funny," he said hoarsely, "I've been wishing that myself. Yes, I might as well admit that when I looked back at that old burg to-night and thought of what they'd be saying in a week or two, why money, no amount of money, seemed such a vitally important thing."

"It isn't," she whispered plaintively. "It isn't. I never knew it before. You know I love you, Charlie. I'd go anywhere, do anything, to prove that. But I couldn't foresee this. I've resented being poor, rebelled against lack of money. I've never tried to make the best of anything. I've been whining for things that require money. I've been so selfishly envious, and I've harped on it so much that it's poisoned your mind as well as my own. This thing, which seems so terrible now, is all my fault. And you'll be punished for it. You've uprooted your whole life. After a while—even if the law never touches you—you'll hate me for that. We've made a ghastly mistake. If we realize it now, what will it be like after a while?"

Broadstone stroked her hair for a minute, staring soberly at the opposite wall.

"What'll we do, Ada?" he said presently. "We've got to make our choice in an hour. I can make a go of what I've started out to do. I feel sure of that. I don't think I'll ever be caught. On the other hand——"

"Yes," she filled in the pause.

"On the other hand, if I could get back to where I was as little as five hours ago," he said wistfully, "I'd feel

like a man who has rolled a mountain off his back. I don't know why, exactly. It's just a feeling. I planned this thing deliberately enough. But now I've done it, it doesn't sit well on my stomach. I wasn't cut out to be a thief."

The girl shuddered.

"Let's go back, Charlie," she whispered. "Couldn't you get that money back into the bank before it's missed?"

Broadstone thought a minute.

"I might," he said gravely.

"Do then," she urged. "You don't want it. I don't want it. Why, I'd rather face anything than the price we'd have to pay for that money. We've been a pair of fools. Let's stop before our folly ruins us completely."

"And suppose I fail?" he continued quietly. "It won't be so easy to return that money as it was to take it. I'd be kicked out of the bank at the very least, if they find out what I've tried to do. I'd be an empty-handed failure, with a black mark against me."

"Not to me you won't," she said, and her arms tightened about him. "I've had my little lesson, and it's burned in deep. If you are lucky, you can put back that money, and we'll draw a fresh breath and go on with our eyes open to a few realities that I, at least, have not been able to see before. If not—well, we'll have each other. We can manage somehow."

"All right," he said, with a sudden, almost incredible, sense of relief. "Let's go back. Let's take the next train back."

III.

It lacked a little of midnight when their train flashed out of a belt of low timber and gave them a glimpse of the town lights, with the outstanding bulk of the Citizen's National limned sharp against the sky with rows of incandescent lamps, a riot of illumination reserved for special occasions. Five minutes later they were hurrying from the depot to catch a street car, encountering, on the way, a few belated shoppers who knew them both. These flung a cheery greeting as they passed.

The girl's hand stole into Broadstone's when they sank into a seat.

"If we could only have seen it so clearly before," she whispered. "After all, this place is home. There's a lot here that we didn't realize, Charlie. I've been so selfish and blind and everything—a thoroughly discontented pendulum. And I infected you with my madness. I don't see how you can forgive me, Charlie."

"I was just as much to blame as you," he muttered. "I didn't have to do this crazy thing. I should have known I couldn't do a thing like that and be able to look myself in the face again. Still, a man can kid himself into almost anything if he broods over it long enough. I lost sight of everything but that insane craving for a bunch of money. Until I actually had it in my possession I didn't seem to have any clear idea of what taking it in that way really meant. I suppose that's what they mean by a man's moral vision getting out of focus."

"If you can just put it back," she whispered uneasily, "and remember it as a bad dream."

"I think I can," he replied.

They did not speak again until they were on the steps of Ada's boarding house. They lingered a minute in the frosty winter night, looking at each other with the tenderness of mutual understanding.

"You'll let me know as soon—as soon——"

He nodded.

"If things go wrong, at least I'll know I tried to make it right," he said huskily.

"If they go wrong," she returned softly, "we'll manage somehow—the two of us—together."

"You're a brick, Ada," he said.

Then he kissed her and walked rapidly up the street, the hard-packed snow creaking under his feet.

He gained his room without encountering any one, and went to bed, with the packets of bills tucked safely under his mattress. But he did not sleep. His mind was too preternaturally active, his nerves too terribly taut. The more he thought about it the more sickening the reaction grew. That money burned him with its nearness. The sense of wrongful possession made him cringe. Over and over he repeated to himself that he must have been completely mad. And from that his mind would fly to the means of restoring the stolen money to the vault of the Citizen's National without betraying himself. That done, he could breathe freely again—and not till then.

He fell into a period of troubled dozing at last, and waked from one of these short stretches of slumber to find the dawn of Christmas Day at hand.

"Peace on earth, good will to men—oh, Lord!" he groaned. "Everybody else will be celebrating, and I'll be sweating blood till Monday morning."

That thirty thousand dollars rode him like some horrid nightmare. He sensed disastrous possibilities of losing it, or a part of it. He dared not leave that pile of currency in his room. He was equally reluctant to stir abroad with it on his person. So he did not get up, even when the bell rang for a late breakfast.

But he could not spend all of the next twenty-four hours within the four walls of his room. He would gladly have done so, if, in his hypersensitive state of mind, he had not feared that might cause comment, suspicion. So he mastered the blue funk that was overcoming him, dressed, and spent the time between that and dinner listening to some of his fellow boarders enthuse over a Christmas Eve dance they had attended. Broadstone casually accounted for his speedy return by saying he had been disappointed in his arrangements, not without a keen sense of the subtle irony of this statement. He had to make some sort of explanation, because in that house, where he had sojourned nearly four years, they were like a family, with a brotherly and sisterly interest, not to say inquisitiveness, in each other's affairs.

He was thankful that he did not have to take his Christmas dinner with the members of the bank staff. The boarding-house dinner was an ample, old-fashioned affair that would have been wholly enjoyable if Broadstone's mind had been at ease. He could not help a lot of dumb regrets, nor stave off recurring inward tremors. His will was never quite powerful enough to shut off sight of the precipice along which he strode.

But the day somehow came to an end.

After his coffee and rolls, next morning, he set out for the bank. Every nerve in his body seemed under a painful tension when he passed up those polished granite steps. Outwardly he wore a purely casual air, his habitual pleasant smile. He did not allow the hunted, harassed feeling to show in his demeanor. A psychologist, observing him critically, might have guessed something amiss. But the staff of the Citizen's National was not given to psychological study—save in the case of applicants for advances upon doubtful paper or undue extension of credit. Broadstone was like Cæsar's wife, wholly above suspicion. His fellow workers had too many pressing tasks ahead of them for more than a belated Christmas greeting.

To the cashier he made the same explanation he gave at his boarding place.

"Thank the Lord," that gentleman exclaimed, "I won't have to make any

shifts! We could use more help this week, at that."

So now, for Broadstone, the supreme moment was at hand. The vault was opened. His usual routine presently took him there. He emerged from the vault, returned to his bronze lattice cage with his day's cash. He could feel upon his body a clammy sweat slowly gathering. The reaction made him dizzy. The packets of gold certificate rested now in approximately the position from which they had originally been abstracted. Broadstone's accounts had in nowise been tampered with. From every angle he was now absolutely secure.

Fortune had favored him in the beginning. Her smile seemed still to rest upon him benignantly in the conclusion of this extraordinary undertaking.

He found his hands tremulous and uncertain as he set about arranging for the work that would fall upon him with the opening of the bank's doors. But, to offset that minor physical disturbance, he felt something of that same profound, soul-satisfying relief which must attend a man who receives an unconditional pardon when his feet are already on the scaffold.

Broadstone went home to lunch. Going to his room after the meal, he found upon his dresser, where a maid had laid them after the postman's morning round, three or four letters. One envelope bore the imprint of the Citizen's National Bank. He turned it over uneasily, wondering what it might contain, and noticed that the postmark bore the date of Saturday, Christmas Eve. He tore it open at last. With an odd flutter of his pulse he read:

DEAR MR. BROADSTONE: In appreciation of ten years' faithful and efficient service we take great pleasure in announcing that after January 1st your salary will be at the rate of eighteen hundred dollars ($1,800) per annum.

Wishing you a Merry Xmas and a Happy New Year, we remain, cordially yours,

THE CITIZEN'S NATIONAL BANK,
JAS. BEARDSLEY, Pres. & Man. Dir.

Broadstone sat on the edge of his bed, gazing at the typewritten lines, reading them over and over. He could scarcely credit it, but there the thing stood in black and white before him.

"That's a hundred and fifty a month," he muttered. "A fifty-per-cent raise. And I—oh, I guess I'm about the luckiest guy in *this* town to-day."

Then he clapped on his cap and rushed downstairs and went striding hurriedly along the street, to use up the remaining fifteen minutes of his noon hour in carrying the double tidings of gladness to Ada Storr.

MR. FLANNERY FINDS HIMSELF

JOSEPH M. FLANNERY, the radium king, who is more than six feet tall, has a diaphragm like a flour barrel and is possessed of the energy of a fully developed locomotive, was invited to lunch on one occasion with six Philadelphia millionaires. The talk turned to health, poor health, and many of the ills that the flesh is heir to.

The millionaires, according to their stories, had suffered greatly. Their talk touched on torpid livers, weak lungs, the thyroid gland, lymphatic glands, the clavicle, the popliteal space, the gastrocnemius, the great trochanter, the ventricles of the heart, and so on.

Finally the medical atmosphere became too pronounced for Flannery.

'Gentlemen," he said solemnly, "I realize my mistake. I thought I had come to a luncheon; but, to my amazement, I find myself at an organ recital."

Virus X

By Robert Welles Ritchie

Author of "Stalemate," "His Master's Voice," Etc.

The most valued member of Raoul Flack's interesting company of international crooks finds a rich field for his endeavors in the person of a millionaire whose life was one long battle with germs

THE big man with the mink-lined overcoat snowplowed his way through the corridors of the Assurance Building, choked with the noon rush for the downtown, hasty-stoking restaurants. His shoulders, wide, competent, aggressive, clove a way for him with little respect for the comfort of others making for the wide battery of doors at the Broadway exit. There was about him that self-centered concentration of purpose and air of genteel bullying which fatuous Manhattan accepts as sure index of power and success. The veiled glare of latent hostility in his eyes, outshoot of close-barbered chin—even the pursy upholstery of his pink cheeks—all these incidentals of the purely physical cried "Way!" for the progress of the masterful one.

He came to one of the doors, which swung inward on massive hinges, and for the fraction of a second he hesitated. Then one gloveless hand dropped into a pocket of his overcoat and produced a handkerchief. The square of fine linen was spread between pudgy fingers as a veil, and thus, with the handkerchief protecting bare flesh from contamination by the metal of the door handle, the square-shouldered one made his exit into the hurly-burly of North America's most petted thoroughfare. As his hand fell away from the door handle the handkerchief was allowed to flutter away unheeded on the stiff February wind. A "newsie" caught the fluttering white bit and came galloping after the one who had dropped it, the fascinating picture of a dime or a quarter filling his mental retina.

"Your hank, mister." He ran alongside and held it up before the eyes of the man in the mink-lined coat.

The man cursed. "Take it away!" came the growl, and the boy faded, abashed, into the crowd.

Of the scores who followed the big man through the doors, but one, aside from the newsboy, noted the incident of the protective handkerchief—that one a man in whom perception of unconsidered things was developed to a passion, and to professional acuteness passing the ordinary. The fine, dark eyes of Gaspard Detournelles—hard drawn, they were, under downward-pointing brows a little like a fox's—viewed all the world of men as a covert wherein fat game might be flushed at the least expected moment. Therefore they were preternaturally acquisitive. And they read significance in the most commonplace incident overlooked by the herd. So in this instance of the quick requisition of the handkerchief to protect a fat hand from effluvium of the masses corroding the handle of

This series began in the November 7th POPULAR.

the door, the eyes of Detournelles read a hint sufficiently diverting. So diverting, in fact, as to swing him away from a quondam business engagement and set him to following a wide brown strip of mink fur through the press on the sidewalk.

Trailing was absurdly simple; he had but to follow the wake of outraged citizens left behind that blocky dreadnaught of a man who elbowed and chivvied his course like an all-big-gun fighting machine on trial triangle. A traffic policeman riding herd on the stampede of automobiles up and down the high-walled cañon, held up a thundering motor truck to permit the gentleman's passing; a street sweeper raised a blunt hand to the vizor of his helmet. For both public servants reward was a gruff "How-yuh?" sufficiently compensating to judge from their beaming smiles. The object of these attentions turned down a side street and into the ornate entrance of a pay-all-you-have restaurant—one of those establishments with painted peacocks on the walls, wherein the price of viands is set by the number of golden eyes in the peacocks' tails. Detournelles, following at a discreet distance, came up to the piratical haunt of the hat boy just as the object of his interest was divested of his hat and overcoat and had turned into the blue-tiled washroom. As casually as he could, Detournelles followed. He was just in time to see an obsequious Greek tip over the edge of one of the basins a bottle of disinfectant, widely advertised in the subway placards. A little spurt of the cleansing fluid into the contents of the bowl satisfied the blocky gentleman; he laved his hands and cleansed them on a towel which the Greek whipped out of an oiled paper jacket.

A dollar bill in the hand of the head waiter secured for Detournelles the dining place he desired; it was just inside an alcove and at a point of vantage whence the fastidious one he had followed could be observed from an angle wholly unobtrusive. The acquisitive eyes of the trailer were all alight now with interest and nimble speculation. His relish was, up to the present moment, purely a detached one—the enthusiasm of a connoisseur in human foibles for a new find. But behind the surface interest that predatory instinct which made Gaspard Detournelles the most valued member of Raoul Flack's interesting company of international crooks—known to the Paris Suréte as the Incomparables—had already begun to function. His imagination could leap a long way ahead of simple circumstance and frame eventualities and possibilities for profit along the oblique lines of the Incomparables' professional activities.

So Detournelles studied the broad shoulders and half profile of the masterful citizen, a few tables removed, with a double interest.

That the object of his scrutiny was petted of the whole Mazarin management was sufficiently patent; also that the Café Mazarin was more than willing to bend its discipline and culinary custom to the curious whims of its wealthy patron. It was the first deputy head waiter himself who bent a slavish ear to take the great man's order; another menial, whose touring car could not have been less than a twin six, brought the silver splendor of casseroled meat and mushrooms *sous cloche*. The rolls, so Detournelles noted, were each incased in oiled-paper pajamas, though no such delicacy was practiced at other tables. The waiter did not menace the cleanliness of the cutlery by removing it from the tray with his own hands, but held the server so that the diner himself could lift knife, fork, and spoon collection to the damask. All this regimen was done so as a matter of course as to carry to

the observer conviction of its having become custom.

One preliminary to the meal rang a deep note in Detournelles' penetration. Before he had touched a mouthful of the food ranged before him the exquisite cleansed knife, fork, and spoons by fire. One by one he held the several accessories in the flame of the alcohol lamp beneath the chafing dish, turning them over and over, and finally dipping the heated service implements in a glass of ice water. Then followed discussion of the viands with gusto born of confidence. He ate largely and with the same imperious air that marked his breasting of the crowd. Detournelles had to extend his meal with a liqueur and cigar in order to remain until the other had finished. With almost no finesse he followed his quarry back through Broadway and up the vaulting elevator to a high level of the Assurance Building. The door behind which the trailed one disappeared was one of an extensive suite and bore on its ground-glass panel this legend: "T. Stacey Crump, Industrials." Within fifteen minutes Bradstreet's, the City Directory, and Social Register had yielded Detournelles much information concerning T. Stacey Crump. What Bradstreet's asserted the Directory of Directors affirmed with emphasis—he was one of the biggest fish in all the Wall Street pool. The Social Register added its discriminating voice as to Mr. Crump's connections with the Shallowbrook Hunt, his town house, and Adirondack lodge. Each of the mute character witnesses brought a deeper gleam to the eyes of Detournelles.

At exactly noon next day the Frenchman was at the Broadway corner of the Café Mazarin, eagerly scanning the street in the direction of the Assurance Building. When he saw a mink-lined overcoat breasting the tide he hurried into the domain of the peacocks, and, by virtue of a tip, secured a table a little to one side and in front of the one reserved for Crump. He was giving his order when the magnate appeared from the washroom and took his seat. Detournelles was so placed that he could not see the object of his manueverings, but knew that he could be seen of him.

The waiter brought rolls to place beside the silver service. Detournelles gave them one scornful glance, then turned and fixed the menial with a cold eye.

"That you should think I would eat these!" he sharply exclaimed. "Bah! Little nests of disease! At once bring me rolls with protective jackets or I shall seek the management."

Overcome with the surprise of the attack, the waiter stumbled away, to return in a few minutes with pajama-clad rolls such as the fastidious Crump enjoyed. Detournelles removed one from its envelope and examined it critically before proceeding to break off an end to butter. When his meat order came, and with it knives and forks, he gravely inaugurated a most surprising campaign of preparation.

First, from a pocket of his jacket, he produced a miniature atomizer, spraying alcohol. He set fire to the tip of the jet, and in the thin fan of blue flame thus kindled passed back and forth the blades of the knives and tines of the forks. He heard the clatter of a fork dropped on a plate at Crump's table, followed by a startled grunt of surprise. Other eyes than the waiter's were on him, Detournelles knew by this token. When the table service had all been sterilized in the alcohol flame he brought from the breast pocket of his coat a small vial of colorless fluid—high-proof cognac it was—poured a film of this over the heaped-up viands on his plate, and applied a match. A veil of blue flame skipped like marsh gas over joint and vegetables, then passed to nothingness.

With a conscious air of satisfaction, Detournelles ate his meal, topping off with liqueur and cigar. But before he would put the tip of the perfecto between his lips he wet it with the liquid from the vial. He smoked at his ease, never turning his head by so much as an inch, though he could feel the gimleting of Crump's eyes between his shoulders.

Before the first ash was sped a heavy figure appeared by his side and a throaty voice hailed him:

"Excuse me, but may I sit down and talk with you for a while? You and I have a good deal in common." Detournelles looked lazily up to Crump's face, and, somewhat distantly, indicated with a wave of his hand the opposite empty chair. The financier dropped heavily to his seat, fumbled with a cardcase, and finally managed to snare one of his cards between pudgy fingers. This he passed to Detournelles with a formal bow. The latter eyed the engraved script, then with a slight accentuation of his French mode of speech: "And for what, M'sieu Crump, this honor?"

Crump, put temporarily at a disadvantage by the coolness of his reception, cleared his throat noisily.

"Well, fact is, Mr.—ah—Mr.——" Detournelles made no move to supply his name. "Fact is, I couldn't help noticing your—hum—precautions you took about your eating. That's a sort of hobby of mine—germ protection, you know. More than a hobby I guess I might as well admit. I'm a nut about it." Detournelles lifted his eyebrows ever so slightly at the slang phrase, and the pink deepened in the other's superlatively healthy cheeks. He forged on doggedly:

"I said I couldn't help noticing your little precautions—and they interested me a whole lot. You seem to have it all over me for science—in the way you go about sterilizing. Maybe you wouldn't mind telling me what that preparation is you put on your food to burn off surface germs from the air. A mighty necessary thing, that; but I never knew how to do it."

Detournelles had allowed his frigidity to thaw materially during the other's halting speech. Now he beamed upon Crump, as one enthusiast upon another. He brought out his cardcase and passed across the table a cardboard neatly engraved:

CHEV. GASPARD DETOURNELLES,
VISCOUNT ALLAIRE,

Institut Bacteriologique.

Directeur. **Paris.**

"We are, then, fellow soldiers in the army of preservation, M'sieu Crump," Detournelles hailed, with a gesture of the hands essentially Gallic. "How well met in this so-strange country, where men know not the first principles of bacteriological defense—and die so miserably by the tens of thousands. You are the first——" He left the sentence pregnant because unfinished.

Crump was delighted. His native pugnacity and denial of convention carried him at a bound over all the reserve of this courteous stranger who made the battle against the unseen myriads of the air one of scientific management instead of the hit-or-miss provision Crump had seized upon. The nameless fear which rode at the financier's elbow day and night—which in his chimera of dread made even his pink cheeks and superlative vitality mockeries in the face of insidious decay—this found solace in a lucky meeting such as the present one. He unburdened himself without reserve.

"Why, Chevalier——" Crump's envious democracy hit upon that handle with avidity. "Why, chevalier, I even leave my shoes in a pan of B. O. disinfectant overnight, and when I'm in a strange hotel I won't step out of my bed without night slippers—burn 'em,

too, rather than put 'em in my trunk when I'm leaving. I won't have a servant who's got the least trace of dandruff. And I use up about a gross of handkerchiefs a month opening doors in public places with them—cheaper than throwing away gloves. Never wear gloves, anyway, since I read how a man got rabies through a pair of dogskin gloves. Of course, my lady wife says I'm crazy—not crazy enough to kiss her, you bet, and I've had to fire every stenographer I've had when she gets a cold and sneezes into her notebooks; and there's considerable expense in having my whole suite of offices washed with B. O. once a week. But—I keep my health, and that's the main thing."

