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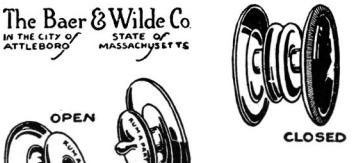

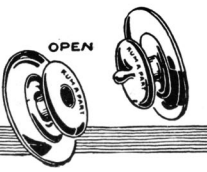

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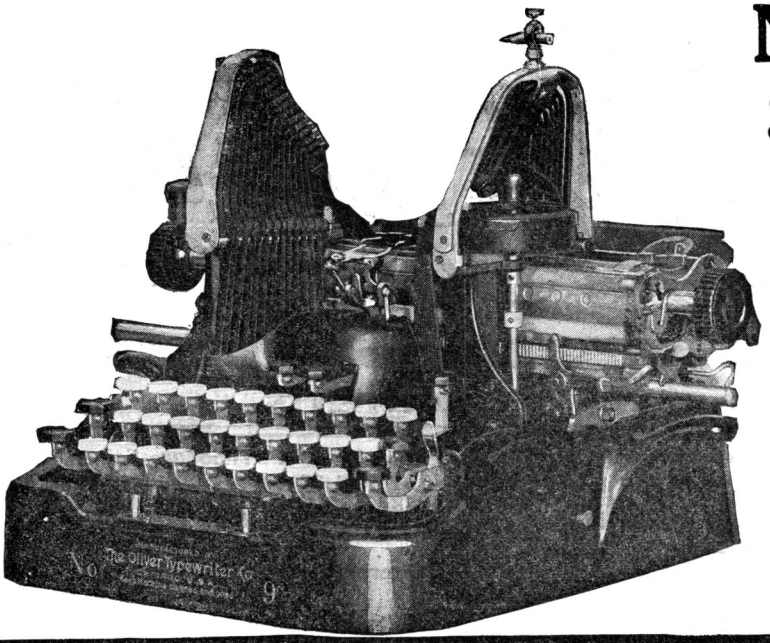

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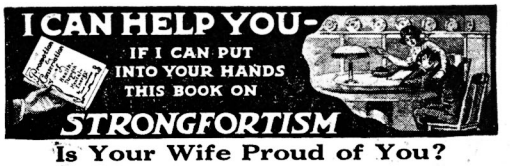

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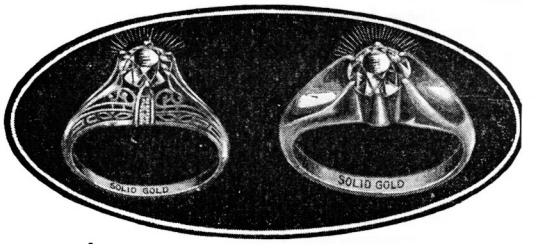

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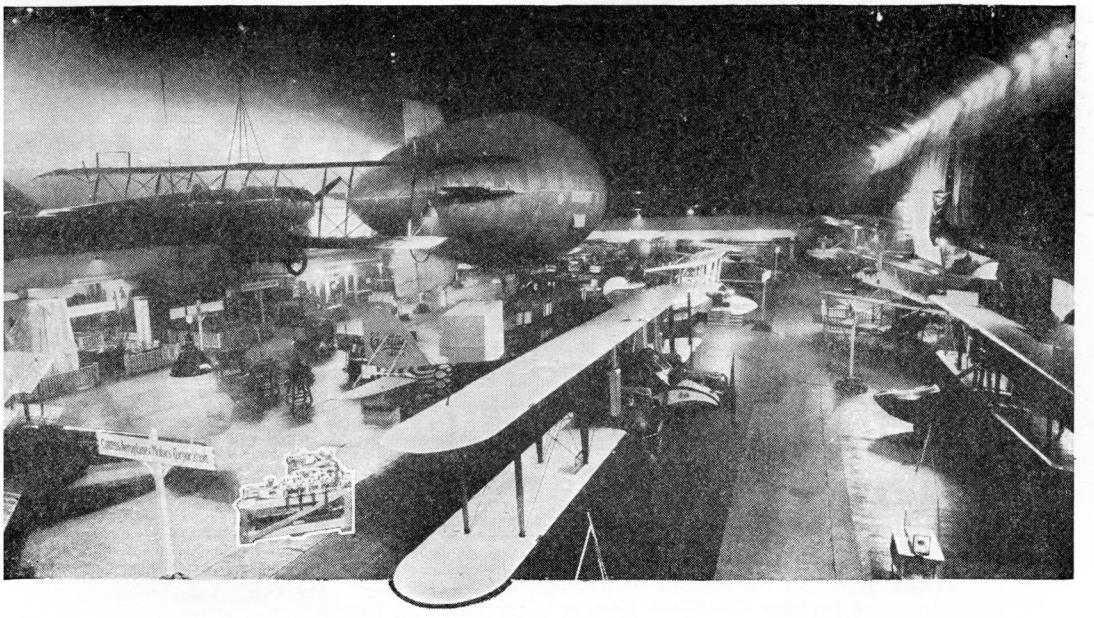

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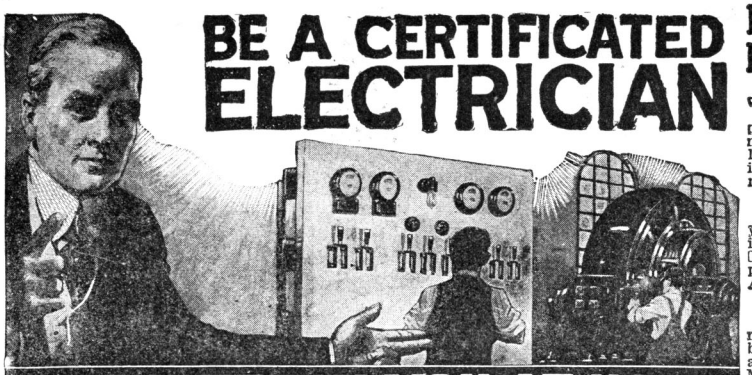

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LVIII. DECEMBER 7, 1920. No. 4

The Implacable Friend

By Theodore Seixas Solomons

Author of "The Young Barbarian," Santa Claws," Etc.

We would all be lucky to have a friend implacable in Bruce Waring's manner. There is more than a fine "yarn" of Alaskan mining to this tale. It is also the story of the saving of a man from himself. Frederick Ticely, supersalesman, believed in making what you have to sell look as pretty as possible. Waring believed in making it look just what it was. Incidentally, if we were in the habit of putting a text to our stories, this one might well bear the ancient one about casting your bread upon the waters. Certainly Ticely's kindness to young Waring was repaid many times over.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

THE GRUBSTAKED MAN.

THERE were many tall caches along the bank of the river, on the outskirts of the tent "city" of Kusko, most of them provided with ladders. But Bruce Waring had never needed a ladder to make the platform, where his outfit was stored under a heavy tarpaulin. A bear hug of the post, a few vigorous kicks, and the lithe fellow was up. But not to-day.

He managed to climb halfway up, and then slid down again, and leaned against the post.

"I wonder what's the matter with me," he muttered.

Every week since midsummer, he had come in to Kusko City from the distant, barren, swale where he was prospecting, for a pack of grub for himself and his Indian helper. Last night, though tired as usual, he could not sleep. To-day, the trail was stumblier, the muck bogs stickier, the mosquitos higher pitched of voice, more obstinately voracious than ever before.

Two men, smoking pipes, went by him bearing a stretcher. Waring followed them and caught up with the rear bearer.

"What's the matter with him?" he asked.

"Typhoid, of course," was the answer.

Then Waring remembered that some one had told him that that scourge of the unsanitary northern camp had broken out in Kusko. "Perhaps I've got it," he thought. "I'll find out."

He followed on through the sprawl of flimsy canvas structures and willow-bough, mud-plastered shacks which Alaskan optimism had grandiloquently christened Kusko City, to a dirty, rambling row of tents at the edge of the dun, spudgy flat, through which the big river ran.

The stretcher bearers stopped in front of a khaki-colored tent, on which was crudely daubed a red cross, and the words: "Canned Milk Wanted in Exchange for Lives."

"Hullo, doc!" called one.

"Doc" came up the line, from one of the muck-surrounded tents, and glanced at the blanket-covered man on the stretcher.

"Take him into the last tent over there, boys," he directed casually. "He'll have to go on the floor, for the present, until the A M Company condescends to rummage through their warehouse for some more cots —if they've got 'em. What's the matter with you, young fellow?" he asked, turning

with affected gruffness to the tall, wabbly looking, young prospector.

Waring grinned sheepishly. "I dunno; I'm kind of sick all over."

Doctor Rose asked him a few questions, and then said: "Go along with that other fellow and lay alongside of him, and do what you can for him, for he's a deal sicker than you are, and very emaciated. You'll have plenty of time, yet, before you're bad. I'll see you later."

He walked rapidly toward the other end of the row, answering the beckoning finger of a very large and very fat woman with a red cross sewed on her billowy bosom. Even at seventy-five yards, Bruce could see that her white gown was sadly in need of laundering.

Waring found the rough boards of Tent 11 of the Kusko Hospital very comfortable. He lay on his side, a single thickness of his Hudson's Bay blanket drawn to his chest, and watched the man who had lately occupied the stretcher. There was a bucket of boiled water, on an empty cream box, at the door. This seemed to constitute the entire medical equipment of hospital tent No. 11.

"Got a cache, somewhere?" asked the doctor, on his first visit to his new patient.

"You bet," said Waring, "and it's a peach. I've been grubstaked by a prince of a man, and here I am lying——"

"Forget it," said Rose abruptly. "You'll dig no less gold for him than the next man. Where's your cache? You need some things here."

Bruce described its location, and then tried to sleep.

Early next morning a stretcher man brought to Doctor Rose's tent—a floorless, eight by ten, bedroom, kitchen, office, and hospital dispensary all in one—the dunnage bag of Bruce Waring and the Red Cross monstrosity, squatting on the floor, pawed through it for personal-record data. Some letters, accounts, and memoranda in a leather pocketbook disclosed the fact that one Frederick R. Ticely had purchased and paid for a very extensive, though otherwise typical, Alaskan prospector's outfit, which had been shipped to Bruce Waring at Kusko City. The invoices were addressed to Ticely at the Ticely Realty Corporation, 106 Merchants Loan Building, Seattle—which was the information the Red Cross lady wanted. That address looked like help, and she waddled down the tent row till she found Doctor Rose—who was lifting a delirious patient back into his cot—and showed him the invoices.

"Ought to stand for a collect telegram, don't you think?" she asked.

"Without doubt. Tell him the boy is in his first week—and no money. That's the worst of these grubstaked men. They tell 'em outside that money's no good in Alaska; all they need is a good outfit!"

Whereupon, Mrs. McColgan, a Klondike veteran mining-camp nurse, spudged across the flat, to the river-front shacks, and sent a collect telegram on the Kusko Hospital's guaranty—which was none too good.

The Ticely Realty Corporation was a product of the erratic genius of Frederick Ransome Ticely, multiplied by the Seattle-Alaska status quo of post-Klondike days. A big fire, plus general stagnation in the West, had held the energies of that city in leash, for some years, when the great gold strike in the Yukon flashed upon the world. Men who, a few years later, would never have dreamed of a raw life in the outlands, disgusted with the torpor of the times, converted their assets into flour and bacon and took, therefore, a bill of lading on any crazy craft that could be patched up for a run up the Inside Passage.

Ticely, then a young and unmarried hardware salesman, was one of the argonauts. He managed to obtain a "lay" on one of the best claims, as it turned out later, on far-famed El Dorado Creek; struck good pay, and, just because he was Frederick Ticely and couldn't help it, sold it for thirty thousand dollars while the selling was good—and lost half a million! He invested in Hunker Creek benches, struck pay once more, and, the selling again being good, sold it for twenty thousand dollars' profit.

Indeed, he could not *refrain* from selling, any more than the drunkard can refrain from drinking or the liar from lying. With his fifty-odd thousand he organized the Ticely Realty Corporation, which was ninety-nine per cent Ticely and one per cent corporation. Also, he married Cecelia Bellingham, who, because she was as unlike him as only a woman could be who instinctively and passionately loathed the thing that is found on the seamy side of business, intensively attracted him, and was as intensively attracted by him. He needed live help and he got it; and if he had not been

as bad a business man as he was good as a salesman—good being an utterly feeble word to describe his salesmanship—he would have made a million.

Near a summer resort, in the big timber of the Cascades, he found Bruce Waring burying his mother and shipping his young sister to an aunt, to go to school. Beyond a meager education, all the fellow possessed of tangible assets was a worthless homestead and a strong back. But he had ambition and a slow, steady, implacable sort of purpose to be something, if he could be it in his own way—which was a way that Frederick Ticely was one day to learn was not *his* way, till life, aided by Bruce Waring, ground him into something like the shape of that way.

Ticely, like all master salesmen, was a nearly unerring judge of men. Therefore he invited the gaunt, awkward, solemn-faced youth to come to Seattle and work for him. For which he was immediately repaid by a glance of high approval from Cecelia Ticely, whose approval was, next to putting over a seemingly impossible sale, the most glorious satisfaction that Frederick Ticely knew anything about.

In Seattle Waring worked on a high stool, lived in a small room, and boarded where he could do so most frugally. At first an occasional visitor, he soon became a weekly dinner guest of Cecelia Ticely and her husband—when the latter was not out of town on some wild hunt for subdivisible suburban land. She made Bruce feel so perfectly at home that his pride permitted this intimacy with the Ticelys.

He climbed other and better paying stools in the busy offices of the Ticely Realty Corporation, but his legs numbed, as they hunched themselves on the rungs; his feet itched for the crackle of dead fir twigs underfoot, or in a fire; his arms ached for the swing of an ax; his fingers tingled for the cool grip of a rifle.

Ticely was disappointed in him, as an employee. His work was good, but it was cheap work—hopelessly clerical; and this was not what he wanted in a man of his own choosing. He felt that his salesmanship, in which he had a satanic pride, had been at fault. He had proposed to sell to Waring a sure and rapid success, and Waring couldn't buy! Ticely had failed to make the sale!

So when, at dinner one evening, the young man talked in an unwonted manner of enthusiasm of the latest gold strike in the Kuskokwim country, Ticely, thoughtfully studying him a moment, asked:

"How would you like to take a run up there as the representative of—well, say Ticely & Waring, prospectors?"

Mrs. Ticely laughed. "You'd like to go yourself, you nomad!"

Not denying it, he waited for Waring's answer. "How does it strike you, Bruce?"

The young fellow was very serious. "If you mean it," he finally replied, "why it's the one thing in the world I'd like to do—if you think I'd be likely to make good."

"As likely as any man I know. All right, then; it's settled."

Mrs. Ticely concealed in Waring's outfit a lot of jelly and the sort of cake that keeps. She could have bought it, but, instead, she made it herself; and she said good-by to him at the dock, and waited for her last handkerchief wave till the steamer was so far away she was sure he could no longer distinguish her.

CHAPTER II.

"FOR THE GIFT WITHOUT THE GIVER IS BARE."

Ticely held the receiver of his desk phone, and drummed a moment on his blotter.

"Hullo, Celie? I have a wire from a doctor in Kusko about Waring. He's got typhoid—evidently an epidemic up there. Says will do his best, but if I can send money the chance will be better. Yes, too bad, poor fellow. You want to talk to me about it? Well—oh, all right. I'll be up to luncheon, in half an hour."

This is what she said to him: "You know what typhoid is! Didn't you tell me it broke out in Dawson, while you were there the first year. It must be frightful, up there in that swampy river district, in a small camp, and everybody poor—a very little gold and a very great crowd. Ugh!" she shuddered.

"Well, my dear, I've telegraphed two hundred and fifty dollars, and instructions to draw on me for more, if necessary."

"But typhoid means nursing; a clean, decent place, and just the proper food—milk and broths, and *very* great care. How is that poor boy to get those things, especially during an epidemic? Mere money is no assurance."

"But what can we do?"

"Let me go up there and look after him."

Ticely dropped his fork. "Absurd, Celie.

He'll be dead, or well, by the time you could get there."

"No, sir! The telegram says he's just down. That's almost a hint. Typhoid runs for weeks. And the trip takes—how long?"

"About a week."

"There you are. Fred; it's more than a case of the gift without the giver. We owe it to him."

"The contract merely provides——"

"Nothing about typhoid—I know. But think what you told him, when he left—'We'll back you, my boy, in every way.' You put up a little money, and he puts up his work. So far, you're even. But, besides his work, he puts up his life—the risk of it: A glacier, a gas-filled shaft, typhoid! He's entitled to the very best help we can give him. That is the substance of our real obligation to him, whatever the mere words were. I have no child that needs me and—I want to go."

"You go right ahead, little woman," said Ticely humbly.

He told her to take whatever she wished, and she did a clever piece of work, that afternoon. She had no idea what Kusko City could or could not furnish her, so she assumed nothing. She bought and shipped a small portable house and many things to put in it; four kinds of canned milk, and other foods for convalescence; and magazines. And *paper flowers!*

The paper flowers were the first things that Bruce Waring really saw, when he came out of the land of illusion; and next, the plump white angel, no longer flitting amid fantastic, absurdly incongruous surroundings, but as and where she really was—in a clean, smooth-boarded, square little house divided by a curtain. He was not sure. He tried to whisper, but he was too weak; quite too weak to put out his hand. But she came to him and laughed and talked, for a few moments, and his cooling brain told him it was really Cecelia Ticely. The filthy tent, the dirty men attendants, the obese and overworked Mrs. McColgan—where were they?

A week later—three weeks after her arrival—she answered all these questions. And, when he wondered at her goodness, she told him very simply that she did not regard it as goodness but rather as business—the business of life, she said it was, to keep to the spirit of your compact. And the last thing she told him, when they parted at the gangplank—it was she, this time, who was to embark—was that he must not say that he owed her anything. He must not even think it! He told her, in his slow, cogitative way, that it was too unbelievably wonderful, to owe your life to a person to whom you owed nothing for it! Some day, perhaps, he might be able to repay her in the same magic way—the way that needs no requital. He walked up the river bank trail, an extremely thin and very thoughtful young prospector.

He approached his cache with a great deal of anxiety, and, when he reached it, he borrowed a ladder, investigated the nether side of the big tarpaulin, and found his fears realized. His essential supplies were gone!

He was not sorry, on the whole. It gave him an excellent reason for shaking the dust, or rather the muck, of the Kuskokwim country from his boots. He hated the place of his nearly mortal sickness—mortal indeed, but for the ministrations of Cecelia Ticely. He pined for trees, for mountains, to remind him of his home land, forested Washington. Northward, in the Yukon, he could find them—and placer country, too. where, with better chances than in this absurdedly overrated camp, he could carry out an obligation which was now more binding upon him than before. Mrs. Ticely had insisted upon giving him what money she had left—several hundred dollars. She did not propose, she said, to hear again of his needing money in a dire emergency. So, with his dog team and Indian, he would go northward into the great Yukon basin and buy, at the last outpost, grub for another year's prospecting.

With the glazing of the marshes, in the first sharp cold, off they started, Ivan the Indian, with his three mongrels hitched to a flat Yukon sled, trailing Waring with his big basket sled, loaded to the rails. The ice of the marshes and sloughs held to the base of the fifty-mile slops of tundra, whose rise and fall, scarcely perceptible except to a straining husky, marks the height of land between the Kuskokwim and the Yukon. There they were held up for white weather, but they got three fat caribou. One night's snow gave them skidding, for their tundra run, over to the endless swales and sloughs of the lower Yukon, where they made good time to the mouth of the Innoko. Then a short portage—and suddenly they canted steeply down the bank of the mighty Yukon

itself, northern Father of Waters, three miles wide, here, and already covered by an eighteen-inch roof of glare ice.

In five days they had made the two hundred miles to Kaltag, where the ancient, as well as the modern, portage to Unalaklik, on the Bering Sea, cuts off four hundred miles of the river route to Nome. Waring's objective was Nulato, some seventy-five miles farther up, where he proposed to replenish his supplies and ascend the Koyukuk River to Bettles and Tramway Bar, of which he had heard old-timers speak with much respect.

Both before and since the days of Midas and Bruce Waring, the Koyukuk River has been one of the most fascinating riddles of the northern gold field. Destiny decreed, however, that he was to approach his goal from another direction.

CHAPTER III.

CHANGING HORSES IN MIDSTREAM.

A week before Waring and Ivan, the Kuskokwim Indian, left Kaltag, a downriver steamer, the *Michael Cudahy,* stuck in the ice halfway between Nulato and Kaltag. She had bucked the slush ice for a week, hoping against hope to make the river mouth where, due to the later freezing of the salt water, she could count with certainty on reaching St. Michael with her little bunch of belated passengers.

She wore her bow half through forcing leads in the still-moving mass of granular ice when, early one morning the floating field of glinting gray paused—and moved no more for eight months! The captain cursed feelingly, for now the company would have to feed those fifteen passengers, for weeks on end, till he could get them back to Nulato.

Joan Manners, the quiet girl aboard, would probably have wept and might have had hysterics, if she had been that kind of a young woman. But five years of life on the upper Yukon enabled her to take the dilemma with the philosophy of the true adventurer and to show no trepidation to the ruling spirits of the *Michael Cudahy.* By which reference is made to "Slim Jim" Collins and his pals, which included at least one of the other two women. Ever since he had boarded the boat at the mouth of the Tanana River, Joan had had to make shift to avoid the attentions of the long, cadaverous miner from Fairbanks, the big camp of the Tanana. She thought he would have done better to confine his compliments, and his offers to promenade, to Miss O'Brien, who also was from Fairbanks and whom he seemed to know extremely well.

When the *Cudahy* became part and parcel of the Yukon ice field, Collins, cautiously venturing ashore, found an Indian village, somewhere up a tributary valley, and returned with the news that there were dogs to be had—and he had them; enough for one good team, which would be ready in a day or two. He and his friend Hennessy, a short, red-whiskered, intemperate individual, and Miss O'Brien, and also Miss Manners—if she would like to go—would run downriver to the Kaltag cut-off. They were all bound for Nome, and that was the way. It wasn't a great distance to the portage, only a three-days' run across to the road houses, up the Norton Sound coast, to their destination.

Joan's misery was a divided one. If she stayed, her father, Judge Manners, who was waiting for her in Nome, would go crazy with anxiety. If she accepted this invitation, she placed herself in the hands of two men whom she distrusted. No rough externals deceived this young frontierswoman, who would have seen in them rather insignia of dependability. But Slim Jim Collins, in the trimmest rig of the northern miner, well-to-do, ostentatious, wearing nuggets—he was of a type she knew. He and his like made good trailmates, often, but—she could not forget his obvious admiration of her.

She decided to go, for her father's sake. She had a small but very effective revolver, which, of course, she did not expect to have to use. Her equipment otherwise consisted of a small bag of necessary articles and her wolfskin robe. The master of the *Michael Cudahy,* with a sigh of relief, checked off four.

Betraying no misgivings, and with the most amiable spirit, twenty-year-old Joan Manners took her seat back of Miss O'Brien in the long, clumsy Indian sled, while Slim Jim Collins held the handle bars directly behind her. Hennessy jogged contentedly in the rear. Before the steamer was out of sight around a three-mile bend, Joan suspected that she had made a mistake, but it was not till toward evening, when it was too late to return alone, that she was sure of it. Collins, riding upon the back of the sled, had patted her shoulder earlier in the

day. Now he essayed franker familiarities. She turned and rose in the sled.

"Surely, you don't wish to make me walk all the way back to the *Cudahy!*"

"My dear little girl," he replied, "you couldn't do it and live, to-night. We've made too good time. Forget it, and be a good little sport. Nobody's going to kill you. You're in Alaska now!"

"I've been in Alaska perhaps as long as you have, Mr. Collins; and it isn't my way, and you know it very well. Please let us have an understanding. If you take me to Nome, in the way I wish to go, I shall be very grateful to you, and I or my father will repay you my full share of the cost. But if you force any caresses upon me, I shall have to kill you!"

Miss O'Brien had been giggling; but at this warning of her sister traveler she gasped:

"Gawd, girlie, don't pull any tragedy-queen stuff. It'll spoil our trip. He don't mean nothing. Take it from me."

"Miss O'Brien is right," said Collins soberly, "I meant no harm at all. Most gals like a little pettin' now and then."

Joan had resumed her seat, in silent misery, and was debating whether to chance freezing to death, in an attempted return to the steamer, or to go on—and keep incessant vigil over this suspiciously affectionate miner. She was in the throes of indecision, when suddenly she heard a faint jingle, and soon, in the dusk, she saw approaching them another sled.

The dogs of the two teams engaged on the instant of their encounter, and there was the usual tangle of bodies and harness and the bedlam of battle, punctuated by the harsh commands of their drivers. Slim Jim had run ahead to the fray and was pulling off his dogs. On the other side, a tall, lithe man and an Indian were doing the same thing with their own team.

A sudden determination came to Joan. She got out of the sled and stepped briskly to the lithe young man. She came close to him and looked boldly up in his face. He drew off his cap in the frosty air and steadily returned her scrutiny, but in such a manner of good nature and respect that she said impulsively:

"I don't know who you are, but will you take me upriver with you to the steamer which is stuck in the ice? We left it this morning."

Slim Jim Collins, turning his leader over to Hennessy, came up to them. Whereupon the girl moved a little closer to the stranger, who appreciated the significance of this slight movement.

Looking Collins in the eye, Bruce Waring said to the girl, "You seem to be afraid of this man. What's the matter, miss?"

"Nothing," she replied calmly, "except—just what you have said."

"Look here, stranger," said Collins, "you mush on and keep out of my affairs." And he shook a warning finger in Waring's face.

Bruce laughed lightly and went to Collins' sled, followed by the girl.

"Show me your things, Miss——"

"Manners. Just this bag and robe."

Collins stalked up. "See here, my friend, you butt out of this. You get me?" His eyes slitted.

Waring, satchel and robe under his left arm, paused a moment, his right hand at his body—a detail not lost on Collins. Watching the latter, alertly, Bruce said to Joan:

"Do you know the name and address of this gentleman?"

"I think I do," answered Joan.

"That's good. Just get into my sled, Miss Manners."

"In a moment." She took a few steps toward Miss O'Brien, who was exceedingly nervous. "Won't you go back with me? You know I wouldn't have ventured on this trip with no other woman."

"I'm in Mr. Collins' party," the other answered coldly.

Joan stepped to Waring's sled and sat on the load. She watched the motionless men, her hand in her pocket, ready, if Hennessy took a hand in the dispute, to draw on him. Unless Hennessy did take a hand, she was sure that the stranger needed no assistance.

"I'll remember you," said Collins sinisterly, as he moved to the rear end of his sleigh.

"Thanks," said Bruce dryly. He did not move till Collins had driven off. Then he went to the girl and again took off his cap.

"I am Bruce Waring, from Seattle, a grubstaked prospector. I've been down at Kusko for nearly a year, and I'm going into the Koyukuk, somewhere, after gold."

"So I supposed," smiled Joan.

She looked about her. But for the presence of a stolid native, she was alone with this young stranger, in as vast and drear a solitude as any her imagination could know.

For just a moment a timid fancy whispered: "Out of the frying pan into the fire, perhaps." But her quiet heart and nerves reassured her.

"We'd better camp, I think," suggested the young man, a little awkwardly.

"Of course," agreed Joan, in as bravely casual a way as she could.

"Mush on, little fellers," he called to the dogs, "Gee!" He swerved them to a wooded river bar, and brought them to a halt at the edge of the ice.

After a hearty supper, their backs to a blazing fire, she told him of what had led to her predicament. Her father, professionally a lawyer of not a little repute in his home State, had been a miner in the Yukon camps since she was a little girl. Over five years before, he had sent for her mother and herself, and they had lived happily together in the North, Manners practicing law at Eagle till, a year ago, he had left Joan teaching school and gone to Nome to accept the appointment of commissioner, an office similar to that of justice of the peace. Then Mrs. Manners had died of typhoid fever.

"I've just recovered from it, myself," Waring told her gently.

She opened her big, dark eyes. "Oh, that's what makes you look so pale. I thought—but only for a moment—it was because you were afraid of that man!"

"Afraid?" said Bruce, puzzled. "Why, how could I be afraid of a man who tries to bully a woman?"

"You shouldn't be, of course," agreed Joan. Then she finished her story.

"Poor father is heartbroken. And, naturally, he sent for me, at once. But I couldn't dispose of our things and get away until the last boat. And the beastly old thing waited too long!"

"It's been an early freeze-up, they tell me," said Waring, in justice to the *Cudahy's* captain. "What did you say you wanted to do? Go back to the boat?"

Joan ruminated. "N-o-o, I really don't, of course," she confessed. "Just when you appeared, it was the one thing I wanted to do. But, indeed, I'm just as anxious now, as I was this morning, to go on to father—else I never would have chanced the trip with those strange men."

"What did they do that angered you?"

"Nothing much, perhaps. A little sentimental, a little—oh, too familiar. I was afraid! I *would* like to go to Nome."

"I'll take you to Nome, Miss Manners, if you wish me to," said Bruce after a pause. "Ivan, here, knows the Kaltag Cut-off."

She looked him in the face, very seriously. In her earnestness, she looked at him very steadily, trying to read his very heart through his eyes. Then her little fretted brow cleared.

"I do wish you would. You are very, very kind."

He built a lean-to for her, scraped away the snow, and made a thick bed of spruce plumes. Then he and Ivan took their sleeping bags and walked up the shore. Joan watched their retreating figures in a kind of dismay.

"Please don't go so far away," she called

CHAPTER IV.

IN A FAR WILDERNESS.

Bruce Waring delivered Joan to her father, but not in Nome.

The Indian pilot of the *Michael Cudahy,* sent upriver by the master, brought the news to Nulato of the freezing in of that vessel. Thereafter, in the course of time, the names of its passengers were wired to the various settlements along the line of the government telegraph, and to Nome, at the end of the line.