The director of the Institut Bacteriologique listened with warm courtesy to the financier's recital of his many precautions. But he was evasive under direct questioning concerning his own system of defense against the ever-present germ, particularly as to the mission of the Parisian institute over which he had charge. "Some day," he vouched tantalizingly, as they rose to go; "some day perhaps we can interest you in our system of permanent self-sterilization, which covers every point of defense except against the zymogenic bacteria. No, no, m'sieu, not a word; this is a happy meeting and we will not intrude business. At another time, perhaps——"

Detournelles was adamant against the big man's importunities for an immediate continuance of the chance acquaintance. Very skillfully he left implanted in Crump's mind overweening curiosity and the desire to pursue farther the mastering passion of protection under the tutelage of the scientist from the institut.

"Right soon, M'sieu Crump, when I find the time in my so-pressing duties, I will meet you here for luncheon," was Detournelles' parting promise. "Let us hope nothing—no triumph of the enemy—will prevent."

II.

It was ten days after the encounter in the Mazarin that Detournelles kept a dinner engagement with T. Stacey Crump, which he had reluctantly permitted to be forced upon him at a second meeting over the table in the downtown restaurant. The meal was served with all the quiet niceties that make the Salamis Club a place of comforts. For Crump the softly shaded candles on the table but lit the way to a larger and more wonderful prospect, for the director of the Institut Bacteriologique had promised that this night he would take his host for a visit of inspection to the branch of the Paris laboratory which he recently had opened in New York—"a small and modest beginning of our work in America, but an outpost, my dear M'sieu Crump, of our army of preservation over there."

For Gaspard Detournelles, as for his precious associates in Raoul Flack's little company of expert criminals, these ten days between meetings with the financier had been crammed with high-tension activity. Not the least portion of this period of preparation had been spent by Detournelles among the dry-as-dust accumulation of tomes in that obscure room of the great library on Fifth Avenue which has "Pathology" inscribed over its door. The nimble wits of the man had leaped to the exigencies of the occasion, and from the many scientific works he skimmed he had culled an engaging line of patter. This he doled out to his dinner companion in homeopathic doses—a word here, a phrase there. Before the cigars were finished and Crump's limousine trundled up to the club door Detournelles had more than ever established himself in character.

It was on the Frenchman's sugges-

tion, artfully put, that the auto deposited them at a corner of the broad avenue flanking Central Park on the west; they would have a brief walk in the park, dear M'sieu Crump and himself would, so as to fill their lungs with the fresh night air after the confinement of the limousine. Detournelles had no wish that the location of the institut should be known to any other than the big man, his companion. Crump did not even notice the illuminated sign at the corner of the street down which they turned after five minutes' brisk walk under the gaunt limbs of the park's winter wilderness.

One of a long row of brownstone fronts, all similar in design, was their destination. A girl in nurse's starched cap and apron—a girl with a sweet, demure beauty of level eyes and broad brow—opened the door at Detournelles' ring. "Ah, Mamselle Nan," the Frenchman murmured, "the reception room for this gentleman, please, and request Doctor Flack's attendance there if he is not engaged." Saying which, he bowed his apology and disappeared down the dim hall.

Without a word, Nan Madden—the Nan Madden of the studio and the phonograph plot that came so near ruining the great tenor, Engwald—led the short way to a room on the right of the hall, and, at the door, bowed the visitor in with a curt little nod, wholly impersonal. The door closed behind Crump. He was alone in the strangest room he had ever seen. Bare it was to the limit of monkishness, and more than monastic the severity of the few pieces of furniture therein. Walls were shining white, reflecting dazzlingly the cold light from the incandescent cluster depending from the ceiling. Instead of the property sofa, center table, and leather-backed chairs of the usual physician's consultation room, here were only a settee and two chairs, all of steel even to the thin mesh webbed across seat and back—steel painted an uncompromising and ultra-sterilized white. White, too, was the floor covering of some rubberoid substance.

But compelling focus of attention was the glistening steel boiler head of some strangely fashioned engine, which stood on spindling steel legs in a corner. Somewhere within its mysterious vitals hidden fires, whether of electricity or alcohol, were burning; a sighing murmur and whispering of imprisoned steam came intermittently from secret vents, and out of a thin tube rising above the boiler was disseminated a grayish vapor. It must have been the vapor that filled the room with that pungent, medicinally clean odor.

Crump had come to Detournelles' "outpost of preservation" with imagination fired and every faculty of his chronic aberration on the qui vive. But this startling engineer of germ destruction—this white and steel room with the lisping whisper of medicated steam making its dead walls vocal—he was hardly prepared for such extremity of precaution. Alone as he was, all the delicious dread that assails the neophyte in the anteroom of the lodge was his. A great sense of peace also settled over him; here was one place in all New York where the ever-present germ could not get at him.

The big man of Wall Street had only the vapor generator for companion during ten pregnant minutes—so nicely did Raoul Flack time the necessities of psychological reaction. Then the door opened and two spectral figures entered. Both wore the gaberdine of the operating room, dropping below their knees and hooding their heads; their faces were partially masked by stiff gauze respirators. It was Detournelles who raised a rubber-gloved hand and unmasked himself, his companion—a diminutive figure somehow conveying the aspect of age even through the gaberdine—following suit.

"Pardon the delay, M'sieu Crump," Detournelles purred. "A little visit to our patients in company with Doctor Flack here. Doctor Flack, my good friend, M'sieu T. Stacey Crump, of whose great name in the field of finance you will hear when you have been longer in this country."

Crump rose and extended his hand. The face he saw under the sagging edge of the cowl was one to remember long. Just two deep-set and age-old eyes in the hollows of shadowed sockets, scraggy cheek bones, and a mouth that was a blue-white line; that was the face. The eyes dominated every other feature, they were so cold and absolute; knowledge seemed to be stored in the depths of their irises like treasure in steel-ribbed vaults. Doctor Flack acknowledged the introduction with professional curtness.

"M'sieu Crump is one who in his own way—maybe a somewhat imperfect way, but nevertheless praiseworthy—has been trying to avoid the perils of the unseen enemy," Detournelles was saying. "I have consented to bring him to our little isle of safety here, my dear doctor, that he may see how far science has progressed along the lines of his endeavor. Will you be good enough to explain our method?"

They seated themselves on the steel-woven mesh, the Phantom pushed back the cowl from his surprising head of dead-white hair, and began, in markedly imperfect English, an exposition of the Detournelles system of immunization against all virulent bacteria save the zymogenic—naïve exception! He told of the inoculation with Virus X—that remarkable blanket policy against the risks of voracious animalculæ from anthrax to yellow jack; of the period of inculbation spent necessarily in complete quiet; the rise in temperature accompanied by occasional delusional symptoms, and the final rapid convalescence, out of which the patient emerged a veritable Samson in the germ world. During Flack's disclosures Detournelles, with an air of translating the profundities for layman's comprehension, threw in a word here and there. In the end Crump persuaded himself that he understood thoroughly.

"And now, M'sieu Crump, for the visual demonstration—so far as circumstances permit," Detournelles murmured, and he led the way out of the room and up a flight of stairs. Crump followed, trembling with eagerness for the final revelation. They passed down a dark hall toward a distant square of light shining out against an opposite wall. In this block of radiance they stopped. Crump saw that it came through a square panel of plate glass set in a closed door. He dared look through.

What he saw was sufficiently impressive: a bare, white-walled room such as the one they had just quitted and made dazzling by the cold light of incandescents. On an iron cot, against the far wall opposite the panel, lay the passive form of a man, head bandaged in white. A hooded figure in white gaberdine was just turning away from the cot as Crump looked through the glass. She saw the faces at the panel, and nodded brightly. It was "Mamselle Nan," the pretty nurse who had admitted the visitor at the front door.

"Ah," breathed Detournelles, as the girl inside made some quick gesture with her hand, "she says temperature is down, doctor. Which is as should be. We do not take you into this room, my dear M'sieu Crump, for a simple reason. It is our desire to protect our patients as greatly as possible against outside contamination during the period of incubation. We ourselves and the nurse go in only when absolutely necessary, and then only after complete sterilization. The sterilizer you will see in the corner, M'sieu Crump"—he pointed to a vapor engine similar to

the one in the reception room below—"that makes of this room a veritable germ desert. No spirilla live in its atmosphere."

"Is it painful, this period of incubation after inoculation with Virus X?" Crump whispered.

"Pah!" snorted Doctor Flack. "A fever for a few days, the—the—what you call it?—night horse—nightmare, perhaps one or a few. And then—the resistant man!"

Crump made his decision on the way downstairs to the reception room; it was made quickly, as were all his decisions.

"I want to come here and take your treatment," he announced. "When can I come and how long will it take?"

Doctor Flack humped his shoulders doubtfully, and looked to Detournelles as if passing judgment on the acceptance of Crump's offer up to higher authority. The latter smiled dryly.

"We are not at all sure we desire you for a patient, M'sieu Crump," Detournelles said. "You are a man—how shall I call it?—masterful. You would not be amenable to necessary discipline. Moreover, because of professional reasons, we desire to work ever so quietly in this our beginning in America. You would have to come to us secretly; not even your closest associate could know of your coming; not even your wife. So jealous are we of the robber physicians who will pattern after our processes so soon as they learn them. So, you see our position."

Detournelles played his card shrewdly, knowing that the least sign of opposition would but whet the determination of this two-handed juggler of the financial balls to have his way. Slowly the director of the Institut Bacteriologique yielded under pressure, giving a point reluctantly and combating another with vim. At last Crump triumphed.

"I'll be here at nine to-morrow night, without baggage, as you say," he affirmed, as he rose to go. "And I'll bring a certified check in blank, at your suggestion; we can decide on the figure to fill in any time—and it'll be a big one, I'll promise you that."

"My children," said Raoul Flack, the Phantom, when they were all gathered about a bottle of excellent vintage—even the "patient," who was Henri, the diamond setter, there with his swathed head and nightgown—"my children, I am inclined to agree with M'sieu Crump's statement that the figure on that certified check will be a large one."

III.

Boylan—Roger Boylan, the detective without frills—was called into the case of the disappearance of T. Stacey Crump through the intervention of his good friend, Edgerton Miles, stockbroker, for whom he had once solved the mystery of the substituted sapphire collar. This was three days after Crump had left his home on upper Madison Avenue on a night after dinner, telling his wife he was going to the Salamis Club to keep a business appointment with a customer. Crump had stepped out of his front door and out of the world as completely as if by some magic the force of gravity had been cut from under his feet and he had soared into stellar space to become a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound comet.

It was in Miles' office Boylan met Mrs. Crump for a preliminary consultation. To Miles as a close friend and business associate of her husband the distracted lady of the missing financier had gone in her extremity. The calling in of the detective had followed. Boylan came to the meeting in his rosy-cheeked and square-toed simplicity, from the flat top of his brown derby to the sleasy strings of his bulldogs every inch a master plumber or ward captain—anything but the confidential solver

of society's delicate problems. The slightly overdressed and delicately florid widow *in posse* made no effort to conceal the disappointment of her anticipations. She bored Boylan through and through with the stabbing of her gold-mounted monocle, injuring the victim not a whit.

Miles took upon himself the task of outlining the facts of Crump's disappearance; the jovial giant took occasion more than once during the recital to slip in a ponderous wink unobserved by Mrs. Crump, as if to say that he, the wise one, could reveal privately a great deal appertaining to the mystery. Boylan listened with his round head cocked on one side in his characteristic, bird-like posture of alert receptivity.

"You say your husband took no baggage with him, Mrs. Crump—sent none away from the house in advance of his disappearance?" the detective asked, when he had all of Miles' facts.

"Not even his bedroom slippers," the lady answered definitively, "and that shows he wasn't planning to be away from home, for without his bedroom slippers he's helpless as a turtle on its back."

"Helpless?" Boylan echoed.

"Positively! T. Stacey won't get out of a strange bed without slipping his feet into bedroom slippers so as not to pick up germs off an unknown carpet." Again the illuminating wink from Miles, semaphored from behind Mrs. Crump's shoulder.

"I suppose—um—Mr. Crump left his business affairs in proper shape?" Boylan hazarded.

"So far as they affect me, yes," said the lady, with a significant tightening of the lips. "I know nothing about his business except the regular payment of my income."

Boylan seemed lost in thought for a minute or more, then put a question with a shading of deference in his voice:

"Mr. Crump—has he any hobbies, any peculiarities of thought or conduct that might bear on this case?" Mrs. Crump bridled at the instant.

"Peculiarities? I should say as much! For one, he hasn't kissed me in twelve years, and I'd call that a peculiarity. He's afraid I'd poison him with some germ. He won't sit down in a chair a caller has used until it's dusted and fumigated. He makes the second maid wash Titbits—that's my Persian—once a day in B. O. And every servant in the house must wear rubber gloves except in their sleep."

When she had taken her leave, Miles rejoined Boylan, his face all broken into humorous wrinkles.

"Germs in the germea!" he boomed. "That's what's the matter with friend Crump, and it seems to have sort o' struck in on his lady's wifely affection, as it were. But, seriously, Crump is the shrewdest trader south of Maiden Lane and balanced like a top except on this one subject of the little wigglers in the air and water and food. You don't suppose little wigglers have anything to do with his disappearance?"

"Not unless—— By the way, does this Crump talk to anybody about his dread of germs? Would he be likely to fall in the way of some faker who'd scare him to death for money?"

"Tries his best to conceal his bug from his associates," Miles assured. "Eats alone at the Café Mazarin, so's nobody'll see him toast his table tools in the chafing-dish flame. Won't drink at a bar because he refuses to swallow anything that's had ice in it or near it. That's how he dodges publicity on the nut stuff."

"Looks to me as if we'd find T. Stacey Crump dangling somewhere on the tail feathers of a large he-bacillus just the same," Boylan mused. "You'll hear from me—when there's something to hear."

He went from Miles' office to

Crump's, in the Assurance Building. Patience was with Roger Boylan no more a virtue than breathing; it was obvious. Late that night he came upon the first clew to the disappearance of T. Stacey Crump. That was after he had sat for five hours, going over a bale of waste paper, the collections of all the wastebaskets of the Assurance Building for a week; dusty incandescents in the vaults of the sub-sub basement gave his only light. The clew was an engraved card, bearing this legend:

CHEV. GASPARD DETOURNELLES,
VISCOUNT ALLAIRE,
Institut Bacteriologique.
Directeur. Paris.

Boylan read the card twice over, and a cherubic smile creased the dust streaks on his face.

"On the tail feathers of a bacillus," he whispered; "a regular bad bacillus."

IV.

T. Stacey Crump eased his two hundred and fifty pounds of superlatively vital bone and sinew between sheets, and offered his plump, pink arm to the ministrations of Doctor Flack. The latter was swathed in his cowled gaberdine; from the shadow about his face his inscrutable eyes appeared to glow with a light all their own. Behind him hovered Detournelles and Nan Madden, the pretty nurse, both similarly garbed in grave cerements. The woman held a metal tray, from which came the limpid glow of lights on some liquid in a glass receiver and the sharp sheen of metal instruments. Flack turned to the tray, dipped gauze in the liquid, and thoroughly sponged a surface of several square inches on Crump's arm. Then he straightened up, lifted a silver-and-glass hypodermic needle from the tray, and, holding it up to the cluster of incandescents in the ceiling, observed it with a critical, professional air.

"M'sieu is quite sure he wishes to proceed with the inoculation?" These were the first words spoken in almost ten minutes of quiet; they were given with the gravity of a death sentence.

"Sure; but don't make such a funeral of it, doc," Crump answered, with forced levity. Nevertheless, one corner of his mouth sagged under a sharp tug of fear, and his eyes roved from shrouded face to shrouded face.

Flack lifted from the tray a test tube, stoppled with a dab of cotton, removed the woolly plug, and inserted the hypodermic needle in the thick yellow fluid, which half filled the glass tube. As he drew back the plunger Crump's eyes followed the flow of the viscid stuff up into the glass barrel of the instrument. Almost before he was prepared for it, Flack had pinched a roll of flesh in Crump's arm, and he felt the stab of a sharp point. He grunted.

"You now have in your veins something over three millions of active bacilli," the Phantom was saying in a voice dry as the rustling of dead leaves. "In an hour—perhaps two—the phenomenon of symptoms makes itself to appear; a temperature rising, headache, perhaps unpleasant visions. But be undisturbed. That is as nothing. Above all things, M'sieu Crump, quiet—quiet! Do not rise from your bed. The touch of your bare feet on the floor—ah, that would be unfortunate!"

"But don't I get a pair of bedroom slippers?" Crump whined.

"Decidedly not," was the Phantom's answer, and without another word the three sheeted figures passed out of the glass-paneled door. Crump was alone.

He lay for a long time, his eyes on the three cold bulbs of light against the shining white ceiling. Every mental faculty was concentrated on a little burning spot on his left arm—the place where the needle had pricked.

His mind came back to the glazed walls of the room, roved over them incuriously. Now he was conscious of the presence of that engine—a lisping sigh and whisper, bubbling, bubbling interminably. By turning his head sharply he could see the thing over in a corner—the polished steel belly of its boiler and the prim tube rising over all to spout gray vapor. The smell of its disgorgings was abominable, even though germ fatal. Crump wondered if there was a chance of suffocation; where ventilation of the room was provided—he saw no openings in the walls and sealed windows.

By and by another sound slowly forced its way through the bubbling of the vapor engine with quiet insistence. He was several minutes identifying it; finally recognized it as a clock's ticking.

How long since the injection of the Virus X? Was it an hour? No, it couldn't be all of that. But——

Thereafter hardly five minutes passed without a painful sighting of the clock face by the patient. He counted the *ticks*—sixty to the minute, three hundred every five minutes. That would be three thousand six hundred in an hour. The doc had said that in an hour, or maybe two, something would begin to happen—fever, headache——

Crump counted his pulse, finger on wrist. He wished he remembered what was the normal pulse; knew once, but had forgotten. Seventy something, wasn't it? Well, his was going strong at eighty-two. And wasn't his forehead growing hot? It sure was—and clammy like the walls with the drops of moisture on them. Huh! Those three million germs were getting in their work.

Then came the headache. Just a dull sort of uncomfortable feeling at first, but growing into a pound-pound-pound, like steam riveters at work——

Downstairs, in the basement dining room of the house, Raoul Flack, the Phantom, was compounding a salad for the midnight meal. About the table were Detournelles, Henri, the diamond setter, and Nan Madden. The girl alone seemed to lack the zest of gayety that held the others to quip and laughter. Perhaps she was too recently come as a recruit for the Incomparables from the world of dubious probity that had been hers. The Phantom balanced a cruet of olive oil over a spoon, and let the thick, yellow liquor flow out.

"Behold, my children," he chuckled, "the all-powerful Virus X, which we are about to take rashly into our stomachs and the effects of which our guest upstairs is now doubtless enjoying. Ah, my children, the psychology of suggestion is a most fascinating study! Had I used plain water, instead of olive oil, in the hypodermic the effect would have been the same: rise in temperature after one hour, headache—and visions. Yes, yes; when we have finished our little déjeuner we will have to arrange for the visions. They are most important."

V.

Some time—Crump did not know when, nor care, for his headache was raging—the three bulbs of light on the ceiling flicked out. The room was sooty black; not a ray of light anywhere. In the dark the whisper of the sterilizing engine grew slowly to the roar of a freight train; that clock overhead was a pile driver, smashing on metal-capped timbers. But time ceased with the dying of the light; no longer could he screw his head around and trace the jump of the minute hand from station to station. The throbbing in his brain came to be synchronized with the hammering of the clock—bang—bang—bang, sixty times to the minute, three hundred in five minutes.

Maybe his brain had become a clock!

If he could only shut off that infernal engine and save himself from strangling in its fumes! Supposing something should go wrong with it and it should race? Then the breath would be shut out of him slowly—slowly. Why didn't they have a bell rigged up by the bed so he could summon that little cockroach of a doctor? In the name of all reason why hadn't they left him a pair of bedroom slippers so he could step to the door—if he could find it in the dark—and yell for somebody to come? By George, he'd go barefooted. Wasn't the floor sufficiently sterilized?

Crump had the covers off and one foot halfway to the floor when he noted a slow change in the sooty composition of the dark. It grew imperceptibly lighter there in the middle of the floor, between the cot and where he thought the door was—grew lighter, but whence came the dissolving of the dark the man in bed could not tell. He could only say that there was a growing patch of light on the floor and a corresponding one, equally strong, on the ceiling above. Now it was light as a star, now had almost the strength of the moon. The patient noted that this was a cloudy, smoky sort of light, as if it were alive within itself. He sat up in bed, the better to see this curious thing.

A cry like a tortured animal's leaped from his lips. It bespoke the very abasement of fear. He fell back, but was dragged up, elbow to pillow, again by the hypnotism of horror.

The light was alive—alive with writhing, spinning bacilli!

That floor, to which he had nearly set his bared feet, was become a veritable serpent's nest of loathsome, yeasty things. And the ceiling above crawled with them. All vague and dim of outline they were, but endowed with prodigious life.

Blind blobs of jelly squirmed and twisted through the pale medium of light. Single, sausage-shaped things darted hither and thither by the propulsion of two finlike hairs streaming from their balloon bodies. Circular disks, with horrid darker cores for eyes, revolved about one another in a mad, senseless convulsion. Bodies severed themselves and became two sentient things, each following a different course, in the winking of an eye.

Years of ghastly existence passed, broken, to be sure, by the most casual sanity. Figures in white came and stood by his bed, ministered to him, gave him food. They laughed off his stuttered tales of the dance of the bacilli—said it was the fever that brought these horrors. In one lucid moment he was propped up in bed and a pen put in his hand. Dazedly he signed his name where directed. He signed "T. Stacey Crump" to a certified check for fifty thousand dollars. Then he was left alone—utterly alone in an echoing house.

Methodical as the rounds of clock hands, and as sure, was Roger Boylan's pursuit of the trail opened by the discovery of that bit of pasteboard in the waste bins of the Assurance Building. First he visited a physician, and from him gleaned information concerning that particular phobia—rare enough in medical jurisprudence—which drives its victims to the elaborate precautions that were Crump's. The doctor gave the detective a list of the supply houses in the Greater City which furnish laboratory equipment and the paraphernalia of scientific study in the field of bacteriology. A round of these establishments was fruitless. None had sold orders to one answering the description of Detournelles, well enough known to the detective through his former meetings with the master crook. A chance word spoken offhand by one

of the dealers sent Boylan to Philadelphia.

There, on the third day of his chase, he found a firm that had sold to Detournelles a bill of hospital equipment —sterilizing engines, rubberoid flooring, steel chairs, et cetera. The goods had been billed direct to an address on West Ninety-third Street, New York. Also the purchaser had taken away with him a most extraordinary cinema film, showing various animalculæ microscopically enlarged.

Edgerton Miles, following a telegram received from Boylan late that afternoon, was waiting the detective's arrival at the Pennsylvania Station at eight o'clock that night. With him was a Doctor Throop, the Crump family physician. This provision was also on Boylan's orders.

"A taxi!" was Boylan's command when they had met outside the train gate. "It may be a question of minutes to save a man's reason." No more could Miles draw from the chubby little man in the dark beside him during all the mad ride up to the residence section off the park. When they alighted before a dark house and encountered a locked front door, Boylan stood not on the order of his progress, but pried open the door with a short-handled jimmy.

Then the groping through deserted hallways, up a black stairway, and in the direction of a strange, moaning chatter. Boylan's pocket flash showed the round button of an electric connection by the side of a door, half paneled in glass. He switched the button. Lights flashed in the room beyond the glass.

"You go in alone, doctor," Boylan whispered, with a catch in his breath; he had seen the figure stretched on the cot there, its starting eyes. "We'll be in the room below this if you need any help."

Then he led the stupefied Miles downstairs and into a bare room directly underneath the one from which smothered animal cries were sounding. The incandescents, switched into brilliancy, revealed the devilish enginery of the chamber.

In the middle of the room a cinema projector stood straddling on its tripod, a strip of black film still in place before the dead lamp, and its lens tilted sharply upward. Both men followed with their eyes the direction of the pointing barrel. They saw, flush with the plaster of the ceiling, a plate of glass three feet wide and running half the full length of the floor above. Through its vitreous under surface the observers could see the dull frosting of the plate exposed in the room above—a surface which would catch and hold, as a screen, the figures thrown upward through the lens.

"This is a deadly weapon," Boylan gritted, his round face suddenly flushed with passion. "With it our friend, the Phantom, and his pack of devils attempted murder—the murder of a man's reason. I suppose they've got away with his money. All we've done is to save his life—and, I hope, his mind."

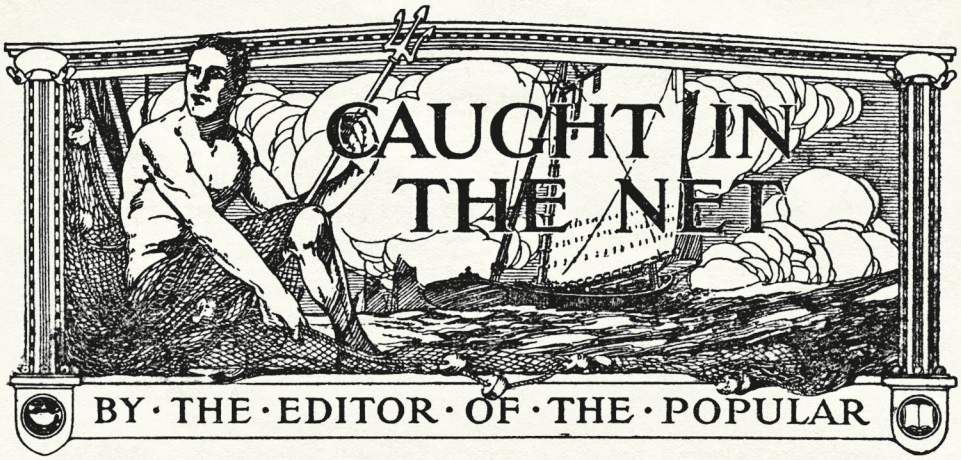
Later, when an ambulance came from St. Luke's, and, almost at the same time, Mrs. Crump, in her limousine, Doctor Throop hurried to Boylan's side in the hallway below.

"Take that woman away!" he commanded in a whisper. "She must not see."

"What'll I tell her?" Boylan urged.

"Tell her what's true, praise God! Say he'll live and possess his reason, but that the way back will be long—long."

The next story in this series—entitled "The Black Angora Rabbit"—will appear in the New Year POPULAR, on sale January 7th.



BROTHERHOOD

WISDOM and Wealth, Ignorance and Poverty, met at the manger cradle the first Christmas, to adore the Child whose divine mission was to be the merging of these opposites into brotherhood. It is worthy of note that the Messiah chose Ignorance and Poverty for his sphere of spiritual leavening, and among lowly laborers toiled at his superhuman task. Surely, out of Labor is born universal brotherhood, and the workers of the world possess that sympathy, steadfastness, and unity engendered by common experience and fate, which knits the souls of men. Now, also out of Labor is promised a renaissance of simple Christianity that shall have nothing to do with creeds and doctrines and magnificent cathedrals, nor with any hierarchy of saints and prelates, but shall follow the humble example of Jesus of Nazareth, who was content with the wayside, the seashore, or the house of a neighbor as a place to preach the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

Orthodox Christianity has become complex and exceeding rich in the past nineteen hundred Christmases, and while its influence for good upon humanity remains peerless, yet in this one vital principle has it been discovered wanting: It has failed to make real brothers of men. Nowhere are the classes of rich and poor more sharply defined and divided than in the Church dedicated to the worship of the Creator and the equality of the human soul. Wealth sits in its pew, hearkens perfunctorily to Holy Writ, donates generously to church charities, and feels its duty done. Poverty either does not go to church at all, or, at best, goes to obtain material help in the spirit of mock humility or secret resentment. Labor, as represented by the men of factories, foundries, mines, railroads, and kindred industries, has practically severed itself from the outward forms of religion, until the complaint of a multitude of preachers echoes with one accord: "We have not a single workingman in our congregations!" And one of the most apposite explanations of the situation was in the foolish boast of a congress of churchmen, not many years ago, that they had in their respective folds ninety-five per cent of our richest citizens. One would suppose it were ideal that the Church and Wealth affiliate, but Labor regards the combination as one of mutual benefit rather than one of sacrifice and unselfish devotion.

America is not alone by any means in this marked division of Wealth and

Labor in the Church. Charles Booth, in his exhaustive analysis of religious London, came to the discouraging conclusion that "the great masses of the people remain apart from all forms of religious communion." France has exhibited the same phenomenon, the workmen in general frankly allied against the clergy and the established Church, and the overthrow of clerical power in that country is a matter of comparatively recent history. Germany, according to authoritative report, is not any better off, with less than two per cent of the working classes attending churches. A similar condition is witnessed in other European countries.

With such premises, we need not inquire what is wrong. It does not call for a Daniel to read the handwriting on the wall. The laborer and the poor man object to the rich and mighty taking possession of the Church and controlling its offices. They have found no brotherhood in organized religion, in the Christianity whose chief tenet is brotherly love; and in their revolt against the Church as an institution of the rich and powerful they have organized bodies of their own, usually of the fraternal class. Hence the rise of socialism, trade unionism —for individualism in the Church bred individualism in economics—the Salvation Army, and hundreds of coöperative and friendly societies. Some of these organizations opposed religion and deliberately scorned any recognition of the spiritual side of humanity. For instance, socialism was altogether atheistic at first, Karl Marx, its founder, declaring: "The idea of God must be destroyed." But latterly it has been observed that Christianity, as exemplified by Christ, and not by the Church, has been affecting the ranks of socialism, especially in England; and continental leaders of the type of the late Jean Jaurès and Emile Vandervelde went so far as to openly acknowledge the Power behind Nature and beyond Death.

It is in England, however, that there has developed what promises to be the greatest application of Christianity in modern days outside the Church, in the form of a Brotherhood Movement which is embracing the laborer and the lowly of every condition and kind. Founded ten years ago by an earnest group of Englishmen, headed by the Reverend Doctor F. B. Meyer and William Ward, this Brotherhood Movement has grown to more than half a million members in Great Britain alone, while in Canada and the United States the number of adherents increases every year. In France and Belgium the movement has taken a strong hold, at one meeting in the former country an English apostle being wildly cheered when he quoted the Sermon on the Mount. Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, and even Germany have been proselytized by the Brotherhood with astonishing success. Workers everywhere have opened their arms to the propaganda. The principles and aims of the Brotherhood Movement are contained in this summary:

1. To lead men and women into the Kingdom of God.
2. To win the people for Jesus Christ.
3. To unite men in brotherhoods of mutual help.
4. To encourage social study and enforce the duties of Christian citizenship.

Many philosophers and sociologists have expressed amazement at the rise and extraordinary impetus of this movement born of Labor. Professor Ammundsen, of the Copenhagen University, said: "Socialism has far outrun in its spirit of enthusiasm the materialism that was once its professed creed. Here we have labor leaders, mostly socialists, preaching Christianity!" Another learned observer exclaimed: "The labor movement has raised up active forces which

seem destined to save the working classes of Europe from materialism and atheism." J. Keir Hardie, often called the Father of the Labor Party in Great Britain, expressed himself in the following words: "The rich and comfortable classes have annexed Jesus and perverted His gospel. And yet He belongs to us in a special degree, and the Brotherhood Movement is tending to restore Jesus to His rightful place as the Friend and Savior of the poor."

War may have temporarily checked this great surge of religious feeling among the workers, but there is every evidence of its vitality still in the ranks of citizens and soldiers; and those of the Brotherhood have been heard to pity their German confrères, and to plan comfort and succor for them when the present holocaust is over. Verily, a new and glorious chapter of spiritual history is to be entered and lived after the Juggernaut of Mars has passed over humanity, this time forever.

THE GOVERNMENT'S UNUSED TREASURES

IF the owner of some rare pictures invited us to visit his gallery, but offered us no means of entrance save down the chimney, it is not likely we should risk our necks to see his property. We should doubtless find some more accommodating gallery in which to appease our art hunger. And we should consider it rather silly of him to scold us for not seeing his pictures first.

However, this has been our attitude toward our National Park picture galleries. Travelers who have literally been down the chimney in their efforts to penetrate the fortresses wherein is hidden America's most splendid scenery, tell us that Europe has nothing to surpass our own scenic glories, and cannot equal them in variety. This information always raises the cry, "See America First." We should see America first, and, without doubt, we would see America first if it were possible for the ordinary tourist—seventy-five per cent of whom are impeded with petticoats—to journey to it. But the Alps, with a splendidly built motor road or footpath leading to every gorge and grotto, are much more accessible to Americans than our own Rocky Mountain wonderland, undeveloped as it is by roads and trails.

Of all our national parks, the Yellowstone is most accessible, one-fourth of its area having been developed by wagon roads and trails. But according to Enos A. Mills, our greatest authority on mountain parks, not over five per cent of any others can be visited by tourists. This is very poor business for Uncle Sam, considering the fact that before the outbreak of the European war, seven hundred million dollars was being spent annually by American travelers abroad. Were our own scenery more get-at-able, a round number of these travel millions would be spent at home.

Congress took a step in this direction when, during the last session, it passed the national park service bill. This bill provides that our sixteen parks and twenty-two national monuments shall be developed by scenic roads—a scenic road is not built to cover the least distance, but the most scenery, between two points—and hotels. These hotels are to be of three classes, the high-priced luxurious, the popular priced, and the simple shelter, it being Uncle Sam's courageous hope to suit all the people all the time. In order that his visitors may observe intelligently, Uncle Sam is writing not only guide books, but bulletins on the trees and flowers and rocks of these regions. For entertaining qualities, the

information in these pamphlets equal the intrigues of a best seller. Considering the fact that the Rocky Mountain National Park, established in 1915, and with its area only one-fifth developed by roads, had eighty thousand visitors the past summer, the indications are that when the government gets its picture gallery opened up, America wil rival Switzerland in the tourist business.

RHEIMS

AS you turn the corner and come on it, your first feeling is: "But it is still standing." You say to yourself: "People have exaggerated. The structural parts are all there. The walls are firm, the stone roof punctured, but still strong. The arches meet, the buttresses are stanch to receive the thrust. People can go on worshiping there for six centuries to come. The shrine of France is undefiled."

But when you pass a space of time with it, and the eye picks up details, you come away knowing that a quite final indignity has been done to one of the loveliest buildings in the world. For a cathedral is not a barracks, which meets every test if it holds together and keeps out rain water. The cathedral was the dwelling place of beauty, and that final touch which made Rheims has been burned away. The beauty that lay across its west front, and glowed in its rose window, is gone. The glory of Rheims was in the perfection of an infinite number of details—a perfect portal, the untarnished lacework of the stone tracery. It is as if vitriol had been thrown in the face of a beautiful woman. She still lives on. Her face is still a face, able to function. But the final grace of expression has been marred. And she no longer answers to something which we went through the world seeking. It is so at Rheims. The incomparable has been reduced to the level of a relic. Half the rose window was shattered, and the fragments fell to the stone floor. The other half is punctured, hangs loosely, and falls each day in little pieces.

The sacristan picks up the glass from the floor. The officer with the writer stooped and picked up a rectangular fragment and gave it to the sacristan, who later sold it to us. He carries a pocket full of bits—blue and red. Only a few visitors come through now, for the cathedral is only a kilometer from the nearest trench. "About one visitor a fortnight from the outside world," said the officer. But some day they will come by the thousand. Then glass from the rose window of Rheims will be sold at a high price. The sacristan will do a *Mayflower* business, and one trusts that his integrity will hold, and that no factory will spring up in a side street to manufacture the peerless red and blue glass of Rheims.

"You should have seen it at sunset in the old days," said the officer, as he pointed to the ragged window.

Outside the marred cathedral rides the equestrian statue of Joan of Arc, fair and free, untouched by any of the shells that fell through all that area.

Sea Plunder

By Henry de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Gold Trail," "The Buccaneers," Etc.

IV.—AVALON BAY

AVALON BAY, on the east of Santa Catalina Island, clips between its two horns a little seaside town unique of its kind. Billy Harman had described it to Captain Blood as a place where you saw girls bathing in Paris hats. However that may be, you see stranger things than this at Avalon.

It is the head center of the big-game fisheries of the California coast. Men come here from all parts of America and Europe to kill tarpon and yellowtail and black sea bass, to say nothing of shark, which is reckoned now as a game fish. Trippers come from Los Angeles to go round in glass-bottomed boats and inspect the sea gardens, and bank presidents, Steel Trust men, and millionaires of every brand come for their health.

You will see monstrous shark gallowsed on the beach and three-hundred-pound bass being photographed side by side with their captors, and you will have the fact borne in on you that the biggest fish that haunt the sea can be caught and held and brought to gaff with a rod weighing only a few ounces and a twenty-strand line that a child could snap.

Every one talks fish at Avalon, from the boatmen who run the gasoline launches to the latest-arrived man with a nerve breakdown who has come from the wheat pit or Wall Street to rest himself by killing sharks or fighting tuna, every one. Here you are estimated not by the size of your bank balance, but by the size of your catch. Not by your social position, but by your position in sport, and here the magic blue or red button of the Tuna Club is a decoration more prized than any foreign order done in diamonds.

Colonel Culpepper and his daughter, Rose, were staying at Avalon just at the time the *Yan Shan* business occurred on San Juan. The colonel hailed from the Middle West and had a wide reputation on account of his luck and his millions. Rose had a reputation of her own; she was reckoned the prettiest girl wherever she went, and just now she was the prettiest girl in Avalon.

This morning, just after dawn, Miss Culpepper was standing in the veranda of the Metropole Hotel, where the darkies were dusting mats and putting the cane chairs in order. Avalon was still half in shadow, but a gorgeous morning hinted of itself in the blue sky overhead and the touch of dusk-blue sea visible from the veranda. The girl had come down undecided as to whether she would go on the water or for a ramble inland, but the peep of blue sea decided her. It was irresistible, and, leaving the hotel, she came toward the beach.

No one was out yet. In half an hour or less the place would be alive with boatmen, but in this moment of

This series began in the November 7th POPULAR.

enchantment not a soul was to be seen either on the premises of the Tuna Club or on the little *plage* or on the shingle, where the small waves were breaking, crystal clear, in the first rays of the sun.

She came to a balk of timber lying close to the water's edge, stood by it for a moment, and then sat down, nursing her knees and contemplating the scene before her—the sun-smitten sea looking fresh, as though this were the first morning that had ever shone on the world, the white gulls flying against the blue of the sky, the gasoline launches and sailing boats anchored out from the shore and only waiting the boatmen, the gaffers, the men with rods, and the resumption of the eternal business—Fish.

The sight of them raised no desire in the mind of the gazer; she was tired of fish. A lover of the sea, a fearless sailor and able to handle a boat as well as a man, she was still weary of the eternal subject of weights and measures; she had lived in an atmosphere of fish for a month, and, not being much of a fisherwoman, she was beginning to want a change, or, at all events, some new excitement. She was to get it.

A crunching of the shingle behind her made her turn. It was Aransas Joe, the first boatman out that morning, moving like a seal to the sea and laden with a huge can of bait, a spare spar, two sculls, and a gaff.

Anything more unlovely than Aransas Joe in contrast with the fair morning and the fresh figure of the girl, it would be hard to imagine. Wall-eyed, weather-stained, fish-scaled, and moving like a plantigrade, he was a living epitome of longshore life and an object lesson in what it can do for a man.

Joe never went fishing; the beach was his home, and sculling fishermen to their yawls his business. The Culpeppers were well known to him.

"Joe," said the girl, "you're just the person I want. Come and row me out to our yawl."

"Where's your gaffer an' your engine man?" asked Joe.

"I don't want them. I can look after the engine myself. I'm not going fishing."

"Not goin' fishin'," said Joe, putting down his can of bait and shifting the spar to his left shoulder; "not goin' fishin'! Then what d'you want doin' with the yawl?"

"I want to go for a sail—I mean a spin. Go on, hurry up and get the dinghy down."

Joe relieved himself of the spar, dropped the gaff by the bait tin, and scratched his head. It was his method of thinking.

Unable to scratch up any formulable objection to the idea of a person taking a fishing yawl out for pleasure and not for fish, yet realizing the absurdity of it, he was dumb. Then, with the sculls under his arm, he made for a dinghy beached near the water edge, threw the sculls in, and dragged the little boat down till she was half afloat. The girl got in, and he pushed off.

The *Sunfish* was the name of the Culpeppers' yawl, a handy little craft rigged with a Buffalo engine so fixed that one could attend to it and steer at the same time.

"Mind you, and keep clear of the kelp," said Joe, as the girl stepped from the dinghy to the larger craft, "if you don't want your propeller tangled up." He helped her to haul the anchor in, got into the dinghy, and shoved off.

"I'll be back about eight or nine," she called after him.

"I'll be on the lookout for you," replied he.

Then Miss Culpepper found herself in the delightful position of being absolutely alone and her own mistress,

captain and crew of a craft that moved at the turning of a lever, and able to go where she pleased. She had often been out with her father, but never alone like this, and the responsible-irresponsible sensation was a new delight in life which, until now, she had never even imagined.

She started the engine, and the *Sunfish* began to glide ahead, clearing the fleet of little boats anchored out and rocking them with her wash; then, in a grand curve, she came round the south horn of the bay opening the coast of the island and the southern sea blue as lazulite and speckless to the far horizon.

"This is good," said Miss Culpepper to herself; "almost as good as being a sea gull."

Sea gulls raced her, jeered at her, showed themselves to her, now honey yellow against the sun, now snowflake white with the sun against them, and then left her, quarreling away down the wind in search of something more profitable.

She passed little bays where the sea sang on beaches of pebble, and deep-cut cañons rose-tinted and showing the green of fern and the ash green of snake cactus and prickly pear. Sea lions sunning themselves on a rock held her eye for a moment, and then, rounding the south end of the island, a puff of westerly wind all the way from China blew in her face, and the vision of the great Pacific opened before her, with the peaks of San Clemente showing on the horizon twenty-four miles away to the southwest.

Not a ship was to be seen, with the exception of a little schooner to southward. She showed bare sticks, and Miss Culpepper, not knowing the depth of the water just there, judged her to be at anchor.