Judge Manners set his calendar two weeks ahead, and got a friendly mail carrier to take him as a passenger with the first outgoing mail. Ten miles out of Nome, he encountered a dog team with an Indian running ahead and a man and a woman jauntily perched on the load. As he approached this young woman, she bounded clear of her sled and landed plump in the arms of Judge Manners, who found that he was her father. After disengaging Joan from his neck, he transferred his luggage to the sled of Bruce Waring—whom he eyed searchingly, as he crushed his hand—and returning to Nome with the young people, turned back his calendar and reconvened his court.

Waring would have liked to stay in Nome, a month or two; nor would Joan Manners have been displeased. But the dismal thought of the time and expense that had already been sacrificed to his illness urged him away. He engaged, for the price of all the pelts they should take for a year, the services of Koyukuk Charley, born Ak Tuk;

he added a few extra dogs to that Eskimo's team, and loaded both sleds to the rails.

Manners, a thorough Alaskan of the more intelligent and cultivated type, thanked Waring warmly for his service; and Joan parted from him with all of the frank regret of a sister, rosily tinctured with an affection of a different sort, which she was too womanly to wholly conceal.

"Some day, perhaps, when you have time, we'll mush to the north pole together," she said, while he held her hand. His teams were ready, out in the crackling air of the November night.

Gravely he replied: "Some day, perhaps, we'll go everywhere together."

She hardly knew whether he meant it sentimentally, or only in the way of the perfect comrade.

Back to Norton Sound he and Ak Tuk took their grinding way; and at the head of the bay the slow work began of breaking trail for heavy loads through raw and rolling tundra. For the rest, he was, at last, set to a task for which he was made and for which he had hungered—a naked pioneering in a virgin wild. His happiness knew but one alloy—his short-skirted little pal was gone.

At Eskimo villages they had traded in dried salmon to conserve their dog feed, and themselves lived largely on the country, taking toll of every gossiping covey of ptarmigan, invisible but for the movement of their gray shadows among the snow-enameled willows of the creek beds. Swinging around the head streams of the Koyuk, the Buckland, and finally the Selawik, they crossed to the country of the Koyukuk over a low pass of the Brooks divide, and descended an unknown tributary of that great branch of the Yukon, which drains the entire subarctic region of central Alaska.

They made a cache at the mouth of the first considerable confluent stream; and used it as a base for expeditions, part hunting, part prospecting, into the surrounding wilderness of wooded streams. The river itself, the winding, tortuous Koyukuk, lay in a shallow trench, a day's journey eastward from the main camp.

Very early in the spring, at some distance up the confluent stream from their main camp, Waring came upon an extensive exposure of creek gravel, kept bare by the percolating waters of a series of warm, perennial springs. Naturally he prospected this gravel, and finding among the fine flakes called "colors"—common to nearly all the streams of Alaska—an occasional granular bit of gold, he pitched a camp on the creek, and in May began a systematic prospecting of it, as fast as its banks thawed. It was open-cut work, in which he needed no assistance. He, therefore, kept Ak Tuk hunting; and, when the salmon ran, catching and drying the fish for their dogs, for the ensuing autumn and winter.

The prospects continuing to be fair, in the early summer he started two shafts in the center of the creek valley, but seepage, that bane of the miner, baffled his search just when the colors became coarse enough to be weighed in his small prospector's balances. There was no help for it—he must wait till autumn, when he could "freeze down." For the remainder of the summer they cut and stacked wood and built a good cabin.

Late in September, when the seepage froze in the shafts, making their walls impervious, Waring got down to bed rock, and found two feet of gravel and one foot of soft bed rock, that carried fair values. The gravel went from two to six cents, and the disintegrated bed rock as high as twenty. The average seemed to be about six or seven cents, in one shaft, and in the other, which was half a mile below, a little better than eight cents. Between the two shafts he put down another hole, which showed about the same prospects. This was not "pay," in so far a country as the Koyukuk, but the creek was decidedly worth careful prospecting, and the obvious thing to do was to communicate with Ticely and get this advice and instructions.

His "partner" had, of course, given him a cipher code. You could trust Ticely for that! So Bruce made up a telegram, wrote a letter, and inclosed both with a note to the trading-post manager at Nutalo, on the Yukon. There was no reason to waste the precious days of early winter by going himself, so he sent Ak Tuk. The distance, figured from the United States Geological Survey map, was not over one hundred and fifty miles, and he decided that, barring early blizzards, the native ought to be back in three weeks, or early in November. But it was nearly Christmas before the grate of Ak Tuk's sled broke the stillness that brooded over that far, white solitude where Bruce Waring had been alone with his work

and his thoughts. Then a great surprise met the eyes of the young miner.

In the year that had gone, since Mrs. Ticely returned from Kusko City, Seattle realties had taken something of a slump. Values had been baseless, fictitious; and what now seemed shrinkage and torpor was really only the resolution of a boom into normal and logical conditions.

The Ticely Realty Corporation would still have held its own, with here and there a loss, easily met from its steady, legitimate earnings, had not Ticely but lately taken over, for subdivision, a tract which began to "act up" in a very alarming way. A nephew of the decedent of the estate, which had been cut up, complained to his lawyer about some transaction, concerning the property, which antedated Ticely's purchase. It came to Ticely's ears just as he was launching his big selling campaign, but he went right on, confident that he could talk the nephew out of the idea, and mollify him by selling him a choice piece of his own land, at a shade under the regular price. But the nephew proved to be that hundredth man immune to Ticely's salesmanship; and he filed a little paper which so clouded the title that the realty company's lawyer, whom Ticely had magnificently ignored, exclaimed: "Hang me if I don't hope you lose every sou markee you've got! I've howled at you to be careful of your titles, till my throat's raw!"

The Ticely Realty Corporation found itself confronted by a demand to make good the price paid for its warranty deeds; Ticely had spent all the first proceeds for final payments on the property and expensive advertising; and the company, perforce, went into a receivership—very privately, of course, in order to avoid a further shrinkage of its assets. And this was Frederick Ransom Ticely's alarming situation, when a telegram came to him from his grubstaked man in the Far North.

Decoded, it read:

> Western branch of lower Koyukuk River, two hundred miles by channel from nearest supply points, shows, in three widely separated shafts, three feet of six-to-nine-cent dirt. Have seen no white man for a year. Native messenger awaits telegraphic reply. Letter mailed.
>
> BRUCE WARING.

Ticely locked himself in his private office, killed his phone, laid three long cigars on his desk, placed his feet alongside of them, and, tilting back in his chair, cogitated.

He had obtained, by perspiring persuasion, an extension of six months for the payment of the twenty thousand dollars that would square the last of the holders of the worthless warranty deeds. The rest had been satisfied by funds raised on mortgages, plastered to the limit of his bank's endurance, upon the remaining properties of the company, after every liquid asset had gone. It was a case of obtaining twenty thousand dollars within six months or—an ugly-looking failure that would bow Cecelia Ticely's head!

Ticely wondered at that telegram—and admired it. It gave him every fact he needed to know. The country was untouched, unprospected. No one could say, "Oh, I know that eight-cent dirt over there. That's all there is, and, at that, it's spotted as a leopard!" If Waring had seen no white man in a year, the find, such as it was, was safe. With only three holes down, its prospecting had only begun, and the chances of real pay were good.

Recollection of the fevered days of his old Klondike exploits flooded his brain. He was thirty-five, healthy, and—if he *had* just made the blunder of his life—an engine of dynamic energy and resource. He called his house, and Cecelia answered. He said, "Wait for me;" and jumped into his car.

He put it to her plainly and with transparent honesty. She knew, in a very general way, of his situation. Well, he could extricate himself, perhaps, with what Bruce Waring had discovered. Bruce was a tyro; he himself was an experienced miner. He thought he'd better go. After deep thought, she gave him her consent and her blessing. Without leaving the house, he called up the telegraph office and dictated offhand this message to the agent at Nulato:

> Hold at my expense native messenger of Bruce Waring until I arrive.

Then he borrowed twenty-five hundred dollars from his wife, who, ten days before, had offered him all she had, and went back to town to cash the check and arrange for an all-night session with his lawyer and the subordinate officers of the Ticely Realty Corporation—and a stenographer. A boat for Valdez, the salt-water terminus of the winter trail to the Tanana and Yukon, was to leave, providentially enough, at noon next day, and he was there—quietly, with his wife only. Not a soul, outside of his own office, knew that Frederick Ransom Ticely had

exchanged serge for Mackinaw, tan shoes for moosehide moccasins, and was off in mid-winter for the frozen North.

At Valdez, by a ruse, he beat the others ashore and procured the best dog team available. On the trail he hardened gradually, and, while December was still young, he arrived at Nulato, with his seven Malemutes waving their tail plumes over their backs—than which there is no better certificate of exemplary dogmanship.

"This the man?" he asked the unshaved, happy-go-lucky trading company agent, who had brought a native to him—a kind he had never seen in Alaska. "He must be an Eskimo."

"Guess he is," said the agent indifferently. "Injuns round here pertend they don't see him."

Ticely made friends with Ak Tuk, at once, by presenting him with the best jackknife that money could buy in Seattle.

They started out next day in the misty, snapping cold; and once across the ice of the Yukon and the near-by delta of the Koyukuk, Fred Ticely thanked his stars he was still young enough to have hardened well under his four weeks' mush from salt water. For now it was turn about, with the iron-legged Eskimo, in breaking trail on a drifted river, and its brush and sedge-grown portages, till his thigh muscles numbed and almost paralyzed under the strain. He froze his cheeks the third day out, and, on the seventh, they lay for eighteen hours in their bags, under a partly collapsed and drifted-over tent. The Eskimo took it as one takes mosquitos—a nuisance; but Ticely, from his long interlude of "civilized" living, nearly lost his nerve.

Stillness succeeded the hum of the blizzard, they worked themselves free of their bed; which was part of a new and very compact mantle of the river itself—and resumed their journey, with the weak rays of the low, noon-day sun playing once more on their enameled backs.

"Here go," said Ak Tuk the second hour of a morning of their last week. And Ticely's frost-fringed eyes, looking through the tunnel of his projecting parka hood, knew that the tributary must be *the* creek, or its parent. Turning into it, they found the going exceptionally good—smooth ice, evenly drifted. After nearly a day of this, the native led up a right limit branch and an hour after noon, next day, Ak Tuk's dogs smelled spruce smoke, and with straightened necks, and muzzles howling welcome, swerved sharply up the steep bank. Ticely, drawn swiftly up by his own closely following team, beheld, in that remote, tenantless world, the miracle of human habitancy—a camp lay before him! The door of a well-chinked cabin was ajar, and through it stalked the familiar figure, in unfamiliar raiment, of his partner—his partner now in very truth—Bruce Waring.

CHAPTER V.

CHANCE VALUES OF GREEK MYTHS.

"Well, well, well!" greeted Ticely, as he jerked off his clumsy trail mitten, and they clasped and shook each other's hand.

"You—you yourself!" sputtered Waring. "Gee, I'm glad!" He was still wringing the hand of his best friend on earth, when there came a sudden thought that drove the gleeful, boyish cordiality from his face. "Unless—say, Mr. Ticely——"

"It's Fred, now."

"Eh—Fred"—the familiarity came hard—"say, you didn't misunderstand my message, did you? There isn't any real pay here, you know."

"Not a bit, my boy," Ticely assured him, while he struggled out of his caribou parka. He patted down his hair again—unconscious survival in him of the well-groomed city man. "Of course I hoped that your winter prospecting might show up something better. But all alone, this way, I suppose you couldn't do much."

"Couldn't I!" exclaimed Bruce pridefully. "I've put down three shallow holes and one deep one since Ak Tuk left."

"The dickens you did!" Ticely knew that job. "How many times did you climb your ladder?"

"Oh, I guess about seven hundred and thirty thousand. Nice and dry, though, and plenty of burning wood handy."

Then he asked Ticely the question that had been hot in his throat from the moment of their meeting—"Why did you come?" Ticely told him frankly. And no one could be franker, when he wanted to be, nor more winningly frank, than Frederick Ticely

"So it's up to me, you see, to get a little money up here, old man," he said, concluding his sketch of the recent vicissitudes of the Ticely Realty Corporation "I've done it before, and be gorry I can do it again!"

After dinner, they "got down to cases," as Ticely called it, in the gambling vernacular he remembered Bruce made him a diagram of the lay of the stream and its tributary gulches, and the position of his shafts and cuts. And, very carefully and proudly, he showed his senior partner the little bottles of prospects

"We seem to have just about what you wired me," said Ticely, summing it up. "A little more of it, now, that's all It's not-so—b-a-d Or wouldn't be if——"

"If it was nearer somewhere," supplied Waring ruefully

"Well, my boy, I've seen 'nowhere' in Alaska become 'somewhere,' in short order —when gold was struck! What's the best route here from salt water?"

"Oh, the Yukon and Koyukuk," answered Waring promptly "It's a long distance, of course, but supplies and machinery could be floated, in barges, to the mouth of the creek, and then up the creek, here, in large and very shallow draft poling boats"

"Fairbanks is the nearest town, for an all-water route," meditated Ticely out loud. "And straight across the mountains it's not so very far to Nome. It's not much past the middle of December, and I think we'd better put down a few more holes before we——"

His voice trailed away, with the bluish vapors from his pipe. He looked at the peeled poles of the cabin's low ceiling.

"What have you named this creek?" he suddenly asked.

"Nothing," answered Bruce, a little shamefacedly. "I've been so busy burning down into the old thing. It's just 'the creek' to me."

Ticely smiled indulgently. "And haven't staked anything, I suppose."

"No."

"First thing we must do. Some party of prospectors might drift along here, any time. Never take chances, Bruce, in Alaska—or elsewhere, for that matter. We'll name it Midas Creek."

For a month Ticely tarried. At the lowest claim on the creek they put down a shaft, and it proved a deep one. It's bed rock brought up the average of their pay only slightly, but the sinking of it brought Bruce Waring into a still closer relation of gratitude to Frederick Ransome Ticely.

The younger man in the shaft, the elder on the windlass, toiling for nearly three weeks, they had made a depth of thirty-five feet, when a warm spell set in, and the outer air, no longer heavy enough to sink rapidly in the shaft, failed to displace the wood gases generated by their night's thawing; and Waring, who had had little experience with deep shafts, came near to taking the long trail. Ticely, receiving no response to his signaling below, called the Eskimo to man the windlass, slid down the rope, and found Waring sitting, stupidly, in a pile of gravel. Emptying the half-filled bucket, Ticely threw his partner over it and howled to Ak Tuk to hoist. He dampened his blue handkerchief in a pool, tied it over his nose and mouth, and waited patiently till Ak Tuk had got Waring out on the dump and lowered the rope again. Then he stood in its hook, signaled "up," and himself was hauled to safety.

Bruce came out of his stupor in the cool air, but he was a mighty sick man for three days. The weather, meanwhile, had turned normally cold again, and they went to bed rock in safety. Then Ticely announced that he must go to Nome, to see what he could do toward procuring machinery and supplies, and men.

"Rome wasn't built in a day, my lad," he told his wondering, doubting partner. "It would be months, or years, possibly, before you and I, unaided, could really develop this creek. The prospects are good enough to take a miner's chance of locating better. I think we'll find plenty of men who will take that chance with us."

With a picked team, and what food could be spared, Ticely and Ak Tuk broke trail up the creek, the next morning, and, the following day, when they reached its head, Ticely told the native their destination. They were to go to Nome, but by a devious route, detouring far to the north to the camps of the Kobuc River. Accordingly, Ak Tuk skirted the hills for two whole days before he struck up toward a low pass and emerged westward on the head streams of the Kobuc.

They ran into a trail with only a few days' drift over it. It had a hard bottom, when you could keep it—and Ak Tuk had eyes in his snowshoes. With his help they reached Shungnak, a very small but not unprosperous placer camp, in two days of downriver travel; and here Ticely exchanged nearly a thousand dollars of *cheeckakko*—the vernacular for coin or currency—for the

local gold dust, which was of dull, brassy hue. It was to obtain dust, as well as to "cover" his real starting point, that Ticely had chosen a semicircular route to the town of Nome.

At the mouth of the Kobuc they took the salt ice to Candle, and then, on well-beaten trails, crossed the Seward Peninsula at Nome. That little city of the Bering Sea, an aristocrat among the half dozen big towns of Alaska, was beginning to feel the coming of sad days—the pinch of worked-out placers. It was her pride that she had drawn El Dorado kings from the Klondike, in her first discoveries, an Anvil and Dexter; and when, next year, the very sands of her seashores were found to be gold flecked, the whole round world had sent its adventurous and covetous to her shores. Forty thousand strong, she had risen in tents, warehouses, frame buildings, shacks, and shanties that extended over five miles of beach and tundra, and "spoilers" made a new record in organized mining-camp graft. Great production followed, waned, and waxed again—when the eighth wonder of the mining world was suddenly revealed in the fabulously rich, third-beach line, an ancient sea strand, half gold, which was uncovered at the bottom of deep shafts sunk far back on the coastal plain. Fairbanks, and still newer towns, were booming, but "old Nome" still held her own—and would, till the third-beach line was gutted and dredgers should drone a requiem for the passing of the "individual miner."

It was a Nome very propitious to the purposes of a man who had anything to sell, provided he was one who knew the game. Ticely, who had planned his campaign in detail—precisely as if it concerned a plot of choice bungalow sites in Seattle—not only knew the game, but how to play it! Being by nature a trader and, by education, a salesman of the up-to-date psychological school, he proposed merely to apply to Alaska's greatest commodity, placer ground, the principles he was accustomed to use, with eminent success, as the head of the Ticely Realty Company.

The game consisted, among other things, in a careful avoidance of the slightest appearance or suspicion of having anything to sell. And hence, Ticely took lodgings in the Penny River Hotel, which a fellow musher had assured him was just what he wanted. This, after Ticely had explained to him that what he wanted was a quiet and very *inconspicuous* place!

The fellow musher, who was little Othmer the painter, returning from a job at Port Safety, noted the fact that this quiet man who, with his Eskimo, had come evidently from a far place, cared to attract no attention whatever. That was point number one.

Ticely was tired, and he slept until nearly noon. Then he breakfasted with Ak Tuk, both because he was naturally democratic and fond of the native, and because it would mean to most white men that these two must have lived like brothers in some remote place from which they had just come. It was point number two. Next, he found a permanent place for his dog team, and installed the native as their keeper. Returning to the hotel, he paid for a week's lodging in advance, and paid for it in gold dust, choosing a time when several idle men were witnesses of his opening his sausagelike poke and pouring from it, into the hotel man's blower, a small quantity of dust.

"Where's she from, partner?" asked a curious man offhandedly.

"Candle."

At that town he had seen the local product. Indeed, he had inspected it carefully. And he knew that this little-known Shungnak gold, which he had bought, was quite unlike the gold of Candle, which was a well-known dust in Nome.

The questioner exchanged significant glances with his friends, which Ticely did not appear to notice.

It is customary in a mining camp to ask men where their dust comes from. The excuse for so personal a question is the general interest which attaches to the subject of gold dust, and the often striking, and always minute, differences in the product of each creek. Usually no question of secrecy is involved, but in case there is, the man questioned may justly resent the inquiry, as an unwarrantable intrusion upon his private affairs. There are two ways of showing this resentment. One, is to intimate that the matter is none of the questioner's business And if it is patent that the questioner knew, or should have known, that his query would be unwelcome, he is usually answered in that way. The other way is a polite evasion, or a polite lie which, if obviously a lie, becomes a polite evasion. And this way it is etiquette to use, when, as in the case of Ticely, the questioner could not be supposed

to know that the matter is a delicate one. Ticely's answer meant: "My dear fellow, I do not care to make you my confidant."

It was one of those lies so conventional, in mining-camp life, as to leave no stigma upon the teller. Otherwise, he would not have told it, for Frederick Ticely was, in a literal sense, a particularly truthful man! But he created the false impression that he had reasons for keeping secret the source of his gold dust. People buy on impressions created by the seller, who produces them upon the mind of a buyer predisposed to receive them, through his wish to buy.

Ticely had named Midas Creek as he had named country residence sites: "Shady Lane"—the shade to be cast by future trees, possibly, in front of a future sun; or "Laughing Water," from the artificial lake that some one proposed, or said he proposed, later to construct. Midas Creek, like Shady Lane or Laughing Water, had excellent prospects —prospects being, after all, matters of opinion! It was Ticely's fine art to lielessly create the impression that the prospects were realities.

CHAPTER VI.

SUPERSALESMANSHIP.

The far northern terminus of the spider web of telegraph-radia communication of our continent was a government-owned wire, strung across western Alaska to St. Michael, a radio span across Norton Sound to Port Safety, and a wire into Nome.

Ticely sauntered into the telegraph office. It was operated by the war department, but since it was the only means of quick communication with the outside world, Uncle Sam obligingly permitted its use to the population of Alaska, and Ticely used it.

He withdrew to the extreme end of the counter—a fact carelessly noted by the operator's assistant. When any person approached him, Ticely ceased writing and shut the little memorandum book—a code, possibly—he was using. This, again, drew the eyes of the assistant. He waited patiently, until the place was, for the moment, empty of outsiders, before he handed in his messages. The operator, Jones, as well as his assistant, Rosslyn, noticed that also. When the words were counted, and Ticely paid for the telegrams, he said quietly to the chief operator, looking slightly—ever so slightly—askance at the assistant:

"I know the service is confidential—but won't you please be very sure that no one sees your filed copies of these?"

Jones looked at Ticely a bit impatiently, but the latter's manner was too courteous, too innocent, to merit the rebuke of a just man like Jones, who merely muttered that it was, "All right; nobody'll see 'em." Whereupon Ticely nodded, turned on his heel, and walked quickly out of the office.

There are men in every mining camp, as in every other community, who are cultivated parasites. They toil not, neither do they spin. But they seek to avail themselves of the luck or the industry of others. One or two of this ilk lodged at the Penny River Hotel, into which, at odd times, industrious little Othmer, the painter, dropped in, for a chat; and the circumstance of the queer-looking gold, which did *not* come from Candle, came up in conversation between Othmer and "Con" Redbank, who had seen Ticely pay for his lodgings in dust and had heard the brief colloquy concerning that dust. Then Othmer drew Redbank into a corner—the painter was known as a very "secretive" among the numerous persons with whom he shared his confidences—and told him that Ticely had traveled with him, Othmer, all the way from Safety, and had asked him to recommend a quiet place in which to stay—where no one would pay any attention to him. Those were not Ticely's words, but they faithfully expressed his meaning.

Redbank took his information to a man for whom, some years before, in the "upper country," he had done considerable sleuthing—Slim Jim Collins, who had but recently come to Nome to look over a piece of bench ground, to which he had fallen heir in a deal he had made in Fairbanks. The ground was "no good," but Collins was tarrying till spring—having, in the interim, glimpsed Joan Manners on the Nome streets. While waiting for some opportunity to meet her, under circumstances more favorable to him than before, he kept his experienced eye open for business chances.

"Watch him. He'll be selling something, pretty soon," he told Redbank cynically, when the latter had related all he knew of the mysterious stranger.

"I'll watch him, Slim. Leave it to me."

He knew that Collins always had loose cash for a "spec," if the thing caught his fancy. The Fairbanks miner lived on the

outskirts on the town, very quietly, with Miss O'Brien, Hennessy being an occasional dinner guest—and the only one. Men who lived with ex-dance-hall girls, even in a go-as-you-please mining camp, prefer domestic privacy. Therefore, Collins met his acquaintances in a favorite downtown hang-out, the North Star Saloon.

Ticely was a very busy man. He quietly studied maps in surveyors' offices. He quietly learned of all the coastwise boats that plied northward toward Candle and the Kobuc country, and southward into Norton Sound, which reached deeply toward the Koyuk-Koyukuk divide. This had been Waring's mode of entry into the region of Midas. Quietly, too, he talked with merchants who sold sundry supplies and machinery necessary to the development of new placer ground. He was exceedingly unobtrusive, modest, talked little—even less in the presence of bystanders—and seemed, to the experienced eyes of the rapidly increasing number of persons who made it their business to gumshoe him about town, to wish, in every way, to avoid the suspicion of being a person in any wise out of the ordinary, or whose business was in any sense strange or mysterious. The sleuths saw plainly that he was making every effort to conceal the fact that he had anything to conceal! Ticely was absolutely the real thing!

The gumshoe squad increased, both in number and in vigilance.

A week after Ticely arrived in Nome he presented a letter to Judge Manners, from Bruce Waring. Manners greeted him as a friend. It was sufficient that he was the partner of the young man who had brought his girl to him from the Yukon.

The letter said:

> We have some pretty fair prospects up here, and Mr. Ticely will be in Nome to arrange, if he can, to bring in supplies and labor as early in the spring as possible. Any information you can give him or courtesies you can extend him will be appreciated by yours truly.

He said a little of the same sort in his letter to Joan, and a great deal more that was in no way related to business.

For all Ticely's quietness and inveterate habit of minding his own business, he was alert to observe the antics of the pussyfoots. For the most part, he knew who were sleuthing him and with whom they were connected. He was aware, for instance, that Con Redbank was a sort of henchman of affluent Jim Collins; and when he learned by accident that Ed Rosslyn, the telegraph operator, had become interested in his affairs, and saw him several times in company with Redbank, he left his cipher code back in his dunnage bag, in his room in the lodging house, for several days. And he inferred, from a very slight change in its position, with reference to other papers, that his room had been entered, the book found, and his telegrams decoded.

He was right. Three men at first, and others afterward, possessed copies of the texts of his telegrams, of which one was as follows:

> TICELY REALTY CORPORATION, Seattle.
> Give Ethelbert Y. Lewisjohn following message. Prepare drop everything. Come to St. Michael first boat with two years' mining outfit. Information as to locality and instructions for reaching will be held for you there. Hold confidential and use extreme caution.

The second was directed to Francis L. Frieling, care, as before, the Ticely Realty Corporation. It directed Frieling to execute prearranged plans, and come at once to St. Michael. Absolute secrecy, it said, was essential to safety!

Edgar Y. Lewisjohn and Francis L. Frieling were imaginary persons. Or, at least, Ticely believed that these names, which were purely the product of his craniel laboratory, would prove imaginary persons, when looked up in the Seattle City directory by his faithful and perspicacious secretary—who would thereupon loudly guffaw, and file them in Ticely's own private file.

When Ticely found that his friends—for they were *very* friendly with him—had gained access to his room, he smiled, and diving deeply into his bag, brought up a small, locked leather case. Within it were certain mementoes of his Klondike mining, among them a little memorandum book, in which he had recorded his pannings for several days during January of the winter he worked the El Dorado lay. He noted with satisfaction that though the month and days were recorded in these random notes, the year was omitted. It was *"the present year"* to him, at that time, he reflected curiously, and it would seem the present year to anybody else now. It was the boldest of his many false impressions.

For several days he left the memorandum book, among his effects, on the rude dresser

and was rewarded, before long, by proof that the book had been examined. He smiled sardonically at this discovery. But had he known what the consequences were to be, he would have paled instead.

It was inevitable that Ticely should become acquainted with a good many Nomeites. In winter, when Alaska coast towns are shrunk to their minimum population, when interests narrow, and every activity is keenly watched, no newcomer, as busy as Ticely, could escape the overtures of the alert and enterprising, once there had attached to his personality the flavor of whispered gossip and speculation. He met these overtures affably enough, for he was naturally and by cultivation "a good mixer." He acknowledged he was arranging for the purchase and transport of a heavy outfit of mining supplies, and he made brief reply to the inquiries of his new acquaintances.

The questions put to him were many in form, but in substance only two. Where was the creek, and what were its prospects? To the first question, he replied that the locality was quite far away from Nome and he didn't care to describe it definitely, as it would be neither wise nor decent to start a stampede to a region which was as yet merely in the first stages of prospecting. As to the prospects themselves—they were fair, only fair. Nothing to get excited about in the least.

Ticely's truthful statements were taken as meaning nothing. They signified no more regarding the real nature of his find than your casual "Good morning" would signify respecting your real attitude toward the acquaintance who greets you in the street. To the ordinary man it implied merely that Ticely was discreet. But to those who were "wise" to certain facts it was evidence that fitted exactly into the structure they were carefully building for themselves.

To Slim Jim Collins, who had recently made his acquaintance and who was cultivating him assiduously, Ticely gave a few facts. They were really facts, and he mentioned them offhandedly, yet always with a slight, flattering flavor of "This is just between us, of course." There was quite a little low-grade dirt out there—four or five cents to the pan. And on bed rock? Oh, it varied; a bit of coarse gold, now and then—ten or twenty cents. He hardly thought the bed rock would average over fifteen cents, and there was only about a foot of it.

"He's foxy, all right," was Collins' size-up, when he told this to his friends who were assisting him—and themselves—in "getting in on the ground floor" of this new strike.

Collins, Redbank, and the rest had been conversing at a card table, in the rear of the North Star resort, and the miner from Fairbanks got slowly to his feet, and with a "Want to see me?" to a newcomer, named Tholmes, led him toward the bar. The others resumed their card playing.

"You're right, Mr. Collins," said Tholmes, of the hardware firm of Tholmes & Hawthorne. "He'll take as much equipment as I'm willing to let go, up to several thousand. His first proposition was nervy, all right. He said he'd pay me five hundred dollars in cash and give me security on the balance. Now, I figure that if his ground's no good, and he can't pay, and the man I send along takes it all—well, he's too wise an old bird to pull anything like that on himself!"

"You're right," agreed Collins, rotating the cigar in his mouth.

"Well, I told him *nothing doing* on perishable security like that; and his next proposition was a mortgage on a claim or two. He smiled when he suggested it, as much as to say: 'Of course you wouldn't do that, because you don't know anything about my ground.' "

"What did you say to that?"

"Why, just what we agreed on. I says, 'Taking a chance on unknown security is no good. If I win, all I get is the price of my goods, which is merely my money back. And if I lose I get nothing.' "

"And his answer?"

"He saw the point all right. He says: 'You mean you'd rather have an interest in the ground itself. Well, if you're willing to take a chance on just fair prospects, I'll give you a little. I suppose it's either that or cut down the outfit to what I can pay for.' "

"Which would mean losing his summer—practically a year. So he'll let go!"

"He'll let go. How much, I don't know."

"No more than he can help, I suppose. *I* wouldn't, in his place. He can get help from these friends of his that he's been telegraphing to, on the outside, next autumn or spring, if he can sluice out enough gold this summer."

"Think he's liable to do that?"

Slim Jim's eyes puckered shrewdly: "Did

you ever see a man willing to wait, when he had big gold in the ground, if there was any way of getting it out? The cost don't matter—if there's plenty there!"

It was evident from this conversation, an extract of which was duly reported by Collins to the rest of the conspirators, that the Seattle realty operator was already in the position of a seemingly reluctant seller from whom many were scheming to buy. He was on the right side of the market! From that point on, things moved rapidly.

CHAPTER VII.

GATHERING WAY.

Manners sat into the game, through his intimacy with Al Tholmes, for whom he had acted as attorney, some years before, in Dawson. When Tholmes learned of the judge's acquaintanceship with Waring and of the letter Ticely had brought, he took Manners into the secret and suggested that his friend had better get in while the getting was good. They needed counsel, anyway. Manners, who had played in hard luck in Alaska, was strongly disposed toward the venture from his confidence in Waring, whom he would have picked at a glance as a sterling and dependable fellow, even if he had not rendered Joan so signal a service.

He advised Tholmes, Collins, and the others. And when Ticely "let go" some interests on the creek, to finance himself properly, he became the legal corner stone of the quietly formed Midas Mining and Development Company, as president of which he qualified by the purchase of as much of the stock as he was able to buy. He had not liked the means by which the secret information concerning Midas had been obtained. But it had been done, and was over with; and he saw no reason why he should not profit, as others were going to profit, by the knowledge that was theirs.

When the company had been formed, Manners had Ticely to dinner. It was by no means the first time that Joan had cooked her best for Bruce Waring's partner.

"How are you getting along with your financing, Ticely?" asked the judge, over their cigars.

"Why, very well. Too well, really," was the modest reply. "I began by letting Tholmes have a quarter interest in One Below Discovery, and Collins a half interest in Number Two. I was mighty glad to do it in order to pay for our thawing outfit and tools. I find that steam hose is fearfully high. I had cash only for a very meager outfit, you know—not nearly enough to do any real mining. Then Baker—of course, you know Baker, of the Nome Trading and Commercial Company? He bought another interest for enough to give us a year's supply of grub. And when one of Tholmes' friends asked me for an interest in One Above, and offered me enough to freight all our stuff to the head of Norton Sound, or even up the Yukon—unless the rate proves too high—naturally I let it go. Then some of Collins' friends persuaded me to let them have some small interests, for cash to go on. I much prefer not to sell any more than is necessary to safely finance the work."

Then Manners told him that these interests had been pooled under the name of the Midas Mining and Development Company, of which he himself was to be president and James Collins general manager. It was not easy to tell whether Ticely was pleased or displeased, for in truth the Midas promoter was a little perturbed by his own success.

While the whole affair was still nominally a deep secret, too many, he knew, were privy to it. He had considerable cash in hand, and saw that much more was going to be offered him in the month or two that must elapse before they would be able to take the trail with their advance outfits. And, knowing what he knew, he was anxious to confine his operations to the fewest men from whom he could obtain the necessary dollars to extricate the Ticely Realty Corporation from its dilemma. In this he was not successful, and the situation became more awkward than even Ticely, shrewd as he was, had feared.

Othmer, the painter, was partly responsible for this, aided and abetted by one or two others who, like himself, had friends whose prosperity lay close to their hearts. Each had whispered the secret to these friends —whom they swore to secrecy, of course. And when the friends converted into cash their holdings in mine and store and workshop, or begged or borrowed funds for fictitious purposes, and then besought Othmer and the others to buy interests for them—any interests, no matter how small, or how remote from the discovery claim—there was simply nothing for these soft-hearted ones

to do but beg Ticely to let them have a little more ground. And when Ticely yielded, they immediately reconveyed to the friends, who thereupon became sick with rapture. There are no sheep like mining-camp sheep!

In addition to the score or more of men who had obtained interests upon Midas Creek, there were numerous others whose speculative enthusiasms took commercial and industrial directions. They quietly prepared to join the little stampede that was forming, each to follow his chosen vocation.

A blacksmith fairly coins money at first in a placer camp, sharpening picks, ironing buckets, shoeing horses that freight on the "summer trails;" and Bill Colwell, the giant smith, *quietly* sold his shop. A lodging house outfit was *quietly* got together by the brawny Corliss "girls," those persistently trusting followers of many a false stampede. Charley Miller, known from the north pole to "Fifty-three" for his chop-house specialties, got his tip from Annie Corliss, and agreed to *quietly* follow them and open up in a corner of their big lodging-house tent. Jimmy Head, the packer, began *quietly* to pick up old skates. And numerous others, whose policy in a new mining camp was to engage in business and let mining alone, made their equally *quiet* preparations. So much quietude attracted the attention, finally, of a contingent of canny and crafty ones who were footloose and unencumbered —true camp followers, these, whose only equipment would be alertness and a wit to profit by whatever might happen, meretriciously or otherwise.

Of much of this enterprise and preparation Ticely himself knew little. For though a man now and again, and once a woman, carried tales to him, to gain his favor, he was obliged to depend for the most part on his own observation to estimate the extent of the movement toward Midas Creek. When he realized that this was to be considerably greater than he had counted on, he was fain to quit the whole affair, with the little stake that his interests and his honor in Seattle demanded. But two things held him—Waring, and his own gameness, the latter aided by his entire self-confidence to cope with any situation in which *mere men* were the only obstacles!

In point of fact a retreat would not have been easy; for Collins and his closest friends, while confident that this picture of Midas was a reality, were too well schooled in the strategies of the gold game to fail of vigilance against the unexpected. They thought it easily a ten-to-one shot that Ticely "had the stuff." But still there was that eleventh shot; and some very literal shots would have followed Ticely, had he attempted to decamp.

As for Collins, a certain circumstance, that might have possessed meaning for Joan Manners, had she known it, featured Slim Jim's handling of his Midas venture: he never met Judge Gordon Manners in his own house!

He did not care to be recognized there by the young woman whose girlish form appeared to his eyes whenever he looked away —as he frequently did—from Miss Pearl O'Brien. Not until they should find themselves on the trail together did he wish Joan Manners to know that the man from whose questionable attentions she had escaped was one of her father's closest associates in this final mining chance he was taking in Alaska. Joan had seen him once on the street. He raised his hat and hurried on. She gave him the curtest of nods—and forgot him!

In preparation for the stampede, Manners resigned his commissionership in the Nome district and was appointed by the district court commissioner and recorder of the Midas precinct of the fifth judicial district, as the new mining camp was to be known. The taking of the legal steps he managed without publicity. Only the boundaries of the new precinct had to be set forth, and by this time it was no secret among the purchasers of Ticely's claims that Midas was a tributary of a creek in the southwestern portion of the Koyukuk basin —a definite enough description for temporary jurisdictional purposes, yet indefinite enough to protect the new mining company and its immediate followers from molestation. Ticely, at his own suggestion, was appointed deputy marshal—which was rather a good idea, he thought, in view of possible eventualities. But in this he erred!

With the shaping of these latter affairs, Ticely realized that the procedure for the testing of Midas was now completely forecast, and it was high time that instructions should go to Waring to make certain needful preparations. About three weeks before the first light outfits were freighted to Norton Sound, Ak Tuk started on his return journey to Midas.

CHAPTER VIII.

WARING IS BEWILDERED.

"Where is my other partner?" grinned Bruce, as he shook the Eskimo's hand—a ceremony which cordial Ak Tuk performed by the pump-handle method.

"Him come bime-by," replied the native, outdoing Bruce's grin by a width of several inches.

The mid-April sun had already thawed the cut banks of the creek, which still slumbered modestly under its mantle of glazed snow, insensible of the burden of responsibility cast upon it by the conjuring name of Midas. Piles of wood, corded up back of the cabin, and on several of the claims above and below it, bore witness to the industry of the brawny lad who had "bached it" alone for ten solid weeks. But the cutting and hauling of wood for burning was only half of his labors; for after two weeks of continued drifting in the creek shaft, with no better results than before, Bruce had taken to roaming the hillsides, companioned by his dog team and a meditative pipe. He smoked a month's tobacco in less than a week while he studied the lay of the valley and its sloping sides, and made comparison with other placer creeks he had known.

"Maybe it's on the bench, on one side or the other," he said to himself. On the right limit, at quite a distance from the creek, there was, in fact, a bench, defined as a belt of more gently sloping hillside that roughly paralleled the course of the stream. Evidently there had flowed here an older channel that long antedated the cutting of the stream's present base level. The whole slope was sparsely forested with spruce and birch, but this curving bench was plain to an observer from the other side of the valley.

In a thick bunch of timber opposite Three Above Discovery, where the flattening of the slope was marked, Bruce had made a small camp and started two holes. Opposite Ten Below Discovery, beyond which the bench broke down into a tributary gulch, he had started another. It was from the dump of one of the upper shafts that he had spied Ak Tuk coming down Midas, and had hastened down to greet him.

He eagerly eyed the big envelope the Eskimo handed him, but it was thick, and the Eskimo too hungry, to justify its perusal at once. He set it on the sill of the cabin window, and heated a big pot of beans. Ak Tuk took his time to the meal, but Bruce gulped his food and, taking the envelope outside, sat on his upturned basket sled and opened it. Thank Heaven, there were several smaller envelopes inside it, all but one of them addressed in a feminine hand! The one—which Bruce observed only casually—bore Ticely's familiar script.

"Hey, Ak Tuk, good work, my boy; good work!" he called to the native within, who replied, without in the least knowing what it was about: "Good work, betcherlife!"

"I guess Fred can wait," Waring murmured; and he opened the first of Joan Manner's messages to the distant, lonesome pal of the one most memorable adventure of her adventurous life. He read it; and though it was only a sweetly sisterlike letter, his fine instinct for the fine instincts of women made him pleased and satisfied with it. Then he turned with sudden interest to Ticely's letter:

MY DEAR BRUCE: How are you, my son? How are the ptarmigan and the arctic hares, and—particularly—how is the pay streak? I assume you are well, barring accidents, and your old failing of working too hard. I'm the busiest man you ever saw, and will be till I and the others get up to Midas late in May or early in June. Who are the others? Sit down, my boy, while I break it to you gently. There are many of them. In fact, we've got a young stampede brewing here.

As to who the new arrivals will be—well, unless you are reading my letter first instead of those of your very sweet little girl friend—which of course you are not—you will know already of *one* of them. And her father. Those two surely ought to please you. As for the rest, they comprise the members of a company that has been formed to prospect Midas, a few others to whom I have sold small interests, and a young mob—as I very much fear—of various and sundry men, and women, too, who always follow along. You know the sort of bunch: a trader or two, a freighter, a lodging house and restaurant keeper, a saloon man, and a sprinkling of mechanics, et cetera, et cetera.

I can see your jaw drop, Bruce. You're not used to society up there on the Koyukuk. But you know I like it—the more men, the more doing! But better yet—now don't drop dead, my boy—we've quite a little cash in hand. My share will easily fix up the Ticely Realty Corporation, and your part is invested in an outfit the most splendiferous that ever went out at a stunning freight rate to a new prospect. Everything we need for a year, and nothing to worry about—except the pay streak! I'm in hopes you've struck the better dirt that I fully believe is there; for what we had up to the time I left will hardly satisfy our friends or ourselves—particularly our friends, although I've told them just what we had. But people are unreasonable sometimes.

Bruce, I want you to stake out a town site where the flat is, down the creek. We'll donate it to the company, taking stock in exchange. The creek is so wide there that it would be an expensive proposition to locate the run of gold, so that's the place to build. Pull down what logs you can for a commissioner's and marshal's office. I'm the marshal, by the way. Miss Manners will be recorder, under her father, who is also commissioner; and they can occupy adjoining quarters in the one building. You can peel some logs nice and pretty for her part of the structure!

Monument and blaze a good route from the head of Midas over the divide to the Koyuk on this side, for our advance party will go in that way with horses over the last of the snow trail. And I would like you to meet us where the Koyuk branches, halfway down to Norton Bay, about May 15th. Until then, good luck, old man.

TICELY.

Waring was stunned—literally stunned. He hardly moved for half an hour. His head, with its heavy, tangled mane, resting against the logs of the little cabin, the cool evening breeze from the upcreek snow slopes fanned his upraised brow.

He was an earnest youth; modest, almost self-effacingly so; and this sudden limelight upon Ticely and Waring, and their dubious prospect in this far outland in subarctic Alaska, made him feel naked and afraid. He was a little slow-witted, too, though his mind's procedure was orderly and its processes strong. He would have to think it all out before yielding to his instinctive judgment that all was not right nor safe in this sudden accession of prosperity. No, it could hardly be called prosperity!

He knew that all the stir was based, not on the present, but on the future of this big creek which he and Ticely had barely begun to prospect. And the thought of these sales of its land brought to him that uneasiness and trepidation which, through ages of experience, has come to be the instinctive reaction of the conscientious poor to a sudden inflow of money. But he remembered Ticely's written words: "I've told them just what we had;" and these he repeated to himself for what assurance ought to have been in them. He tried to make himself believe that they afforded him relief; that they made everything all right. And in the midst of his strivings, his eye fell upon the other letters of Joan Manners.

A lump rose in his throat as he looked at them. Poor little Joan—he was a very neglectful friend! He took them up and read them slowly in the failing light. It was only the last that bore on the thing that troubled him—the coming of all these people to Midas Creek. In this letter, she told of the meetings with "your partner, Mr. Ticely," and of her father's plan and hers, to cast their fortunes with those of her campmate of the Yukon portage in his wonderful mining enterprise. She wrote:

You know, dear friend, we were to go out together soon—to go home where I was born and passed my early girlhood. Father has been long enough in this cold country, with its ups and downs, its hopes long deferred. We haven't saved much, but it was enough, at least, to start father off again in his practice, which used to be a good one. But when we learned that Mr. Ticely was your partner and your letter confirmed what he said about the prospects over there, father's mining blood was up, and he asked me if I was willing to take one more chance with him. It didn't seem to be so good a one. I surely ought to know by this time how little ten-cent pans mean in an interior camp hundreds of miles from tide water. But for some reason or other father seems certain that it will be all right, so, of course, I wouldn't attempt to dissuade him, especially as I rather relish the idea of a summer in a bran'-new part of Alaska. And need I say, Bruce, that I shall be very, very glad to see you again—even if you *will* be too busy to see very much of the "recorder"—at least in the *day*time!

"You no sleep?" asked Ak Tuk. It was Eskimo etiquette not to roll up in his bunk in advance of his white friend. The sun had long set. It was past eleven o'clock.

Waring came out of his long reverie and shivered. "Me go sleep now," he said. But he did not, though he went to bed.

The letters Ak Tuk brought affected Waring's course but slightly. He worked a part of each day on a cabin for the commissioner, as Ticely requested. And he staked off the town site. But with the rest of his time —and he labored eighteen hours of each twenty-four—he went doggedly on with his prospecting of the bench. It seemed to him like a promise of safe anchorage in a misty sea. And in this the lad builded better than he knew.

Allowing himself six days for the trip, he and Ak Tuk started out to blaze a route westward to the place of meeting in the Koyuk basin. There was not snow enough for a sled, so they took packs and a few packed dogs. What snow there was lay in patches, mostly in the timber, where the webless snowshoes Ak Tuk had advised their taking proved an actual necessity. For the rest, it was a "mush" through endless slop-

ing tundra, berry covered on the higher ground and deeply soggy in the swales, with much retracing of the way to find the best going for the incoming party.

Two days beyond the treeless divide—a savage contrast of blackish rock and naked snow—Ak Tuk spied them twenty miles away—a crawling caravan on the snow-mottled flats of the Koyuk, horses, dogs, and men. A crooked line of ants they seemed; and though, spaced out as they were, they numbered less than a hundred, even counting the animals, they seemed a legion to Waring, whose misgivings woke again at the sight. The next day he met them face to face—the advance guard of the Midas Creek stampede, certainly the most curious and probably the most famous of the minor Alaskan gold rushes.

CHAPTER IX.

JOAN ASKS QUESTIONS.

The Joan Manners who strolled along in the wake of the sleds, with no apparent concern but to drink in the air and the light of the beautiful spring day, and see that her collie, ranging the copses of shrunken willow, flushed no early laying ptarmigan from their cozy nests, was a wiser and more worried Joan than the girl who had written her "dear friend" the latest of her four letters.

When she and her father, traveling "light," overtook the stampeders, who had started from Nome some distance apart, in the fallacious belief that they could thus avoid attention, one of the first persons to be presented to her was Slim Jim Collins. She flushed and, for her father's sake, acknowledged his carefully deferential greetings. And she bowed to the others in his sled whom Collins named in turn—Hennessy and Miss O'Brien and her "lady friend," Miss Anderson, who had been added to their party to comply with the conventions that outwardly rule even in a mining camp.

The eyes of Joan Manners and Pearl O'Brien met—and passed, Joan instantly deciding, in this contretemps, that, until she should have time to think it over, it would be wise to act as the Collins party acted—as though they had met her for the first time. She was a girl of quick discernments, and she realized that if wealthy Slim Jim Collins had become a member of this new mining venture, it was a mischance that called for delicate handling!

Her second and more perturbing discovery came gradually, as she grew acquainted with one after another of these travelers, bound for a common destination, and bound to each other by a common purpose, a common expectation. With tongues fettered no longer by the imagined secrecy that had made them in Nome the butt of many a droll jest, in their forgatherings on the trail they compared notes and discussed the pros and cons of their prospects with the utmost freedom and candor. And Joan's eyes were opened to the fact that all of them believed they were to be the favorites of fortune, the first arrivals in a mining region of virgin and surpassing richness.

Her father had hinted to her, before they started, that he and his associates believed that Midas was a far better creek than Ticely's admissions concerning it would lead one to suppose. But she had taken this partly as Ticely's conservatism—and Bruce Waring's, and partly as her father's optimism. Now, however, she learned that they knew, or thought they knew, that Midas was actually very rich, and that this conviction was founded upon certain facts which, though they were never openly referred to, seemed to be the common property of the leaders, if not of the entire party.

Timidly she sounded her father on the subject, and found him amiable but very reticent. It was, upon the whole, a very hopeful, a very excited, but also a very perplexed Joan Manners who clasped Bruce Waring's hand and smiled into his frank and smiling eyes.

The stampeders had halted when Waring and Ak Tuk met them, the principal men bunching themselves on the tundra alongside the rotten snow trail they had made, and exchanging greetings and civilities with the much-embarrassed young stranger and his Eskimo comrade. Ticely duly presented his partner, and when he came to Collins—why, Collins was fussing with the loosened lashing of a sled! By which shift, he avoided the possibility of Waring's hand being refused him. Bruce said, "How do you do?" as he had to the others, and gave no sign beyond a lengthened glance at the stooping figure of the miner from Fairbanks.

To their question, "How did you leave things at Midas?" he merely replied, "Oh, all right." Such a company on the move is an energetic one, and what further talk there was concerned the route over the divide,

whose slopes they were approaching. Led by Ak Tuk, the caravan resumed its march, while Bruce remained with the outfit of the Manners, and gradually fell behind with Joan. Alone at last, a fleeting embarrassment succeeded. They looked at each other, and laughed—and it was gone!

"Isn't it queer," she said, "that we should be together again, and in so strange a company?"

"It's quite a procession, all right," replied Bruce laconically; and the girl gave him a quick glance.

"Did you get my letters?" she asked, with a slight return of the embarrassment.

"You bet I did. It was mighty good of you."

"But think of the excitement of it all. I don't see how you ever remembered me or anybody else, you lucky dog."

"Lucky dog!" he repeated, and a shadow crossed his face. "You mean what we've got there?"

"Why, yes, of course." It was coming—the moment to which she had looked forward, the confirmation of her hopes or fears. For she was sure that this quiet, clear-eyed, indomitable young fellow would tell her nothing but the truth.

He looked ahead at Ticely who was walking along with Judge Manners and Slim Jim Collins, occasionally gesturing, debonair, thoroughly comfortable-looking.

"You remember what I said in my letter about our prospects?"

"Oh, yes. But I know how careful one must be about a thing like that in these treacherous mining camps."

He halted and looked at her; opened his mouth to speak, and, glancing again toward his distant partner, closed it. But presently he asked:

"But my partner, Mr. Ticely—he said the same thing. He told me he did, and he wouldn't——"

"Oh, yes," she hastened to assure him, reading the thought in his face. "Yes, indeed, he said the same thing to father and me, and I presume to the others also. At any rate, no one has said that he said anything different. But——"

"But?"

"But every one has the idea, the firm conviction, in fact, that the creek is wonderfully rich. And they have been making sacrifices——"

"Sacrifices!"

"Selling things; letting go their property and possessions for much less than their value to get money quickly."

"To buy——"

"Midas; and the outfits that are coming to it. Others, you know, with heavier loads are coming by the rivers a little later."

"Yes; go on!"

"I know that secrecy was necessary where so many are unscrupulous. So I think I can understand your having been very conservative in your actual statements, and yet your giving father and the others to understand——"

She floundered miserably in her efforts to avoid the flat question. But his straight, set face and distant eyes helping her not at all, she threw up her head with a little jerk, her native bravery dominant.

"It's only the fact, after all, that counts—whether Midas is really rich or not. *That* is the one important thing." She halted and looked into his face, and waited for some sort of answer, some sort of sign.

Waring returned her look, struggling to control his expression. She thought his face hardened a little, and it did—hardened against the softness of his feeling for her that tempted him to frankness. When his words came, their caution, their measured constraint, made them cold to Joan.

"I haven't talked to Ticely. He is a very capable man, and I suppose he knows what he is doing."

"That's very noncommittal, Bruce," she said a little ruefully.

"I—know it is, Joan."

It was not for several minutes that they resumed their conversation, and then they talked of other things.

The party camped that night in a grove of stunted white spruce, the last timber on the slopes of the pass through which Waring had monumented a route. He had added his little outfit to Ticely's, and after the two partners and their native had eaten supper, they were joined by Manners, Collins, Tholmes, "One-Word" Watkins, and several others. These came strolling up, one at a time, pipe or cigarette in mouth, and talked at first of everything except Midas—a stilted sort of converse which was so obviously preliminary as to be painful rather than entertaining to Waring. The talk had Ticely on edge—but for a different reason: He was apprehensive as to Waring's attitude. He feared that his young partner's replies to

these questions, adroit, almost casual, that were put to him might be so bluntly honest as to tear away the shimmering, silken veil that had been woven about the facts.

His anxiety was short-lived. Waring was sufficiently responsive to avoid an effect of surly reticence, yet negative enough to avoid any awkward disclosure. His talk with Joan had helped him to this discreet attitude. He itched for a private interview with Ticely, but he had sense enough not to openly seek it. His chance came when the men, but little wiser than before, straggled back to their camps along the creek bank and wearily sought their sleeping bags.

Bruce threw a dry log across the coals and waited till the first blue flames that leaped flickeringly about it yellowed and steadied. Then he turned and looked into his partner's lighted face. Ticely returned his scrutiny without speaking. The oddity, the strangeness of their situation made, for the moment, its own communication between them. They smiled at length. Then Waring frowned.

"This is a hell of a situation, Fred! Tell me all about it."

"Well, frankly, I do not like it myself," replied Ticely, shrugging. "We've been very successful in getting the help we needed—money, supplies, and labor. Perhaps we've been too successful. I'm afraid these fellows think *too* favorably of the proposition."

"How's that?" asked Bruce, determined to curb all criticism until Ticely's course had been fully explained to him.

And the elder man proceeded to give his young partner a truthful narrative of his operations in Nome, if an incomplete account can be called truthful. Yet he covered the gaps, too, in a way—the gaps which in a complete chronicle would have been occupied by the episodes of the poke, the telegrams and the diary! With these in mind, he merely said: "Of course, once they knew I was from a new and distant creek, everything I did or said was construed as another proof of the richness of the ground. And this, understand, in spite of my accurate description of just what we had! It's really amusing—the way people salt themselves in a mining country. I let them suppose what they would; for denial in such a situation is always vain, and, besides, the use they made of their imaginations was entirely to our interest."

He paused, twisting his pipe in his fingers, his look penetrating the fire to the distant places its magic revealed.

"The company in Seattle will get practically all it needs—after a while that is, and by a roundabout route. I didn't care to take the local bank too wholly into my confidence!"

Bruce did not fully understand that, but he caught the flavor of it—"roundabout route"—"too wholly into my confidence." It was a flavor that, applied to all that had gone before in Nome, was mightily perturbing to a cleanly taste. His brow darkened, and he drew strongly upon the brier stem in his mouth.

"There's a strong impression that they've all got that the creek is rich; that you wouldn't say so, but it's rich just the same. Joan—Miss Manners herself thought that. She told me so. I——"

"What did you tell her?"

"What did I *tell* her?" replied Waring slowly, as if the question were an unnecessary one. "Why, I couldn't tell her anything—much, till I had a talk with you, could I?"

Ticely's stern eyes softened. "Good lad!" they said. He lit his pipe very carefully. Bruce was all there, he reflected; an inexperienced lad, but a thoroughly sensible and dependable one. He felt grateful to Waring for his discretion. It gave him a sense of temporary security, and evoked a little further and somewhat more confidential explanation—still leaving those gaps, however; or, at least, bridging them with generalities. He told him he had a lot to learn, yet, about business, which was a game—simply a game in which, naturally, you sought to raise the value of your commodity all you could.

"We had to sell some of this Midas ground while it was still only a prospect, and though I stated the bald truth, naturally I was glad that their disbelief in what I told them took forms that were very attractive to them, and favorable to us! They certainly bought—and went on buying! We could have sold considerably more ground than we did, and at a higher price than I took. But I thought it best to cover our needs only."

"Why," asked Bruce with the keenest attention.

"Two reasons: I knew they were taking a big chance, and I really didn't want them to lose any more than is necessary—if things don't turn out well. The second reason

is that the disappointment of a lot of people is likely to be awkward, to say the least!"

"I should say so!" Waring agreed sententiously. "Especially with a mixed bunch, as these fellows seem to be. They're not all like Manners and Tholmes. He's a business man, isn't he? I think I bought two sets of dog harness and an ax helve from him."

"Yes, Tholmes & Hawthorne," replied Ticely abstractedly. He was thinking how much more "mixed" was the bunch that was even now threading the tortuous waterways to Midas.

"There's that fellow Collins," pursued Bruce. "Isn't that his name? What do you think of him?"

"A man with plenty of ready money. He's our heaviest investor. From Fairbanks. Good placer man I hear."

"Look out for him!" Waring's lip curled and his forehead drew scowlingly. "A man who bullies a defenseless girl who has trusted herself to him on the trail isn't a good guy to tie to in any game, is he?"

"Was *he* the fellow!" Before Ticely left for Nome, Bruce had told him of the meeting with Joan Manners. "That complicates things somewhat, I'm afraid."

"The whole thing's too complicated for me," declared Waring uncomfortably. He ought, he supposed, to be thoroughly pleased with the situation. They had good prospects and provisions and equipment galore with which to develop them. And Joan Manners had stepped out of his dreams, and was with him in the flesh. Yet he was profoundly disquieted. Ticely read his thought, and put his hand on Bruce's arm.

"I'll handle them, my boy," he assured him with a kind of cynical jauntiness. "They've got to take a chance. And so have we—with the ground and with them. I know 'em and I'll handle them. Leave 'em to me!"

"All right," sighed Waring.

They raked the embers into a pile and began untying the thongs of their mukluk boots.

CHAPTER X.

A BUSY CALM BEFORE THE STORM.

In the Gold Stampede of the Far North, whether large or small, an infinite variety of detail composes an ensemble which, in its broader features, is identical with that of every other stampede.

The way of the discovery, the number of men who vouch for it, the outer circumstances of its inception—these are as various as Alaska's rivers and mountains, its climate, soil, and rocks. But, whether, twenty or forty thousand strong, the stampeders crowd the waterways in great ocean liners, in river steamers, in boats and barges and canoes, to Kondike or Nome; or, on the other hand, in modest hundreds, equipped with pack horses, sleds, and dogs, they break new overland trails to lesser camps like Candle, Kougarok, Squirrel, or Midas—the phenomena of human life, of human struggle, is the same.

Emotions, passions, purposes; the means, the methods, the processes—these are identical. In principle they are one—The Stampede, that tense, fantastic drama of the North, whose placers, locked in frost and hidden beneath an inexpressive mantle of tundra mosses as spacious as a nation's territory, must still challenge the red-rimmed eyes and staggering feet of generations of prospectors to come. And these endlessly will reënact the great epic of Alaska, the Gold Stampede!

Midas, though in size and importance one of the smallest since the pre-Klondike strikes of Circle and Forty-mile first opened up the vast Yukon basin to the prospectors of the world, was in many respects the strangest stampede in all Alaska. It was unique in the fact that a single mind had conceived it, had molded certain other minds to a similar way of thinking, and these had molded the rest. Whether they came overland or by the roundabout way of the river, one thought, one belief, was common to them all. That Midas Creek was too rich for a cautious and canny fellow like Fred Ticely to have told the truth about it!

But the way the different individual minds and characters reacted to the events of their coming were as different as were the men and women themselves. One or two of the advance guard, thrown rapidly ahead to cut more timber, could scarcely keep their hands out of the flooded shafts in the creek. If unrestrained by the others, they would have ignored their orders to cut wood, and gone to bailing out the holes to get at the gravel. The other extreme of these gave the dumps a mere glance and imperturbably took their axes up the wooded hill.