Here, clear of the island barrier, the vast and endless swell of the Pacific made itself felt, lifting the *Sunfish* with a buoyant and balloonlike motion. Steering the swift-running boat across these gentle vales and meadows of ocean was yet another delight, and the flying fish, bright like frosted silver, with black, sightless eyes, chased her now, flittering into the water ahead of the boat like shaftless arrowheads shot after her by some invisible marksman.

The great kelp beds oiled the sea to the northward, and, remembering Joe's advice, but not wishing to return yet a while, the girl shifted the helm slightly, heading more for the southward and making a beam sea of the swell. This brought the schooner in sight.

It was now a little after seven, and the appetite that waits upon good digestion, youth, and perfect health began to remind Miss Culpepper of the breakfast room at the Metropole, the snow-white tables, the attentive waiters. She glanced at her gold wrist watch, glanced round at Santa Catalina, that seemed a tremendous distance away, and put the helm hard astarboard.

She had not noticed during the last half minute or so that the engine seemed tired and irritable. The sudden shift of helm seemed to upset its temper still more, and then, all of a sudden, its noise stopped and the propeller ceased to revolve.

Miss Culpepper, perhaps for the first time in her life, knew the meaning of the word "silence." The silence that spreads from the Horn to the Yukon, from Mexico to Hongkong, held off up to this by the beat of the propeller and the pur of the engine, closed in on her, broken only by the faint ripple of the bow wash as the way fell off the boat.

She guessed at once what was the matter, and confirmed her suspicions by examining the gasoline gauge. The tank was empty. Aransas Joe, whose duty it was, had forgotten to fill it up the night before.

Of all breakdowns this was the worst,

but she did not grumble; the spirit that had raised Million Dollar Culpepper from nothing to affluence was not wanting in his daughter.

She said, "Bother!" glanced at Santa Catalina, glanced at the schooner, and then, stepping the mast of the yawl, shook out her sail to the wind. She was steering for the schooner. It was near, the island was far, and she reckoned on getting something to eat to stay her on the long sail back; also, somehow, the sudden longing for the sight of a human face, and the sound of a human voice in that awful loneliness on whose fringe she had intruded had fallen upon her. There were sure to be sailormen of some sort upon the schooner, and where there were sailormen there was sure to be food of some sort.

But there was no one to be seen upon the deck, and, as she drew closer, the atmosphere of forsakenness around the little craft became ever apparent. As she drew closer still she let go the sheet and furled the sail. So cleverly had she judged the distance that the boat had just way enough on to bring it rubbing against the schooner's starboard side. She had cast out the port fenders, and, standing at the bow with the boat hook, she clutched onto the after channels, tied up, and then, standing on the yawl's gunwale, and, with an agility none the less marked because nobody was looking, scrambled on board. She had not time to more than glance at the empty and desolate deck, for scarcely had her foot touched the planking when noises came from below. There were people evidently in the cabin and they were shouting.

Then she saw that the cabin hatch was closed, and, not pausing to consider what she might be letting out, the girl mastered the working of the hatch fastening, undid it, and stepped aside.

The fore end of a sailorman emerged, a broad-faced, blue-eyed individual blinking against the sunlight. He scrambled on deck, and was followed by another, dark, better looking, and younger.

Not a word did these people utter as they stood taking in everything round them from the horizon to the girl.

Then the first described brought his eyes to rest on the girl.

"Well, I'm darned!" said he.

II.

Let me interpolate now Mr. Harman's part of the story in his own words.

"When Cap Ginnell bottled me and Blood in the cabin of the *Heart of Ireland,*" said he, "we did a bit of shoutin' and then fell quiet. There ain't no use in shoutin' against a two-inch thick cabin hatch overlaid with iron platin'. He'd made that hatch on purpose for the bottling of parties; must have, by the way it worked and by the armamints on it.

"You may say we were mugs to let ourselves be bottled like that. We were. Y' see, we hadn't thought it over. We hadn't thought it would pay Ginnell to abandon the *Heart* for a derelick schooner better found and up to her hatches with a cargo of champagne, or we wouldn't have let him fool us down into the cabin like we did and then clap the hatch on us. Leavin' alone the better exchange, we hadn't thought it would be nuts to him to do us in the eye. Mugs we were, and mugs we found ourselves, sittin' on the cabin table and listenin' to the blighter clearin' the crew off. There weren't no chance of any help from them. Chows they were, carin' for nothin' s'long as their chests an' opium pipes was safe.

"The skylight overhead was no use for more'n a cat to crawl through, if

it'd been open, which it wasn't, more'n an inch, and fastened from the deck side. Portholes! God bless you, them scuttles wasn't big enough for a cat's face to fit in.

"I says to Blood: 'Listen to the blighters! Oh, say, can't we do nuthin', sittin' here on our beam ends? Ain't you got nuthin' in your head? Ain't you got a match in your pocket to fire the tub and be done with it?'

"'It'll be lucky for us,' says Blood, 'if Cap Ginnell doesn't fire her before he leaves her.' With that, I didn't think anythin' more about matches. No, sir! For ha'f an hour after the last boatload of Chows and their dunnage was off the ship and away I was sniffin' like a dog at the hatch cover for the smell of smoke, and prayin' to the A'mighty between sniffs.

"After that we rousted round to see how we were fixed up for provisions and water. We found grub enough for a month, and in one of the bunks a breaker ha'f filled with water. Now that breaker must have been put there for us by Ginnell before we left the *Heart* to 'xamine the derelick schooner. He must have fixed in his mind to do us in and change ship right from the first. I remarks on this to Blood, and then we starts a hunt for tools to cut our way out of there, findin' nuthin' serviceable but cutlery ware an' a corkscrew. Two prong forks and knives wore thin with usin' weren't what we were searchin' for; a burglar's jimmy, blastin' powder, and a drill was more in our line, but there weren't any, so we just set to with the knives, cuttin' and scrubbin' at the tender parts of the hatch, more like tryin' to tickle a girl with iron stays on her than any useful work, for the plates on that hatch would 'a' given sniff to the plates on a battleship, till I give over and just sat down on the floor cursin' Schwab and the Steel Trusts and Carnegie and Ginnell and the chap that had forged them plates from the tip of his hammer to the toe of his boots. 'Oh, why the blazes,' says I, 'weren't we born rats! There's some sense in rats; rats would be out and on deck, while here's two chaps with five fingers on each fist and men's brains in their heads bottled and done for, scratchin' like blind kittens shet up in a box, and all along of puttin' their trust in a swab they ought to have scragged when they had the chanst.'

"'Oh, shet your head!' says Blood.

"'Shet yours,' says I. 'I'm speakin' for both of us; it's joining in with that skrimshanker's done us. Bad comp'ny, neither more nor neither less, and I'm blowed if I don't quit such and their likes and turn Baptis' minister if I ever lay leg ashore again.' Yes, that's what I says to Cap Blood; I was that het up I laid for everythin' in sight. Then I goes on at him for the little we'd done, forgettin' it was the tools were at fault. 'What's the use,' says I, 'tinkerin' away at that hatch? You might as well be puttin' a blister on a bald head, hopin' to raise hair. Here we are, and here we stick,' I says, 'till Providence lets us out.'

"The words were scarce out of my head when he whips out Ginnell's gun, which he was carryin' in his pocket and hadn't remembered till then. I thought he was goin' to lay for me, till he points the mouth of it at the hatch and lets blaze. There were three ca'tridges in the thing, and he fires the three, and when I'd got back my hearing and the smoke had cleared a bit there was the hatch starin' at us unrattled, with three spelters of lead markin' it like beauty spots over the three dimples left by the bullets.

"All the same, the firin' done us good —sort of cleared the air like a thunderstorm—and I began to remember I'd got a mouth on me and a pipe in my pocket. We lit up and sat down, him on the last step of the companionway

and me on the table side, and then we began to figure on what hand Providence was like to take in the business.

"I says to him: 'There's nothin' *but* Providence left, barrin' them old knives and that corkscrew, and they're out of count. We're driftin' on the *Kuro Shiwo* current, aimin' right for the Horn, you may say, but there's the kelp beds, and they're pretty sure to hold us a bit. They're south of us, and Santa Catlina's east of them, with lots of fishin' boats sure to be out, and it's on the cards that some of them jays will spot us. "Derelick" is writ all over us—bare sticks and nothin' on deck, and sluin' about to the current like a drunk goin' home in the mornin'.'

"The cap he cocks his eye up at the telltale compass fixed on the beam overhead of him. It cheered him up a bit with its deviations, and he allowed there might be somethin' in the Providence business if the kelp beds only held good.

"'Failin' them,' he says, 'it's the Horn and a clear sea all the way to it, with the chance of bein' passed be day or rammed at night by some rotten freighter. I don't know much about Providence,' he says, 'but if you give me the choice between the two, I'll take the kelp beds.'

"Blood hadn't no more feelin's for religion in him than a turkey. He was a book-read man, and I've took notice that nothin' shakes a sailorman in his foundations s' much as messin' with books.

"I don't say my own religious feelin's run equal, but they gets me by the scruff after a jag and rubs me nose in it, and they lays for me when I'm lonely, times, with no money or the chanst of it in sight; times, they've near caught me and made good on the clutch, so's that if I'm not bangin' a drum in the Sa'vation Army at this present minit it's only be the mercy of Providence. I've had close shaves, bein' a man of natural feelin's, of all the traps laid for such, but Blood he held his own course, and not bein' able to see that the kelp beds might have been put there by Providence to hold us a bit—which they were—and give us a chanst of bein' overhauled before makin' a long board for the Horn and sure damnation, I didn't set out to 'lighten him.

"Well, folks, that day passed somehow or nuther, us takin' spells at the hatch to put in the time. Blood he found a spare ca'tridge of Ginnell's, and the thought came to him to scrape a hole at the foot of the hatch cover and use the ca'tridge for a blastin' charge. The corkscrew came in handy for this, and toward night he'd got the thing fixed. 'Now,' says he, 'you'll see somethin'!' And he up with the revolver and hit the ca'tridge a belt with the butt end, and the durned thing backfires and near blew his head off.

"After that we lit the cabin lamp and had supper and went asleep, and early next mornin' I was woke by the noise of a boat comin' alongside. I sat up and shook Blood, and we listened.

"Then we began to shout and bang on the hatch, and all at once the fastenin's went, and all at once the sun blazed on us, and next minit I was on deck, with Blood after me. Now what d'you think had let us out? I'll give you twenty shots and lay you a dollar you don't hit the bull's-eye. A girl! That's what had let us out. Dressed in white, she were, with a panama on her head and a gold watch on her wrist and white shoes on her feet and a smile on her face like the sun dazzle on water. And pretty! Well, I guess I'm no beauty-show judge, and my eyes had lit on nothin' prettier than Ginnell since leavin' Frisco, so I may have been out of my reckonin' on points of beauty, but she were pretty. Lord love me, I never want to see nothin' prettier! I let out an oath, I was that shook

up at the sight of her, and Blood he hit me a drive in the back that nigh sent me into her arms, and then we settled down and explained matters.

"She was out from Avalon in a motor boat, and she'd run short of spirit and sailed up to us, thinkin' we were at anchor. Providence! I should think so! Providence and the kelp beds, for only for them we'd have been twenty miles to the s'uth'ard, driftin' to Hades like hutched badgers on a mill stream. We told her how Ginnell had fixed us, and she told us how the gasoline had fixed her. 'And now,' says she, 'will you give me a biskit, for I'm hungry and I wants to get back to Avalon, where my poppa is waitin' for me, and he'll be gettin' narvous,' she says.

" 'Lord love you,' says I, 'and how do you propose to get back?'

"For the wind had fallen a dead ca'm, and right to Catalina and over to San Clemente the sea lay like plate glass, with the *Kuro Shiwo* flowin' under like a blue satin snake.

"She bit on her lip, but she was all sand, that girl—Culpepper were her name—and not a word did she say for a minit. Then she says, aimin' to be cheerful: 'Well, I suppose,' says she, 'we'll just have to stay at anchor here till they fetch me or the wind comes.'

" 'Anchor!' said I. 'Why, Lord bless you, there's a mile-deep water under us! We're driftin'.'

" 'Driftin'!' she cries. 'And where are we driftin' to?'

"That fetched me, and I was hangin' in irons when Blood chipped in and cheered her up with lies and told me to stay with her whiles he went down below and got some breakfast ready, and then I was left alone with her, trustin' in Providence she wouldn't ask no more questions as to where we were driftin' to.

She sat on the cargo hatch whiles I filled a pipe, lookin' round about her like a cat in a new house, and then she got mighty chummy. I don't know how she worked it, but in ten minits she'd got all about myself out of me and all about Ginnell and Blood and the *Yan Shan* and the dollars we'd missed; she'd learned that I never was married and who was me father and why I went to sea at first start. Right down to the color of me first pair of pants she had it all out of me. She was a sure-enough lady, but I reckon she missed her vocation in not bein' a bilge pump. Then she heaves a sigh at the sound of ham frying down below, and hoped that breakfast was near ready, and right on her words Blood hailed us from below.

"He'd opened the skylight wide and knocked the stuffiness out of the cabin, and down we sat at the table with fried ham and ship's bread and coffee before us.

"I'd never set at table with the likes of her before, but if every real lady's cut on her bias, I wouldn't mind settin' at table with one every day in me life. There was only two knives left whole after our practice on the hatch with them. Blood and she had the whole ones, and I made out with a stump, but she didn't mind nor take notice. She was talkin' away all the time she was stuffin' herself, pitchin' into Cap Ginnell just like one of us. Oh, I guess if she'd been a man she'd have swore worth listenin' to; she had the turn of the tongue for the work, and what she said about Ginnell might have been said in chapel without makin' parties raise a hair, but I reckon it'd have raised blisters on the soul of Pat Ginnell if he'd been by to hear and if he'd a soul to blister, which he hasn't."

Mr. Harman relit his pipe, and seemed for a moment absorbed in contemplation of Miss Culpepper and her possibilities as a plain speaker; then he resumed:

"She made us tell her all over again about the *Yan Shan* business and the dollars, and she allowed we were down on our luck, and she put her finger on the spot. Said she: 'You fell through by not goin' on treatin' Ginnell as you begun treatin' him. If he was bad enough to be used that way, he wasn't even good enough for you to make friends with.' Them wasn't her words, but it was her meanin'.

"Then we left her to make her t'ilet with Blood's comb and brush, tellin' her she could have the cabin to herself as long as she was aboard, and, ten minutes after, she was on deck again, bright as a new pin, and scarce had she stuck her head into the sun than Blood, who was aft, dealin' with some old truck, shouts: 'Here's the wind!'

"It was coming up from s'uth'ard like a field of blue barley, and I took the wheel, and Blood and her ran to the halyards. She hauled like a good un, and the old *Heart* sniffed and shook at the breeze, and I tell you it livened me up again to feel the kick of the wheel. We'd got the motor boat streamed astern on a line, and then I gave the old *Heart* the helm, and round she came, so that in a minit we were headin' for Santa Catalina hull down on the horizon and only her spars showin', so to speak. I thought that girl would 'a' gone mad. Not at the chanst of gettin' back, but just from the pleasure of feelin' herself on a live ship and helpin' to handle her. I let her have the wheel, and she steered good, and all the time Santa Catalina was liftin', and now we could see with the glass that the water all round the south end was thick with boats.

"'They're huntin' for me,' said she. 'I guess poppa is in one of them boats,' she says, 'and won't he be surprised when he finds I ain't drowned? Your fortunes is made,' says she, 'for pop owns the ha'f of Minneapolis, and I guess he'll give you ha'f of what he owns. *You* wait till you hear the yarn I'll sling him—— Here they come!'

"They sighted us, and ha'f a hundred gasoline launches were nose end on for us, fanning out like a regatta, and in the leadin' launch sat an old chap with white whiskers and a fifty-dollar panama on his head.

"'That's pop,' she said.

"He were, and we hove to, whiles he came climbin' on board like a turkle, one leg over the bulwarks and one arm round her neck, and then up went a halalujah chorus from that crowd of craft round us, women wavin' handkerchiefs and blowin' their noses and blubbing nuff to make a camel sick.

"Then he and she went down to the cabin to make explanashions, and the parties in the boats tried to board us, till I threatened them with a boat hook and made them fend off while we got way on the *Heart*.

"When we were near into Avalon Bay, the Culps came on deck, and old man Culpepper took off his hat to me and Blood and made us a speech, sayin' we'd lifted weights off his heart, and all such.

"'Never mind,' says Blood, 'we haven't done nothin'. Put it all down to Providence,' says he, 'for if we saved her she saved us, and I ain't used to bein' thanked for nothin'.'

"But, Lord bless you, you might as well have tried to stop the Mississippi in flood as that old party when he'd got his thank gates up. He said we were an honor to merchant seamen, which we weren't, and the great American nation—and Blood black Irish and me Welsh, with an uncle that was a Dutchman—and then I'm blest if he didn't burst into po'try about the flag that waves over us all.

"It began to look like ten thousand dollars in gold coin for each of us, and more than like it when we'd dropped anchor in the bay and he told us to come ashore with him.

"Now I don't know how longshore folk* have such sharp noses, but I do know them longshore boatmen on Avalon Beach seemed to know by the cut of the *Heart* and us we weren't no simple seamen, with flags wavin' over us and an honor to our what-you-call-it navy. They sniffed at us by some instinct or other, more special a wall-eyed kangaroo by the name of Aransas Jim, I think it were.

"Said nothin' much, seein' old man Culp was disembarkin' us with an arm round each of our necks, so to say, but we took up their looks, and I'd to lay pretty strong holts on myself or I'd have biffed the blighters, lot o' screw-neck mongrels, so's their mothers wouldn't have known which was which when sortin' the manglin'.

"Now you listen to what happened then. Culp he took us up to a big hotel, where niggers served us with a feed in a room by ourselves. Champagne they give us, and all sorts of truck *I'd* never set eyes on before. And when it was over in came old man Culp, with an envelope in his hand which he gives to Blood.

" 'Just a few dollars for you and your mate,' says he, 'and you have my regards always.'

"The girl she came in and near kissed us, and off we went with big cigars in our mouths, feelin' we were made men. The longshoremen were still on the beach scratchin' the fleas off themselves and talkin', I expec', of the next millionaire they could rob by pretendin' to be fishermen. Blood he picked up a pebble on the shingle and put it in his pocket, and when the longshore louts saw us comin', smokin' cigars and walkin' arrogant, they made sure old man Culp had given us ha'f a million, and they looked it. All them noses of theirs weren't turned up just now. They saw dollars comin' and hoped for a share.

" 'Here, you chap,' says Blood to Aransas Jim or Aransas Joe or whichever was his name, 'help us to push our boat off and I'll make it worth your while.' The chap does, and wades after us, when we were afloat, for his dues. He held out his hand, and Blood he clapped the pebble into it, and off we shot with them helaballoing after us.

"Much we cared.

"On board the *Heart,* we tumbled down to the cabin to 'xamine our luck. Blood takes the envelope from his pocket, slits it open, and takes out a little check that was in it. How much for, d'you think? Five thousand dollars? No, it weren't.

"Twenty dollars was writ on it. Twenty dollars, no cents.

" 'Say, Blood,' says I to him, 'you've got the pebble this time.'

"Blood he folded the check up and lit his pipe with it. Then he says, talkin' in a satisfied manner 's if to himself:

" 'It were worth it.'

"That's all he said. And, comin' to think of it now meself, it were."

*Allow me to assure the "longshore boatmen" on Avalon Beach that my opinion of them is not that expressed hereafter by Mr. Harman.—AUTHOR.

The book-length novel for January 7th POPULAR

THE SHERIFF OF SACATONE

By Frederick R. Bechdolt

If you want action, read this. A story of the passing of the bad man

Rimrock Jones

By Dane Coolidge

Author of "Pecos Dalhart, Rustler," "Hidden Water," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

Small wonder that Rimrock Jones was disillusioned with humanity, for the very town of Gunsight itself owed him its existence, yet the element that considered itself exclusive frowned upon him and his wild ways. They did not stop to consider that Rimrock put the town on the map, and had been duped and robbed legally by old McBain and L. W. Lockhart. Now, undismayed at his hard luck, Rimrock was again prospecting out in the Tecolote hills, and felt sure he had struck it rich. People laughed at him and his claims. When he tried to borrow money to work his mine he found his friends scoffing as usual. However, the little typist for McBain, Miss Mary Fortune, a stranger in Gunsight, told him she would give him her savings, some four hundred dollars, provided Rimrock would give her shares in his mine. So delighted was he that he swore he'd give her half. Then for a long time Mary heard nothing from him. Even when he came to town he neglected to look her up. She was nettled, but kept her own counsel. Meanwhile, Rimrock had done his best with the loaned money, but it was insufficient. One day, through a trick, he manages to get two thousand dollars from the banker Lockhart. Rimrock thereupon vanishes East. He goes to New York and interests capital in his Tecolote property, and returns flamboyant and apparently rich. Gunsight sits up and takes notice. Rimrock remembers all his friends generously. He visits Miss Fortune and offers her thousands of dollars for her share in his Tecolote copper. But she is firm in her demand to remain a stockholder and take her regular profits. Rimrock is annoyed and angry at her stubborn stand, though he admires her spirit. At length, he agrees to her course, and signs an agreement. Troubles pursue Rimrock. He cannot understand Mary. She is elusive. His proposal of marriage she turns down. McBain tries to jump Rimrock's new property after fresh warning from the owner, and Rimrock kills him. Put in jail, Rimrock refuses to retain a lawyer, and is vindicated by the jury on his own showing. Mary and other of his friends urge him to relocate the dubious claim to his mine, but Rimrock scoffs at their advice. Though Mary wont promise her coöperation in management of the property against her principles, Rimrock insists on making her a director in the company. Whitney Stoddard, the New York capitalist behind the Tecolote development, begins his clever maneuvering. One of his minions, a Mrs. Hardesty, comes to Gunsight. She is beautiful and fascinating, and soon has Rimrock in her toils. Mary, disgusted at the affair, leaves town without word. Keeping up her game, Mrs. Hardesty lures Rimrock to New York, where he promptly bursts into a bloom of folly and stock speculation.

(A Five-Part Story—Part Four)

CHAPTER XIX.

WHERE ALL MEN MEET.

WHEN Rimrock had caught the first train for New York, he had thought it was to seek out Mary Fortune—to kneel at her feet and tell her humbly that he knew he had done her wrong—but as the months went by, and his detectives reported no progress, he forgot his early resolve. The rush and excitement of that great gambling game that goes on in the Stock Exchange, the plunges on copper, and the rushes for cover, all the give and take of the great chase; it picked him up as a great, flowing stream floats a leaf and hurries it along, and Gunsight and Tecolote and the girl he had known there seemed far away, like a dream.

He was learning the game from the gamblers about him, all the ins and outs of the Street; the names and

This story began in the November 7th POPULAR.

methods of all the great leaders, and how they had won their success; and, also, bold gambler that he was, he was starting on a career of his own. In days gone by, at roulette or faro or in frontier poker games, he had learned to play with big chances against him, and, compared to them, Wall Street was safe. The money that he staked was less than six months' earnings of his share of the Tecolote Mine; and from the brief notes of L. W., who was acting as his agent, there was more of it piling up. So he played it carelessly, like the plunger he was, and fortune—and Mrs. Hardesty—smiled.

He won, on the Street; and, though the stakes were not specified, he seemed to be winning with her. It was a question with him whether a woman of her kind ever thought of such a thing as marriage. She had money of her own, and all that money could buy; and her freedom, whatever that was. In this new world about him, all the terms of life seemed changed and transposed and vague, and he never quite knew what she meant. Every word that she said when they discussed life and love seemed capable of a double intent, and whether by freedom she meant to yield or to escape was something he had never made out. All he knew was that at times she seemed to beckon him on, and at others to fend him away. She was fickle as fortune which, as he plunged and covered, sometimes smiled and again wore a frown.

But it was sparkling and stimulating as the champagne he now drank, this new life, with its win and lose, and he played his stakes with the stoical repose of a savage, the delighted abandon of a boy. His broker was always Buckbee, that gay, laughing Beau Brummel, who had given him his first start in the world. It was Buckbee who had met him when he first came to the Waldorf, with his assays and his samples of ore, and, after much telephoning and importuning and haggling, had arranged for his interview with Stoddard. That interview had resulted in Rimrock's first clash with Stoddard, and he had hated him ever since; for a man who would demand a controlling interest in a mine for simply lending his name was certainly one who was fully capable of grabbing the rest if he could. So Rimrock had fought him; but for Buckbee, the broker, he had nothing but the best of good will.

To be sure, Buckbee worked for Stoddard—that was plainly made evident at the time they had made the first deal—but he was open-hearted and honest and generous with his tips, and Rimrock found they were good. Buckbee even went farther; he arranged credit for Rimrock at one of the biggest banks, and when, in his plunges, he was caught short of funds, the bank made him loans on his note. They took no chances, for he was rated at millions as half owner of the Tecolote Mine, but it helped out mightily as he extended his operations and found his margins threatened. But all this buying and selling of stocks, the establishment of his credit, and the trying out of his strength, it was all preliminary to that great contest to come, when he would come out into the open against Stoddard.

Whitney Stoddard was a man rated high up in the millions, but he was fallible, like the rest. His wealth, compared to Rimrock's, was as a hundred dollars to one, but it was spread out a hundred times as far; and with his next dividend, which was due in December, Rimrock would have nearly a million in cash. To Stoddard, at the same time, there would come nearly the same amount of money, but it would be gone within a few days. There were obligations to be met, as Rimrock well knew, that would absorb his great profits and more. The Tecolote Mine, before it began to pay, had

cost several million dollars in dead work. That money had been borrowed, and while Rimrock took in velvet, Stoddard was obligated to pay his debts.

Several months went by, and, patient Indian that he was, Rimrock still followed on Stoddard's trail. He looked up his connections with the Transcontinental Railroad, and there he made his first strike. Although he molded the policies of that great corporation, and seemed endowed with unlimited power, his actual holdings in the stock of the company were almost ridiculously small. Yet he took advantage of his dominating position and the influence it gave him with the directors to make such coups as he had made with the Tecolote, building the branch line which had given value to his mine. As a business proposition, it was a good investment for the company, but who was it that reaped the big profits? By the investment of less than three million dollars—which he had borrowed as he went along—Whitney Stoddard had acquired practically a half interest in a property which he valued at a hundred millions. And now he was bucking the Hackmeisters!

The thought of this man, who had come up from nothing, and was even yet barely on his feet, deliberately attempting to break the great copper combine, was hardly credible to Rimrock. He marveled now at the presumption of Stoddard in offering him fifty millions for his half and the control of the mine. From what he could gather, Stoddard had never possessed fifty million, nor did he possess it then. He was trading on his name and traveling on a shoe string; quite the common thing, in New York. But Rimrock knew as well as he knew anything that a man like Stoddard was dangerous. As sure as the time came, by some hook or crook, he would beat him out of his mine. The thing to do was to beat him to it—to raid his newly acquired Navajoa stocks, and then pinch him until he let go of Tecolote. But it must be done secretly, not a word to anybody, not even to Buckbee or Mrs. Hardesty. They were friends of Stoddard's as well as his—it was safest to work alone.

So, while outwardly the same good-hearted plunger, Rimrock began his campaign of revenge. It opened with a series of secret orders to outside brokers that he knew, and soon, by selling Navajoa short, he had hammered the asking price down. Then he bought it in, a little at a time, until the market began to rise; and then, vindictively, he slaughtered it again and gathered in more at the bottom. Not for nothing had he listened to Mrs. Hardesty and Buckbee, and learned how the market riggers worked, but neither to her nor to Buckbee did he so much as hint of his purpose. His day would come when the Tecolote dividend was voted, when he got his million-dollar check; and the only thing that could keep him from a notable revenge was some slip-up in connection with the dividend.

In the continued absence of Mary Fortune, with her third and decisive vote, it would be necessary for Rimrock to agree with Stoddard, to the extent of dividing their profits. Not a great ways to go, even for men who were sworn enemies, and Stoddard certainly needed the money. He needed it badly, much worse than Rimrock, and would need it from time to time; yet, until Rimrock actually got his hands on the money, it was essential to conceal his plans. For a shrewd man like Stoddard, if he got an inkling of his purpose, was perfectly capable of tying up their profits and of stopping his credit at the bank. It was dangerous ground, and Rimrock trod it warily, buying Navajoa in the most roundabout ways; yet month after month increased his holdings, until his credit at the bank

was stretched. If they asked for collateral, he could turn over his Navajoa, although that would tip off his hand; but his note was still good, and he went in deeper as the date of the annual meeting drew near.

There came a time when Buckbee asked shrewd questions, and Mrs. Hardesty took him playfully to task; but he carried it off by wise nods and smiles, and the statement that he knew something good. He was learning the game, and, to cover up his tracks, he joined the mad whirl of social life. In place of his black sombrero and the high-heeled boots that had given him his entrée in New York, he appeared one evening in a top hat and dress suit, with diamonds glittering down the front of his shirt. It was a new plunge for him, but Buckbee supplied the tailor and Mrs. Hardesty launched his début.

She had almost adopted him, this baffling, "free" woman, and yet she still had her reserves. She went with him everywhere, but the recherché suppers were almost a thing of the past. It was the opera now, and the gayest restaurants, and dinners where they met distinguished guests; but at the entrance of the St. Cyngia, when the graven-faced doorman opened the door to let her pass, she had acquired a way of giving Rimrock her hand without asking if he wouldn't come in. She played him warily, for his nature was impetuous, and might easily lead him too far; but the time came at last when she found him recalcitrant and insurgent against her will.

It was at the opera, where, amid jeweled women, and men in immaculate attire, they had sat through a long and rather tedious evening, during which Mrs. Hardesty had swept the boxes with her lorgnette. Something that she saw there had made her nervous, and once in the cloakroom she delayed. Rimrock waited impatiently, and when at last she joined him, he forced his way aggressively into the slow-moving crowd, and they were swept on down the broad marble stairs. Once a part of that throng, there was no escaping its surge, and yet, as they drifted with the rest, two great columns of humanity flowing together like twin brooks that join in a river below, she clutched his arm and started back; but the crowd swept her inexorably on. Then Rimrock caught her glance—it was flashing across the foyer to the stream on the other side. He followed it instinctively, and there, tripping gracefully down the stairway as he had seen her once before at Gunsight, was Mary Fortune, his girl!

Yes, his girl! Rimrock knew it instantly, the girl he had always loved. The One Woman he could love forever, if fate would but give him the chance. He started forward, but a hand restrained him; it was Mrs. Hardesty at his side.

"Where are you going?" she asked, and the slim, jeweled fingers closed down on his hand like a vise.

"Let me go!" muttered Rimrock, as he struggled against her; but she jerked him back to her side.

"Don't you dare to humiliate me!" she hissed into his ear. "Don't you dare to leave me—for her!"

"It's Mary!" mumbled Rimrock, without taking his eyes from her, and Mrs. Hardesty tightened her grasp.

"If you do, I'll kill you!" she added dangerously; but Rimrock gave no heed. He had forgotten all about her; forgotten she was there, the dead weight that was holding him back; all he saw was Mary, more radiant than ever, moving toward him down the stairs. She was dressed in soft white, and her glorious brown hair, that had before been brushed down beneath its clasp, was fluffed out now in all its beauty; and she talked and laughed as she came. At her side was an elderly,

distinguished gentleman, who listened with an indulgent smile—and then they were engulfed in the crowd. The mass of humanity that had swept them down the stairway closed in and swallowed them up.

She was gone—but she was there—right there through the crowd—and Rimrock started toward her. Mrs. Hardesty followed, dragged on by main strength, and then resolutely she set her feet. The outraged escorts of jostled ladies formed a solid phalanx against him, and Rimrock wheeled impatiently.

"Let go of my arm!" he commanded savagely, and then he met her eyes. If he had doubted before the nature of the tiger woman, he could read it now at a glance. She was choking with anger, and her thin, even teeth were bared as she hissed out her breath; and then she spoke very quietly.

"If you are a gentleman," she said in his ear, "you will not fail to escort me home. Otherwise——"

She stopped, but the roll of her eyes conveyed a threat that went beyond words. She was a tigress, after all, a woman of dark passions and uncontrolled anger, a woman who, beneath her languid grace, had the strength and the courage to strike. And now, as she faced him, the mill race of people surged against them, and carried them on. They moved with the crowd, there was no escape, and she lashed him with bitter words. He listened, unchastened, his head held high, his eyes still seeking for Mary; and as they plunged into the opposing currents of the street, he met her, face to face.

The distinguished man was talking now, and Mary was listening to what he said; yet her eyes, that were accustomed to read from the lips, were now free to look about. A swift, unbidden gladness leaped up into them at first, as she recognized Rimrock in the crowd; and then, quick as lightning, she saw the other woman, and the glad look went out of her eyes. They flared up suddenly with the old anger and resentment, and as quickly took on a distant stare. Then they turned to her escort, and, as Rimrock was shoved past them, he heard her answer him pleasantly. It was just a word, only a fraction of a word, and then Mrs. Hardesty broke in. What she said fell again upon unheeding ears, but Rimrock knew it was harsh. Harsh and threatening, and yet with an undertone of passion that thrilled him against his will.

He found himself in a gliding auto with the street lights twinkling past, and there he came out of his dream.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked at last, as he discovered her still talking on, and she burst into hysterical tears.

"What's the matter!" she echoed. "Why, can't you see? I'm in love with you—that's what's the matter! Oh, I hate that woman! She's a cruel thing—didn't you see the way she looked at me? But I'll pay her back, I'll get even with her yet! Ah, how I hate the sight of her!"

She fell to weeping, and Rimrock, silenced, drew away and left her alone. Then the automobile stopped, and through the glass they could see the imposing entrance of the St. Cyngia. The chauffeur reached back and threw open the door, and Rimrock leaped quickly out, but Mrs. Hardesty did not follow. She sat in the half darkness, composing her hair, and working swiftly to cover the traces of tears; and when she stepped out, she was calm.

"Excuse me," she whispered, as he led her toward the door, "I didn't mean what I said. But I do love you, Rimrock, in spite of myself, and—won't you come in for a moment?"

They stood by the entrance, and the

sphinxlike doorman opened the door to let them pass. Outside it was cold, and from the portals there came forth a breath of warm air, but for the first time Rimrock held back.

"No, thank you very much," he said, bowing formally, and turned quickly back toward the car. She watched him a moment, then drew her cloak about her and hurried in swiftly through the door.

CHAPTER XX.

A LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY.

As Mrs. Hardesty guessed, Rimrock was hurrying away in order to follow Mary Fortune, and, as Rimrock guessed, she had invited him in to keep him from doing just that. She failed, for once, and it hurt her pride; but Rimrock failed as well. After a swift spin through the streets he returned to his hotel and called up his detective in a rage.

"Say, what kind of an agency are you running, anyhow?" he demanded when he got his man. "Ain't you been working ten months to find Mary Fortune? Well, I met her to-night on the street. What's that you say? There's three million people! Well, I don't care if there's six—I want you to find that girl! No, stop her nothing! You lay a hand on her and I'll come down to your office and kill you. Just tell me where she is and keep an eye on her, and I don't care what you charge. And paste this in your hat—if you don't find that girl, you'll have to sue for your pay!"

The agency had to sue—for, ten days later, Rimrock received a letter from her hand. It was mailed from Gunsight, Arizona, and was strictly business throughout. It was, in fact, the legal thirty days' notice of the annual meeting of the company

in the town of Gunsight, county of Geronimo, Territory of Arizona, on Tuesday, the twenty-second day of December, to transact the following business, viz:

1—to elect a Board of Directors.

2—to transact any other business that may properly come before the meeting.

Rimrock read it over, and his courage failed him—after all, he was afraid to face her. He did not flatter himself that she hated him; she despised him, and on account of Mrs. Hardesty. How, then, could he hasten back to Gunsight and beg for a chance to explain? She had fled from his presence ten months before, on the day after Mrs. Hardesty came, and, ten months later, when she met him by accident, he was with Mrs. Hardesty again. As far as he knew, Mrs. Hardesty was a perfect lady. She went out everywhere and was received even by millionaires on terms of perfect equality—and yet Mary Fortune scorned her, and would not even argue the matter. Rimrock decided to use "the inclosed proxy."

He made it out in the name of L. W. Lockhart, and returned it by the following mail, and then he called up the detective agency and told them to go ahead and sue. He told them further that he was willing to bet that Stoddard knew where she was all the time, and if they were still working for him, as he strongly suspected, they could tell him she was back in Gunsight. Rimrock hung up there and fell to pacing the floor, and for the first time the busy city looked gray. It looked drab and dirty, and he thought longingly of the desert with its miles and miles of clean sand. He thought of his mine and how he had fought for it, and of all his friends in the straggling town; of old Juan and L. W. and hearty Old Hassayamp with his laugh and his Texas yupe. And of Mary Fortune, the typist, as he had known her at first—but now she was sending letters like this:

DEAR SIR: You are hereby notified that the regular annual meeting of the stock-

holders of the Tecolote Mining Company will be held at the offices of the company, in the Tecolote Hotel, et cetera, et cetera.

Rimrock threw down the letter and cursed himself heartily for a fool, a chump, and a blackguard. With a girl like that, and standing all she had from him, to lose her over Mrs. Hardesty! Who was Mrs. Hardesty? And why had she gone to Gunsight and fetched him back to New York? Was it because he was crazy that he had the idea that she was an agent, somehow, of Stoddard? That two thousand shares of Tecolote stock that she had assured him Stoddard had sold her, wasn't it part of their scheme to lure him away and break up his friendship with Mary? Because if Mrs. Hardesty had it she had never produced it, and there was no record of the transfer on the books. Rimrock brought down his fist, and swore a great oath never to see the woman again. From the day he met her his troubles had begun —and now she claimed she loved him!

Rimrock curled his lip at the very thought of any New York woman in love. There was only one woman who knew what the word meant, and she was in Gunsight, Arizona. He picked up her letter and scanned it again, but his eyes had not learned to look for love. Even the dryest formula, sent from one to another, may spell out that magic word; may spell it unconsciously and against the will, if the heart but rules the hand. Mary Fortune had told him in that briefest of messages that she was back in Gunsight again; and, furthermore, if he wished to see her, he could do so in thirty days. It told him, in fact, that while their personal relations had been terminated by his own unconsidered acts; as fellow stockholders, perhaps even as partners, they might meet and work together again. But Rimrock was dense; his keen eyes could not see it, nor his torn heart find the peace that he sought. Like a wounded animal he turned on his enemy and fought Stoddard to keep down the pain. And, back at Gunsight, trying to forget her hate, Mary Fortune fought her battle alone.

There was great excitement—it amounted almost to a panic—when Mary Fortune stepped in on Jepson. During her unexplained absence he had naturally taken charge of things, with L. W., of course, to advise, and to facilitate business he had moved into the main office, where he could work with the records at hand. Then, as months went by and neither she nor Rimrock came back to assert their authority, he had rearranged the offices and moved her records away. Behind the main office, with its plate-glass windows and imposing furniture and front, there were two smaller rooms—the directors' meeting place and another, now filled with Mary's records. A clerk, who did not even know who she was, sat at his ease behind her fine desk, and back in the directors' room, with its convenient table, L. W. and Jepson were in conference. She could see them plainly through the half-opened door, leaning back and smoking their cigars, and in that first brief interval before they caught sight of her she sensed that something was wrong.

Of course there were apologies, and Jepson insisted upon moving out or giving her any room she chose, but Mary assured him she had not come back permanently and the smaller room would do just as well. Then she set about writing the notices of the annual meeting, which had to be sent out by her hand, and Jepson recovered from his fright. Perhaps he recovered too much, for Mary Fortune had intuitions, and she remembered that first glimpse of L. W. As the agent of Rimrock and his legal representative, it was desirable, of course, to be friends; but Jepson, it was well known, was the

agent of Stoddard, and Stoddard was after their mine. Therefore it ill became Lockhart, with one treachery against him, to be found smoking so comfortably with Jepson.

So astonished and stunned had she been by the changes and the sudden suspicions that arose that Mary at first had stood startled and silent, and Jepson had raised his voice. At this he remembered that she had gone East for an operation to help restore her hearing, and, seeing her now so unresponsive, he immediately assumed the worst. So he shouted his explanations, and Mary, flushing, informed him that she could hear very well.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he apologized abjectly, but she noticed that he kept on shouting. And then, in a flash of sudden resentment, she bit her lips and let him shout. If he still wished to think that she was deaf as a post, she would not correct him again. Perhaps, if her suspicions should prove to be justified, it would help her to discover his plans.

In her room that evening, Mary brought from her trunk the ear phone she had cast aside. She had packed it away with a sigh of relief and yet a lingering fear for the future, and already she was putting it on. At the back of the transmitter there was a mechanical device which regulated the intensity of the sound. When she settled the clasp across her head and hung the phone over her ear she set it at normal, and then advanced the dial until she could hear the faintest noise. The roar of the lobby, drifting in through the transom, became separated into its various sounds. She could hear men talking and outbursts of laughter and the scrape of moving chairs. The murmur of conversation in the adjoining room became a spat between husband and wife, and, ashamed of her eavesdropping, she put down the instrument and looked about, half afraid.

As the doctor, through his stethoscope, can hear the inrush of air as it is drawn into his patient's lungs, or the surge of blood as it is pumped through the heart with every telltale gurgle of the valves, so with that powerful instrument she could hear through walls and know what was being said. It was a wonderful advantage to have over these men if she discovered that there was treachery afoot, and the following morning, to test it out, she wore her phone to the office.

"Mr. Jepson," she said, as he rose nervously to meet her, "I'd like to bring my books down to date. Of course it is mostly a matter of form, or I couldn't have been gone for so long, but I want to look over the records of the office and make out my annual report."

"Why, certainly," responded Jepson, still speaking very clearly and assuming his most placating smile. "I'd be glad to have you check up. With Mr. Jones away I've been so pressed by work I hardly know where we are. Just make yourself at home, and anything I can do for you please feel free to let me know."

She thanked him politely, and then, as she ran through the files, she absently removed her ear phone.