And so when the next contingent arrived. Manners, truer for the moment to a sense

of his professional duty, set about finishing the commissioner's house that Bruce had framed for him. Hennessy could hardly tear himself away from Ticely and Waring's cabin, as though a kind of halo surrounded it which drew and held him like the unseen aura of a magnet. Collins, on the other hand, a more coldly deliberate man, looked to the swollen creak, now turbidly flushing out the last ice barriers from its sinuous channel, for the best landing point for the expected river boats, where he quickly erected a pole frame for the big storage tent in which were to be housed the precious supplies of the Midas Mining and Development Company.

Most of the advance party were connected either in direct interest or by employment with this hopeful concern, whose business-like organization reflected the up-to-date methods of present-day Alaska. While the various members were sizing up the externals of the place and getting their impressions, Ticely found opportunity to say to Waring:

"I'll get 'em together, Bruce, as soon as they've quit rubbering around the place. See 'em goo-gooing at the ground, as if they were expecting nuggets to jump out and hit 'em in the eye!"

He chuckled. Even in his thorough concern over the future the salesman in him could not but smack his lips at each new evidence of the spell he had cast upon them. Then he jerked back to action. "We'd better bring them over the flat yonder, and show them your town-site stakes. Midas City—ahem!—is a real-estate proposition. I ought to be rather at home there. However, we won't put you on a high stool again, Bruce."

"I should say not!" exclaimed Waring.

"But we'd better hold their attention on that town site—or on anything, in fact, except the bottom of those shafts!"

Waring putting in one of his blunt "why's," Ticely showed a trace of impatience. "Don't you see it will be better for us, and for them, too, since they've pulled up stakes in Nome and come here to settle, to get them as much *settled* as possible before they go to prospecting? Right now they could hitch up again and beat it back to Nome, after putting us through a mighty ugly ordeal. But if we get 'em to take off their things and stay a while—make camps, and quarrel a little over the choicest sites for cabins and stores, and start building and getting the big outfits in and unpacked and housed—get to feeling at home, you know, and well rooted to the place—why, then, you see the meager prospects won't drive them off! They'll get obstinate and hopeful. 'We've got to win, now,' they'll say. 'The darned old pay streak's *got* to show up, that's all.' Get me?"

Bruce "got" him. It was a kind of thought that was alien to the fiber of his mind, and with which, therefore, he had little sympathy. But his strong intelligence enabled him to grasp it fully. Evenly, and with almost a stolid face he replied:

"I dare say you're right. But wouldn't it be really better for them, in the long run, to make up their minds quickly, before they've done all these things and spent all that additional time and money?"

"It would be a great mistake," answered Ticely earnestly. "Any one who had gone as far as we have ought to give this creek a good prospecting. A little time and labor now won't add much to what they've spent, while if they give up now they simply lose everything. Ah, judge, what do you think of the lay-out?"

Manners had strolled up, a few paces ahead of Collins. He looked very fit, after his two weeks in the crisp spring sunshine. His graying hair made a handsome contrast with his ruddy, smiling, sanguine face.

"Oh, fine country, fine country, Ticely," he replied, looking up and down the wooded valley, bare of snow, now, except in the notches of its side ravines. "What's the next move?"

That played nicely into Ticely's hands. "Why the town site, I suppose. We'd better decide on the boundaries of it, and get whatever ground the company needs withdrawn at once, before the bunch arrives by the river. Mr. Collins, here, can probably come closer than any of us to sizing up the probable run of the gravel channel through the flat. For, of course, we'll have to consider the future working of the flat with as little interference as possible with the town property." As he talked, he led them down the creek toward the future "Midas City."

While an amateur surveyor readjusted the boundaries of the town site, Manners attended to the legal formalities; and with one or two other expert miners, Collins studied the channel in its relation to the shafts and cuts that Ticely and Waring had put down, and decided on the probable run of the gold. For the time being, the guess would have

to do, he told Ticely; and when they returned to the scene of building operations where Bruce, heading a gang of axmen, was hewing and notching logs as fast as they were snaked downhill by the horse teams, Collins drew the group toward Waring, so that the latter must at least hear, even if he did not join, in the ensuing conversation, and proposed that a prospecting crew be put to work at once bailing out the shafts. The spring thaw had, of course, completely flooded them—a fact on which Ticely relied for much of the delay he needed to "handle" the situation.

"Pretty sloppy work," warned the Midas magnate critically, "and unnecessarily expensive. With the flat still running surface water, it will seep in at least half as fast as it can be bailed out for a week or two yet. Why not start a few holes up on the bank, where it's drier?"

"Take too long to put 'em down," said Collins briefly. "We'll get more idea of the lay of the pay streak in a week of drifting from your shafts than we could in two months of sinking new holes."

Ticely knew that. He had an obvious defense, however—that these prospect holes were upon ground which he and Bruce had wholly retained. No one else had a right to work upon them. The claims in which he had sold the fractional interests that had been pooled in the Midas Mining and Development Company were as yet untouched by pick or shovel. But, as it would have been the height of folly to use that defense, he merely suggested that they explore the holes below the town site where, he said, the prospects were the best. They might have been—by a cent or two! But his real reason was that these holes, being on gravel bars, would be difficult to drain.

That night they all talked it over at a "regular meeting" of the officers of the company, with delighted little Joan, as secretary, sitting at a make-shift table in the unfinished commissioner's office. There was no holding them back, even if Ticely had tried. The bed rock under the muck and gravel of Midas Creek was the unseen cynosure of all eyes; and in the morning a bailing crew was started at one of the upper holes and another at a lower. They would have put a couple of men at constructing a "Chinese pump," a time-worn device of the nature of an endless chain of pockets, had not Ticely promised them, among his own supplies which were being rushed up the river, a very efficient little hand pump, which would lift water faster than any windlass and bucket crew could hoist it.

"I hope the current is swift on the river," Ticely confided to his junior partner the next day. "If it isn't, the first poling boats will be up on time, now."

Apparently the current was not very swift that spring, and he was right as to the result. In two days, several of the men he had employed in Nome reached Midas in a very slender red canoe that Ticely had admired and purchased in Nome. These men reported that the nearest of the big poling boats with the pumps and other important equipment were within ten miles of the mouth of Midas. The bailing had proceeded slowly, but with the early prospect of putting the pumps into operation, Ticely and Waring foresaw the early ending of their interlude of uncertainty.

The interlude had been utilized by Ticely to stabilize in every way the interest of the miners, but the period was too brief! But by Collins, though he in no way neglected his work, the time was utilized to cultivate Joan as much as she would permit, and that was no more and no less than a narrow civility to the man who was manager of the company in which her father had invested practically all he possessed in the world.

As she and her collie were returning up the creek from a ptarmigan hunt, her little spitfire of a .22 cradled in her arm, she paused curiously at the lower shaft workings. Collins, coming around the cribbing of the windlass, lifted his cap and asked her if she would like to go down the shaft. Going down shafts was an old story to Joan—which was the excuse she gave for declining. She moved away, but he joined her.

"Just going up to camp myself," he remarked casually, as he walked along by her side, his lank form towering above her. "About through here for this afternoon. Tomorrow morning will show us dry bed rock, and we'll soon see what we've got in *that* hole."

It was the first time he had walked with her any distance—it was fully a quarter of a mile to the flat where axes and hammers were thudding on clean, sappy spruce timber—and it gave him an opportunity for real conversation with her. Too much of her leisure time had been spent with Bruce Waring, he thought. In reality, it was time

which she could easily spare from her recording books; but it was a source of secret anger and irritation to Collins, who was deeply moved by the girl's beauty and by her refinement; to which he was not insensible, despite his own crudities and the coarseness of the life he had led. Between Waring's attitude toward him of casual brevity and Joan's polite avoidance of anything savoring of personal relations, he was made to realize perfectly the view they held concerning him.

"Say, Miss Manners," he began abruptly after the silence that followed his first remarks, "there's something I want to explain to you."

"There's something you certainly ought to," replied Joan, who knew at once what he wished to speak about. In her heart she had hoped he *would* speak of it, and definitely apologize, for unless he did her pride would permit her no friendliness with him, and this was exceedingly awkward for all of them.

"Well, I don't know," rejoined Collins, who had his own sort of pride in the matter. "It all depends on how you look at it. I didn't know who you were. And, anyhow, I wasn't going to eat you!"

Joan's eyes flashed. "No, and I don't suppose you are intending to eat Miss O'Brien!"

"Say, how long have you lived in Alaska?"

"Long enough to know things, if that is what you mean. But knowing them doesn't excuse them, does it?"

"I tell you I didn't know the kind of gal you were. But even at that, I wouldn't have hurt you any."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't have done me bodily harm, I suppose—against my will," admitted Joan wearily, for it wasn't the sort of explanation her pride demanded. "What you did wouldn't have been so bad on the boat or in a town. It would have been just fresh and cheeky, and it would have been up to—the girl—to set you right! But to let me start out with you for a long trip, when a girl has to fully trust a man—and begin that way——" Wrath surged at the recollection: "How *dared* you!" she exclaimed, looking up at his eyes.

He met her gaze frankly—and admired her the more for her anger. "You were a mighty big temptation—for a very little girl!" he replied half humorously. "I'm—awfully sorry!"

Joan felt she ought to be appeased, at least for her father's sake and Bruce's. After a moment's reflection she said: "We had best say no more about it, perhaps. It was a very unfortunate thing to happen just before your getting into mining up here with my father and—Mr. Waring."

"You ain't going to cut me out for it, now, are you, Miss Manners?"

It was hard to be friendly with this man. His innate coarseness jarred upon her—a coarseness greater even than that of his actual speech.

"Avoid you, I suppose you mean. No, I will try to forget it, and to be the same in my attitude toward you as to any of the other men."

"Including Waring?"

Joan flushed angrily. "Please avoid personalities, Mr. Collins. You know precisely what I mean."

They were at the camp already, and where their wet trails diverged they came to a halt, and he removed his cap. "If you'll really and truly forget it, that's all I want. That'll give me an even break. Good evening, Miss Manners."

"Good evening," she replied as pleasantly as she could. But when she resumed her walk her brow darkened once more, as she thought of Miss O'Brien, whom she would have liked to discuss with him—for Miss O'Brien's sake. Not only had Joan lived in Alaska long enough to "know things," as she had told Collins, but she had seen and heard and thought enough to have sympathy and understanding without, however, abating one jot of the Puritanism—as we are wont to call a very universal sentiment in the clean of heart—which belonged to her innately.

Miss O'Brien and her friend, Miss Anderson, were living in a big tent and cooking for a number of men besides Collins and Hennessy. Their way of living in Nome was impossible in the camp at Midas, even had Collins not had his own reasons for observing the proprieties. He hoped what, in fact, was true, that neither Waring, Manners, nor Joan knew anything about the little house on the outskirts of Nome. Nevertheless it was not humanly possible for either Joan or Bruce to fail to suspect the truth. They had not, however, discussed this aspect of the affair of Collins.

Waring's state of mind during that two weeks' interlude was a complex one, and,

therefore, very trying to a man of so forthright a make. Busy, harassed as he was, he saw much of Joan. Neither sought the other exactly; they gravitated. They couldn't help it; they were chums. And, responsive to that natural affinity, they would very soon have been lovers avowedly, if Waring had not hardened his heart to its own tenderness. He felt that if he made love to her, and she responded, as instinct told him she would, it would be all the worse for the girl when the inevitable trouble came. For renounce him she would, she must, in any case, unless, indeed, he were to solidify his defense in advance by making a clean breast of his own ignorance of whatever it was that Ticely had done in Nome to mislead them all—intentionally or otherwise. Afterward, such a defense, even if he were weak enough to make it, would be too late. But he had no thought of making it, either before or after the impending dénouement. He must take his medicine—with Ticely!

Constraint, therefore, strove with naturalness and freedom in his manner toward the girl and cooled the spontaneous joy of their comradeship. She remembered this manner of his afterward, and took it as the preying of a guilty conscience on the heart of a man whose impulses were superior to his actions. Waring drowned his perplexities as well as he could in herculean labor. He directed the ax gang, and while they were at work he doggedly persisted, night and day, in the prospecting of the bench. Only Ak Tuk, his helper, knew of this activity!

With the installation of the pumps, the shafts were drained, and the bed rock tested. With compressed lips, little said, Collins and Colwell drifted several feet, both up and down the creek. The pay was the same—if you could call it pay! The cat was out of the bag. Frederick Ticely had told *no less than the truth* about the gravel he had so far uncovered on Midas Creek!

CHAPTER XI.

CONSTERNATION!

Most of the freighters had arrived with their stores of building materials and merchandise—all the diversified paraphernalia of a brand-new, booming mining camp of the northern placer fields. With the arrival of each new craft at the landing, whether it were canoe, poling boat, or slender barge, new white tents sprang up on the flat, goods were piled up, men, and not a few women rushed about, entering into "deals" of all sorts—buying or leasing lots, contracting for log buildings, or earnestly discussing, and often squabbling over, "lay" agreements to work ground on the creek. The flat was rapidly taking shape as the embryonic Midas City; and its population, which now numbered upward of one hundred souls, were, with few exceptions, too bustlingly employed to notice the half dozen men, muck-covered, scowling, who passed in single file along the creek trail to the commissioner's office at the upper edge of the flat.

Collins, acting as spokesman, tersely gave their information to Judge Manners, who turned thoughtful on the instant. His immediate response was a long-drawn whistle.

"Where's Ticely, judge?" asked Tholmes, worriedly slapping his knee with his cloth cap.

"Who knows?" Manners looked questioningly from one to the other.

"I believe he's directing the unloading of a barge," replied Collins, who privately "kept cases" on Ticely.

"Better get him," said Othmer excitedly. Having been the most enthusiastic Midas fan in Nome, his fall was the fall of Lucifer!

"We'll have to have a talk right away, won't we?" asked Tholmes, whose investments were largest, next to Collins.

"About what?" asked Slim Jim. It was intended as a feeler—to bring out the temper of mind of his associates.

"Well put," said Manners, mistaking his meaning. "We may be mistaken, and if so——"

"We're not," asserted Collins shortly. "I'll answer for that."

"But even if we're not, it's a rather delicate business, boys. What are we going to say to him?"

"I know what *I'll* say to him," answered Othmer in a loud voice.

"Don't crack your windpipe, Oth!" warned Redbank. "They can hear you down on the flat!"

"I don't care if they do. I'm goin' to know where them big pans are, and know quick!"

Collins pointed a long finger at the dancing painter. "Say, you just dry up a minute, will you? You're a damn good promoter, old top, but you haven't got the head to handle this. You keep your temper in what's coming, or I'll keep it for you, see?"

"Get him," advised One-word Watkins.

"Get him, Collins," echoed Tholmes. "Let's have it out right now. Will you start the ball a-rolling, judge? You can use diplomatic language."

"Con, go after him, will you?" said Collins to Redbank. "Just say we're having a kind of meeting up here, and could he just as well as not stroll up." Redbank nervously lit a cigarette and left the building.

"Where is Bruce Waring?" asked Judge Manners.

Collins waited to see if no one else would answer, and then volunteered: "I think he's up in the timber somewhere with the cutting gang."

"I wonder what he knows about this thing?" queried Manners hesitantly.

"Oh, nothing, of course!" said Slim Jim quietly.

"It's going to be rather embarrassing if we talk to Ticely frankly," warned Manners. "We should have to give away the—the men who got some of the information."

"You're right, judge," agreed Tholmes. "We don't want to do that, if we can help it. In a sense, we had no right to that information."

"Didn't we, though!" challenged Collins. "When a man *acts* the way he did——"

"It may be all right yet," put in Colwell hopefully. "Perhaps the big pay is in some of the other holes. Here he is now, I guess." Footsteps sounded among the chips outside.

"Hullo, boys, what's up?" greeted Ticely amiably, as he and Redbank entered.

"Why, just this, Mr. Ticely," began Manners. "Yesterday and to-day the men have been drifting in both the drained shafts and have made a thorough test of the gravel and bed rock. They are very much dissatisfied with the result."

"I feared they might be," answered Ticely quickly, "though—you found what I told you, didn't you, gentlemen?"

"Then why did you fear we might be dissatisfied?"

Ticely smiled. "It didn't make any difference what I said or might have said. You know perfectly well that you did not believe me. You thought the ground was better." There was silence.

"Well, maybe it is," added the Midas promoter. Then he added again—for that was not artistic enough: "Let's hope so, at least." He said it in a very cheerful manner. Nothing came from those six glowering men; nor from Judge Manners, deeply thoughtful. They were baffled—defeated, almost, in the first encounter. Then Collins gave Manners a glance which said: "Dig in—the best way you know how."

The judge began again, a note of sternness in his voice: "All true enough, as far as it goes, Mr. Ticely. But it doesn't go far enough. I think you know perfectly well that you have been more or less responsible for our optimism."

"If you mean that I was glad that you thought so well of the prospects up here that you wanted to invest with me, enabling us all to attack the ground in the right way—why certainly. I'd have been a fool to have discouraged you when I needed assistance. I was mightily encouraged, myself, in the prospects—and am still, for that matter. Perhaps you all felt the way you did because, in spite of my conservative statements, you had reason to think *I* felt very optimistic!"

"We sure had!" exclaimed Othmer feelingly. Collins transfixed him with two cold-gray eyes, and the little painter's teeth came together almost with a snap.

"Distant pastures look the greenest, you know," pursued Ticely. "You're simply experiencing a reaction, now that you've got on the ground itself. The facts remain the same. It's a big proposition here——"

"I should think it is!" sneered Collins. "A few feet of six or eight-cent dirt, and half of Alaska to lug every pound of outfit over. *I'll* say it's big!"

"I—what is your pleasure, gentlemen?" asked Manners uncertainly. He felt he could go no further without letting out secrets. The interview was a grave disappointment to him. He was oppressed by a sense of failure—of ruin. He wanted to think it all out. Perhaps they were wrong. At least Ticely had lost none of his comfortable assurance.

"I suppose that'll do for now," prompted Collins, and Tholmes nodded to him. The others scowled at Ticely and shuffled toward the door. Ticely remained, obediently to a look from Manners—which Collins observed. When out of earshot of the cabin the men grouped again.

"Hell, this won't do," said Tholmes angrily.

"I should say not," agreed Collins with a light, derisive laugh.

They decided to get together the rest of the Midas mining company men and to see the judge later. The yeast of disappointment was rapidly fermenting a bitter and angry resentment.

Inside the log house for a few long moments Manners silently regarded the partner of clean young Bruce Waring. Then, a little falteringly, he asked:

"Can't you say more to me about this thing, Ticely? I'm your friend—I certainly want to be."

"Why, my dear judge, I hardly know what to say," replied Ticely in nicely simulated bewilderment. "I spoke as candidly as I know how. Quite as candidly, I think, as you did—or the rest."

The truth of this made further progress difficult for Manners. He held obstinately to the hope that real frankness would disclose that there *was* big pay which, for reasons held good by its discoverers, they had not wished as yet to reveal.

"Can't you be franker—franker, perhaps, than I have been?"

"That's rather naïve of you, judge, don't you think?" smiled the other.

"Perhaps."

"No, Judge Manners, I think the thing will have to work itself out. Just have a little patience, and try to instill a little into the others, and I'm sure they will be satisfied in the end." Once more the artist in him suggested another stroke. "I'm sure they'll be satisfied" was too humble. So he added: "It's what is known as the baby act, isn't it, that these fellows are putting over? I told them exactly what I had. I gave it to them straight. And yet they almost made life a burden to me till I sold them interests. What the deuce is the matter with them, anyhow? What do they want!"

"We'll see soon enough, I dare say. Too soon, perhaps." Manners bit his lip and turned away.

"I'll stand pat, judge," replied Ticely cryptically; and he left the cabin, passing Joan in the doorway.

The girl went white at the look on her father's face, and bit by bit she got from him the details. He had no wish, and, indeed, there seemed no reason, to withhold the truth from her.

"But Bruce!" she exclaimed. To which cry from her heart her father could make no reply.

CHAPTER XII.

THE NUDGE.

Between seven and midnight of that night there were several groups in earnest conversation. The news had quickly spread that the big mining company, whose operations had stimulated by far the larger number of the camp followers to their present undertakings, had failed to locate the big pay, that Ticely and Waring had claimed to have uncovered. That Ticely and Waring had, in words, made no such claim was a circumstance unknown to many and of consequence to none. It was "supposed" to be a rich strike—nothing like it since Dexter in the Nome country and Cleary at Fairbanks! And if it was really true—but thunderation! it couldn't be!—that there was nothing in it—that the creek was a fake—

That was the burning question. It was also an explosive one, but the fuse was slow. It would take hours yet, or days. For when weeks have been consumed in the fixation of an idea it cannot be dislodged in a moment. Nor is the process of extraction a painless one, or unaccompanied by alarmingly inflammatory symptoms. Manners, who was well acquainted with many of the Midasites, as they had been dubbed in Nome, strolled from group to group, having little to say to each but closely noting the thought and temper of all.

Among his own immediate associates it had been decided to bring the whole matter to "a show-down;" to put all their own cards on the table, and demand the same thing of Ticely and Waring. Manners had earnestly counseled forbearance; and though he knew that, as a petty justice, he had no sufficient jurisdiction to legally try the issue of a criminal charge, even if the men would have brooked the delays of a formal court proceeding, he had declared his willingness to conduct a hearing the next day which should have something of the character of a regular trial.

Meantime, early in the evening, Ticely had gone in search of Waring whose private prospecting of the bench in the heart of the woods had made him, each evening, a late comer to their cabin. Sometimes, indeed, he had remained out all night. The elder man looked for him in the timber camp of the axmen, and wandered about for some time, calling him. But Bruce was nowhere on the mountainside. Very late the previous

night he had walked the length of the bench, which was much farther up the slope than the zone of cutting, and staked it into claims from end to end. This evening, when his fires were set in the bench shafts, he had left Ak Tuk to watch the thawing and had come down to the creek with copies of the location notices in his pocket—all made out, of course, in the name of Ticely and Waring. He headed straight for the recorder's office.

He found the recorder doing up her supper dishes, and anything but communicative. "What's the matter, Joan," he asked, hurt by her curt replies to his overtures at conversation.

At first evading him, she finally told him what her father had told her of the strange conference that afternoon in the adjoining office. It was now Joan's turn to question Bruce, and his to be curt, or at least reticent—almost taciturn. And pain grew in her heart with the suspicion, which in a less loyal and trusting woman would doubtless have been certainty—that Bruce Waring was saying little because he had little that he could truthfully say in his defense.

Realizing what her thought must be, fearing that his perturbation might move him to some indiscretion of speech, he abruptly handed her the location notices. "Please file these Joan," he requested. "Don't record them; just stamp them and seal them up."

"Very well," she said, a little stiffly. She wondered what it meant.

Bruce took his hat and walked to the door. He turned.

"I know it must seem queer to you, Joan dear, that I don't—want to talk of this. I—can't, that's all. I'm—sorry. I'd do anything but—— Oh, Lord!" He bolted from the place; and Joan, when she was sure that he had really gone, went to bed and cried herself to sleep.

Stalking to his cabin, Waring also went immediately to bed, for he was dog tired. And he, too, wept—in the way of such a man; a peculiarly manifested phenomenon compounded of sighs, mutterings, cuss words, hair fretting—even the casting of boots into distant and resounding parts of the cabin. It did not even occur to him to alter his predetermined course of conduct.

Ticely, entering some hours later, and finding his junior partner sleeping heavily, did not disturb him. But he caught him in the morning, before Bruce left the cabin, and told him to be sure to come to the commissioner's office early in the afternoon.

"What for, Fred?"

"Investigation," replied Ticely sleepily. "They've got to bed rock in two of the holes, and—there's hell a-poppin'." Then, waiting for no comment, he turned on his side and resumed his slumbers.

At one o'clock Bruce came down the hillside, and entering the cabin, found and pocketed his automatic. He looked for Ticely's, but it was gone.

"All right!" he muttered, and went down to the commissioner's building where he stared at whosoever stared at him among the knots of men standing about the place. The mining company members were all there, and Ticely was chaffing them goodhumoredly in return for remarks whose distinctly sinister character seemed to go over his head. He sobered appreciably during the hearing!

Manners told the partners that they were charged with obtaining money and goods under false pretenses, a crime which could only be tried in the district court at Nome. His jurisdiction enabled him, however, to sit as a committing magistrate, to determine whether there was probable cause for holding them to answer before that court, but he was plainly disqualified from performing this duty because of his financial interest in the case. The other members of the company, he explained, wanted him to hear it, anyhow—if Ticely and Waring were willing to subject themselves to a formal hearing—and had asked that their statements be reduced to writing.

"I told them—sure," said Ticely to his partner.

"It suits me," assented Waring.

The room had filled with scowling men. Joan, quite pale, sat at a small table, with a stenographer's book and pencil, and took down her father's examination of the debonair king of Midas Creek. The story that all of the Midas mining company men, and not a few of the other stampeders, already knew was rehearsed, Ticely answering promptly and, apparently, without evasion. Then Manners asked him where he had obtained the poke of dust he brought to Nome.

"Up at Shungnak, on the Kobuc," replied Ticely.

"Didn't you tell Con Redbank here that it was Candle dust?"

"I did. It was none of his business, and he knew perfectly well that any one not wishing his affairs made public would answer him untruthfully. However, the reason I said 'Candle' was because I had an idea that those Shungnak miners, who treated me mighty well when I was through there, did not want to advertise their diggings to the idle and curious in Nome. No such objection could apply to Candle, which is a long-established camp, as I am told."

There was a slight buzzing stir in the room, a profound dissatisfaction, it seemed, with an explanation which, on its surface, was unassailably logical and natural.

"Did you not, in the presence of Ed Rosslyn, here, who was assistant radio operator at the time, send two telegrams to friends, or alleged friends, in Seattle virtually claiming that you had made a big strike?"

Ticely looked incredulous. "I sent two telegrams, yes. I certainly claimed to have made no *big* strike, though."

Manners produced copies of the telegrams, in code and decoded, and handed them to Ticely, who merely remarked that whatever might be true of the imaginations of "some people in Nome," it could not be denied that they were highly gifted sneaks. Upon which Manners immediately retorted:

"It has been thought you were quite willing to be spied on: you left your code book in your room!"

Again there was a stir, truculently murmurous, which Ticely cut short by the prompt rejoinder: "Which I certainly never would have done had I considered secrecy a vital matter. What did I say in those telegrams? Why not read them?"

Manners did so, very slowly—and realized as he read them that in no express terms had Ticely made claim of a rich strike.

"I expect those fellows up, by the way," remarked the sender of the telegrams. "And when they come, I think they'll be satisfied that while this creek is no bonanza, as yet, it's a mighty good prospect for men who are willing to work for a living instead of expecting to buy a Klondike for a few hundred dollars!"

The thrust, deep as from a rapier's point, evoked a light laugh from a few, a rasp of hate from more. Still others merely winced and scowled.

"Another thing—probably the most serious," pursued Judge Manners. "Did you not leave in your room, where it could be seen by any——"

"Sneak who crawled in there——" supplied Ticely with casual contempt. He was really appealing to the many against the few.

"Where, I repeat, it could be seen by any person disposed to examine your effects, a little memorandum book purporting to contain a record of pannings made in January?"

Waring, who stood at Ticely's side, his face as nearly expressionless as he could hold it, turned slowly and looked at his partner anxiously, as the elder man replied: "I had such a diary, yes. I think I had been rummaging among my things trying to find something, and doubtless the diary turned up among those things."

"It ran like this, didn't it?" Manners read from a small sheet of paper. " 'January 3d. Bottom gravel, eighty-five cents; coarse, also very fine, and brighter than the creek; bed rock, twenty-two dollars to sixty dollars; scraped pan, one hundred and seventy-five dollars. January 5th: Gravel thinner, three dollars and sixty cents; coarse, fine, and bright average of three pans; bed rock, five pans, average, one dollar and fifteen cents; scraped pan, four hundred and sixty dollars,' and so on?"

Joan, not having to take down this reading, dropped her pencil and turned wide brown eyes upon the writer of the diary. Waring, alert, his lips compressed, lessened, unperceived, the few inches' space between Ticely's elbow and his own.

"Was the diary from which these extracts were copied a fake diary?" asked Manners.

Evenly, with perhaps a shade of reproach, but amiably withal, came the reply: "It was not."

"Will you explain these entries?"

Ticely, conscious of a gentle pressure of Bruce's elbow, glanced a fleeting instant at his partner's face, and caught its message of dissent—a shake of the head so slight as to be perceptible to no one else—except Joan, who faced him!

"I will not!" said Ticely. It is probable he intended to say that, anyhow. A murmur low, hissing, almost, followed his reply.

"Why not?" asked Manners sternly.

"You'll probably know why, some day," replied Ticely airily. But he perceived he was losing. Instantly, then, he changed his tactics. Where witty sarcasms and perfect

plausibility were impotent with this character of men, anger might bluff them. He flamed!

"I'm glad you asked me those questions!" His voice rose a little in pitch, a little in loudness. "I've been wondering what the devil kind of a strike you fellows imagined you had here, anyway—for a few thousand dollars or so apiece! Now I get you. You gumshoed me from the minute I hit Nome. I don't mean you, judge. I mean whoever did it. You shadowed me, pried into my business, stole my papers, acted like rats! Why? *To fool yourselves*—as men always do, who want to get something for nothing. Well, you did it. You salted yourselves and I hope you're satisfied. I've let you go as far as you liked and answered your questions—practically all of them. There are certain things you have no right to know, and you're not going to know."

He seemed to cool down a little after this tirade. In a somewhat gentler and more respectful tone: "Get down to brass tacks. We've got a darn good prospect here, and if she turns out well—as she will, take it from me—we've got the whole creek and the whole country round it. What more do you want?"