"Just hold out that report of the mining experts," she heard Jepson remark to his clerk, and in an instant her suspicions were confirmed. He had had experts at work, making a report on their property, but he wished to withhold it from her. That report was doubtless for Whitney H. Stoddard, the only man that Jepson really served, the man who actually controlled their mine. But she worked on, unheeding, and presently, from across the room, she heard him speak again. His voice was low, but the painful operations, the tedious treatments she had endured, had sharpened her hearing until she caught every word except the mumbled assent of the clerk.

"And tell Mr. Lockhart I'll arrange about that rebate. The check will go directly to him."

He went on then with some hurried directions about the different accounts to be changed, and then, without troubling to shout at her again, he turned and slipped away. She had found him out, then, the very first day —Mr. Jepson had an understanding with L. W.! She retired to her room to think it over, and then went systematically to work on the books, but these seemed scrupulously correct. The influence of Stoddard, that apostle of thoroughness, was apparent throughout the office, for Jepson well knew that the day was coming when he must render an accounting to his master. The books were correct, yet she could hardly believe the marvelous production they recorded. Her share alone—a poor one per cent of all that enormous profit—would keep her in comfort for the rest of her life; she need never work again.

But as the days went by, and the yearly profit was reduced to dollars and cents, as she looked over the statement from L. W.'s bank and saw the money piling up to their credit, the first thrill of joy gave way to fear—of Stoddard and what he might do. With interests so vast lying unprotected what could restrain his ruthless hand? And yet there was Rimrock, wrecking his life in New York and letting her watch their mine alone! A wave of resentment rose up at the thought—it was the old hatred that she tried to fight down—and she clasped her hands and gazed straight ahead as she beheld in a vision the woman! A lank rag of a woman, a Kipling's vampire, who lived by the blood of strong men! And to think that she should have fastened on Rimrock, who was once so faithful and true!

For the thousandth time there rose up in her mind the old Rimrock as she had seen him first—a lean, sunburned man on a buckskin horse, with a pistol slung at his hip; a desert miner, clean, laughing, eager, following on after his dream of riches. But now, soft and fat, in top hat and diamonds, swaggering past with that woman on his arm! It would be a blessing for them both if Stoddard would jump the mine and put them back where they were before —he a hardy prospector, and she a poor typist with a dream! But the dream was gone, destroyed forever, and all she could do was to fight on.

As she waited for his letter from day to day, Mary Fortune thought incessantly of Rimrock. She went out to the mine and gazed at the great workings where men appeared no larger than ants. She watched the ore being scooped up with steam shovels and dropped, load by load, into cars; she saw it crushed and pulverized and washed and the concentrates dumped into more cars; and then the endless chain of copper going out and the trainloads of supplies coming in. It was his, if he would come to it. Every man would obey him, his orders could tear down a mountain, and yet he chose to grow fat and sordid; he preferred that woman to her!

She fought against it, but the anger still raged that had driven her fleeing from New York. How could she endure it, to meet him again? And yet she hoped he would come. She hated him, but still she waited, and at last his letter came. She tore it open and drew out his proxy, and then, in the quiet of her office, she sat silent, while the letter lay trembling in her hands. This was his answer to her, who had endured so much for him, his answer to her invitation to come. He inclosed his proxy for L. W.

She began on a letter, full of passionate reproaches, and tore it up in a rage. Then she wrote another, and tore it up, and burst into a storm of tears.

She rose up at last, and, dry-eyed and quiet, typed a note and sent it away. It was a formal receipt for his proxy for Lockhart and was signed: "Mary R. Fortune, Secretary."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SECOND ANNUAL MEETING.

The second annual meeting of the Tecolote stockholders found Whitney H. Stoddard in the chair. Henry Rimrock Jones was too busy on the stock market to permit of his getting away. He was perfecting a plan where, by throwing in all his money and all he could borrow at the bank, he hoped to wrest from Stoddard his control of Navajoa, besides dealing a blow to his pride. But Whitney H. Stoddard, besides running a railroad and a few subsidiary companies as well, was not so busy; he had plenty of time to come to Gunsight and to lay out a carefully planned program. As his suppositious friend, the mysterious Mrs. Hardesty, had remarked once upon a time: He was a very thorough man and very successful.

He greeted Mary warmly, and in a brief, personal chat flattered her immensely by forgetting that she was deaf. He also found time to express his gratification that she had approved his idea of a temperance camp. In the election that followed, the incumbent directors were unanimously reëlected, whereupon, having performed their sole function as stockholders, they adjourned and immediately reconvened as directors. In marked contrast to the last, this meeting of the directors was characterized by the utmost harmony; only L. W. seemed ill at ease. He had avoided Mary since the day she came back, and even yet seemed to evade her eye, but the reason for that appeared in time.

After the usual reports of the secretary and treasurer, showing a condition of prosperity that made even Stoddard's eyes gleam, Mr. Jepson presented his report. It was a bulky affair, full of technical statistics and elaborate estimates of cost, but there was a recommendation at the end.

"The report of our treasurer," said Jepson in closing, "shows a net profit of several million dollars, but I wish to point out our losses. Chief of these is the enormous wastage which comes from shipping our concentrates. There is no doubt in my mind that the Tecolote properties contain an inexhaustible supply of ore, nor that that ore, if economically handled, will pay an increasing profit. The principal charges, outside the operating expenses, have been freight and the smelting of our concentrates. As you doubtless know, the long haul to El Paso, and the smelter charges at that end, have materially reduced our net profits. The greater part of this loss is preventable, and I therefore recommend that the company construct its own smelter."

He went on with estimates of costs and the estimated saving per ton, but Mary allowed her attention to stray. She was thinking of Rimrock Jones, and she was watching Rimrock's proxy. Like a criminal on trial, L. W. sat glowering, his dead cigar still in his teeth, and before the end of the report was reached the sweat was beading his face.

"Well, I, for one," began Stoddard diplomatically, "most heartily approve of this plan. It will necessitate, of course, a postponement of profits, but I think we can all stand that. I therefore suggest that we apply this year's profits to the immediate construction of a smelter, and, if I hear a motion, we will consider the question of passing the annual dividend."

He paused, and as Mary went on with her writing a dead silence fell upon the room. L. W. glanced at Jep-

son and then at Stoddard, and at last he cleared his throat.

"Well, Mr. President," he said half-heartedly, "this is a new proposition to me. I regret very much that Mr. Jones isn't here, but—well, I make a motion that we build the smelter and pass the annual dividend."

He spoke with an effort, his eyes on the table, and at the end he sank back in his chair.

"Did you get that, Miss Fortune?" asked Stoddard solicitously, and Mary nodded her head.

"Yes, I second the motion," she answered sweetly, and an electric thrill passed round the room. It had not been expected by the most optimistic that the vote would be unanimous.

"All in favor say 'Aye!'" spoke up Stoddard sharply, but L. W. had sprung to his feet.

"Mr. President!" he began, suddenly panting with excitement, and Stoddard fixed him with his steely eyes.

"Very well, Mr. Lockhart," he responded curtly, "what is it you wish to say?"

"Why, I—I didn't know," began L. W. haltingly, "that she was going to vote—that way."

"Well, you know it now," answered Stoddard freezingly. "Does that conclude your remarks?"

"Oh, no!" burst out L. W., his drawn face twitching. "I—in that case, I change my vote. I don't think Mr. Jones——"

"You haven't voted yet," corrected Stoddard shortly. "All in favor please say 'Aye!'"

"Aye!" said Mary, and as Stoddard echoed it he cast a sneering glance at L. W.

"Do I understand, Mr. Lockhart," he inquired pointedly, "that you wish to go on record as voting 'No?'"

"Yes, put it down 'No!'" directed L. W. feverishly. "I don't approve of this at all. Rimrock needs the money; he wrote me particularly. I wouldn't put him out for the world." He straightened the stoop from his long, bent back, and his eyes opened up appealingly. "Put me down for a 'No,'" he repeated wildly. "He'll kill me for this! I wouldn't cross that boy for anything in the world; he's the best friend a man ever had. But put me down 'No'—you will, won't you, miss? I don't want Rimrock to know."

"Mr. Lockhart votes 'No,'" broke in Stoddard peremptorily. "The 'Ayes' have it, and the motion is carried. Is there any other business?"

His cold, incisive words seemed almost to stab, but L. W. still swayed on his feet.

"I'd like to explain," he went on brokenly. "I never go back on a friend. But Rimrock, he's wasting his money back there—I thought it would be a kindness."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Lockhart," interrupted Stoddard impatiently, "we all know the goodness of your heart. Do I hear a motion to adjourn?"

He shifted his keen, commanding eyes to Mary, who nodded her head in return. She was watching L. W. as he stood there sweating, with the anguish of that Judaslike thought. He had betrayed his friend, he had sold him for gold, and already he was sorry.

"Second the motion," said Stoddard. "All in favor say 'Aye!' The meeting stands adjourned."

He rose up quickly, and, gathering up his papers, abruptly left the room. Jepson followed as quickly, and L. W., still talking, found himself alone with the girl. She was gazing at him strangely, and as he paused inquiringly she went over and held out her hand.

"I understand, Mr. Lockhart," she said, smiling comfortingly. "I understand just how you feel. It *was* a kindness—I felt so myself—and that's why I voted as I did."

The staring eyes of L. W. suddenly focused, and then he seized her hand.

"God bless you!" he cried, crushing her fingers in his grip. "You'll make it right on the books? God bless you, then; I wouldn't sell out that boy for all the money in the world."

He broke off suddenly and dashed from the room, while Mary gazed pensively after him. She, too, in a way, had betrayed her friend, but she had not done it for gold.

As secretary of the company and the board of directors it devolved upon Mary Fortune to notify Rimrock of the passed dividend. She knew as well as L. W. knew that it would be a bitter blow to him, but she felt no pity or regret. The money that would otherwise be wasted in New York would be diverted to the construction of the smelter, and if he found the loss a hardship, he had only himself to thank. She went into her office and shut the door, but, simple as the letter seemed, she was unable to put it on paper. Three times she tried, but at each attempt her pent-up anger burst forth, and the coldest and most businesslike words she could summon seemed packed with hate and resentment. She gave up at last, and was sitting listlessly when she heard voices in the outer room. It was Jepson and Stoddard, and as she listened closer she could make out what they said.

"I've got a report here," said the voice of Jepson, "that I'd like to show you—alone."

There was an impatient slamming of desk drawers, and then the clerk spoke up—the young man who had taken Mary's place:

"That report of the experts? I put it in here. You remember, on account of Miss Fortune."

"Oh, yes," answered Jepson. "And, by the way, where is she?"

And then suddenly his voice was dropped. Mary reached for her ear phone, and slipped it on and listened to catch every word. If Jepson saw fit to practice deceit, she had no compunction in listening in.

"Well, that's all right," he was saying. "She can't hear what we say. You go on out for your lunch."

There was a scuffling of feet, and then, still talking, Jepson led the way to the directors' room.

"Yes, she reads your lips; she's really quite clever at it. That's her running the typewriter now."

He shut the door, and for several minutes Mary played a tattoo on her machine. Then she keyed down quietly, and, setting her transmitter at its maximum, she turned it toward the wall.

"This is that report," the voice of Jepson was saying, "that you spoke to me about in the spring. It gives the geology of the whole Tecolote properties by the very best experts in the field—three independent reports, made in advance of litigation, and each comes to the same conclusion. If we accept the ore body as a single low-grade deposit, instead of a series of high-grade parallel veins—and each of these experts does—the crest of that dome, the Old Juan claim, is the apex of the whole. In other words, according to the apex law, the possession of the Old Juan claim will give us indisputable right to the whole property. You can look over that yourself."

There was a period of silence, broken only by the rattling of Mary Fortune's machine, and then they began again.

"Very well," said Stoddard, "this seems satisfactory. Now what about this L. W. Lockhart? In our meeting this morning he showed such a contemptible weakness that—— Now, Jepson, that was very careless of you! Why didn't you find out before that fiasco how Miss Fortune intended to vote? It must have been perfectly evident to her, from the way Mr. Lock-

hart talked, that he had been—well, overpersuaded, to say the least. It was very awkward, and if I hadn't rushed it she might have reconsidered her vote. But never mind that—I suppose you did your best. Now who is to relocate this claim?"

"Well, that's the question," began Jepson. "There's a man here named Bray that used to keep a saloon——"

"No, no!" broke in Stoddard. "No disreputable characters! Now Jepson, this is up to you! You're the only man we can trust in an extremity——"

"Positively—no!" exclaimed Jepson firmly. "I absolutely refuse to touch it. I'll arrange the preliminaries, but after it's started you must look to your attorneys for the rest."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Stoddard. "Isn't it perfectly legal? Won't the claim be open to location? Well, then, why this sudden resort to evasion and hairsplitting, and all over a mere detail?"

"I have told you before," answered Jepson impatiently, "that it's against the ethics of my profession. I am a mining engineer, and if you want this claim jumped——"

"Oh, yes, yes! We won't argue the matter. Who is this Mr. Bray?"

"He's a man with nerve—about the only one in the country that will stand up to Rimrock Jones. It seems that Jones won his saloon away from him and gave it to one of his friends. Some gambling feud they've had on for years, but now Mr. Bray is broke. I haven't sounded him, but for a thousand dollars——"

"Five hundred!"

"Now, Mr. Stoddard," burst out Jepson complainingly, "you don't understand the gravity of this case. Do you realize that already one man has been killed in trying to jump that claim? And Rimrock Jones has made the threat openly that he will kill any man that does it."

"He's a blusterer—a braggart—a criminal through and through. Well, make it a thousand dollars. Now one thing more—is there any chance that Mr. Lockhart may still break up all our plans? As I understand it, Jones gave him his orders to see that the assessment work was done. There are still nine days before the first of January, and it struck me that he was repenting of his bargain. You must watch him carefully—he doesn't seem trustworthy—and positively we must have no slip-up now. Does he actually know that this work has been neglected—and that, if not performed, it will invalidate the claim?"

"Yes, he knows it," answered Jepson wearily. "I've been stuffing money into his bank until he has over a million in deposits, and still the old screw isn't satisfied. He's crazy over money—and yet he's just as crazy over standing A1 with Jones. You don't realize, Mr. Stoddard, what a strain I've been under in trying to make that man run true."

"Well, give him anything. We must win at all hazards before this thing gets back to Jones. We have cut off his money by the construction of this smelter, but that can't be done again, and, once he begins to accumulate his profits, we'll find him a dangerous man. But we have passed this dividend, and before I get through with him he'll be stripped of every dollar he has won. I'm going to break that man, Jepson, if only as an example to these upstarts who are hounding Navajoa. I've got him by the heels, and—but never mind that; let's see if our plans are airtight. Now, this man Lockhart!"

"He's drunk!" answered Jepson. "I'll arrange it to keep him soaked."

"Very well. Now Bray!"

"He's drinking, too. I'll wait till the last day, and probably send him out with a guard."

"Yes, make sure of that. Better send two guards. They can sign their names

as witnesses, in case Bray should leave the Territory. And now, this girl!" went on Stoddard, lowering his voice instinctively. "Is she really as deaf as she seems? Remember, you can never depend on a woman!"

"Yes, she's deaf," replied Jepson. "And you don't need to worry—she hates Rimrock Jones like poison. Did you notice the way she passed that dividend, to cut off his supply of slush? Just as sweet and smiling! When they take it like that—well, we can forget about her!"

He paused, and in the silence a typewriter began to clack with a fierce, staccato note. It was Mary Fortune, writing her letter to Rimrock Jones.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FOOL.

The big day came for which Rimrock had waited—the day when he could strike his first blow. In his room at the Waldorf he had installed special telephone connections, with a clerk to answer his calls, and close by the table, where he could follow his campaign, a stock ticker stamped away at its tape. It was the morning of the twenty-third of December, and he had wired L. W. for his money. All was ready now for the first raid on Navajoa, and he went down to see Buckbee, the broker.

"Mr. Buckbee," he said, when he had him by himself, "I just want to find where you're at. You introduced me to Stoddard, and, as it turned out, we all of us made on the deal. But here's the question: If it came to a showdown, would you be for Stoddard or me?"

"Why, my dear friend Rimrock," answered Buckbee jovially, "I'm afraid you don't get me right. That little deal with Stoddard was strictly on the side; my business is to buy and sell stock. An order from you will look just as good to me as one from Whitney H. Stoddard, and it will be executed just as carefully. But if it's Navajoa you have on your mind, my advice is positively to lay off. I'll buy or sell as much Navajoa as you want for the regular brokerage fee, but get this straight—when you go up against Stoddard you stand to lose your whole roll. Now shoot, and I give you my word of honor to execute your orders to the letter."

"All right," said Rimrock. "Sell ten thousand shares short. Dump 'em over—I want Navajoa to go down."

"It'll go down," answered Buckbee, as he scribbled out the order. "At what point do you want me to buy?"

"Don't want to buy," replied Rimrock grimly, and Buckbee shook his head.

"All right, my boy," he said debonairly. "There'll be wild doings this day in Navajoa. But it's people like you that make the likes of me rich, so divvel another word will I say."

Rimrock returned to his room and sat watching the tape as the ticker champed it out, and soon he saw Navajoa. It had been quoted at thirty-two and a half, but this sale was made at thirty. He watched it decline to twenty-eight and twenty-five, and soon it was down to twenty. He called up Buckbee.

"Sell ten thousand more!" he ordered, and Buckbee went on with the slaughter.

Navajoa went down to eighteen and sixteen, and then it jumped back to twenty. Big buying developed, but still Rimrock sold short, and again Navajoa slumped. At the end of the day it stood at twenty, and he prepared for the next step in his campaign. He had beaten Navajoa down to nearly half its former price and without parting with a single share. He had at that moment, in stock bought and paid for, enough to cover all his short selling—this raid was to call out more. When stock is going up the people cling to it, but when it

drops they rush to sell. Already he could see the small sales of the pikers as they were shaken down for their shares. The next thing to do, as he had learned the game, was to buy in, and then hammer it again.

On the twenty-fourth, the day before Christmas, he bought till he could buy no more, and still the price stayed down. It was the holidays slump, so the brokers said, but it suited him to a nicety. The next day was Christmas, and he wired once more for his money, for L. W. had not answered his first telegram, and then he went out with the boys. Since his break with Mrs. Hardesty he had taken to dodging into the bar, where he would be safe from her subtle advances, but on Christmas Eve he went too far. They all went too far in the matter of drinking, but Rimrock went too far with Buckbee. He told him just exactly what he intended to do to Stoddard, which was indiscreet, to say the least. But Buckbee, who was likewise in an expansive mood, told in turn everything he knew, and the following day, as Rimrock thought it over, he wondered if he had not been wrong.

Buckbee had assured him that the stock on the market represented less than half of the Navajoa capitalization, and if that was the case it was hopeless, of course, to try to break Stoddard's control. But, strictly as a friend and for old time's sake, Buckbee had offered to sell Rimrock's stock at a profit; he had even gone further and promised to pass it on to Stoddard, who was in the market to protect his holdings. At twenty-four, which was where it was selling, Rimrock would clean up a tidy sum, and every cent of that absolute velvet would come out of Stoddard's pocket. It was a great temptation, but as Rimrock sobered he remembered that it was a fight to a finish. He had set out to break Whitney Stoddard.

The next morning at ten he sat at his desk, waiting expectantly for the Stock Exchange to open. It was to have been his big day when, with over a million dollars from his dividends, he had intended to buy in Navajoa. But there was one thing that left him uneasy; his money had not come. If it had been sent by registered mail, the Christmas glut would easily account for the delay, but three telegrams had remained also unanswered. He pondered for a minute whether to wire to Mary or not, and then the telephone rang.

"Hello," said a voice, "this is Buckbee speaking. What do you think about the proposition I made?"

"What proposition?" demanded Rimrock, and then he grunted intolerantly as Buckbee renewed his offer for the stocks. "You must be drunk!" he said at the end, and a merry laugh came back over the phone.

"No, all joking aside—I'm sober now. What do you say to twenty-four?"

"Too little!" bluffed Rimrock. "I want at least thirty."

"Will you take that?"

"No!" replied Rimrock. "Nor thirty-five. I'm in the market to buy!"

"Well, how much do you want, then?" began Buckbee eagerly. "It's all the same to me. As long as it moves and I get my commission I don't care who buys the stock. But I'll tell you one thing—you'll have to put up more margin if you start to bidding it up. Twenty per cent, at the least, and if it goes above thirty I'll demand a full fifty per cent. You want to remember, old scout, that every time you buy on a margin the bank puts up the rest, and if that stock goes down they'll call your loan and you're legally liable for the loss. You'll have to step lively if you buck Whitney H. Stoddard; he's liable to smash the price down to nothing."

"I'll show him!" gritted Rimrock. "But I'll call up that bank first and

find out just how far I can go. A man like me, worth fifty millions at least ——"

"Ye-es!" jeered Buckbee, and as the broker hung up, Rimrock called the president of the bank. It took time to get him, but when Rimrock stated his case he promised an immediate report. The answer came within half an hour —he could borrow up to five hundred thousand.

"All right," said Rimrock, and, calling up Buckbee, he told him to go ahead and buy.

"How much?" inquired Buckbee.

"Buy all you can get," answered Rimrock briefly, and hurried off to the bank.