"You'll see!" said Collins, enraged beyond restraint. He, too, evidently, had hoped against hope.

"Gentlemen," Manners hastened to say, "I have presented our case, and listened to Mr. Ticely's replies. He does not deny the facts you allege, but puts a different interpretation upon them." He paused, disagreeably consicous that what he was about to say would intensify rather than curb the mounting passion of his hearers. "An interpretation which we have no present means of refuting, however any of you may doubt the truth of it. If this were a judicial proceeding, as a judge I could not hold either Mr. Ticely nor, of course, Mr. Waring, to answer for fraud. That we have been bitterly deceived, all of you know, and Mr. Ticely himself knows it now, if he did not know it before."

Above the angry murmur that filled the room, rose the shrill, scathing voice of Othmer: "No, oh, no! He didn't know it before!" And his words were sardonically echoed by others.

Manners finished determinedly. "Whether he knew it or not, boys, I'm afraid there's no just way, and there's certainly no legal way, of holding him responsible for the deception."

"He done his work too slick—the damn thief!" yelled Bill Colwell, the giant blacksmith, shaking his great grimy fist. And the hubbub rose into a roar.

"Out of here, fellers!" cried another, and the crowd surged through the door.

Manners, long before, had risen from behind his table.

"I'm sorry for this, Ticely," he said ominously, shaking his head. "I've done what I could—against my own interest, perhaps—to give you a chance to explain—to *really* explain." He bit his lip and shook his head again. "I can't answer for what they'll do now."

"They'll come to their senses, of course," declared Ticely, but his face belied the confidence of his words.

"I wouldn't bank on that too strongly, if I were you," warned Manners.

When the door closed on Ticely, Joan, pale to the lips, turned to her father.

"It's all over, is it, dad? We've lost everything?"

"I suppose so. I hoped up to the last that perhaps——"

"He was very mysterious about that diary. He said we'd probably know some day——"

"Bluff, pure bluff. There's no doubt they've got nothing to speak of on the creek here. As to their having deceived us—Ticely handled those accusations mighty cleverly. If it wasn't for the diary, I'd almost be inclined to think they might be innocent. Waring though—I hoped up to the last he would clear himself."

"I did, too," she confessed, with averted face. "But Bruce—Mr. Waring couldn't very well say what he knew, if it was against Mr. Ticely, could he?"

"N-o, I suppose not. Even if they didn't cook it up together, Waring must know that nobody would believe him—in fact, they'd only hate him the more for trying to plead ignorance of what Ticely did in Nome."

"Daddy, I could still have cherished the belief that he didn't know what Ticely was going to do, and that loyalty, even more than policy, kept him silent, if I hadn't seen—father, I saw him *nudge* Ticely, just before Ticely refused to answer about the diary. My—heart—broke—then!" sobbed Joan.

Manners put his arm around the motherless girl and stroked her dark hair.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MINERS' MEETING.

Slim Jim Collins guided the infuriated gang toward the other end of the flat. It was easy to do this seemingly without intention. With Redbank and Hennessy, he merely walked a little ahead of the others in the direction of the tent of Miss O'Brien and Miss Anderson, where most of the members of the Midas mining company messed. In the kitchen portion of the structure, back of the canvas partition, Miss Pearl O'Brien sat peeling potatoes.

"See here, boys," said Collins, when the door of the tent house closed, "there's no use all talking at once. Let's see how this thing stands."

For reasons which he did not care to disclose, he had avoided any appearance of leadership at the hearing in the commissioner's office. But he was logically their leader, and, for days during the prospecting of the shafts, he had worked in the quiet ways that best bring about actual leadership—a word of advice here, a wise suggestion there, a sympathetic fraternizing with all. And now he knew that he *was* their leader, especially if he deferred sufficiently to Galen Tholmes, "Chop-house" Miller, Tom Baker, and one or two others whose interests were large and whose influence, like his own, was considerable. His words brought the instant attention of nearly every one; whereupon he asked:

"What did you think of that farce?"

"Farce is right," sneered One-word Watkins; and Redbank, quite in character, added:

"Somebody oughter have stayed outside and listened to what he said to 'em after we left. You all noticed they hung back!"

"I'd *hang* 'em back!" hissed Jimmy Head.

"What did ye expect? He and the gal is old friends of Waring," reminded Othmer. "Old friends of Ticely, too, I'll bet my lead dog!"

"Figgers he's going to be the young feller's father-in-law, perhaps," suggested Collins.

"It's all the justice you ever get from a tinhorn lawyer, nowadays, in Alaska," declared Hennessy bitterly. "*A miners' meeting* for me every time!"

"A miners' meeting's the only thing to settle this business," agreed Othmer enthusiastically, and there were cries of "You bet!" and "That's the stuff!"

Tholmes held up his hand to be heard. "I've known the judge a long time, and I hope he'll arrest 'em or something."

"Ticely's the marshal, you chump," interjected big Colwell disrespectfully. "*Some game!*"

"Manners is just weak, that's all," continued Tholmes—but a hiss of derision expressed general dissent. "Maybe it's partly the girl and Waring. I don't know, and I don't care. What I do know is, these fellows have got our money and our outfits. I'm in about half the stock of the hardware store, between them and the company here. And that means *I'm all in*—I don't mind saying."

"Same here," muttered several others.

"Half the money he got from us he sent out," asserted Collins. "Salted it down, I suppose."

"He'll never live to spend it," declared Colwell grimly, his great hands working.

"*Miners meeting! Miners meeting!* Come on!" cried several impatiently. "Call 'em to order, Slim Jim."

"Supper time," reminded Watkins, the soul of deliberateness as well as of brevity.

"Throw him out—to hell with supper!" yelled Othmer.

"All right, gentlemen," assented Collins, who was entirely satisfied with the way things were trending. He moved from their midst and sat on the table's edge. "Now just to start the ball a-rollin', let's see if we agree about what's happened. We've been suckers, all right, but that don't get us anywhere, and it don't make them fellows any less crooks. Question is if any of you gentlemen believe for one minute that Fred Ticely and Bruce Waring didn't deliberately——"

"Don't know about Waring," interrupted Chop-house Miller with cautious fairness.

Collins laughed. "Still waters run deep, as they say. Those quiet mugs are always the worst."

"Every time!" fervently agreed Watkins.

"Naturally they'd have the smoothest talker of the two attend to the Nome end of the game. Now, did any of you fellows believe that explanation about the telegram and the little book?"

"Little book!" yelled Redbank. "Gawd, that was a good one!"

"He didn't even try to explain that ex-

cept to say it wasn't a fake. Wasn't a fake! Say, I'll give any man my outfit, if he can raise twenty-five cents on that bed rock, let alone four hundred and sixty dollars!"

Collins' friend, Hennessy, had edged forward.

"Gentlemen," he said oratorically, "it's the slickest job ever worked in Alaska; a dirty, contemptible, cold-blooded, framed-up swindle, and there's men and women on this flat that's put every cent they got in the world up here. And I ask you gentlemen, I ask you: *'Will we stand for it?'* "

"Stand for it nothing!"

"Tie 'em up tight and float 'em down to Nome——"

"And have 'em turned loose next day, like Manners says! They done their work too cute!"

"Handle 'em here!"

"Handle 'em here, you bet!"

"That's the stuff!" yelled several.

Just then, above the babel, rose the voice of the doorkeeper outside: "Here's Judge Manners."

Miss O'Brien caught those words, and dropped her knife, though she had peeled very few potatoes since the miners' meeting began. Joan Manners must be alone in her cabin, and it would be safe to——

She left the tent house, by the kitchen door, and walked across the flat to the hillside whose stump-dotted slope she ascended at a leisurely pace. Then she made her way along the hillside and, unobserved, descended again to the flat and entered the commissioner's office. Crossing the wide floor, she knocked at the door of the recorder's room, and a voice said: "Come."

Joan Manners sat with a book before her and a pen in her hand. It was an idle pen —as idle as Miss O'Brien's knife had been. The two girls stared at each other.

"Can I speak with you a minute?" asked Pearl O'Brien. "I ain't got much time." Joan noted the suppressed excitement of her manner.

"Certainly, Miss O'Brien."

She came quickly to the table and stood over Joan, trembling.

"There's a miners' meeting, down at our place. You've heard of them, maybe?"

"I've seen them," said Joan concisely. "I'm an old sour dough."

"Then you know they generally mean business!"

Joan caught her breath. Her eyes glowed.

"I ain't supposed to be up here tellin' you this, but—you and your father and Ticely and Waring had better beat it!"

"Thank you!" said Joan icily. Then she relaxed a little. "What are they going to do?" Her voice quivered slightly.

"I can't tell you. Some talked about taking them to Nome, but the most wouldn't stand for that. They was yellin' something about 'Handlin' them here,' when I heard some one say that your dad had come. I left just then—by the back way—so I don't know what they said. But—they think the judge is in on the swindle, so, of course, *they won't tell him nothin'!* As soon as he comes back, you can put him wise, and the whole four of you had just better paddle down that river. You can send your native down the creek with that fast canoe Ticely's got, and along about midnight the rest of you can go over the hill without being noticed, and work around and drop down to the river and take to the canoe in the morning."

"Why should *I* go?" demanded Joan, her blood mounting angrily to her face.

"Because you—because your father wouldn't be safe."

Joan rose and grasped her arm.

"No! You are anxious for *me* to go."

The girl gave Joan a quick, bold glance: "I know how it is with you and Waring!"

"You know nothing of the kind," denied Joan sternly. "Tell me!" She tightened her grasp on Miss O'Brien's arm and looked her down!

"Jim—Slim Jim! He's after you!"

"*After* me!"

"Yes, after you. *I* know him. He's never forgotten, and never forgiven——"

Joan released her hold upon the other's arm. But she did not take her eyes off her face till Miss O'Brien dropped her head upon her hands and wept silently.

"I'm sorry," whispered Joan. "You don't need to be afraid of me." Even to say it was a humiliation, but she did not care for that in the presence of this woe.

"Will you g-go?" came through Miss O'Brien's wet fingers.

"No!" said Joan. "Of course not." She found her cap. "But—I'm much obliged to you, Miss O'Brien. I think you meant us kindness, too. I'll try to think so. I *will* think so!"

"Oh, Miss Manners, please don't ever ——" She raised her tearful face—a visage

of alarm. "Don't ever mention that I came to you and told you——"

"I never will!" promised Joan. Still holding her cap, she waited for the girl's departure. Then she left the cabin herself.

Manners had left it only half an hour before. After the hearing, he had waited in his office, hoping for a return of the men of his own company. When they did not return, he grew restive, knowing full well that mischief was afoot, and, though somewhat against his dignity, he set out to find them in the interest of peace.

A listening group outside of the mess tent identified it as the place of meeting of the indignation meeting. As he walked toward the door, the angry cries for immediate justice that came through the canvas walls apprised him of the alarming trend of the sentiment of the men within. Not without some difficulty, he gained admittance. With his appearance an angry hush succeeded the noisy demonstration.

"Now, look here, men," said Manners earnestly, "I'm out and injured as much as any of you, proportionately to my means, and I guess I'm just as mad. But we've got to remember we haven't been any too straight ourselves."

"How do you make that out?" demanded Con Redbank.

"He was shadowed around town; traps were set for him; his messages were stolen from the government telegraph office; his room was burglarized, and his private papers searched and copied. Just because Ticely got away with it—beat us at our own game, as you might say——"

"Are you his lawyer?" shouted Baker belligerently.

"You certainly act like it," sneered Collins.

"I'm not, and you know it. I'm simply trying to make you fellows see both sides of the case in the interest of law and order. Even if he was all black and we were all white, it would be murder if you hang that man!"

"*That* man!" Collins shot back. "You'd just get Ticely, would you?"

"I don't see that Waring had anything to do with it."

"Oh, no, he's a nice, quiet, *good-lookin' boy!*"

The meaning of that last phrase, subtle, perhaps, to the less discerning of the others, was plain enough to Manners, who had often admired the picture Bruce and Joan made as they walked or talked together. There was a glint—none too amiable—in the judge's eye, as he answered:

"Look here, Collins, it would become you better if you'd stick right to this question of fraud, and let no personal likes or dislikes influence you in this thing."

"Just what I was going to advise *you* to do," Collins struck back, and comprehension of the retort was voiced in the derisive laughter that followed.

Manners tried to resume his argument, but the men were in no mood for it. Cries of "Put him out!" "You're their lawyer!" "How much of the swag did *you* get?" drowned his voice; and when, pale with anger and chagrin, he ceased speaking, the leaders began whispering together. That was enough for Manners, who angrily withdrew, aware that in another minute he would probably be ordered out.

"All right," he said, turning at the door, "I'll wash my hands of the whole affair."

"Use soap!" advised One-word Watkins sententiously, and sneering guffaws followed Manners from the shack.

His first thought was to warn Ticely and Waring, angry though he was at both of them. But he had not gone a hundred yards up the creek before he perceived he was followed, so he turned gradually toward his office and went to bed.

CHAPTER XIV.

DURING THE NIGHT.

After the hearing, Ticely and his brawny young partner walked up the creek to their cabin, almost in silence. Waring made a fire and cooked supper, while the elder man found relief from the strain he was under by vigorously chopping wood. As silently as they had entered the cabin, they ate their simple meal. Then they lighted their pipes and looked at each other.

"What did you think of it, Bruce?" asked Ticely nervously.

"I think——" Suddenly laying down his pipe, Waring rose from the table and sat on the edge of his bunk. "God Almighty, Fred! tell me the truth about it. You know I'll stand by you all I can."

Ticely flung his own pipe down. "Damn it, Bruce, I've told the truth—to them and to you. What do you mean, anyhow?"

If it was a simulated asperity it was

well executed, and Waring was instantly uncomfortable. His deference for Ticely as an elder, a better educated, and almost superior being, had survived the intimacies of camp life. Though Ticely had generously—as Bruce felt—admitted him to a comradeship of equality, he still retained a certain timidity of demeanor and utterance which not even his risen sense of something seriously wrong in his partner could wholly banish. Nevertheless, he was now resolved that nothing should balk his efforts to gain the truth.

"Don't misunderstand me, Fred. I don't doubt the facts you stated. Even Judge Manners didn't do that. But there's something else that gave those fellows their big hunch—something else than that poke and those telegrams. Something else, even, than that diary that they found in your bag."

"Did you think for one moment that I faked that diary?" asked Ticely, in a sorrowful voice.

"Why, Fred, it must have been your Klondike diary. You've told me about that big pay you fellows ran into in 'ninety-nine when you worked that lay on 'Swede' Anderson's claim. And if the year wasn't on it——"

"Apparently it wasn't!"

"They'd naturally think it was our own Midas prospects. But, still, beyond even that, there must have been something that gave them the *key* to those things—something in the way you acted!"

"Look here, Bruce," said Ticely, very deliberately, "I'll be frank with you—franker than I have ever been. You are innocent in business. You're too—well, you're too matter of fact. Don't you know yet what business *is?* Any kind of business, from shoeing horses to organizing a trust? It's exactly and precisely the same. You put your best foot foremost. You try in every way you can, without, of course, doing anything actually wrong, to put your proposition over. When you sell a garment, you know the way you have to act and what sort of thing you have to say. You don't actually claim that there is so much wool in it, but if the prospective purchaser derives the impression that it's wool, or contains a great deal of wool, it helps you build the conviction in his mind that it is a good garment and that he wants to buy it. You make everything look as pretty as you can. You don't make things *really* pretty. The artist, designer, or manufacturer does that. The salesman merely creates a belief that things *are* attractive. And the less attractive they really are, the greater the triumph of salesmanship. I'm accounted a good salesman, as perhaps you know." Ticely bit his lip thoughtfully: "I'm beginning to believe I'm too good a salesman!"

"You certainly have been in this case, Fred Ticely, or I miss my guess," replied Waring soberly.

Ticely frowned. "They bought, or bit—call it what you will. And now they're welshing like curs. *Of course,* I made it look good. I had to. But I defy them to produce one scintilla of truthful evidence that I used any other means than those of salesmanship; subtle, indirect, perhaps, but *—salesmanship!"*

"But you made them think what wasn't true?" Waring said it respectfully but in deadly earnestness. And with equal earnestness, Ticely replied:

"And every man, woman—yes, and child, on top of God's footstool does the same thing, consciously or unconsciously, every hour, almost, of their lives!"

Waring slowly shook his head. "No, it can't be. It *can't* be!"

"It's *so.* Look at it carefully, cold-bloodedly, and you'll find it's so. You'll know it some day, if you don't now."

"Fred, just one more question—about this memorandum book. Did you *just happen* to find that old diary, or did you——"

Ticely interrupted him. How much through a deliberate intention to interrupt, how much through a really sudden memory of Waring's gently pressing elbow, only the Conscious Light in men's hearts could have told.

"When they asked me about it, Bruce, while you were standing close to me, why did you——"

Bruce interrupted *him.*

"What's *that?"* he asked, listening.

He heard a light footfall on the path outside the cabin, and in another moment a gentle knock sounded on the rough planks of the door. Waring knew that step, and bounded across the cabin.

"Joan!"

She entered and closed the door. Without preface, she said very distinctly: "The men are having a miners' meeting. They are very, very angry, and—I know this from some one who was there—they are dissatisfied with father's advice. They mean mis-

chief. The person who told me this thinks you had better leave the camp at once."

"Does your father know of this?" asked Ticely.

"Probably; I did not wait to find him. I came up here instantly, so that—if you wished to go, you might lose no time. This person suggested——"

"I don't want to hear what the person suggested," interrupted Waring harshly. Then, "Please pardon me, Joan!"

"Miss Manners!" she corrected him.

He bowed his head.

"Aren't you—going?" she asked.

He came up close to her and looked her intently in the face.

"What do you think!"

She gazed into his clear eyes. "I hoped —in spite of what I heard to-day—I hoped *you* would not, at least."

"You are right. *We* will *not* go!" His jaw set strongly with his words.

"It is kind of you, Miss Manners, to risk detection by telling us," acknowledged Ticely. "I thank you."

She did not appear to hear him. She had turned her back to both of them and put her hand in her loose khaki bodice. When she turned again she laid a blued Colt's revolver upon the table.

"I suppose you have your own. But—here is an extra one." As she looked at Bruce, who was regarding her with drawn brows, she seemed about to speak again. But abruptly she fled from the cabin. The two men stood as if petrified. Then Bruce took his cap and turned to Ticely.

"You were asking me, when Miss Manners interrupted us——"

Ticely studied a moment. "Why, simply —when they asked me about the diary—why did you nudge me and frown slightly, as if you wanted me to refuse to say what it was? Why didn't you want me to explain about it?"

Bruce walked toward the door.

"It would have done no good; in fact, only would have made 'em madder. And, besides, it might prevent——" He snapped his teeth against the completion of his sentence. Then he looked at Ticely narrowly. "How about that diary?"

"How about that nudge?"

Waring smiled mirthlessly. "This seems a game of answering one question by asking another." Quite abruptly he went out and closed the door behind him.

Swiftly he ascended to the bench claim. By going to his shaft by a slightly different route each day he had avoided making any trail. He found that Ak Tuk had already taken out the remains of the burned-out fire and hoisted several buckets of the wet, sticky gravel. Bruce examined it attentively, and noted that it was very sticky indeed—evidently he was now in the sediments overlying the bed-rock gravel. He judged that one more fire would uncover the bottom of the old channel.

They worked in silence for an hour and a half, picking the warmed and thawed gravel and hoisting it to the dump. Not until the last bucket of thawed dirt was lifted did Waring sample the dirt. It was a most excellent prospect—for top gravel. He wished the fire had been a bigger one, and the shaft had thawed deeper.

"Come on, Ak Tuk," he called, seizing his ax. "We make plenty fire to-night—big thaw. Maybe bed rock to-morrow. Mebbe plenty *need* good pay. Might help some!" he added, more to himself than to the native. It was nearly midnight when they lighted the new fire and threw upon it a quantity of small quartz bowlders which, becoming almost red-hot, would later sink beneath the ashes and continue the thawing of the frozen mass. Then they walked down the hill.

Bruce did not know what was going to happen to-morrow. He knew only that he would stand shoulder to shoulder with the man who had been his benefactor, and who was the loved and loving husband of that dainty woman who had traveled three thousand miles to a filthy, disease-ridden swamp and nursed him like a mother through a mortal illness.

But the man was gone! On the table, under a frying pan, he found two notes. The first read:

To THE MIDAS MINING AND DEVELOPMENT COMPANY AND ALL OTHERS WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

As I do not propose to allow myself to be mistreated by a gang of lunatics, I am going to Nome, where I shall hold myself answerable in a proper way to any claims that any one decides to bring against me. My partner, Mr. Waring, who knows nothing whatever of any of my operations in Nome, and is in no way responsible, personally, for my conduct there, will remain and represent me in any matters affecting the interests of Ticely and Waring on Midas Creek. FREDERICK R. TICELY.

The other note was addressed to Waring:

If you hadn't left the cabin so suddenly, I

would have told you that I did not propose to remain and knuckle down to that bunch of swine. You are safe enough, I suppose; but to make certain of it, I am leaving the other letter. I am taking the route that only you and I are familiar with. Please burn this letter, Bruce. And good luck to you. TICELY.

Bruce promptly burned it, and—after thinking it over for a long time—*he burned the other letter also!* Then he clenched his fist at the man who had departed, and cursed him for a coward.

He sat on the table and, oblivious of his surroundings, thought it all out—all of it, from the beginning when they had taken him, a youth buried in toil and ignorance—taken him with no thought, no purpose, save the spontaneous, disinterested kindness of their hearts—and given him his glorious chance. This would have been reason enough, with any of a different stamp than Waring, to aid Ticely in his flight. But in Waring's veins coursed blood of no strains but the indomitable. The instincts that make for the open, where no boldness of brain, no keenness of eye, no strength of arm, but one's *own* wrests from the earth the wherewithal of happiness and content, were Waring's. A scion of frontiersmen, he looked to no man for help and shrank from no man in fear. To him, the one unpardonable sin, more despicable than theft, more atrocious than murder, was cowardice; the one unpardonable shame that would pursue the very soul, quitting life and earth, was the shame of the fugitive.

"He can't do it," he groaned. "Damn him, he can't do it—not to himself and not to his wife!"

He struck the table with his naked fist, and the jumping ink bottle reminded him of something—of his locations on the bench. They might prove very good, indeed, and—in case he did not come back—those poor devils who apparently had lost their all, must have another chance, and a quick one, without the ruinous delays of tedious legal redress.

He found in a book at the side of his bunk a number of blank deeds belonging to Ticely. These he filled in, referring frequently to a list in Joan Manners' handwriting. Then he wrote Joan a note, and, wrapping it up with the deeds and Joan's revolver, gave it to Ak Tuk, with some instructions.

He threw some grub into a barley sack, strapped on his gun belt, and made for a flat up the creek where the idle horses were pastured. Here he caught the one which his practiced eye picked as the best for his purpose, and led him to a big birch from whose limbs many packsaddles and several riding saddles were slung. In a few moments he was doing what Ticely undoubtedly had done—guiding his horse up the shallow channel of the creek, leaving no trail. He followed the main stream two miles and then ascended the channel of a tributary nearly to its head. Satisfied that his trail from now on could never be discovered, he struck out for the high ridge. His partner had several hours the start of him, was probably well mounted, and would ride hard. Moreover, his exact route was uncertain. Bruce knew it only as the high moose trails which follow along the crest of the ridges. But he knew in his heart that he would find Frederick Ticely.

CHAPTER XV.

JOAN SINKS THE RED CANOE.

One of the instructions which Bruce gave Ak Tuk the native carried out too literally. He was to "give the little package to young girl Joan early to-morrow morning." Ak Tuk glued his eye to the cabin clock for a little over an hour till the hands read "one-thirty." He felt that that was early!

He walked down the creek to the judge's cabin with the packet concealed in his spacious parka, and knocked softly on the window of Joan's room. The girl was on her bed, but she had not slept. She had only stared at the poles of the roof, every one of them most carefully peeled—for her, as she well knew—by Bruce Waring. She went to the window, drew aside the skirt she had pinned over it for a curtain, and beheld Ak Tuk, who thrust the packet under the sash when Joan raised it. She lit a candle, opened the package, glanced wonderingly at the deeds, and read Bruce Waring's note:

DEAR JOAN: If you will let me call you Joan just once more, for old time's sake. Ticely and I have hit the overland trail, but we expect to be back. But if anything prevents, please record the location notices you stamped a while ago and record these deeds and tell the men. The ground may be worth something. Anyhow, the whole outfit we have is theirs. I've not eaten or used anything bought with their money. You will think we changed our minds pretty suddenly, and you will think even less of me. There are things I can't explain—and never

can. But if I live, I'm coming back some time to Midas or wherever you and your father are.

Good-by for now, little pal. Your friend,

BRUCE WARING.

P. S.—Please burn this and say nothing. I know you'd do both, anyhow.

Joan crumpled it first and ground it under her heel—a futile procedure, for her foot was bare. Then, viciously, she tore it into bits and fed each separate piece to the candle flame. Her heart, heavy before, was broken now. Up to the end—in spite, even, of the damning evidence of the nudge and the drawn eyebrows—she had tried to believe that Bruce himself was the victim of his own loyalty to the masterful, persuasive Ticely. But to sneak out of the camp with him—Bruce who, himself, was not directly threatened, who had an excellent chance of reprieve! He was more cowardly than Ticely, whose very life she knew was in danger. And after his scornful repudiation of flight!

Tears of anger and despair filled her eyes, tears not so much of pity for him, so weak when he had seemed so buoyantly strong, but for herself, dreading as she did the sight of him ignominiously dragged back. Yes, dragged back! For how could they hope to elude capture on that overland trail? It might be a long chase, but they would be brought back—trust that lean, determined, cunning Collins for that. And she couldn't—she *couldn't* stand it! There was a way, perhaps, of helping them. The river!

She dressed hurriedly and stole out of the cabin to the creek. Hidden from the flat by the high banks of the channel, she made her way over the flanking gravel bars, dry now for a week, to the place where the boats were moored. She knew Ticely's fleet canoe. It was the only red one. A few days before, Bruce had taken her in it down the creek on a duck hunt. She shoved it into the water, drew it along to a deep hole, and piled rocks in it till it sank. From the brush of the opposite hillside, the Evaporated Kid, an early bird, starting out on a long hunt, saw her through a notch in the bank. He wondered why Joan Manners was loading a canoe with stones at two o'clock in the morning.

Four hours later, five men surrounded Ticely and Waring's cabin, while two more tapped on the door with the muzzles of their pistols. Then they pushed the door open—and found the cabin empty.

"Some of Manners' work, I guess," said Collins venemously. "Now you see why he was so keen for us not to act *hastily!*"

They went back to the flat, where ten more men joined them outside the commissioner's building. Manners in his sleeping clothes let them in, and was curtly told the news.

"Gone?" he echoed, rubbing his eyes.

"Yes, 'gawn!' " echoed Redbank in sneering mimicry.

"And damn well you know it!" yelled Othmer in his high-pitched voice.

Manners was always irascible in the morning. He ran in his bare feet back to his bunk and returned to the door with a revolver, his face pale with rage.

"Say that again, you," he gritted, "and I'll blow your ugly little head off."

Joan heard it all. She was sitting on her bed, dressed. Seizing her pistol, she flung open the connecting door and crossed the office to her father's side.

"They're *gone,* you say?" she cried, looking Slim Jim Collins squarely in the eye.

"Yes," he replied.

Manners, his choler vanishing with Joan's sudden appearance and strangely excited demeanor, put his hand on the arm that held her little revolver. She drew her arm away and turned stiffly toward her father.

"You're too easy, dad! What did you let them go for, you men?" she scolded. "Didn't you have sense enough to know that they knew what you were going to do? They've robbed us, dad, and—and all you think of is your old law!" She walked out among them—to Tholmes.

"Where did they go? Which way did they go?"

"We don't know yet, Miss Manners. Their cabin is empty, that's all."

Joan knew that she must act quickly—else some one would suggest the horses.

"The river!" she cried. "That light, slender canoe of Ticely's—the red canoe! They'd figure it was the fastest craft we've got up here——"

"But there's only two of them to paddle it," put in Colwell. "Gimme an oar in a poling boat—gimme an oar!" He bared his giant arms.

Collins was cold. Joan's angry manner did not deceive him a moment. He thought her suggestion a futile shift of desperation for her lover—anything to gain time for him. But, perforce, he followed them all to the

landing where, sure enough—the red canoe was gone!

"Look up and down," directed Rosslyn. "She's doped it right, I guess." And when the canoe was nowhere to be seen Collins himself was forced to admit that it was to be a downriver chase.

"Let's go with them, dad—the curs!" cried Joan imploringly to her father.

"We certainly will not," refused Manners. "I'll have no hand in lawbreaking."

With a man hunt before them, the Midas men were maniacs. Hurrying hither and thither after oars, paddles, supplies, guns, and hip boots, Manners and his daughter were forgotten, and the two returned to their big cabin.

"What's all this, Joan?" asked her father. She seemed no longer his little daughter, and unconsciously a note of respect tempered the severity of his tone.

"What is what?" she asked innocently.

"Putting aside the—eh, disrespect of your late remarks to me, why are you so keen to start them down the river after Waring—or Ticely and Waring, if you prefer?"

"Because I hate and despise a coward!" replied Joan vehemently.

Then she decided to trust him—she had never before deceived her father.

"And, besides——" She flushed scarlet —*"they didn't go down the river!"*

CHAPTER XVI.

THE IMPLACABLE FRIEND.

Waring neither slept nor rested till he sighted a horseman silhouetted for a moment against the sunrise on the rounded crest of a distant hill.