"Now about this loan," said the president pleasantly. "I find we have already given you money on your note up to nearly the entire five hundred thousand. Of course there's no question of your ability to pay, but wouldn't it be more businesslike if you could put up a little collateral?"

"For instance?" said Rimrock, and at the note of antagonism the president was quick to explain.

"Of course you understand," he went on cordially, "you are good, as far as I'm concerned. But we have such troublesome things as bank examiners, and the law is very strict. In fact, a loan of half a million dollars on the unindorsed note of one man——"

"How much do you want?" asked Rimrock, and fetched out a great sheaf of Navajoa.

"Well—not Navajoa," said the banker uneasily. "We have quite a lot of that already, on brokers' loans. Mr. Buckbee, you know. But if you would just put up, say two thousand shares of Tecolote——"

"No!"

"We could loan you up to two million."

The president paused and glanced at him mildly, but Rimrock had thrown down his stock.

"No," he said, "you can take this Navajoa or I'll quit and go somewhere else. I wouldn't put up a single share of Tecolote if you'd give me your whole danged bank!"

"Very well," said the president, with a fleeting smile, "we'll accept your Navajoa. My secretary will arrange it—but mind this is on a call loan! Give him credit for five hundred more," he added, and the clerk showed Rimrock out.

There are certain formalities that the richest must observe before they can borrow half a million, and it was nearly noon before Rimrock was free and on his way to the hotel. He was just leaping out of his taxicab when he saw Mrs. Hardesty reeling toward him.

"Oh, Rimrock!" she gasped. "I've had such a blow. Won't you take me back to my rooms? Oh, I can't explain it, but Whitney H. Stoddard is trying to force me to give up my stock. That Tecolote stock——"

"Here, get into this taxi!" said Rimrock on the instant. "Now where do you want to go?"

"To the St. Cyngia, on Ninety-fifth Street—and hurry!" she commanded, and the chauffeur slammed the door.

"Now what's the matter?" demanded Rimrock hurriedly. "I haven't got a minute to spare. Did you notice Navajoa? Well, I've got a buy order in ——"

"Oh, no! I've seen nothing—not since he sent me that message! It seems he's back in town."

"Who? Whitney Stoddard? Well, let me get out then; I've got to get back to that tape!"

"Oh, no!" she murmured, sinking against him with a shudder. "Don't go and leave me alone. I need your help, Rimrock. My whole fortune is involved. It's either that or give back the stock."

"What stock?" asked Rimrock. "That two thousand Tecolote? Well,

you just give that to *me!* Have you really got it, or are you just stalling? Let me look at it, and I'll see you through hell!"

"It's in my apartment," she answered weakly. "I'll show it to you when we are there. Ah, Rimrock, something told me you would come to save me. But—oh, I'm ready to fall!"

She dropped against him, and the startled Rimrock took her quickly within his arm. They rode on swiftly, and as she lay panting on his breast she told him the story of her misfortune.

"I don't deserve it," she said, "to have you help me, because I started to do you a wrong. I didn't know you then, nor your generous heart—and so I made the agreement with Stoddard. I was to go to Gunsight and get acquainted with you and get you to come back to New York—and for that I was to receive two thousand shares of Tecolote stock. Oh, not as a present—I'd never think of that—but far below what they are worth. It would take all the money I had in the world just to make a part payment on the stock. But I knew how wonderfully valuable they were, and so I took the chance."

She sighed and leaned against him closer, while Rimrock listened eagerly for the rest.

"Can you understand now why I've seemed worried and anxious and why I've concealed my affairs? I went there and met you, but when I refused to betray you I found I was caught in a trap. Whitney Stoddard is hounding you in every possible way to make you give up your mine, and after I refused to give back my stock he set out deliberately to ruin me."

She shuddered and lay silent, and Rimrock moved uneasily.

"What was it he wanted you to do?" he asked at last, and she tore herself swiftly away.

"I can't tell you—here. But come up to my rooms. I defied him, but I did it for you."

She fell quickly to rearranging her hair and hat in preparation for the short dash past the doorman, and at the end she looked at him and smiled.

"I knew you would come," she said, and as he helped her out he thrilled to the touch of her hand. At odd times before she had seemed old and blasé, but now she was young and all alive. He dismissed the taxi without a thought of his business, and they hurried up to her apartments. She let herself in, and as she locked the door behind them she reached up and took his big hat.

"You must stay a while," she said. "The servants are gone and I have no one to protect me if they come to serve the papers. Just start the fire—and if any one knocks don't let them break down the door."

She smiled again, and a sudden giddiness seemed to blind Rimrock and make him doubt where he was. He looked about at the silken rugs and the luxurious hangings on the walls, and wondered if it was the same place as before. Even when he lit the laid fire and sank down on a divan he still felt the sweet confusion of a dream, and then she came back, suddenly transformed by a soft house gown, and looked him questioningly in the face.

"Can you guess," she asked, as she sat down beside him, "what it was that he wanted me to do? No, not to betray you or get possession of your stock. All he asked was that I should marry you."

"Marry me!" exclaimed Rimrock, and his keen, staring eyes suddenly narrowed as she bowed her head.

"Yes, marry you," she said. "That was what made it so hard. Did you notice, when I stopped inviting you here? I was afraid, my Rimrock; I was afraid I might forget and—marry you. That was the one spot where Stoddard's plan failed; he forgot that

I might fall in love. I loved you, Rimrock, loved you too much to marry you, and so I broke up all his plans. If I had married you, don't you see how easy it would have been for me to get hold of your stock? And that girl out there—the one I don't like—she would have thrown her vote to Stoddard. That alone would give him control; they would have fifty per cent of the stock."

"No, they wouldn't," corrected Rimrock, "not if you've got that two thousand. That would give *us* fifty-one per cent!"

A shadow of annoyance passed over her face, as if some part of her plan had gone wrong, and then her eyes took on a fire.

"'*Us?*'" she said. "Would you have married me, Rimrock? But surely not for the stock! Oh, I wish sometimes ——" She stopped abruptly, and looked at him strangely, and then she hurried on. "Ah, no," she sighed, "that can never be—you are in love with that other woman—out there. When you met her at the opera you forgot all about me. You went off and left me alone. If Whitney H. Stoddard had called me up then!" Her eyes flashed dangerously, and she looked away, at which Rimrock glanced quickly at his watch.

"By—grab!" he exclaimed, half rising to his feet. "Do you know it's half past twelve? Say, where's your telephone? I've got a deal on in Navajoa and I've just got to find out where I am."

She rose up suddenly, and turned to face him with a look of queenly scorn.

"I have no telephone!" she answered evenly. "And if I did have, I would not lend it to you. You're just like the rest of these men, I see. You think in terms of stocks. I should have done as Stoddard said, and paid you back for your rudeness. Do you know, Mr. Jones, that you think more of money than of anything else in the world? Are you aware of the fact that all the love and devotion that any poor woman might bestow would be wholly wasted, and worse than wasted, on a miserable stock gambler like you? Ah, I was a fool!" she burst out, stamping her foot in a passion, and then she sank back on the divan and wept.

Rimrock stood and gazed at her, then glanced absently at his watch and looked about, shamefaced, for a phone. But in that elegant apartment, with its rich furnishings and tapestries, there was no place for a crude, commercial telephone, and the door to the inner room was closed. He turned toward the outer door, for his business was urgent, but she had carried off the key. He stirred uneasily, and a shrewd doubt assailed him, for her weeping seemed all at once sophisticated and forced, and at the movement she raised her head. One look and she had cast herself upon him and twined her arms about his neck.

"I can't help it! I can't help it!" she sobbed convulsively, and drew down his head and kissed him. "I can't help it!" she whispered. "I love you, Rimrock; I can't bear to let you go!"

She clung to him passionately, and with tremulous laughter tugged to draw him back to the divan, but Rimrock stood upright and stubborn. He put away the hands that still clung and petted and gazed fiercely into her eyes. And the woman faced him—without a tear on her cheek for all the false weeping she had done.

"How's this?" he said, and as she sensed his suspicion she jerked back in sudden defiance.

"A stock jobber!" she mocked. "All you think of is money. The love of a woman is nothing to you!"

"Aw, cut out that talk!" commanded Rimrock brutally. "Some women are stock jobbers, too. And, speaking of stock, just give me a look at those two thousand shares of Tecolote."

A sullen, sulky pout distorted her mouth, and she made a face like a willful girl.

"You'd snatch them," she said, "and run away and leave me. And then what would I say to Stoddard?"

"Are you working for him?" he asked directly, and she threw out her arms in a pet.

"No! I wish I were, but it's too late now. I might have made money, but as it is I stand to lose everything."

"Oh, you stand to lose everything, do you? Well, say, that reminds me, I guess I stand about the same."

He picked up his hat and started for the door, but she caught him by the arm.

"You're going to that woman!" she said vindictively. "Perhaps I can tell you something about *her*. Well, I can!" she declared. "And I can prove it, too. I can prove it by my Tecolote stock."

"You haven't got any stock," answered Rimrock roughly. But he stopped, and she drew back and smiled.

"Oh!" she said, as she noted his interest. "You're beginning to believe me now. Well, I can show you by the indorsement where she sold out to Stoddard over a month before I came. She sold him two thousand shares of Tecolote for exactly two million dollars—and that's why she left when I came. She was afraid you would find her out. But you, you poor fool, you thought she was perfect, and had left because her feelings were hurt. But she couldn't fool me; I could read her like a book, and I'll tell you what she had done."

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" broke in Rimrock savagely. "You'll go and get me that stock. I won't believe a word you say——"

"What will you give me if I do?" she demanded coquettishly, at the same time backing away.

"I'll give you a nice, sweet kiss," answered Rimrock, twisting his mouth to a sinister smile. "And if you don't ——"

"Ah, will you?" she cried as she started toward him, and then she danced mockingly away.

"You can keep it for her!" she flung back bitterly and passed out through the inner door.

Like a lion held in leash, Rimrock paced up and down, and then he listened through the door. All was silent, and with a sudden premonition he laid a quick hand on the knob. The door was locked against him! He listened again, then spoke through the keyhole, then raised his voice to a roar. The next moment he set his great shoulder to the panel, then drew back and listened again. A distant sound, like a door softly closing, caught his ear and all was still. He hurled himself with desperate vehemence against the door so treacherously locked, and with a crash it leaped from its hinges, and he stumbled into the room. From where he stood Rimrock looked about in a daze, for the room was stripped and bare. The table, the furnishings, all that had made it so intimate when he had dined with the tiger lady before, all were gone, and with the bareness there came a chill and the certainty that he had been betrayed. He turned and rushed to the outer entrance, but as he laid violent hands on that door it opened of itself, and with such unexpected suddenness that he fell backward on the floor. He rose up, cursing, for something told him whose hand had unlocked that door, but she was gone and all that remained was a scribbled card in the hall.

"Kiss your money good-by" was written on its face, and on the back:

"I hate a fool."

TO BE CONCLUDED IN JANUARY 7TH ISSUE.

The Bell

By Arthur Stringer

Author of "The Gun-Runner," "The Hammer of God," Etc.

One man brings another four hundred miles to answer the question Thomas Bailey Aldrich once asked about a certain situation for a story: "What would happen if you knew you were the last human being alive in the world and you were sitting alone in your study, and suddenly your doorbell rang?"

DO you happen to know just why you're here?" asked Ryckman, as I stepped into the waiting motor car.

"Because you sent for me," was my deliberate retort. I stared about the lonely little station half buried in snow.

Ryckman cranked the car, shook the snow from the lap robe that had been covering his radiator, and crowded in beside me. We backed about, swung into the frozen road, and crawled southward across a country blue gray with wintry twilight.

"You've been wondering why I *did* send for you, of course," said Ryckman, as he pushed the lap robe over across my knees. "And, now you're here, I'll explain it. You see, you could never make it clear in a telegram."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Buchner," Ryckman said, after a silence, "do you remember what Thomas Bailey Aldrich once asked about a certain situation for a story? What would happen if you knew you were the last human being alive in the world and you were sitting alone in your study, and suddenly your doorbell rang?"

I turned and stared at Ryckman as he bent over his wheel.

"Did you bring me all the way up here to answer that question?" I demanded.

"Yes," was his answer.

Ryckman had always been odd, but I had never thought of him as insane. That he was not without temperament had been made plain to me seven long years before, when I first became his attorney. We had then stopped by injunction one of his own plays because a Broadway manager had grabbed a third-act ending. And since then we had been through most of the small legal skirmishes which every successful author, I suppose, has to face.

Yet success had not greatly added to Ryckman's eccentricities. He had always loved solitude, I knew, when struggling with a new drama, and this was largely based on the fact that he composed *viva voce*, striding up and down his study and shouting his big-scene speeches to a waiting stenographer. So I had not been surprised when he wrote me that winter, saying he had snatched up a huge old country house on Lake Erie and was leaving the city to give three months of hard work to the new Frohman comedy.

But I was not willing to swallow four hundred miles in an overheated sleeper

and accept a spoiled Christmas holiday as the negligible whim of a temperamental playmonger.

So I looked at the capped and mufflered Ryckman for some time, trying to sweep back the wave of anger which was inundating my weary body.

"So I've been brought here on the matter of a doorbell?" I inquired, with ironic placidity.

"Precisely," said Ryckman.

"On the matter of your doorbell, which somebody has been making so bold as to ring?" I went on.

"Exactly," said the man at my side.

"But, my dear Ryckman," I retorted, exasperated by the theatricality of his attitude, "the situation seems rather without point in this case, because you do not happen to be the last human being alive in the world."

"That's where you're wrong," he quickly amended. "I am the only human being alive in the world!"

"Oh, are you?" I echoed, steeling myself for some confession of incipient paranoia. It was clear, I told myself, that the man had been overworking.

"I mean I'm the only human being left in this world of mine up here," explained Ryckman.

"How about Burke?" I asked.

Burke was Ryckman's stenographer, who had been with the playwright, I knew, for the last three years at least.

"Burke left three days after my housekeeper went. He couldn't stand it any more than the others could!"

"Stand what?" I demanded.

"The bell," was Ryckman's answer.

I tried to be as calm as possible.

"What did the bell do?" I finally inquired.

"It rang."

Ryckman had uttered this foolish answer in a quite matter-of-fact tone, but for some absurd reason I experienced a faint horripilation of the nerves.

"Bells have a habit of doing that."

"No, they haven't," solemnly and decisively declared Ryckman. "Not without some human being first making them ring! Not without some earthly reason or cause!"

I could afford to laugh at his solemnity.

"And this is some super-rational bell that rings of its own sweet will and givs you goose flesh along your idiotic young legs just because a couple of wires have got crossed."

He turned to me with a quick and reproving side glance. I could see his face, thin and blue with the cold, in the shadowy half light of the snow-muffled dusk.

"There are no wires to get crossed," he declared. "It is just a plain bell that has to be pulled, pulled by some one's hand. The only wires that are getting crossed are the wires in my brain. I tell you, I can't stand this thing much longer. I've got to straighten it out in some way!"

I sat silent, momentarily disturbed by the rising note of protest in his voice. It was clear that the man was not himself.

"Been working hard?" I finally inquired.

"I can't work," he cried. "This thing has got on my nerves and knocked everything out of my head."

"Then why are you staying here?"

"I want to get to the bottom of it," was his answer. "I've got to understand it."

I thought things over. Then I went back to the question of the bell.

"You're sure it actually rings?" I asked.

"As sure of it as I know we're sitting in this car."

"And without reason?"

He nodded an affirmative.

"I even lampblacked the pull knob, hoping to get finger prints, something to work on. *But there was no sign that a human hand had touched it.*"

Again I felt that small chill along

the nerve ends. But I forced a laugh at the solemnity of his face.

"And the servants—Burke and others—what stampeded them?"

"They knew the bell rang."

"When would it ring?"

"At night."

"And how did they explain it?"

"They *couldn't* explain it. That's what stampeded them."

"But they must have talked about it."

"Burke told me they had passed a story on, from one to the other, about a woman being killed in the place and buried under the bricks in the cellar. Being lowbrows, they accepted the story—even Burke did, at last, and with the usual results."

"And you yourself?" I inquired.

Ryckman threw me another quick side glance.

"I'm not altogether foolish!" he replied. Then he added, without looking at me: "And the cellar floor isn't of bricks. It's solid cement."

"Any details about that woman?" I asked, feeling that the more Ryckman could externalize the thing, as the psychopathologists phrase it, the better it would be for him.

"Nothing authentic, naturally. Those yarns never are authentic. But as far as I can gather the house was built about thirty years ago by a retired Lake captain. He was in middle life then, and married a young wife. They had two children. The first, a boy, was delicate and afraid of the water. This used to anger the old captain, who took the boy out in a boat and threw him overboard to make him a swimmer. The shock, or the strain on the boy's throat when he screamed, ruptured the vocal chords. At any rate, according to the story, it left him a mute. And the boy's mother never forgave his father. They lived under the same roof, side by side, for two years without speaking. Then the captain disappeared. They said he went back to the Lakes, took up sailing again. Then he came back one winter and tried to make up with his wife. She still refused to speak to him. He was drunk, and turned her out in zero weather. Three times she came back and rang the bell. The third time, they say, he dragged her in and killed her. As a matter of fact, I suppose, she died of exposure, or probably was never even turned out of the house."

"And the boy with the ruptured vocal chords?"

"He went to Baltimore and had an operation on his throat and got his voice back. He and his younger sister turned the place—they called it Pine Brae—into a fruit farm. But old Captain Hudson's family disputed the title and threw it on the market. That's how it came into my hands."

We had turned off the main road, and were winding down through a stretch of heavily wooded hills. We chugged and stuttered in past two huge stone gateposts, crawling on second speed through a spectral-looking orchard. Then we took a turn to the left and skirted a thick tangle of pine trees. Half hidden in the gloom of these pines I could make out the still gloomier pile of the house, without a light or a sign of life showing from any of its windows. As I sat in the car, while Ryckman got out to unlock his garage door, I could hear the sound of the lake booming desolately on the ice ridge along the shore.

"This is surely a sweet and homelike corner of the world you've bought yourself," I told him, with a candor born of much weariness of body and depression of mind.

"I don't believe I'll buy the place," he said, as he stood staring into the gloom of the pines.

"But you have bought it."

"Not altogether," he amended.

"There's a disputed title somewhere or other. That is one of the things you've got to look into for me at the county seat. I've been too busy, and I'm not much good at that work."

Again I detected a flaw in my young client's line of talk, but I did not draw his attention to it.

"Well, that's saner work than waiting for bells to ring," I told him, as I followed in his steps and circled the gloomy pile that huddled back among its gloomy pines. I stood beside him as he took out a key to unlock the forbidding oak door; I could see the faint glimmer of a polished brass knob. I reached out and touched it, feeling sure it was the hand knob of a pull bell. Then I let my gloved fingers close about it. The next moment I pulled promptly and deliberately on the knob.

From beyond that still unlocked door, from somewhere deep within the silent and tomblike house, I could hear the sudden, brazen clamor of the bell. I don't know whether it was the uttter desolation of the place or my own depressed spirits or the ghostly nonsense which Ryckman had been dishing up to me, but as I heard those muffled sounds reverberating through the gloom which I could not decipher I felt a shiver speed up and down my backbone.

Ryckman swung about as though he had been shot.

"Was that you?" he gasped, catching at my arm.

"Of course it was me," I retorted. But I could see that it had given him a bad turn.

Again I forced a laugh as I struck a match for him. He stood there until it burned out, before he turned again to unlock the door. Then I struck a second match. This time I held it close to the bell knob and looked it over. Then I stepped in through the opened door, at Ryckman's heels, following him into the silence of the unlighted house.

II.

I found the interior of Ryckman's house much more comfortable than I had anticipated. And I made the further discovery that Ryckman himself was a much more practical-minded man than I had thought him. He soon had a wood fire roaring in the huge fireplace of the great high-ceilinged hall, which ran the full length of the house. Then came a hot supper, of his own cooking, and coffee and cigars. And although the wind increased as the night advanced and the sound of it in the pine tops was no blither than the booming of the surf on the ice ridge below the lake cliffs, I found myself, what with the hot meal and the lighted lamps and the open fire and the easy-chairs, in a much more comfortable frame of mind.

The situation, as we smoked and talked, became a more matter-of-fact one, and when Ryckman carried a lamp to the rear end of the wide reception hall and pointed out the bell which was given to ringing without earthly reason or cause, I could even view that bell with half-amused disdain.

It was an old-fashioned and very ordinary-looking bell, swinging on the end of a curling steel band wire. When once set in motion, because of this wire, it would naturally oscillate for some length of time. I noticed that it stood high above the door tops, and could not be easily interfered with by any one crossing the back of the hall, which, Heaven knows, had doors enough standing on either side of it. I made particular note of this, for the back end of the hall was in shadow, far beyond the radiance of our open fire and the large reading lamp which stood behind us; and the deeper the shadows, I knew, the better the chances for that trickery of the senses which is all too readily accepted as the supernatural.

So fortified, in fact, did I become

in my skepticism that I determined to cut off all other chances of trickery. I first insisted on making sure we were alone in the house. And this we did by a most thorough and painstaking search of the place from attic to cellar. During that search, which was a dismal and bone-chilling experience, I stumbled on nothing that could be made to serve as an elucidation of Ryckman's tuppeny little mystery. I discovered, though, that the house was even larger and drearier than I had first thought it. I also discovered that the cellar, in which Ryckman had made preparations for installing a hot-water furnace, was a solid-walled, well-floored place in no way suggestive of the abnormal. The only feature of that cellar which could be called in any way irregular was a door which opened into a passageway running under the terrace to the east of the house. But this passage, Ryckman explained, had originally connected with a frame building holding two huge cider presses, for when the orchards of Pine Brae were in their prime the earlier owner had thought to make a business of champagnizing and aging native cider for the city market.

I made it a point to see, however, that the door of this passage was securely locked, just as I made it a point to see that every door and window on the ground floor could not be tampered with by a possible intruder. And as for intruders, I knew that no one could approach the house without leaving in the freshly fallen snow unmistakable marks of that approach. Yet before we settled ourselves before the open fire again I obtained a hammer and wood chisel from the quietly condoning Ryckman. With these, after some difficulty, I removed an inner board from his front-door casement, and then a couple of the floor boards, to make sure, as I had expected, that the bell wire ran along to the back of the house under our feet, and not overhead. My first impulse was quietly to cut this wire. But, on second thoughts, I surreptitiously loosened the set screw which held the brass bell pull in place. Then stepping outside for a moment on the pretext of making sure there were no footprints in the freshly driven snow, I drew the brass knob from its socket and slipped it into my pocket.

When I lighted a fresh cigar in front of Ryckman's open fire I was fortified with the knowledge that no one outside the house could ever interfere with my neurasthenic friend's bell. I nursed the even more comforting conviction that for one night at least this sleep-disturbing bell would remain quite normal. I had to struggle against a tendency, in fact, to doze off in the very face of Ryckman's spasmodic and thin-voiced talk. I even laughed a little, from the depths of my chair, when he showed me the Ross rifle he had brought into the hall and left leaning there in its corner, protesting that he always felt safer with the firearm at his elbow. Then I stretched myself and told him that I was tired and thought I'd turn in.

He stopped short at these words from me, and a look of trouble deepened on his thin and none-too-happy face.

"I'd rather you'd wait," he said.

"Wait for what?" I demanded.

He moved his head toward the hall end, where I knew the bell swung on its spring.

"But nothing's going to happen," I protested, as I sat watching him stare into the shadows at the back of the house. "Nothing *can* happen!"

"I want you to wait," he said, with a new and more wistful note in his voice. He was still watching the shadowy hall end, but I could see that his stare was not directed toward the bell itself.

"Ryckman," I suddenly asked him, "is there anything in this besides the mere ringing of that bell up there?"

"Yes," he replied, after a pause. But still he did not look at me. I became more conscious of a sense of reservation about the man and everything he had said to me.

"What's the other thing?" I inquired.

His right hand groped behind him, feeling for the chair arm. Having found it, he sank slowly down into its depths.

"It's a woman," he said. And I caught his vague look of abashment, his eye flash of mute protest against possible ridicule, as the strong side light picked out the shadows on his lean and tragic face.

"You mean you see a woman?" I asked, struggling to make my tone a casual one.

"I tell you, Buchner, I've seen her, as plain as I see that reading lamp. God only knows where she comes from or where she goes! But every line of her face stands out as distinctly as though it had a stage spotlight on it!"

"And you want me to sit up for a thing like that?" I demanded, with a pretense at disgust.

"Yes," he replied quite simply.

III.

I had been reading on and off for about an hour when Ryckman got up from his chair and crossed to the fireplace. He put on a fresh log, lighted a cigarette, and stood looking down at me.

"I guess it's no use," he said, with a sigh of weariness.

"Of course it's no use," I told him. "The combination, you see, is broken. According to the recipe, you have to be the last man left in the world—at least, in your world, as you put it. You have to be alone before you can get those things to happen—alone and all ready to let your sense be imposed upon."

He raised a hand and took the cigarette from between his lips. Then he lifted his head a little, as though to answer me. But he did not speak for a moment or two. Instead, he stood staring off into space.

"Oh, my God!" he said in a quick gasp. And, before I had quite realized that he had spoken, the quietness of the house was shattered by a sudden tumult of sound.

It was the bell!

There, on the wall before us, the bell had most unmistakably rung. It clamored out through the quietness with a suddenness that struck on the sense like a mallet blow. And with it it seemed to carry a note of desolation, of vague misery attempting to articulate itself, which sent a tingle arrowing up and down my startled body.

In a moment I was out of my chair, running toward the door. Instead of opening the door, as Ryckman expected me to do, I dropped on my knees before the torn-up floor boards. There I thrust my hand through the opening and firmly grasped the pull wire. I held it tight, so that it could not be moved. But even as I held it motionless the silence was again shattered by that unearthly brazen clamor.

"It will ring again," Ryckman was saying in a voice that sounded as thin as though it had come to me over a long-distance wire.

Neither of us spoke as the third signal sounded and died away. Then I ran to where Ryckman stood, with a scattering of high lights on his moistened forehead. I put my hand on his arm; I think I must have shaken him.

"Can you get me another lamp?" I asked him.

He did not answer me. But in the face staring over my shoulder I could see sudden terror. I could see the lips become flaccid and the eyes alter and widen. And I knew that behind me was a Something which had entered his line of vision, a Something which it was my duty to face.

I turned slowly about, forlornly struggling to fortify myself for anything with which I might be confronted. Then I leaned forward, with one hand on the chair back, giving vent as I did so to a little challenging call that was as foolish and futile as the squeak of a frightened mouse.

For there, before our eyes, was a figure in white, moving across the shadowy end of the hall. The figure was that of a woman still young.

I stood staring at her face, which seemed rapt and luminous. I could see the delicately chiseled nose and the line of the white cheek that merged into the slender chin. I could see the mouth, with the lips slightly parted. And then I saw something else. It was a trivial thing, but it drove the cold chill out of my legs. That apparition which I had tried to tell myself had been conjured up by overtense nerves and too active imagination had moistened its lips.

Even as I stepped forward I heard Ryckman call out. The next moment the place was filled with the reverberations of a quick report. I saw the vague figure in white wheel halfway round, throw out an arm, and go down on the floor. It was only then that I realized that Ryckman had made use of his rifle, and it was only then that I had the intelligence to clear the space between my chair and the far end of the hall.

"Bring the lamp," I called, "for I rather think you've killed a woman!"

I was down on my knees before a tangle of white cotton drapery, padding foolishly about a warm body which seemed hopelessly enmeshed in its swathings. I was exploring and feeling frantically about, trying to find the bullet wound.

"It's there in her shoulder," said Ryckman, with a choke in his voice. I could hear the lamp shade rattle against its holder in his shaking hand.

I was clumsily but determinedly cutting away the wet sleeve with my pocketknife when the bluest eyes I have ever looked into opened and stared up at me and then suddenly closed again.

"It's here in the arm," I cried out as I got the wet sleeve away. "Fetch me something for a tourniquet, quick!"

He was back with enough linen and lint to outfit a Red Cross camp.

"I'm better at this than you are," he said, as he dropped on his knees and elbowed me aside. "I want you to get a doctor."

"How?" I demanded.

"Can you run a car?" He was busy tightening the tourniquet.

"No!"

"Then you'll have to telephone from the Tishburn Farm. There's a rural line there that connects with Egerton Corners. Take my fur motor coat. And follow the trail until you come to the main road where we turned in."

"And then what?" I asked, as I struggled into the coat.

"The Tishburns will tell you the rest," he said, without looking up, for he was busy making a pillow for the tumble-haired head so close beside him.

"But do you know who this woman is?" I demanded.

"Yes, I do," he retorted.

"Who is she?"

"She's the daughter of the man who built this house."

IV.

It was two hours later that the practicing physician of Egerton Corners drove up to the Tishburn farmhouse. He came in a "cutter" that looked about as big as a conch shell, and drove a team of spanking bays. He wore a coonskin hat and a greatcoat of the same outlandish fur, looking like a cross between a submarine monster and an Eskimo in spectacles.

So I duly said good-by to the Tish-

burns—who had all promptly arisen and dressed and joined me about their sitting-room "base-burner," waiting, avid-eyed, for some inkling as to why a doctor should be called up at such unseemly hours—and climbed in beside that fur-smothered practitioner, who further barricaded me beneath a ponderous buffalo robe.

He waved his whip to the cluster of faces peering from the lighted window, touched his bays on their steaming flanks, and chuckled audibly as we swung down into the Lake Road.

"Now I understand why you gave me the message in Latin," he said from the depths of his furs, nodding back toward the crowded casement.

"It's the sort of thing one has to keep quiet," I explained.

"Naturally," he agreed. "But I'd like a few of the particulars, nevertheless."

I told him, as briefly as I could, what had happened that night. He took it all as a matter of course—that is, with the one exception of Ryckman.

"This man, Ryckman, is a bit eccentric, isn't he?"

I remembered how I had been elbowed aside and dumped out into the night, to say nothing of being brought four hundred miles to hear a bell ring.

"Most eccentric," I admitted, "for one so young."

"I've always thought as much," said the man at my side.

It was my turn to surrender to undue curiosity and put a question to him.

"Who in the world," I casually inquired, "could that young woman be?"

The fur-clad figure tooled his team in through the broken-down stone gateposts of Pine Brae.

"Oh, that's old Captain Hudson's daughter. She and her brother live in the cottage just beyond the old orchard there."

But he would say nothing more. Ryckman himself, once we were back in the house, was equally reticent of speech. He already seemed to look on me as an outsider, an interloper. When I told him, a little wearily, that I thought I'd be going back with the doctor in the morning, he did not even demur. He merely said it was a nasty flesh wound, but that the patient was doing nicely and they would have a trained nurse there by noon.

"But how about that bell?" I inquired.

He was carrying towels and hot water upstairs to the doctor. He stopped only long enough to regard me with a cold and unsympathetic eye.

"How d'you expect me to talk about bells when I've got a sick woman to look after?" was his quite ungenerous and altogether unsatisfactory answer.

It was not until the end of January that I heard from Ryckman. He had been busy, he said, installing his hot-water heating system and finishing up his Frohman comedy.

"You will be glad to know," he continued, "that Catherine's arm is quite healed. She asked me to explain to you about the bell.

"They had told her that if the family could retain possession of Pine Brae until over the New Year, their legal claim, in the matter of that disputed title I told you about, would be unassailable. The bell kept ringing because she had a key to the passageway and could step into the cellar and pull the wire overhead when she felt it would do the most good. She's a wonderful girl, Buchner, even though she did try to frighten me out of a perfectly good home and into a psychopathic ward. And it seems only fair to confide to you, remembering the generous part you played in it all, that Catherine and I are to be married the second week in February."

A Chat With You

WHATEVER we have worth keeping needs care if we are to enjoy its possession. Books are defaced and torn, pictures are hidden with dust, furniture loses its beauty, silver grows tarnished, through neglect. We have possessions of an immaterial sort much more valuable than anything we can handle or touch. Aspiration, hope, ideals are all much more necessary to a sound and happy life than anything bought with money. They direct the current of our thought and feeling, give light and color to an existence that would be dull and meaningless without them. They may awaken and set free at rare moments that better genius that sleeps in every man and that has been responsible for all great heroism and achievement.

OUR ideals, our conceptions of what was beautiful or noble or true, came to us new-wrought and gleaming. Like the picture covered with dust, they may come to lose their meaning. They need attention if they are to remain valuable to us. Religion—every one, whether he knows it or not, has some sort of religion—may come to be a meaningless formula; the celebration of Christmas, which, in spite of war and suffering, is in the air in all parts of the world to-day, may develop into a hypocritical and ceremonial nuisance.

IT is well to remember now the first impression that Christmas gave us. Surely there was a time for almost every one when the words "Merry Christmas!" meant something more than a salutation, something really bright and generous and glowing. Surely the Christmas trees and presents of long ago are not quite forgotten. Surely there was a time when a Christmas dinner was really a great and memorable feast. If we have any such memories, we know that they are ours, partly by virtue of one of the oldest and certainly the most beautiful of human traditions, and partly through the devotion and unselfishness of those who in other days were simple and wise enough to honor the tradition and obey it.

IT is true that those who give us the most happiness are often beyond the reach of our gratitude. We owe them something—but it cannot be paid back. The most we can do is to do as they did, and hand the light and blessing to others, who have come later, and whom we benefit without hope of reward. After all, is not this a higher and better form of gratitude? Is it not the fruit of the seed of Christianity itself, a natural and spontaneous manifestation of that spirit which continually strives to break down the barriers of family or race or prejudice and to build a greater commonwealth of all

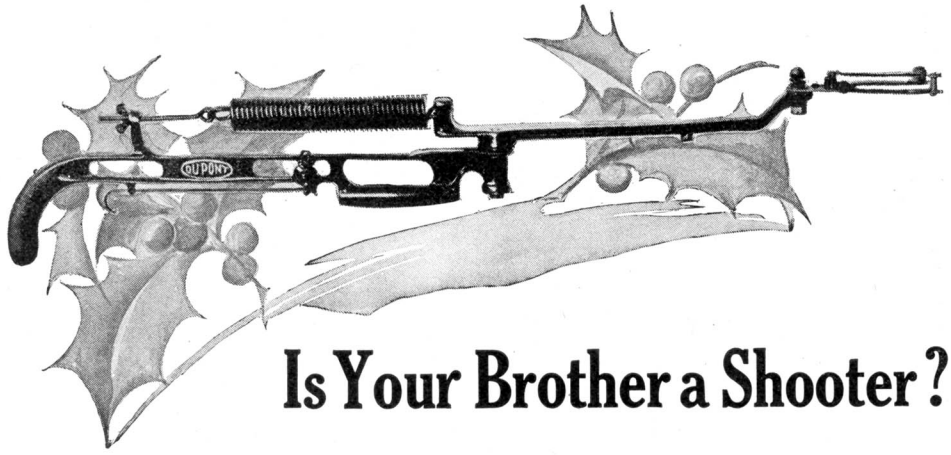
mankind? Is it not a tribute to the truth and vitality of that spirit that, in spite of war or disaster, in spite of shifting philosophies and failing creeds, Christmas is the one universal holiday still observed over all the world?

THE principles of Christianity are something quite beyond professed religion or formal creed. To deny their force and truth to-day, in the presence of the terrible struggle of a world war, is easy. So is it easy to deny the fact that honesty is the best policy in the face of a successful bank burglary. Christianity may fail in appearance now as it has in the past. Like all great truths, it needs time and breadth of application to prove its veracity. If there were only one believer in the doctrines of unselfishness, forgiveness, and consideration in the world, he would scarce live a day. The wider spread the application of the idea, the truer it becomes. For centuries the charm, the artistic and spiritual beauty of the spirit kept it alive. The time is coming when it will shine forth as a living, practical truth, even in the literal sense. Thousands died for it, protesting to the last the greatness and truth of the conception. Now it becomes evident that it is more than a help to a noble death; it is the finest and happiest way to live.

WE like Christmas best because it is the most significant of Christian holidays. A celebration of the awakening of nature from the death-like sleep of winter, long antedated our Easter, and is as old as Thor and Odin themselves. They had temples and religious services long before Abraham founded his race. Ra and Osiris, Zeus and Apollo, sun gods and earth divinities have been prayed to and sung to from time immemorial, and some of our meaningless customs date back to such misty days. The little tassels on the umbrella that always get in the way were originally acorns. Acorns come from the oak, and the oak was sacred to Zeus, who threw the thunderbolts, so they were a great protection in a thunderstorm. Christmas, however, is a newer idea. The thought of "good will to all mankind" is so new that we are still struggling with the conception. We can't, of course, live up to it or feel it all year, just yet. But for one day we ought to do it and have a good time doing it, too.

IS it practical to interrupt our daily business, to decorate house and hall with evergreens, to give to those from whom we expect nothing? If we go through it as an empty form, it is meaningless and worse than impractical, for the word without the spirit is a mockery. If we can remember our own happiness, if we can still feel the glow of gratitude, we do well to try to convey it to others. We are helping to keep bright and inviolate one of the good gifts that, once received, none but ourselves can ever deprive us of.

Three wise men came out of the east to Bethlehem. And they brought with them gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Perhaps the symbolism of the gifts was the best proof of the wisdom and prescience of the magi. And perhaps we are wisest when we bring gifts at Christmas time.



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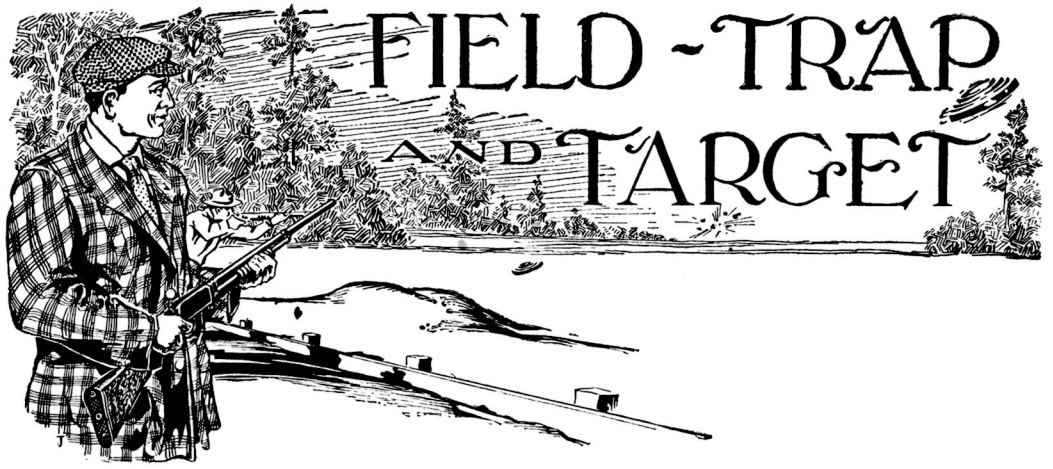

ENTER TRAPSHOOTING.

JUST at this time when trapshooting is enjoying the full flush of popularity, and the other outdoor sports are either fast waning or have entered into their long winter season of hibernation, perhaps a few figures relative to the clay-pigeon sport may be interesting.

It may not be generally known, but there is about $20,000,000 invested in the sport.

There are approximately 500,000 trapshooters in the country to-day, 12,000 of which number competed in registered tournaments in 1916.

There are 4,108 active gun clubs in existence. 737 of these were organized in 1916.

It is estimated that $4,000,000 is spent annually for targets and shells, and close to another $2,000,000 is spent by trapshooters for car fare, hotel bills, and other incidentals.

LICENSE FEES.

THERE is only one State in the Union that does not now require a nonresident to have a license. That State is Arkansas.

There are only four States in the Union now that do not require a resident to purchase a hunter's license. Those States are Maine, Virginia, North Carolina, and Mississippi.

Every province in Canada requires both the resident and the nonresident to have a hunter's license.

For a record for you to keep we publish the nonresident fee in every State in the Union and every province in Canada.

Maine, $5-$15; New Hampshire, $15; Massachusetts, $10; Connecticut, $10; Rhode Island, $10; Vermont, $10; New York, $20; New Jersey, $10; Delaware, $10.50; Pennsylvania, $10; Maryland, $2.75-$25; Virginia, $10; North Carolina, $10; West Virginia, $16; Tennessee, $10; Kentucky, $15; South Carolina, $15; Georgia, $15; Florida, $15; Alabama, $15; Mississippi, $20; Louisiana, $15; Arkansas, none; Missouri, $25; Illinois, $10; Indiana, $15; Ohio, $15; Michigan, $10-$25; Wisconsin, $10-$25; Minnesota, $10-$25; Iowa, $10; North Dakota, $25; South Dakota, $15-$25; Nebraska, $10; Kansas, $15; Oklahoma, $15; Texas, $15; Montana, $10-$25; Wyoming, $5-$25; Colorado, $1-$10; New Mexico, $10-$25; Idaho, $5-$25; Utah, $5; Arizona, $10-$25; Washington, $5-$10; Oregon, 10; Nevada, $10; California, $10.

New Brunswick, $10-$50; Quebec, $10-$25; Ontario, $25-$50; Manitoba, $15-$50; Saskatchewan, $10-$50; Alberta, $5-$25; British Columbia, $5-$100.

Where there is more than one amount stated it shows the scale from small game to the largest game, the maximum amount including all game that is in season at the time the license is issued.

THE NAVY RECORD.

TRAPSHOOTING on United States warships has been a popular form of amusement for some time, and as a result several of the officers have become experts.

Paymaster F. R. Holt, U. S. S. *Louisiana,* recently set up a mark that is likely to stand for some time. The paymaster broke 97 targets out of a possible 100. This is mighty fine shooting, and establishes a record in the navy which, to our knowledge, has never been equaled or surpassed.

From Clermont to California

The first steamboat, the *Clermont*, built by Robert Fulton, was running on the Hudson when the Hartford Fire Insurance Company of Hartford, Conn., began writing fire insurance in 1810. Throughout the entire history of steam navigation, from Fulton's crude experiment to the great super-dreadnaught *California* with its turbine-electric drive, there has been an equally remarkable insurance development toward the present comprehensive

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