It was two in the morning, and he knew that Ticely would travel all night and sleep in the daytime. He made camp in a sunny hollow where the feed was high, picketed his horse, and slept for four hours. Then he found and took the ridge which Ticely was following, and followed it all day. As night approached, he kept in the hollows, in the willows and low, scrubby timber, for he knew Ticely would look back from every high point on the undulating ridge to see if he were pursued, and to overtake him Bruce must travel during several hours of night when Ticely, too, would be traveling.

He caught up with him at ten o'clock the second morning. Hoof marks in a soft spot showed where his partner had turned down into a draw a few hours before. Waring tied his horse to a slender, upright rock on the other side of the slope, and very cautiously crawled down the draw till he came upon the camp in a thick clump of brush near the stream bed.

His boots off, but otherwise fully dressed, a light blanket partly covering him, Ticely lay sprawled beside the embers of a small fire, his head pillowed on his saddle. Waring crawled free of the brush, raised himself upon his knees, drew his gun from his hip, and with his left hand flicked a pebble at his partner's head. Ticely rubbed his ear and muttered. A second pebble brought him awake and alarmed. He flung out his arm toward his gun, which lay in its holster and belt, within his reach. But, as he turned, his eyes met those of Waring.

"Why, what in——" His surprise at Waring's mere presence turned to stupefaction, as his gaze took in his young partner's posture—on his knees, his right elbow at his waist, his hand holding a pointed gun. He blinked and rubbed his eyes, making no effort to grasp his gun. Then a sense of absurdity gained on his bewilderment and he half smiled. But Waring did not smile.

"What's the big idea, Bruce?" asked Ticely, sitting up.

"Just this: I want you to come back with me, and I was afraid you wouldn't. So—I'm taking no chances. You'll have to excuse me for holdin' a gun on you."

"Oh, don't mention it," said Ticely grimly. Staring at him with narrow eyes, he slowly flushed with anger.

"You've been following me—and keeping out of sight?"

Waring nodded. "If you'd sighted me any time you looked back along the ridge, you'd have taken me for an enemy, and then—Lord knows when I'd ever have caught up with you!"

"I see," said Ticely, an anxiously meditative eye on the gun, horizontal, motionless. He didn't like that gun. His instincts told him it was no joke, but his brain insisted that it must be, so he said: "So you're trying to show me how easy it is for friend Collins and his fellow maniacs to get me! You're wrong. Only you and I and Ak Tuk know anything about this moose trail along the ridges."

"I know that," replied Bruce. "I'm not trying to show you anything. I'm just telling you to come back with me."

Ticely's eye roved over the whole kneeling figure of his partner. At war still with his surer instincts, his brain, abandoning perforce the joke theory, now questioned the lad's sanity.

"You say you *want* me to go back to Midas?"

"*I sure do.* It's the only way. You *can't* do anything else, Fred." He paused appealingly.

"Go ahead," said Ticely quietly, "I'm listening. Say what you've come to say."

"I will!" said Bruce; and he found a tongue that neither he nor Ticely ever knew he possessed.

"You've stolen away like a thief in the night, Fred. You can't do that! They'll think you're guiltier than you are. Not only they, but your real friends, and your—well, the whole world."

"Guiltier than I *am!*" Ticely pointed an accusing finger at him. "Go slow, now, young man."

"Guiltier than you *are,*" repeated Bruce obstinately. "I know just how guilty that is, if you don't. It's all come to me, dogging you along the ridges, thinking it out, mile after mile. Things I heard in Seattle, in the office and out of it—things I didn't understand, then, came to me, and I put them alongside of this Midas business in Nome, and I see it was all the same. The same kind of thing. Only up here, in the wilds, with no law, and the men you deceived being altogether and ribbing each other up, makes the result worse, that's all.

"You know how to make people think things that you don't actually say. It's so easy for you—this selling that you explained to me everybody does—so easy that you go further and worse than the rest. I suppose you can't hardly help it. And being caught as you were—just *having* to get money—why you did the most careful and genius-like job you ever did in your life. I won't ask you any questions. You told me all you was willing to then, and I won't ask you any more—not with a gun in my hand. I won't force you except in one thing—to go back. That, I've got to do!"

"'Got to do!' What on earth do you mean?"

"Got to!" repeated the lad miserably. "If you were a whelp, I'd have let you go—yes, and helped you all I could, I guess, for the things I owe you—you and your wife. *But you're too much of a man to let go that way.* Think! You're only part guilty; and they're some guilty, too. And you've got a right to a trial, if what you did is as bad as a crime on the books. Come back, own up to what you've done, give 'em back everything, and then, if you *must,* fight for your rights like a man. I'm with you, and Manners is, and there's others, too, when it comes to a show-down—there's bound to be!"

Ticely understood perfectly. And in the core of his heart he was unangry. But angry remonstrance was necessary, and there was heat in his reply:

"Look here, Bruce. If you're serious about this—and I guess you are, or you wouldn't be holding a gun on me!—let me remind you of what I told them in my note, which I meant, absolutely. I'm going to Nome—and stay. I want *men* to deal with, sober men, not lunatics. I don't want to embroil you in any hopeless gun fight against heavy odds. I'm fighting for my rights in a sensible, practical way."

"They'll say you tried to jump a boat and failed! They'll flash the news all over Alaska and the Outside. And it'll be worse than it really is—far worse. They'll have you plainly guilty of a dirty swindle—proved by your own flight at night over the hills. *They* won't admit that they were going to *get* you themselves. And your running away will damn you forever in the eyes of the world."

"What the world says—what does *that* weigh against a matter of life and death!"

"But that's only part of it. How about yourself—in your *own* eyes? Running from men who are nearly as bad as yourself; putting your back to them; skulking away in the night. Mebbe I'm wrong about that, but the man you've been to me can't do it! I got no right to let you. And, damn me, *I won't!*"

Thoroughly alarmed now, Ticely, pondering this singular speech, became conscious that he was confronting a man with a great pride of physical courage. There was Waring's weakness! And the salesman in Ticely reached out for it. A sneer curled his lips.

"I get you now," he said slowly, leaning forward and pressing his fingers in the dry moss. "You've *got* to bring me back! They caught you, and gave you your choice of being lynched yourself or swearing you'd bring me back!"

Waring's eyes looked horror.

"You don't think that, Fred. You're

saying it on the chance that I'd rather let you go than have you think that about me. You don't believe it. You *can't!*"

"Don't they know you're after me?"

"No one except Joan. And I let her think we went together."

There was only one thing left to the baffled man—to force the hand of his implacable friend. Slowly he reached out his arm for the holster, but at the first sign of movement toward it, Waring drew a bead on Ticely's forearm.

"I'll bore it, Fred!"

"You'd *shoot* me? *Me!*"

"Yes."

"A man that has been to you——"

"Don't say it, Mr. Ticely; I know it better than you do. And it's just because of that——"

"All right," said Ticely quietly. "What do you want me to do?"

Bruce took a stout strip of seal hide from his pocket and tossed it over to the sitting man.

"Tie the free end around your left wrist and wind it up as far as the noose at the other end—that's it. Now slip your right wrist in the noose and draw it tight. I'll make a more comfortable job of it, in a minute."

First securing Ticely's gun belt, Waring bound his partner's hands more securely, and tied his feet together. Leaving him for a few minutes, he returned with his horse, brought up Ticely's from the grassy bank of the creek, and saddled both animals. He untied Ticely's feet, and held the horse while his partner mounted. The stake rope was still around the animal's neck. Holding it in his hand, Waring mounted his own horse, and led up the ravine to the ridge trail.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LETTER AND THE SPIRIT.

When Bruce Waring tied his partner's hands, pride tied Ticely's tongue. But a man can do a great deal of hard thinking in two long days of riding with a silent captor—especially when he is being dragged back to a ferocious mob mad from baffled avarice—and Frederick Ticely, who loved life, really cogitated!

During the remainder of that first morning, he scowled at Waring's broad back, fifteen feet ahead of him, and sometimes shook at it his bound fists in voiceless imprecation. When they stopped for a cup of tea, the ignominy of his position, borne to him by the necessity of lifting both hands with his cup and with his hunk of bread, goaded him almost to frenzy—which was all the greater because pride locked within him the violent words that might have relieved it.

All the long afternoon, the cruel humiliation of it burned; and it was that that determined the main current of his thought of Bruce Waring and the fate awaiting them. Caught by his own partner, whom he had trusted with the secret of his way of escape, and dragged at the end of a rope woven of callow sentiment, sentiment inexperienced, maudlin—absurd! Never in the secret recesses of his being questioning the sincerity of that sentiment or the loyalty to him of the man, he raged at Waring only as we rage at those forces which, whether sentient, as in man, or insentient, as in the wave of the hurricane, surge across the pathway of our vital needs and purposes, menacing our liberty or our life. A lunatic noble enough, where those of Midas were ignoble, but a lunatic just the same, Ticely hated him as we sometimes hate transiently our loved ones. And he would, if he could, have done him injury enough to thwart his fell intent.

But after supper that night, when Waring untied his hands—watching him, however, ready pistol at thigh—Ticely found humility enough to engage Bruce in converse. What he said to him was said partly in curiosity, partly with the obstinate purpose of yet securing his liberty. And thence followed that which swerved the currents of his thought.

"Bruce," he said, when he had lit his pipe, "suppose some one had told me when I first met you in that God-forsaken clearing of yours in the Cascade Mountains, and offered you a job in my office, and took you into my house—suppose somebody had told me that some day you'd make me a prisoner at the point of a gun and turn me over to a gang of bloodthirsty curs. What do you suppose I would have said?"

Waring, lying on his side, was making squares on the smooth sand surface—where Ticely, at his ease, would have drawn curves!

"Called him a fool, may be," he replied in a low voice.

"And my wife—the woman who came to nurse you——"

"Hol' on!" Bruce lifted his finger. "Wait: Don't say it. I thought you'd speak

of that—some time. You've got to understand that—if you can. She was always my friend, as much or more than you've been. And in a different way. She kind of understood me better—knew I wasn't cut out for business—that kind of business, anyhow. And when the doctor sent you word about me—I didn't tell him nor want him to—she did what my mother would have done; and done it better than mother could have."

He stood up, and his feeling carried him back to the language of his boyhood.

"I seen her in the light when I come to myself—in white, the sun on her hair; her face, anxious but smiling, bending over me. All that was left of my dream delirium she was, but the best part of it—and *real*. I had gone out of my head in a filthy hovel. Men were dying around me. And—thanks to her—I woke up far from there, on a clean hillside, in a clean-floored tent—everything clean, like at home and *her* bending over me!"

"And yet——"

"Wait! God, can't you wait! She used to read to me—fine, clean things. And we talked, by and by, when I got the strength. At first I labored like a bellows for to get out ten words. And I asked her why she come—she had no call to come. She could of sent me money. She says: 'We thought of that, but we was afraid money wasn't enough.' "

"She lied—in my favor," cut in Ticely. "*I* said money *was* enough—all we could do. She said, 'No, we have to do more.' "

Waring turned his gray eyes upon him. "There! And you say it? Hell, man, you're comin' round! I told her the grubstake says nothing about fevers and nursing. And she says to me, 'Those words in that document was just the letter of our covenant, and the letter I despise. The spirit of it was to protect you in all ways possible in your hard task. They was her words. 'The spirit, Bruce, the spirit, not the letter,' she repeats. 'Better be dead than keep the word and spurn the spirit.' That's what she said to me."

Waring wiped his forehead with the back of his great caloused hand, and went on—gazing fixedly into the other's eyes:

"She loves you, Fred; she loves you hard. And I think she knows you're a—a terrible clever salesman. And don't you, honest now, catch a turning-away look of hers sometimes when you tell her—if you ever do tell her—of your neat little turns in real estate—at the other feller's expense! Don't you *know* she's proud, fearfully proud about everything—you—might—do!

"Man, I just got to do it, for her and for you. She'd rather have you dead than know you just told the truth in words—and the lies of hell in what you meant for them to think. And if you turn tail and run, she'll know it all—everything. And if she was here and knew it all—why she'd *put her arm around your neck* and draw you back. Me *for* her—I got to use a gun! Don't beg, don't plead. It ain't any use. I got a debt to pay to her and you, and by the livin' God, I'm a-goin' to pay it!"

As they approached Midas, the hour of fate upon him, the second current gathered force within the soul of Frederick Ticely—a force strengthened by a picture he could not banish: his wife in her white raiment reading the "clean books" to the emaciated youth she had snatched from the brink of eternity, telling him pridefully of the triumph of the spirit, of her preference of death to the cowardice of dishonor. Stronger and yet stronger within him flowed the current in that channel of *her* making. And the man being, in reality, a strong and a proud one, its waters had become a flood when they padded down the mossy hillside of Midas Creek and in the moonlit valley were halted by a grim confrontation.

A heavily gnarled alder, one of the few trees growing near the stream bed, shadowed the trail in front of them, and hanging from a jutting limb a rope, with a loop at the end, stood starkly out against the risen moon. Waring's horse stopped abruptly in front of it, and Ticely's came on and stood alongside of Waring's mount. Motionless, the two men sat their motionless horses, the noose of the stout lariat gently swinging between them in a whispering breeze. Finally Ticely said:

"They're all ready for me!"

"For *us*," amended Waring, "if we can't stand 'em off!"

Ticely turned to him curiously.

"*You've* done nothing, Bruce. You mean to tell me——"

"Partners are partners, Fred. No baby act for mine!"

"All right," decided Ticely—the next current racing. "But you can't do it. I'm through. They can have me, if they like,

but if they take you, it's going to be plain murder. I'll tell them the truth—what I'm going to tell you now. They were right. You were right. *I'm guilty*—guilty of a fraud and a swindle. Just what many men do all the time, but—a spade's a spade. I *intended* to get them! By playing on their credulity and avarice. I schemed it out cold-bloodedly—every detail of it. The telegrams were addressed to men who did not exist. The diary—which happened to have no year date on it—I purposely left out where they could get it. I helped them deceive themselves—salt themselves—every way I could. I'm guilty, and they know it. My wife is right. You are right. They are right. The thing is coming to me!"

They looked into each other's faces. Then, slowly and solemnly, Waring held out his hand to him.

"Shake, old man!"

Ticely meditatively regarded the outstretched hand. Even with confession still warm on his lips, the anger of those long, bitter hours died hard. At last he gripped his partner's hand.

"I'll tell them just what I've told you," he assured him.

"Not by a jugful, you won't!" exclaimed Waring.

"I've got to. They've got it coming."

"Not much," said Bruce decisively, an ugly look about his jaw. "A lot of that bunch—the ones that are hollering the loudest—are cheap skates. Sneaks you called them, and sneaks they are—men that would have done us out of rich ground, jumped our claims, if they had to. We'll agree to give them back all we got from them, if they're dissatisfied—all the outfit and all you sent out to Seattle. You can do it, now that your business has been saved. *But tell them nothing!* It would only get to *her* ears! Fight, if we have to, you and me, back to back. And they'll be others, others besides Manners and Joan—yes, Joan. See if there won't, if it comes to a show-down! They might not speak to us, but they'll not see us lynched or shot when we're offering to make good!"

"Perhaps you're right. Come on, then, to the cabin."

"*No!* Not to the cabin. Up the hill there, to the bench. *We've got one chance*—one way out. That chance is in some shafts I'm putting down in as pretty a line of bench claims as you ever saw in the north country. I was close to bed rock when I went out after you, and——"

"But what—how can——"

"The prospects were darn good when I came down to that meeting. Remember that 'Coarse, also very fine, and bright' the judge read from your Klondike diary? Well, that exactly described the gold in my bench prospect—what there was of it. And when they asked you what that book was it struck me all of a heap that if the bed rock turned out big, that old memorandum book *could* have been what they thought it was—a diary of pannings on Midas. So I hunched you to keep mum!"

"Oh, *that* was why you did it, hey?" murmured Ticely. "Well, I'm damned! There's plenty under your hat, boy, if you do keep so quiet."

"There's a chance," pursued Waring. "The last fire's been thawed four and a half days ago, and if Ak Tuk hasn't let it freeze back again, we can go up to the bench and take it out. No matter what we get, remember *we've never left there.* Running away nothing! Been working there five days. Sticking around and gritting things out is the one best thing you do—not even excepting selling prospects on wild-cat creeks at boom prices!"

Ticely blinked.

"Joan knows, but she'll never tell. So—it's win or lose on that bed rock. And remember—we've been up there all the time!"

He untied the long halter from the saddle pommel, and flung the end to Ticely. "We'll make up quartering, right about through there! I've got a camp and everything up on the bench. Come on!"

"We'll get away from this dangling rope for a while, anyhow," remarked the man who was no longer a captive, as he turned his horse to follow Waring.

CHAPTER XVII

COLLINS CORNERS JOAN.

Late the previous afternoon, the first pursuing party returned in disgust to Midas and beached their poling boat, as long and slender as the man who had chosen it for the upriver search—Slim Jim Collins. He himself, in the stern of another poling boat, returned from downriver early next morning, beating in by half an hour a third boat which had been sent up a large confluent of the Koyukuk.

"No trace of the red canoe," reported Collins sourly, "unless those fellows up the tributary catch 'em."

A scrawny, dessicated figure was standing near, his bony hands in his pockets.

"Red canoe!" he exclaimed. "Why, was there more'n one red canoe up here?"

"No, you dried-up eel," replied Collins. "What's it to you?"

"Haw, haw!" replied the Evaporated Kid —he was none too fully witted. "I kin tell you where that canoe is, if that's all you want to know."

"Where?" demanded Collins, and twenty men surrounded them.

"Under a pile of river stones in the pool, yonder."

Collins grabbed him by the collar.

"You been putting something over on us!"

"It was the Manners gal, boss. I seen her doin' it at sunup a few days ago—'bout two o'clock it must have b'en."

Led by the parchment-covered person, Collins and a dozen others made off to the pool where, lying on their stomachs, several of them descried the dark shadow of the canoe, under ten feet of water. They rose and faced each other excitedly.

"Who's right now about your fair, impartial judge, Tholmes?" sneered Collins. "I told you he was in cahoots with them!"

Tholmes turned frowningly away, angry at himself, furious at Manners.

"Pretty neat piece of work, all right," cackled Othmer derisively. "'The villains!' she shrieks, all het up and madlike. 'They've escaped in their canoe! Let's come down and see if it's there?' Pulls us around like —like——"

"Monkeys on a string," finished Redbank.

"They escaped overland, and she knows all about it," Rossiter yelled.

"String up the judge—he's the worst one of the bunch!" howled another, and as they surged over the flat they were joined by half the men in the camp.

Manners was inside his cabin at carpenter work when, with scant ceremony, he was seized and bound. Collins, however, kept unobtrusively back! Joan, returning in haste from the hillside, from which she had seen the crowd of men press upon the cabin, ran to her father—trussed and flung upon his bed. But Colwell, the blacksmith, took her by the arm and led her away.

"You let me go, you great big, brutal bully!" panted Joan, trying with all her strength to wrench her arm away. She was as though chained to a wall.

"The biggest man's the best to handle you, miss," protested Colwell. "A smaller man might hurt you some trying to hold you."

"Lock her up in her room, Bill," said Con Redbank, "and nail up the winder from the outside."

Beyond denying that he knew anything about the affair of the red canoe, Manners refused to talk himself, *or to question Joan!* He remarked, however, that if any harm were done his daughter, the man or men responsible for it would do well to commit suicide. A guard was set over him, outside the cabin, a meeting was arranged for the afternoon, and the men, more angry now than they had ever been, dispersed to their camps and shacks for their noon-day meal. Except Collins!

He strolled over to Osmund Johnson, the guard, and said:

"You'd better go down and get your grub, Johnson. I'll look out for these birds till you get back." Johnson accepted the suggestion with alacrity, and Collins entered the office.

"I'm sorry, Manners," he said stiffly.

"Then why don't you do something about it?" retorted Manners, who itched to tell him what he thought of him.

"I will, if I can," returned Collins smoothly. "But I'll have to question Miss Manners first. Perhaps I can square things." He moved toward the door of the partition.

"Eh—Collins!"

Slim Jim paused, his fingers on the key in the lock.

"I think I read your mind, my tall friend. I've certainly read your eyes lately, when Joan's been around. You wouldn't take advantage of this situation, Collins—now, would you? And remember I'm bound—though I think, if it came to a case of Joan, I could get loose all right!"

Collins flushed: "Whether you were bound, unbound, or miles away, your honor, I'd treat Miss Manners just the same!"

He passed into the room, and locked the door again. Joan rose as he entered.

"What do you want?" she asked in a low but very dangerous voice.

"I want to talk to you, Miss Manners."

"You wanted 'an even break' the last time you talked to me alone. Is this what you call an even break?"

"Being locked up here, you mean? Eh—may I sit down, Miss Manners?"

"How very polite of you! It seems to me, if I hadn't scrupled to enter a woman's room uninvited, I'd do as I pleased with the furniture!"

"Why, you're locked in here, Miss Manners. I couldn't come in any other way."

"I asked you what you wanted?"

"I want to tell you, to begin with, that the men know the red canoe was sunk and that *you* sank it. You helped those fellows get away, and it's going to go hard with you, or anyhow with your father!"

Joan burst into angry tears. "He doesn't know a thing about it. Not a thing! *I* did it; and I never even told him."

"Miss Manners," said Collins earnestly, "you've made a mistake in men. Young girls often do. I was careless with you, like a man will be who lives around careless women. *He* was careful. I give him credit for that. But you know what he is now, and—I don't think you ever heard any one knock me, as far as being square——"

"I don't recall. I haven't been interested," replied Joan with curt indifference.

"Thank you, Miss Manners," said Collins bitterly. "Anyhow, it's a fact. I don't bull honest prospectors and miners, and take money from hard-working women like those Corliss girls, and——"

"Miss O'Brien!" interjected Joan, though she could have bitten her tongue a moment later.

His sallow face became sallower. "Or Miss O'Brien. Or, worse still, I don't stand back in the shadow and let another man do the dirty work."

Joan flushed to the roots of her hair: "If you have anything to say to me that isn't personal, please say it and get out. I'm interested in my father, and in *nobody else!*"

"I'm glad of that," said Collins meaningly. "About him, then. If *I* was more interested in him than I am now, if he was going to be my—well, if you was going to marry me——"

"Marry you!" gasped Joan.

Collins flushed crimson, and his pale eyes lit. "You think I'm crazy, of course."

"Yes, I *don't!*" said Joan, coming very close to him so she could look up squarely into his eyes. "I think you're crazy like a fox! You schemed this whole thing—today, last week, last month—how far back I don't know."

"I did not," he denied, and he only half lied, for he had in fact merely taken advantage of the drift of events. "I'm sorry for some things and glad of others."

"Glad? Of course you're glad——"

"I'm glad I can be of some service to you now."

"You can't—without throwing down your friends like a treacherous cur!"

"You may live to regret those words, Miss Manners!"

Joan gathered her wits with a mighty effort. "I said you'd have to be that to help father."

"You're wrong there; I got a right to persuade them to do nothing rash; to let him go, or, at least, to take him to Nome——"

"If?"

"If you'll promise to marry me afterward, on your word of honor."

"A man I despise!"

Collins drew himself very straight: "You got no right to despise me. I'm in dead earnest. I want you bad—bad. I never yet seen a gal I——"

Joan wrung her hands. "Men, oh, men! Poor girl, poor light, foolish, loving girl who——"

Collins' brow had knitted: "Miss O'Brien, you mean?"

She made no answer, and he understood.

"She's got no holt on me—and never had. I've told her straight I intended to get you, if I could!"

Joan wept again; again wrung her hands: "The insult! The degredation of it!" She retreated to the end of the room and turned, panting.

"Father would never, never allow me, if he knew. He'd die first!"

"He don't need to know; he can just think that——"

She turned on him wildly: "What can you do with all those other men?"

"They think a heap of my judgment," replied Collins significantly. "And even if I couldn't swing them—why, for you——" His eyes narrowed and, unconsciously, his hand moved back a little toward his hip. "I'd help you and your father stand 'em off. I handle an ugly gun, some say! They're not liable to stand for bloodshed to get him; they don't hate him bad enough for that. I'll treat you the best I know how—like a man would have to treat my own sister. And I can do it. I'm well fixed, you know. This Midas is just a side spec with me.

You might do worse, little girl. You're broke, dead broke, you and your dad, and his good name is gone besides!"

Joan jerked up her head. "That is a lie. No man like you can smirch him. There's not a thing against him, and you know it. If you mean this red canoe, I tell you I did it, alone. I did it because I wouldn't see Bruce Waring hung."

"You loved him?"

"It's none of your infernal business if I did!"

"A dirty swindler like that! Why—say he——"

The panel of the door resounded to the impact of pounding knuckles.

CHAPTER XIX.

WARING SURPRISES HIMSELF.

"Hullo, Ak Tuk!" said Waring, shaking the Eskimo in his bed of spruce boughs in the little tent. Without moving, the native opened his eyes.

"Hull*ough!*" he greeted, his round face rounder with a smile of welcome. "You come back?"

"Yes, we're back—both of us. Say, Ak Tuk, how's the thawin'? Him freeze back again?"

"No freeze," replied the native, sitting up. "Me throw on little more wood every day. Plenty ashes, but no freeze 'em."

"Great!" said Bruce. He left the tent, and rejoined Ticely, whose eyes had taken in every detail of the hidden camp. "We can clear her out and go to work, Fred. Ak Tuk's kept her thawed."

It was broad daylight, and peeling their Mackinaws, they got to work, Waring below, Ticely on the windlass. Bucket after bucket of ashes, charred wood and heating stones were hoisted. In the midst of this grimy work, Ak Tuk called them to a late breakfast, during which they learned from the native what had happened in Midas during their five days' absence.

"Apper you go, next morning," narrated Ak Tuk, "him men come you cabin. Every man one gun, right hand. You no there. Plenty mad. Go judge house. Chew rag. Miss Joan come out—*plenty* mad, too! Say you rob. Speak: 'Maybe they go red canoe. Look red canoe!' All go down boat place. Red canoe gone. Plenty men take three, four boat—go!"

"Funny," was Ticely's comment. He looked askance at Waring, whose head was bent morosely over his plate.

At ten o'clock they got down to the gravel, and when he had sent up the first bucket, Waring followed it out of the hole. Together they tried a pan of it.

"Darned if it don't look like that El Dorado dust of mine," said Ticely. He panned it down rapidly to a crescent of black sand and gleaming yellow. "What's in it?"

"A good dollar, I guess, isn't there!'

"Just about," said Ticely, studying it. "It might help—some!"

"There ought to be a foot or two of this gravel, before we hit bed rock, and it may go much better."

Ticely flung down the pan. "There's no such luck, old man, though your idea was great—the one thing to help us out of the pickle we're in. But even suppose the bottom dirt *does* show up big. What then?"

"I've figured it out, Fred. We've been here right along. That's understood already. More than that, I've staked the whole length of the bench, and I've made out deeds to every man you sold interests to. I had the list from Joan. She didn't know what I wanted it for, of course. Wherever you had sold a quarter interest, or an eighth, on a creek claim, I made out a deed to a quarter or an eighth on the bench claim opposite to it. I gave those deeds to Joan to stamp and file away before we left, or rather, before we went into retirement to force the prospecting up here. We'll say we found the prospects last January, and have done nothing since—till the big holler they made forced us to get busy here again. You get me?"

His lips parted, Ticely stared at his junior partner in dumb amazement.

"Some head!" he finally articulated.

"It's lying," admitted Waring, "but I guess it's in a good cause. *You* can do the talking!"

"Thanks," said Ticely, grimacing, "I suppose—I *am* better at it than you!" They had walked back to the shaft. "Let's hope that there's dirt down there that will make those deeds something better than an ante-mortem joke!" He lowered him to his two hours' job of picking the gravel.

"Shall we test it some more?" yelled Ticely down to him, after a dozen buckets had come up.

"No!" shouted up Bruce. "Let's wait for the bed rock. It's coming pretty quick now.

There's a slab of it—feels like—sticking up here in the corner." And the work went on, with Ticely at the windlass dumping the slimy mass from the bucket and eying it with beating heart. Many times he was tempted to take a panful of it to the pool and learn his fate. But he held stubbornly on to the end of the strangest game of his whole gambler's career.

"Bed rock! A full bucket of it," came Bruce's voice from the depths of the shaft.

"Got it," called Ticely, landing the heavy, slab-filled tub. "Sending down the hook for you. Come up and we'll pan it."

Waring stepped out on the dump just as Ak Tuk came panting toward them.

"Men come back," announced the Eskimo. "No find red canoe. Plenty mad. Then little skinny white man say: 'Red canoe! Me see Joan Manners put 'em rocks in red canoe four, five days ago.' Then all white men plenty, *plenty* mad! Go judge house, tie 'em up, throw 'em bed, maybe kill 'em. Joan, too——"

Bruce, who had risen with a pan of slimy bed rock in his hands, dropped it spatteringly on the dump.

"You pan it, Fred. *I'm going!*"

"Me, too," said Ticely.

"No, you'd only aggravate them. Stay here." He dived into the tent.

"I'm taking them both," came out of the tent—and Waring came out swiftly after his words. "Stay up here, Ak Tuk." Bruce sped to the bottom of the hill in long strides, and swung into the trail at a trot.

A few men, back early after their noon grub, hung about the place waiting for the rest. As Bruce approached them, he did some hard thinking. He had agreed with Ticely upon a "front"—an attitude based on falsehood for the good of all. He must begin right now, and never swerve! If Joan had spoken, all was lost. They might escape the necessity of fighting for their lives, if the bench pay improved, but hatred, contempt, and dishonor would be their portion.

Why had he not stayed for three minutes to pan that bed rock? Then he would have known *that* much, at least. But no power, he knew, could have held him for a minute, with Joan menaced; and he would have to "front" it out! For the better acting of his part, he strove with all the power of his youthful imagination to convince himself that the big pay was there. It must be there! It *was* there! And this mob was persecuting a man and woman on an imaginary grievance!

As he came upon the loiterers, he drew his gun and they recognized him. So unexpected was this encounter with the man they thought miles away in flight that Bruce had the drop on them before they realized it.

" 'Lo, Waring," muttered a few doggedly. Some hands went up.

"What's this I hear," growled Bruce, as he flung open the door of the judge's office—and closed and locked it instantly!

"Shush?" came from the lips of the bound commissioner, prone on his bed. Waring tiptoed to him.

"Hullo, judge," he whispered. "Why 'shush?' "

"Bruce! Well, I'll be—shush! Collins is in there with Joan, locked up. I want to hear—if she makes the least outcry, I'll break——"

"Collins—with Joan—locked up!"

Words angry, pleading, coaxing, sarcastic—too muffled by the solid partition to be intelligible—came to Waring from the little recorder's office.

"She's a prisoner like myself, only not bound."

Waring, knife in hand, had already freed Manners' wrists when the voices rose sufficiently for Waring's ear—forest trained—to catch the words: "You loved him?" and Joan's "It's none of your infernal business if I did!"

"She doesn't deny it," exulted Bruce. Thrusting the other gun into the judge's hand, he crossed quickly to the partition door.

"A dirty swindler like that?" came Collins' rejoinder, and Bruce brought the back of his left fist hard upon the panel.

"Who's there?" called Collins angrily.

"Bruce Waring. Open that door!"

Inside the room, Slim Jim Collins and Joan Manners stood motionless from amazement. The girl was the first to recover and to act. She leaped like light to the door and turned the key before Slim Joan could stop her.

"Bruce!" she cried, as he stepped inside and closed and locked the door again. Slim Jim's hand had gone hipward, but he was too late—he was gazing into a steel-blue muzzle. Waring looked at Joan hungrily. She drew away, her eyes averse, but when he offered her his gun she took it eagerly.

"Just see he don't pull his, Joan." So

perfect was his trust in her—after the one cry that spoke her heart—he was content to rest his safety in her hands.

"Now, Collins, I'll take 'dirty swindler' from no man, least of all from a hound like you!"

With her weapon pointed at him, Joan felt that Collins was at a disadvantage, which Bruce himself had not foreseen. Instantly she leaped between them, narrowly escaping a blow which Bruce had aimed at Collins' jaw.

"Bruce!—Mr. Waring. Not now—not here."

"But you! Joan, did he offer you one word of——"

"No, no! He was horrid, detestable; but he was respectable in his manner—or tried to be." Disdain almost routed indignation. "He doesn't *know* he is infamous. He acted very well—for him!"

"What did he dare to say to you?"

She looked at Waring with what hauteur she could summon. "You have no right to ask." Her lip quivered then. "But I thank you for coming—Mr. Waring!"

There was pounding on the outside door and cries and oaths.

"All right, Joan," said Bruce humbly. Then he turned fiercely to the Fairbanks miner.

"You'll eat those words, when I get time for you, Collins."

"Not unless they wasn't true, I won't!"

Bruce took his gun from Joan. "Hands up, Collins, and out of here when Miss Manners opens the door!" Slim Jim surlily obeyed.

One eye on Collins, the other on the work he was doing with his knife, Waring had Manners on his feet in a moment: and together they marched Collins to the door.

"In your room, Joan," said Bruce briefly; "in case they shoot. Now, open the door, Collins."

When Slim Jim obeyed, Manners and Waring looked upon a doorway crowded with the astonished faces of Tholmes, Colwell, Othmer, Rosslyn, and Baker—faces keenly interested in the two guns pointed at them. Their own had been lowered at the appearance of Collins in the doorway, and an excellent discretion now kept them lowered!

"Back again, are you?" Tholmes managed a tone almost of idle curiosity.

"Back again!" echoed Waring disgustedly. "There's another one. Where do you get that stuff? Back again! Can't my partner and I go about our own affairs for a few days without you fellows running amuck like Chinamen? And how dare you commit this outrage on Judge Manners and his daughter! Who owns nine-tenths of this creek, *and its benches,* anyhow? For two old mukluks I'd shoot the whole bunch of you!"

"If you're not back again," said Tholmes bewilderedly, "well, then—where have you been?"

"Well, if you've *got* to pry into other people's business, we've been upon our bench claims, where the *real gold* is."

"Real gold is!" It came a multiple, muttered echo.

"Sure. I only came down when I heard you were making trouble for my friends here. What for, beats me!"

Collins had slipped out of doors with the rest, and Joan stood by her father's side, her brow unsmooth, her eyes, luminous with mystification, never leaving Waring's face. There was a whispered conference of the leaders, who had drawn back from the wide doorway.

Then Collins said: "We've had enough bull from you guys——"

"I say, Tholmes," interrupted Waring. "If you fellows have any defense to make for this outrage, better you or Rosslyn or somebody else do the talking. Your present spokesman doesn't arbitrate with me till he pulls a little apology I've got coming from him. I don't like his vocabulary."

Some one laughed, and it broke the ice.

"All right," agreed Tholmes. "What we want to know is whether we've been bunkoed or not. Don't know whether you like my vocabulary any better, but I guess you get me, all right."

"I sure do," said Bruce amiably. "Fact is, you went at Ticely and me the wrong foot first. He's the business man for Ticely & Waring: see him. I've got to go back to the claim. We're taking out a thawing. Just let the Manners family alone, you fellows, or there'll be some *six-foot shafts* to be thawed down around here." To Joan he whispered: "Bring that package of deeds."

Pocketing his gun, he boldly made his way through the crowd, which parted for him to right and left—mouths were open, eyes were staring and abashed.

"We're comin', too," said several.

"Suit yourselves," was the indifferent reply Waring flung back at them.

"Right after him, boys," said Tholmes excitedly.

"Pronto!" rasped One-word Watkins.

CHAPTER XX.

REQUITAL.

Whatever the values might be in the bench placers of Midas Creek, Bruce Waring knew that Ticely knew them now. Doubtless he knew what they were a very few minutes after Bruce precipitated himself down the hill and essayed the rôle of placer plutocrat —his first and only attempt at the histrionic. A temporary self-conviction, born of desperation and an iron will, had enabled him to act this part with a success that amazed him. But it was a success destined to be as ephemeral as the conviction that had achieved it, unless those bench values—which Ticely now knew—should be very like the values that Ticely had noted in his Klondike diary!

As he threaded his devious way through the dark spruce of the bench land, dogged by the little procession of men who were still his enemies—unless he made good, Bruce Waring hoped as he had never hoped before, that his "front" would be justified when next he looked into the face of the man whom he had snatched back from safety to meet the fury of a raging mob!

When in sight of the bluish-gray dump, unconsciously he quickened his footsteps. Then he resumed his previous pace, or made it even slower, to avoid the slightest suspicion of excitement or uncertainty. Once in the camp, it would be up to Ticely to take the colossal burden off his shoulders.

Nor was Ticely unprepared for his visitors. From a coign of vantage near the camp, he had seen them coming, had returned, picked a pan of the stickiest bed rock, and as Bruce and the closest to him climbed the flat surface of the big dump, he rose from his knees, pipe in mouth, the pan under his arm and looked them over with amiable, whimsical surprise.

"Bringing some visitors, Bruce?" he asked between slow puffs.

His heart pounding in his breast, Waring scanned his partner's face for a message—a sign. In vain! Ticely was too finished an actor to reveal to the riveted scrutiny of his enemies by so much as the quiver of an eyelash that all was not well with the mining partnership of Ticely & Waring.

"Yes, I brought 'em," answered Bruce. "They were making trouble for the judge, here, on some fool idea that you and I had beat it for Nome, and he had helped us make the get-away."

"Sorry to hear that," said Ticely reprovingly, pausing in his passage to the panning pool. "Fact is, we hadn't figured on letting you know anything about our prospects up here till we were good and ready. Between you and me and that birch tree yonder, you didn't deserve it—the low-down tricks you played to get information which was too dangerous for me to give out. However, now that you're here——" and he waved his free hand magnanimously, as he turned to the pool and immersed his heaping pan in the murky water.

Even then, Waring did not know whether that dirt was running eighty-five *cents* to the pan or eighty-five *dollars!* It was evident that Ticely would bluff to the end, and die hard. He edged close, ready to slip him a gun at the first sign of little gold and much trouble!

Ticely whirled and shook the pan expertly in the water, drawing it up only for a moment, now and then, to toss out the lighter gravels and chunks of bed rock, and giving no chance for a glimpse at the heavier sediments beneath. Then he raised it for a casual glance.

"Rotten," he remarked cheerfully. But Bruce Waring's eyes nearly jumped out of his head—as did those of several other stooping men. Dark-gray, speckled with clean yellow, was the hue of the full third of the pan remaining.

They lined the little pool—a circle of men on hands and knees, with another tier of pop-eyed onlookers bending over them, and still others, crowding their heads between the shoulders and bodies of those in front—as Ticely dipped, shook and tipped, dipped, shook, and tipped the crescent of sandy sediment and pure, virgin gold, *very coarse and also very fine,* as the diary had said! A third around the pan that broad crescent extended, and Collins, whom nothing could now enthuse, but whose appraisal of a prospect pan was known to be marvelously accurate, put it at "about twenty ounces." Ticely gave the pan a few last, quick tippings, and turned, as it were privately, to Waring:

"Not very good to-day, huh, Bruce? I guess we're getting off to the side of the pay streak."

"Must be," agreed Waring. He was able to keep his countenance only by pinching Ticely's arm till the other almost bit his tongue in the effort to avoid crying out. It would not have mattered, for excitement reigned. There were eyes only for the pan and ears only for each other's comments. One-word Watkins started the ball rolling. "Eureka!" he shouted, and tossed his hat in the air.

"You got to hand it to 'em," yelled Othmer. "They done the right thing. Pay like that has got to be kept under your hat. Yet *got* ter hand it to 'em!"

"I told you!" exclaimed several wiseacres, and at least one: "Darn it, I knew it all the time!"

"That's good enough, boys, as far as it goes," conceded Rosslyn, when the noise had partially subsided, "but don't forget this is on the bench. Where do we come in, Ticely?"

"Oh, that's right. Say, Bruce—we might as well tell 'em. You got those deeds?"

"Miss Manners has them. They were to be recorded, you know, when we instructed her to do so."

Instantly all eyes swiveled upon Joan.

"That is correct," she admitted in a businesslike manner. "They were filed with me some time ago, and locked away."

"What were they?" asked Judge Manners. It was evident to the most suspicious—if any were longer suspicious—that whatever might have been the commissioner's leanings in respect to the discoverers of Midas Creek, at least they had not taken him into their confidence. He knew nothing of this private transaction with his daughter in her capacity of recorder.

"As nearly as I remember," replied Joan, "they correspond exactly with the creek claims conveyed in Nome by Ticely and Waring to various purchasers, name for name; interest for interest and claim for claim—only on the corresponding claims on the bench, instead of the creek."

"Quite an idea," smiled Tholmes.

"Durn white of 'em, *I* call it," admitted Colwell cordially.

"Han'some!" from One-word Watkins.

"Handsome? Why it's *magnifercent!*" declared Othmer, wildly enthusiastic. "I allus said——"

His voice was drowned in laughter, which Ticely hushed by a raised hand.

"It's what I intended doing all along. But you see, don't you, that we couldn't make it public until we got things lined up right on the bench here, and everything safe with the recorder?"

"Perfectly correct," corroborated Tholmes. His face lit with a sudden comprehension. "And until you *did* make it public, you couldn't explain about that diary you kept of your pannings up here!"

Ticely shrugged his shoulders—and smiled. While the crowd, partly dispersing, wandered along the bench ground, discussing the direction and formation of the old channel, Waring lured Joan into the little tent. He knew she must be utterly at sea—fairly dizzy with puzzlement over these new developments.

"Joan—Joan, you've been a trump. You've said the right thing, and done the right thing—kept our secret, helped us get out of that fearful scrape we were in."

"And made a *liar* of *myself!*" she returned fiercely. She would not look him in the face.

"Did they—do they know about the red canoe yet? That is the weak point in our alibi."

"Yes," she replied, her eyes still downcast. "Coming up the hill they asked me why I went to all the trouble of deceiving them—if you had *not* gone away! I replied that you had sent me a message that you might not return to the creek for some time, and I naturally supposed you had lit out to save your lives; and as I was averse, like my father, to see murder committed, I—did as I did!"

"It was like you, Joan, dear—and very, very clever."

"Don't talk of cleverness to me! I despise you for it. I do not know why you came back, or how you came suddenly to know of this wealth up here. I only know you stood before me like a man and promised—that's what it really was—to fight it out like men. And then you turned and fled in the night!"

He could only look at her and murmur falteringly:

"Can't you forgive me, Joan? Your forgiveness means everything to me."

She turned to him wistfully, her anger gone. She touched his sleeve.

"Bruce, in spite of it all, I can't help being glad you escaped, and glad of this

sudden miracle of gold—for dad's sake especially. That much I can say, if it will comfort you any. But—there's a wall between us. You know it."

She left him there, staring at the sleeve she had lightly touched. And Ticely found him—still staring. He had passed Joan, pale, eyes turned from him, leaving the tent. The situation was exceedingly plain.

"High-spirited girl, that," observed Ticely cheerfully. "All she needs is the truth!'

"No human being is going to know that," declared Bruce, grasping his partner's arm. "No secret is safe forever in the keeping of any one. She—then Manners—then Tholmes—then others—finally your wife! We've got to consider her!"

"I promise to," returned Ticely, looking at him queerly. "But I've known her longer than you. Starting supper?"

"I will," said Bruce in a woebegone voice. He slouched over to the sheet-iron stove.

Ticely found Joan Manners, and took her aside—under a tree.

"Are you fond of facts?" he asked her.

"From you?" she replied, with raised eyebrows.

Ticely winced. "Here are a few real ones about the realest man you've ever known or ever will know. When I wrote Bruce Waring that I'd sold forty thousand dollars' worth of Midas Creek, he nearly threw a fit. When I gave him further particulars on the trail, his face went black. When he told you in my presence that we would 'not go!' he meant it. And when, hours later, he came back to our cabin and found my note saying *I had* gone, he undoubtedly ground his teeth and cursed!"

"But he followed you!" said Joan icily.

"Oh, he followed me! And he caught up with me while I was asleep in my camp. When I awoke, I could see right into the barrel of his automatic. It was a very captivating view! And he brought me back—this way!"

He held out his wrists to Joan, who stared at them fascinatedly. Ticely himself was capable of romancing, but his wrists were not. Still red and swollen from the thongs, they told a story that compelled belief.

"He captured and brought you back to face them!"

"Just that. But there was a possible way to avoid a scrap—just a chance. He had a good prospect here; but he had kept that a secret. We came up here early this morning, and took out the last thawing. The little god of chance was our third partner!"

Joan blinked hard, as at new white light.

"Why does he let me think he, too, was guilty; that he, too, fled?"

"Loyalty to a partner, and to the partner's wife—who befriended him. He insists that it be kept a secret, lest my wife should ever learn the truth. That, my girl, is sacrifice, for he loves you better than his life!"

"And *you?* You refuse the sacrifice?"

"Naturally! And, by the way, a fellow who is as loyal as that to a man partner, is likely to be as loyal to a—*woman partner!"*

She shook his hand and, in a broken voice, said:

"You are right, Mr. Ticely. I—*we*—thank you!"

Lightly she fled away, her contrite heart shining in her face. And Ticely smiled as he watched her make straight for the tent.

STRAIGHT INFORMATION

FRANK P. MORSE, the promoter and publicity agent, was once a "cub" reporter on a Washington newspaper. Sent out at two o'clock one morning to ask a member of the Roosevelt cabinet an important question, he pounded on the statesman's front door, pulled out the bell cord, and beat on the brass railing of the porch steps. After half an hour of this weird clamor, the cabinet official put his head out of a second-story window and demanded hotly:

"What blank-blankety-blank fool is that down there?"

The reporter, expecting an approach by way of the hall and not having seen the protruding head upstairs, was startled into instant and candid reply:

"Frank P. Morse, sir, of the *Post.*"

You Ask Anybody

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Cow Country," "The Quirt," Etc.

Tumultuous "Casey" Ryan had driven horses since he could stand on his toes, and as one of Nevada's last stage-drivers speed was his middle name. Wherefore the ubiquitous Ford finally claimed him for its own—and so did The Widow at Lucky Lode Mine. A combination prolific of complications. You will be glad to continue Casey's acquaintance in future numbers

FROM Denver to Spokane, from El Paso to Butte, men talk of "Casey" Ryan and smile as they speak his name. Bearded men with the flat tone of age in their voices will suck pipes and cackle reminiscently while they tell you of Casey's tumultuous youth—time when he drove the fastest six horses in Colorado to the stage line out from Cripple Creek, and whooped past would-be holdups with a grin of derision on his lips and bullets whining after him, and his passengers praying and clinging white-knuckled to the seats.

Once a flat-chested, lank man climbed out at the stage station below the mountain and met Casey coming off the box with whip and six reins in his hand.

"Sa-ay! Next time that gang starts in to hold up the stage, by gosh, you *stop!* I'd ruther be shot than pitched off into a cañon som'eres."

Casey paused and looked at him, and spat and grinned. "You're here, ain't yuh?" he retorted finally. "You ain't shot, and you ain't laying in no cañon. Any time a man gets shot outa Casey's stage, it'll be because he jumps out and waits for the bullet to ketch up."

The lank man snorted and reached under his coat tail for the solacing plug of chewing tobacco. "Why, hell, man, you come down around that hairpin turn, up there, on two wheels!" he complained.

Casey grunted and turned away uninterested. "I've done it on one," he belittled the achievement. "The leaders wasn't runnin' good, to-day. That nigh one's tenderfooted. I gotta see about havin' him shod before the next trip." He started off, then paused to fling reassurance over his shoulder. "Don't you never worry none about Casey's driving. Casey can *drive.* You ask anybody."

Well, that was Casey's youth. Part of it. The rest was made up of reckless play, fighting for the sheer love of action, love that never left a scar across his memory and friendships that laughed at him, laughed with him, and endured to the end. Along the years behind him he left a straggling procession of men, women, and events, that linked themselves reminiscently in the memory of those who knew him. "Remember the time Casey licked that Swede foreman up at Gold Gap?" one would say. "Remember that little girl Casey sent back to her folks in Vermont—and had to borrow the money to pay her fare, and then borrow the money to play poker to win the money to pay back what he borrowed in the first place? Borrowed a hundred dollars from Ed Blair, and then borfowed another hundred off Ed the next day and boned Ed to set into a game with him, and won the money off Ed to pay Ed back. That's Casey for yuh!"

As for the events, they were many and they had the Casey flavor, every one of them. A few I should like to tell you, and I'm going to begin with one which shows how Casey was born an optimist and never let life get the better of him, no matter what new wallop it invented.

From the days when his daily drives were apt to be interrupted by holdups—and once by a grizzly that rose up in front of his leaders on a sharp turn and all but made an end of Casey and his record for shaving death close and never drawing blood—Casey drifted from mountain to desert, from desert to plain, blithely meeting hard luck face to face and giving it good day as if it were a friend. That was the remarkable trait which Casey possessed. Nothing downed him, because he never seemed to know when he was whipped, but thought it merely an incident of the game. Cheerfulness was in the bones

of him—though he had a temper as Irish as his name.

So, in time, it happened that Casey was driving stage from Pinnacle down to Lund and making boast that his four horses could beat any automobile that ever infested the trail. Infest was the word Casey would have used often had he known the dictionary contained it. Having been deprived of much knowledge of books, but having a facile imagination and some creative ability, Casey invented words of his own and applied them lavishly to all automobiles and, in particular and emphatically, he applied the spiciest ones to Fords.

Put yourself in Casey's place and sympathize with him. Imagine yourself with a thirty-mile trip down a twisty, rough mountain road built in the days when men hauled ore down the mountain on wagons built to bump over rocks without damage to anything but human bones. You never stopped for stage robbers or grizzlies in the past, and you have your record as the hardest driver in the West to maintain. You pop the lash over the heads of your leaders and go whooping down a long, straight bit of road where you count on making time. And when you are away halfway down and the four horses are at a gallop and you are happy, around the turn below comes a Ford, rattling its various joints, trying to make the hill in "high."

More likely than not, the driver honks his horn at you to turn out—and you are Casey Ryan, of whom men talk from El Paso to Butte, from Denver to Spokane. Wouldn't you writhe, and wouldn't you swear, and wouldn't you hate the man who invented Fords? Yet you would turn out. You would have to, unless the Ford did—and Fords don't. A Ford will send a twin-six swerving to the rocky rim of a road, and even Casey Ryan must swing his leaders to the right in obedience to that raucous challenge.

Casey had the patience of all optimists, and for a long while he had contented himself with his vocabulary and the record he held of making the thirty miles from Pinnacle to Lund in the same time a Ford would make it. He did not, by the way, say what his stage cost him in repairs, nor did he mention the fact that Lund and Pinnacle citizens rode with him once and then never again, and that his passengers were mostly strangers picked up at the railroad station at Lund because they were tickled with the picturesque four-horses-and-Casey stage. He had never killed anybody with his record, but he had almost.

Once Casey did not turn out. That morning he had been compelled to stop and whip a heavy man who came up and berated him because the heavy man's wife had ridden from Pinnacle to Lund the day before, and had fainted at the last turn, and had not revived in time to catch the train for Salt Lake, which she had been anxious to catch; so anxious that she had ridden down with Casey rather than take the narrow-gauge train which carried ore and passengers and mail to Lund every day, arriving when most convenient to the train crew.

Casey had managed to whip the husband, but the difference in weight had given him the victory by a narrower margin than Casey liked. Besides, the fight delayed him so that he started out ten minutes late. He was reflecting upon the injustice of the case, and asking himself if he, Casey, were to blame because a woman fainted inconveniently and missed her train, and had answered emphatically that he was not, and that he would like to have given her husband another good punch, and would have given it, if he'd had the time—when the Ford came chugging around the turn and honked at him impertinently.

Casey popped his whip, yelled and charged straight down the road. He would make that Ford turn out, or bust something. He would show them that Casey was Casey Ryan. Wherefore Casey was presently extricating his leaders from his wheelers, ten feet below the grade. On the road above, the Ford stood still with one front fender cocked up rakishly and a headlight smashed, mulishly balking while the driver cranked and cranked and swore down at Casey, who squinted into the sun that he might see the man he likewise cursed.

They were a long while there exchanging disagreeable opinions of one another. When the leaders had veered to the edge of the grade at the last second before the collision, and the wheelers had responded, the left front wheel of the stage did something to the Ford. It would not start, and Casey finally freed his four horses, mounted one and led the others and so proceeded to Lund, as mad a little Irishman as Lund ever beheld.

"That settles it," he snorted when the

town came into view in the flat below. "They've pushed Casey off'n the grade for the first time and the last time! What pushin' and crowdin' and squawkin' is done from now on, it'll be Casey that's doin' it —mind what I'm telling yuh, now! Faint? I'll learn 'em what to faint over. They can't hand it to Casey. They never did and they never will. If it's Fords goin' to rule the country from now on, and take the road away from the horses, you can climb a tree if yuh like, and watch how Casey'll drive the livin' tar outa one! Go 'em one better— that's Casey Ryan, and you can go tell 'em I said so. Hawnk! Wait till yuh hear the hawnkin' Casey'll be doin'!"

I tell you his horses knew the mind of Casey and all his fell purpose by the time he rode into town and up to one of those ubiquitous "Ford Agencies" that write their curly tailed blue lettering in one endless chain from the high nose of Maine to the shoulder of Cape Flattery.

"Gimme one of them gol-darned blankety bing-bing Ford auty*mo*bils," he commanded the garage owner who came to meet Casey amicably, in his shirt sleeves. "Here's four horses I'll trade yuh, with what's left of the harness. And up at White Ghost turn you'll find a good wheel off the stage, 't I'll make yuh a present of." He slid down from the sweaty back of his horse and stood bow-legged and determined before the garage owner.

"Well—there ain't much sale for horses, Casey, and I ain't got a place to keep 'em, nor anything to feed 'em. I'll sell yuh a Ford."

Casey glanced over his shoulder to make sure the horses were standing quietly, dropped the bridle rein and advanced a step, his Irish eyes fixed upon the face of the other.

"You *trade,*" he stated flatly.

The Ford man backed a little. "Sure, Casey. What yuh want for the four, just as they stand?"

Casey did not trouble with triumph. He continued to forge straight at his object. "Me? I want a Ford auty*mo*bil. I want you to put on the biggest horn you got, so I c'n be heard from here to Pinnacle and back in one hawnk. And run the damn thing out here and show me how it works, and how often yuh gotta wind it and when. I've got my stage line to take care of, and I've missed a run on account of being pushed off'n the road. I'll sign papers tonight when I get in. Show me the biggest horn yuh got."

Thus was the trade effected, with much speed and few preliminaries, because the garage man knew Casey well, and had seen him in action when his temper was up. He adjusted a secondhand horn he happened to have; one of those terrific things warranted to lift a medium-sized man off his feet at one hundred yards or money refunded. Casey tried it out on himself, walking down the street several doors and standing with his back turned while the garage man squawked at him.

"She'll do," he approved, coming back. "What'll kink Casey's backbone oughta be good enough for anybody. Bring her out here and show me how you run the darn thing. I've got a load of bohunk muckers to take up to the Blackbird Mine. Meant to haul 'em up to-morrow morning, but I guess I'll take 'em this afternoon for practice."

Naturally, the garage man was somewhat perturbed at the thought. The road from Pinnacle to Lund was the kind that brings a sigh of relief to many a seasoned driver after it has been safely driven. It is narrow in spots, has steep pitches both ways, and in the thirty miles there are sixteen sharp turns and others not so sharp.

"Better let me write you out some insurance on the car, Casey," he suggested, not half as jokingly as he tried to seem.

Casey turned and looked him in the eye. "Say! Never you mind about insuring *this* car. What you want to do is insure the cars I'm liable to meet up with!"

The garage man said no more about insurance, but took Casey down the cañon where the road was walled in on both sides by cliffs and was fairly straight and level, and proceeded to give him a lesson in driving. Casey made two round trips along that half mile of road, killed the engine, and figured out for himself how to start it again.

"She's tender bitted, and I do hate a horse that neckreins in harness," he criticized. "All right, Bill. I'll put you down at the garage and go gather up the bohunks and start. Better phone up to Pinnacle that Casey's on the road and it's his road so long as he's on it. They'll know what yuh mean."

Pinnacle did know, and waited on the sidewalk that afforded a view of the long hill

where the road swung down around the head of the gulch into town.

Much sooner than his most optimistic backers had a right to expect—for there were bets laid on the outcome there in Pinnacle—a swirl of red dust on the brow of the hill grew rapidly to a cloud. Like a desert whirlwind it swept down the road, crossed the narrow bridge over the deep cut at the head of the gulch, and rolled on down the steep little, narrow street. Out of the whirlwind emerged the pugnacious little nose of a new Ford, and behind the windshield Casey Ryan grinned widely as he swung up to the post office and stopped with a lurch that sent the insecure fourth bohunk in the tonneau hurtling forward into the front. Casey threw up an elbow and caught the bohunk in the collar button and held him from going through the windshield. The others made haste to scramble out, until Casey stopped them with a yell that froze them where they were.

"Hey! Stay right where y'are! I gotta deliver yuh up on the hill to the Blackbird, in a minute."

There were chatterings and gesticulation, and one who was not scared out of all the English he knew protested that they would "Walk, mister, if you *pleese*, mister!" Whereat the crowd slapped thighs and laughed long and loud.

Thereafter Pinnacle and Lund had a new standard by which to measure the courage of a man. Had he made the trip with Casey?

Casey did not like that. Freely enough he admitted that he was a hard driver. He had always had the name of being the hardest driver in the country, and he was proud of it. When a man started out to go somewhere, he wasn't much, in Casey's opinion, if he did not immediately proceed to get there. But he was a safe driver, he argued.

Casey had an accident now and then, and his tire expense was such as to keep him up nights playing poker for money to support his stage. You can't whirl into town at a thirty-mile pace—which is fast driving in Pinnacle, believe me—and stop with a flourish in twice the car's length without scouring more rubber off your tires than a capacity load of passengers will pay for. Besides, your passengers generally object.

In two weeks—perhaps it was less, though I want to be perfectly just and give him a full two weeks if possible—Casey was back, afoot, and standing bow-legged and nonchalant in the doorway of the Ford Agency at Lund.

"Gimme another Ford auty*mo*bil," he requested, grinning a little. "I guess mebby I oughta take two or three, if you've got 'em to spare. But I'm a little short, right now, Bill. I ain't been gitting any good poker, lately. I'll make out with one for a while."

Bill asked a question or two while he led Casey to the last arrival from the factory. Casey explained.

"I had a bet on with a fellow up in Pinnacle, y'see. He bet me a hundred dollars I couldn't shave off another ten minutes on my run down, and I bet I could. I'd a got his money, too. I had eight minutes peeled off, and up here, at this last sharp turn, Jim Black and me butted noses together. I pushed him on ahead of me for fifty rods, Bill—and him a-yelling at me to quit—but something busted in the insides of my car, I guess. She give a grunt and quit. All right, I'll take this one. Grease her up, Bill. I'll eat a bite before I take her out."

You've no doubt suspected before now that not even poker, played industriously o' nights, could keep Casey's head above the financial waters that threatened to drown him and his Ford and his reputation. Casey did not mind repair bills, so long as he achieved the speed he wanted. But he did mind not being able to pay the repair bills when they were presented to him. Whatever else were his faults, Casey Ryan had always gone cheerfully into his pocket and paid what he owed. Now he was haunted by a growing fear that an unlucky game or two would send him under, and that he might not come up again.

He began seriously to think of selling his car and going back to horses which, in spite of the high cost of feeding them, had paid their way and his, and left him a pleasant jingle in his pockets. And then he bumped hard into one of those queer little psychological facts which men never take into account until it is too late.

Casey Ryan, who had driven horses since he could stand on his toes and fling harness on their backs, could not go back to driving horses. The speed fiend of progress had him by the neck. Horses were too slow for Casey. Moreover, the thirty-mile stretch between Pinnacle and Lund was too tame for him, too monotonous. He knew in the dark every twist in the road, every sharp

turn, and he could tell you offhand what every sharp turn had cost him in the past month, either in repairs to his own car or to the car that had unluckily met him without warning. For Casey, I must tell you, forgot all about that ear-splitting klaxon at his left elbow. He was always in too much of a hurry to blow it, anyway, and by the time he reached a turn he was around it, and there either was no car in the road or Casey had already scraped paint off it or worse. So what was the use?

Far distances called Casey. In one day, he meditated, he could cover more desert with his Ford than horses could travel in a week. An old, half-buried passion stirred, lifted its head, and smiled at him seductively. He would go away into the far distances and look for the riches which Nature hides so miserly in her hills. A gold mine, or perhaps silver or copper—what matter which mineral he found, so long as it spelled wealth for him? Then he would buy a bigger car and a faster car, and he would bore farther and farther into yonder. In his past were tucked away months on end of tramping across deserts and up mountain defiles, with a packed burro nipping patiently along in front of him and this same, seductive passion for finding one of Nature's little hoards of mineral beckoning him over the next horizon. Burros had been slow. While he hurtled down the road from Pinnacle to Lund Casey pictured himself plodding through sand and sage and over malapi and up dry cañons, hazing a burro before him.

"No, sir, the time for that is gone by. I could do in a week now what it took me a month to do then. I could get into country a man'd hate to tackle afoot, not knowing the water holes. I'll git me a radiator that don't boil a tea kettle over a pitch fire, and load up with water and grub and gas, and I'll find something that'll put me in the clear the rest of my life. Couldn't before, because I had to travel too slow. But shucks! A Ford can go anywhere a mountain goat can go. You ask anybody."

So Casey sold his stage line and the good will that went with it, and Pinnacle and Lund breathed long and deep and planned trips they had refrained from taking heretofore, and wished Casey luck. Bill, the garage man, laid a friendly hand on his shoulder and made a suggestion so wise that not even Casey could shut his mind against it.

"You're starting out where there won't be no Bill handy to fix what you bust," he pointed out. "You wait over a day or two, Casey, and let me show yuh a few things about that car. If you bust down on the desert you'll want to know what's wrong, and how to fix it. It's easy, but you got to know where to look for the trouble."

"Me? Say, Bill, I never had to go lookin' for trouble," Casey grinned. "What do I need to learn how for?"

Nevertheless, he remained all of that day with Bill and crammed on mechanics. He was amazed to discover how many and how different were the ailments that might afflict an automobile. That he had boldly—albeit unconsciously—driven a thing filled with timers, high-tension plugs that may become fouled and fail to "spark," carburetors that could get out of adjustment, spark plugs that burned out and had to be replaced, a transmission that absolutely *must* have grease or something happened, bearings that were prone to "burn out," if they went dry of oil, and a multitude of other mishaps that could happen and did happen, if one did not watch out, would have filled Casey with foreboding, if that were possible. Being an optimist to the middle of his bones, he merely felt a growing pride in himself. He had driven all this aggregation of potential grief, and he had driven with impunity. Whenever anything had happened to his Ford auty*mo*bil, Casey could trace the direct cause, and it had always come from the outside instead of the inside, save that time when he had walked in and got a new car without probing into the vitals of the other.

"I'd ruther have a horse down with glanders," he admitted when Bill finally washed the grease off his hands and forearms and rolled down his sleeves. "But Casey Ryan's game to try anything once, and most things the second and third time. You ask anybody. Gimme all the hootin'-annies that's liable to wear out, Bill, and a load uh tires and patches, and Casey'll come back and hand yuh a diamond big as your fist, some day. Casey Ryan's goin' out to see what he can see. If he meets up with Miss Fortune, he'll tame her, Bill. And this little Ford auty*mo*bil is goin' to eat outa my hand, this summer. I don't give a cuss if she does git sore and ram her spark plugs into her carburetor now and ag'in. She'll know who's boss, Bill."

Taking that point of view and keeping it,

Casey managed very well. Whenever anything went wrong that his vocabulary and a monkey wrench could not mend, Casey sat down on the shadiest running board and conned the Instruction Book which Bill handed him at the last minute. Other times he treated the Ford exactly as he would treat a burro, with satisfactory results.

Away out on the high mesas that are much like the desert below, except that the nights are cool and the wind is not fanned out of a furnace, Casey fought sand and brush and rocks and found a trail now and then which he followed thankfully, and so came at last to a short range of mountains whose name matched well their sinister stare. The Ghost Mountains had always been reputed rich in mineral and malevolent in their attitude toward man and beast. Even the Joshua trees stood afar off and lifted grotesque arms defensively. But Casey was not easily daunted, and eerie places held for him no meaning save the purely material one. If he could find water and the rich vein of ore he dreamed of, then Casey would be happy in spite of snakes, tarantulas, and sinister stories of the place.

Water he found, not too far up a gulch. So he pitched his tent within carrying distance from the spring, thanked the god of mechanics that an automobile neither eats nor drinks when it does not work, and set out to find his fortune.

Now this is not a story of Casey's quest for gold. It's a love story, if you please. Until the lady entered Casey's orbit there was no logical reason for telling you, nor for stating that the Ford auty*mo*bil played the part of Fate—and played erratically.

Casey knew there was a mining camp on the high slope of Furnace Butte. He knew the name of the camp, which was Lucky Lode, and he knew the foreman there—knew him from long ago in the days when Casey was what he himself called wild. In reaching Ghost Mountains Casey had driven for fifteen miles within plain sight of Lucky Lode. But gas is precious when you are a hundred miles from a garage, and since business did not take him there Casey did not drive up the five-mile slope to the Lucky Lode just to shake hands with the foreman and swap a yarn or two. Instead, he headed down on to the bleached, bleak oval of Furnace Lake and forged across it straight as he could drive toward Ghost Mountain.

But the next time Casey made the trip—needing supplies, powder, fuse, caps, and so on—Fate took him by the ear and led him to the lady. This is how Fate did it—and I will say it was an original idea.

Casey had a gallon sirup can in the car, which he used for extra oil for the engine. Having an appetite for sour-dough biscuits and sirup, he had also a gallon can of sirup in the car. It was a terrifically hot day, and the wind that blew full against Casey's left cheek as he drove, burned where it struck. Casey was afraid he was running short of water, and a Ford comes first, as every man knows, so that Casey was parched pretty thoroughly, inside and out. Within a mile of the lake he stopped, took an unsatisfying sip from his big canteen and emptied the rest of the water into the radiator. Then he replenished the oil in the motor generously, cranked and went bumping along down the trail worn rough with the trucks from Lucky Lode.

For a little way he bumped along the trail, then the motor began to labor and, although Casey pulled the gas lever down as far as it would go, the car slowed and stopped dead in the road. It was after an hour of fruitless monkey-wrenching and swearing and sweating that Casey began to suspect something. He examined both cans, "hefted" them, smelled and even tasted the one half empty, and decided that Ford auty*mo*bils did not require two quarts of sirup at one dose. He thought that a little sirup ought not make much difference, but half a gallon was probably too much.

He put in more oil on top of the sirup, but he could not even move the crank, much less "turn 'er over." He did not know what to do. So long as a man can wind the crank of a Ford he seems able to keep alive his hopes. Casey could not crank, wherefore he knew himself beaten even while he heaved and lifted and swore, and strained every muscle in his back. He got so desperately wrathful that he lifted the car perceptibly off its right front wheel with every heave, but he felt as if he were trying to lift a bowlder.

It was past supper time at Lucky Lode when Casey arrived, staggering a little with exhaustion both mental and physical. His eyes were bloodshot with the hot wind, his face was purple from the same wind, his lips were dry and rough. I cannot blame the men at Lucky Lode for a sudden thirst

when they saw him coming, and a hope that he still had a little left. And when he told them that he had filled his engine with sirup instead of oil, what would any one think?

Their unjust suspicions would not have worried Casey in the least, had Lucky Lode not possessed a lady cook who was a lady. She was a widow with two children, and she had the children with her and held herself aloof from the men in a manner befitting a lady. Casey was hungry and thirsty and tired and, as much as was possible to his nature, disgusted with life in general. The widow gave him a smile of sympathy which went straight to his heart; and hot biscuits and coffee and beans cooked the way he liked them best. These went straight to ease the gnawing emptiness of his stomach—and being a man who took his emotions at their face value, he jumped to the conclusion that it was the lady whose presence gave him the glow.

Casey stayed that night and the next day and the next at Lucky Lode. The foreman helped him tow the sweetened car up the hill to the machine shop where they could get at it, and Casey worked until night trying to remove the dingbats from the hootin'-annies —otherwise the pistons from the cylinders. The foreman showed him what to do, and Casey did it, using a "double jack" and a lot of energy.

Before he left the Lucky Lode Casey knew exactly what sirup will do to a Ford if applied internally, and the widow had promised to marry him if he would stop drinking and smoking and swearing. Casey took the drinking pledge quite cheerfully for her sake, since he had not been drunk in ten years on account of having seen a big yellow snake with a green head on the occasion of his last carouse. He promised to stop smoking, glad that the widow neglected to mention chewing tobacco which was his everyday comfort. As for the swearing, he told her he would do his best, and that he would taste the oil hereafter before he fed it to the Ford.

"But Casey, if you leave whisky alone you won't need to taste the oil," the widow told him. Whereat Casey grinned feebly and explained for the tenth time that he had not been drinking. She did not contradict him. She seemed a wise woman, after a fashion.

Casey drove back to his camp at Ghost Mountain, happy and a little scared. Why, after all these years of careless freedom he should precipitate himself into matrimony with a woman he had known only casually for two days, puzzled him a little.

"Well, a man gits to feelin' like he wants to settle down when he's crowdin' fifty," he explained his recklessness to the Ford as it hummed away over Furnace Lake which was flat as a floor and dry as a bleached bone —and much the same color. "Anny man feels the want of a home as he gits older. And Casey's the man that will try anything once. You ask anybody." He took out his pipe, looked at it, bethought him of his promise and put it away again, substituting a chew of tobacco as large as his cheek would hold without prying his mouth open. "G'long, there! You got your belly full of oil—shake your feet and show you're alive!"

After that, Casey spent every Sunday at Lucky Lode. He liked the widow better and better. Only he wished she would take it for granted that when Casey Ryan made a promise, Casey Ryan would keep it. "I've got so now I can bark a knuckle with m'single jack when I'm puttin' down a hole, and say, 'Oh, dear!' and let it go at that," he boasted to her on the second Sunday. "I'll bet there ain't another man in the State of Nevada could do that."

"Yes. But Casey, dear, if *only* you will never touch another drop of liquor. You'll keep your promise, won't you, dear boy?"

"Sure as hell I'll keep my promise!" Casey assured her headily. It had been close to twenty years since he had been called dear boy, at least to his face. He had kissed the woman full on the lips before he saw that a frown sat upon her forehead like a section of that ridgy cardboard they wrap bottles in.

"Casey, you swore!"

"Swore? Me?"

"I only hope," sighed the widow, "that your other promise won't be broken as easily as that one. Remember, Casey, I cannot and I will not marry a drinking man!"

Casey looked at her dubiously.

"Oh, I've heard awful tales of you, Casey, dear! The boys talk at the table, and they seem to think it's awful funny to tell about your fighting and drinking and playing cards for money. But I think it's perfectly awful. You must stop drinking, Casey, dear. I could never forgive myself, if I set before my innocent little ones the example of a husband who drank."

"You won't," said Casey. "Not if you marry me, you won't." Then he changed the subject, beginning to talk of his prospect over on Ghost Mountain. The widow liked to hear him tell about finding a pocket of ore that went seventy ounces in silver and one and seven-tenths ounces in gold, and how he expected any day to get down into the main body of ore and find it a "contact" vein. It all sounded very convincing and as if Casey Ryan were in a fair way to become a rich man.

The next time Casey saw the widow he was on his way to town for more powder, his whole box of "giant" having gone off with a tremendous bang the night before in one of those abrupt hailstorms that come so unexpectedly in the mountain country. Casey had worked until dark, and was dog tired and had left the box standing uncovered beside the dugout where he kept it. He suspected that a hailstone had played a joke on him, but his chief emotion was one of self-congratulation because he had prudently stored the dynamite around a shoulder of the cañon where he camped.

When he told the widow about it, and pointed out how lucky he was, she looked very grave. It was a very careless thing to do, she said. Casey admitted that it was. A man who handled dynamite ought to shun liquor above all things, she went on; and Casey agreed restively. He had not felt any inclination to imbibe until that minute, when the Irish rose up hotly within him.

"Casey, dear, are you *sure* you have nothing in camp?"

Casey assured her solemnly that he had not, and drove off down the hill vaguely aware that he was not so content with life as he had been. "Damn that sirup!" he exploded once, quite as abruptly as had the giant powder. After that he chewed tobacco and drove in broody silence.

Being Casey Ryan, tough as hickory and wont to drive headlong to his destination, Casey did not remain in town to loiter a half day and sleep a night and drive back the next day, as most desert dwellers did. He hurried through with his business, filled up with gas and oil, loaded on an extra can of each, strapped his box of dynamite upon the seat beside him where he could keep an eye on it—just as if that would do any good if the tricky stuff meant to blow up!—and started back at three in the afternoon. He would be half the night getting to camp, even though he was Casey Ryan and drove a wicked Ford. But he would be there, ready to start to work at sunrise. A man who is going to marry a widow with two children had best hurry up and strike every streak of rich ore he has in his claim, thought Casey.

All that afternoon, though the wind blew hot in his face, Casey drilled across the desert, meeting never a living thing, overtaking none. All that afternoon a yellow dust cloud swirled rapidly along the rough desert road, vainly trying to keep up with Casey who made it. In Yucca Pass he had to stop and fill motor and radiator with oil and water, and just as he topped the summit a front tire popped like a pistol.

Casey killed the engine and got out stiffly, bit off a chew of tobacco, and gazed pensively at Furnace Mountain that held Lucky Lode, where the widow was cooking supper at that moment.

"I sure would like to flop m' lip over one of her biscuits, right now," he said aloud. "If I do strike it, I wonder will she git too high-toned to cook?"

His eyes went to Furnace Lake lying smooth and pale yellow in the saucerlike basin between Furnace and Ghost Mountains. In the soft light of the afterglow it seemed to smile at him with a glint of malice like the treacherous thing it was. For Furnace Lake is treacherous. The big earthquake—America knows only one big earthquake, that which rocked San Francisco so disastrously—had split Furnace Lake halfway across, leaving an ugly crevice ten feet wide at the narrowest point and eighty feet deep, men said. Time and the passing storms had partly filled the gash, but it was there, ugly, ominous, a warning to all men to trust the lake not at all. Little cracks radiated from the big gash here and there, and the cattle men rode often that way, and sometimes not often enough to save their cattle from falling in.

By day the lake shimmered deceptively with mirage that painted it blue with the likeness of water. Then a lone clump of greasewood stood up tall and proclaimed itself a ship lying idle on a glassy expanse of water so blue, so cool, so clear that one cannot wonder that thirsty travelers go mad sometimes with the false lure of it.

Just now the lake looked exactly like any lake at dusk, and Casey's thoughts went beyond, to his claim on Ghost Mountain. Be-

ing tired and hungry, he pictured wistfully a cabin there, and a light in the window when he went chucking up the long mesa in the dark, and the widow there with hot coffee and supper waiting for him. Just as soon as he struck "shipping values," that picture would be real, said Casey to himself, and opened his tool box and set to work changing the tire. By the time he had finished it was dark, and Casey had yet a long forty miles between himself and his sour-dough can. He cranked the engine, switched on the electric headlights, and went tearing down the long incline to the lake.

"She c'n see the lights, and she'll know I ain't hangin' out in town lappin' up whisky," he told himself as he drove. "She'll know it's Casey Ryan comin' home—know it the way them lights are slippin' over the country. Ain't another man on the desert can put a car over the trail like this."

Pleased with himself and the reputation he had made, urged by hunger and the desire to make good on his claim, so that he might have the little home he instinctively craved, Casey pulled the gas lever down another eighth of an inch—when he was already using more than he should—and nearly bounced his dynamite off the seat when he lurched over a sandy hummock and down onto the smooth floor of the lake.

It was five miles across that lake from rim to rim, taking a straight line, as Casey did, well above the crevice. In all that distance there is not a stick, nor a stone, nor a bush to mark the way. Not even a trail, since Casey was the only man who traveled it, and Casey never made tracks twice in the same place, but drove down upon it, picked himself a landmark on the opposite side, and steered for it exactly as one steers a boat. The marks he left behind him were no more than pencil marks drawn upon a sheet of yellow paper. Unless the lake was wet with one of those sporadic desert rains, you couldn't make any impression on the cementlike surface. If the lake was wet you stuck where you were. Wherefore Casey plunged out upon five miles of blank, baked clay with neither road, chart, nor compass to guide him. It was the first time he had ever crossed at night, and a blanket of thin, high clouds hid the stars.

The little handful of engine roared beautifully and shook the car with the vibration. Casey heaved a sigh of weariness mingled with content that the way was smooth and he need not look for chuck holes for a few minutes, at any rate. He settled back, and his fingers relaxed on the wheel.

Suddenly he leaned forward, stared hard, leaned out and stared, listened with an ear turned toward the engine. He turned and looked behind, then stared ahead again.

"By *gosh* I bet both hubs is busted," he said under his breath—Furnace Lake impresses one to silence, somehow. "She's runnin' like a wolf—but she ain't *goin'*."

He waited for a minute longer, trifling with the gas, staring and listening. The car was shaking with the throb of the motor, but there was no forward lunge, nothing whatever but vibration of the engine. "Settin' here burnin' gas like a 'lection bonfire—she sure would think I'm drunk if she knew about it," Casey muttered, and straddled over the side of the car to the running board.

"I wish—to—*hell*, I hadn't promised her not to cuss," he gritted, and with one hand still on the wheel, Casey shut off the gas and stepped down. He stepped down upon a surface sliding beneath him at the rate of close to forty miles an hour. The Ford went on, spinning away from him in a wide circle, since Casey had unconsciously turned the wheel to the left as he let go. The impact of meeting that hard clay stunned him just at first, and he rolled over a couple of times before he began to regain his senses.

He lifted himself groggily to his knees and looked for the car, saw it bearing down upon him from the direction whence he had come. Before he had time to wonder much at the phenomenon it was upon him, over him with a lurch, and gone again.

Casey was tough, and he never knew when he was whipped. He crawled up to his knees again, saw the same Ford coming at him with dimming headlights from the same direction it had taken before, made a wild clutch, was knocked down and run over again. You may not believe that, but Casey had the bruises to prove it.

On the third round the Ford had slowed to a walk, figuratively speaking. Casey was pretty groggy, and he thought his back was broken, but he was mad clear through. He caught the Ford by its fender, hung on, clutching frantically for a better hold, was dragged a little distance so, and then, its speed slackened to a gentle, forward roll, he made shift to get aboard and give it the gas before the engine had quite stopped. Which he told himself was lucky, because

he couldn't have cranked the thing to save his life.

By sheer doggedness he drove on to camp, drank cold coffee left from his early breakfast, and decided that the bite of a Ford, while it is poisonous, is not necessarily fatal, unless it attacks one in a vital spot.

Casey could not drill a hole, he could not swing a pick. For two days he limped painfully and confined his activities to cooking his meals. Frequently he would look at the Ford speculatively and shake his head. There was something uncanny about it.

"She sure has got it in for me," he mused. "You can't blame her for runnin' off when I dropped the reins and stepped out. But that don't account for the way she come *at* me, and the way she *got* me every circle she made. That's human. It's dog-gone human! I've cussed her a lot, and I've done things to her—like that sirup I poured into her—and dog-gone her, she's been layin' low and watchin' her chance all this while. That there car *knowed!*"

The third day after the attack Casey was still too sore to work, but he managed to crank the Ford—eying it curiously the while, and with respect, too—and started down the mesa and up over the ridge and on down to the lake. He was still studying the matter, still wondering if Fords can think. He wanted to tell the widow about it, and get her opinion. The widow was a smart woman. A little touchy on the liquor question, maybe, but smart. You ask anybody.

Lucky Lode greeted him with dropped jaws and wide-staring eyes, which puzzled Casey until the foreman, grasping his shoulder—which made Casey wince and break a promise—explained their astonishment. They had, as Casey expected, seen his lights when he came off the summit from Yucca Pass. By the speed they traveled Lucky Lode knew that Casey and no other was at the steering wheel, even before he took to the lake.

"And then," said the foreman, "we saw your lights go round and round in a circle, and disappear——"

"They didn't," Casey cut in trenchantly. "They went dim because I was taking her slow, being about all in."

The foreman grinned. "We thought you'd drove into the crevice, and we went down with lanterns and hunted the full length of it. We never found a sign of you or the car."

"'Cause I was over in camp, or thereabout," supplied Casey dryly. "I wish you'd of come on over. I sure needed help."

"We figured you was pretty well lit up, to circle around like that. I've been down since, by daylight, and so have some of the boys, looking into that crevice. But we gave it up, finally."

Then Casey, because he liked a joke even when it was on himself, told the foreman and his men what had happened to him. He did not exaggerate the mishap; the truth was sufficiently wild. They whooped with glee. Every one laughs at the unusual misfortunes of others, and this was unusual. They stood around the Ford and talked to it, and whooped again. "You sure must have had so-ome jag, Casey," they told him exuberantly.

"I was sober," Casey testified sharply. "I'll swear I hadn't had a drop of anything worse than lemon soda, and that was before I left town." Whereupon they whooped the louder, bent double, some of them, with mirth.

"Say! If I was drunk that night I'd say so," Casey exploded finally. "What the hell—what's the matter with you rabbits? You think Casey Ryan has got to the point where he's scared to tell what he done and all he done? Lemme tell yuh, anything Casey does he ain't afraid to *tell* about! Lyin' is something I never was scared bad enough to do. You ask anybody."

"There's the widow," said the foreman, wiping his eyes.

Casey turned and looked, but the widow was not in sight. The foreman, he judged, was speaking figuratively. He swung back glaring.

"You think I'm scared to tell her what happened? She'll know I was sober, if I say I was sober. She ain't as big a fool ——" He did not want to fight, although he was aching to lick every man of them. For one thing, he was too sore and lame, and then, the widow would not like it.

With his back very straight, Casey walked down to the house and tried to tell the widow. But the widow was a woman, and she was hurt because Casey, since he was alive and not in the crevice, had not come straight to comfort her, but had lingered up there talking and laughing with the men. The widow had taken Casey's part when the others said he must have been drunk. She had maintained, red-lidded and trembly

of voice, that something had gone wrong with Casey's car, so that he couldn't steer it. Such things happened, she knew.

Well, Casey told the widow the truth, and the widow's face hardened while she listened. She had kissed him when he came in, but now she moved away from him. She did not call him dear boy, nor even Casey, dear. She waited until he had reached the point that puzzled him, the point of a Ford's degree of intelligence. Then her lips thinned before she opened them.

"And what," she asked coldly, "had you been drinking, Mr. Ryan?"

"Me? One bottle of lemon soda before I left town, and I left town at three o'clock in the afternoon. I swear——"

"You need not swear, Mr. Ryan." The widow folded her hands and regarded him sternly, though her voice was still politely soft. "After I had told you repeatedly that my little ones should ever be guarded from a drinking father; after you had solemnly promised me that you would never again put glass to your lips, or swallow a drop of whisky; after, that very morning, renewing your promise——"

"I was sober," Casey said, his face a shade paler than usual, though it was still quite frankly red. "I swear to Gawd I was sober."

"You need not lie," said the widow, "and add to your misdeeds. You were drunk. No man in his senses would imagine what you imagined, or do what you did. I wish you to understand, Mr. Ryan, that I shall not marry you. I could not trust you out of my sight."

"I—was—*sober!*" cried Casey, measuring his words. Very nearly shouting them, in fact. The widow turned indifferently away and began to stir something on the stove, and did not look at him.

Casey went out, climbed the hill to his Ford, cranked it, and went larruping down the hill, out on the lake and, when he had traversed half its length, turned and steered a straight course across it. Where tracings of wheels described a wide circle he stopped and regarded them soberly. Then he began to swear, at nothing in particular but with a hearty enjoyment worthy a better pastime.

"Casey, you sure as hell have had one close call," he remarked, when he could think of nothing new nor devilish to say. "You mighta run along, and run along, till you got *married* to her. Whadda I want a wife for, anyway? Sour-dough biscuits tastes pretty good, and Casey sure can make 'em." He got out his pipe, filled it, and crammed down the tobacco, found a match, and leaned back smoking relishfully, one leg thrown up over the wheel.

"A man's best friend is his Ford. You ask anybody," he grinned, and blew a lot of smoke and gave the wheel an affectionate little twist.

The next issue will present "Casey" Ryan in "A Godsend to a Lady."

THE RESULT OF A WAGER

DAVID CARUTHERS and Brydon Sloane, two real-estate agents from New Orleans, were in a smoking car on their way to New York recently when Sloane saw, several seats from them, a man whom he took to be Josephus Daniels, secretary of the navy. Caruthers thought he was mistaken, and, in the ensuing argument about it, they made a wager, Sloane of course betting that he was correct. To settle the matter, Sloane approached the supposed Daniels and, explaining that he had made a wager on his identity, asked him who he was.

The stranger, who appeared as amiable and obliging as a large hog with cholera, gave Sloane a withering look and, after an embarrassing pause, retorted:

"Young man, in making a wager, always bet that you're a fool, and you'll never lose."

With that rebuff, Sloane went back to his seat.

"Well," queried Caruthers, "who is he?"

"I don't know," Sloane replied solemnly, "but he knows who I am!"

F. O. B. Miami

By Clarence L. Cullen

Author of "An Alibi for Altogether Al," "Butch and the Great Bernice," Etc.

Whether or not you regard prohibition as the mother of necessity, you can not help enjoying this added proof of the fact that there's a way where there's a will

HOW'D you like," the man asked me, "to take a ride in this wagon, to-morrow?"

I told him it might rush me some to get ready for that kind of a ride to-morrow. There was nothing else to say, seeing it was a motor hearse he'd invited me to ride in.

"I don't mean inside," says he. "Outside."

"Outside sounds more like me, as I am at present," I told him. "The riding position ain't so cramped, outside as inside, in a limousine like this. Outside riders in a buggy of this build can stretch their legs and take a smoke when they need one which is something."

"You're right—nearly" says he thoughtfullike. "Leg-stretching anyhow ain't much indulged in by through tourists inside this kind of a bus. But there's no way of knowing about their smoking. Ever steer a ship like this?" he asked me.

"Not up to now" I told him. "Driving a dead wagon is one of the few hobbies I've laid away from in this business. Live ones, in cars and folks, for mine."

"My hobby right now is to get a live one to drive this here motor hearse, and me along with it, to Jacksonville to-morrow," the man I'm overhauling the Cemetery Six for comes at me then.

This listens newsier and more northerly, Jacksonville being nearly four hundred miles up the line from Miami. By the middle of March I never begrudge the space I take up in Miami to the bat-winged swordfish—maybe you'd call them mosquitoes—that begin about then to waft in on the winds from the Everglades. The March wafting is preferred by millions of Miami-bound mosquitoes because they know they've got a cinch on the fodder, seeing that most of the tourists in Miami stay there through March. And if you think those Everglades zephyrs, by St. Patrick's Day, ain't hot or humid enough to keep your pores on the job, just drop, any mid-March afternoon, into the back room of the Miami repair garage where I do my wintering, and I'll let you try on my dungarees. If the work duds don't feel like they'd been wrapped on you with bill-posters' paste that's just been boiled, I won't charge you a cent.

"I'm through here for the season, and Jacksonville's one good leg of the trip north," says I to this man I'm putting new spark plugs in his mortuary vehicle for. "But a hearse ain't just my speed—yet."

"There's hearses and hearses," says he. "A good driver ought to tool this one to Jacksonville in ten hours or less."

"What's the hurry, cap?" I asked this man that's got the Barney Oldfield idea about a hearse. "Is the inside passenger you're taking up kind of overduelike, or are——"

"You leave that to me, son," he cut in on me with a slow-spreading grin. "Driving's what I want you for, not undertaking."

"I get you," says I, "but wouldn't this here inside tourist's folks, if he's got any, kind of hate to have the hearse he's riding in pinched for speeding?"

"I'll take care of the pinches, Jerry," says he, confidentlike, and christening me to suit himself. "All you've got to pin your mind on now is the fifty bucks I'll ease you for piloting this here last-tour touring car from Miami to Jacksonville. What say—yes, or no?"

There's no jarring note that I can notice in this noise; fifty wheels for the fun of making a get-away from the mid-March midsummer of Miami, with better than a fifty-fifty chance that in Jacksonville some upbound party will hire me to drive them the rest of the way north, ain't a bet to overlook.

"I'll need a shave and a nut sundae before

starting—where's the fifty?" says I, and he strips a fifty from a roll that looks like it's taking the rubber-band treatment for the mumps, and stuffs this nice etching into the cigarette pocket of my overalls. This makes it unanimous, so I stroll into my Miami boss' office and ask him for my time.

"You want to keep your eyes peeled in driving that kind of a sport car through this man's Florida," the boss said to me when I told him I was going to steer a last-ride sedan to Jacksonville. "You can head into a lot of bother with the authorities down here, just now, by tipping over a motor hearse on Mr. Dixie's Highway and smearing up the road with it."

He looked at me kind of pointed and close-uppedly, with a queer expression on his face, when he said this, but I couldn't make his meaning; you're liable to muff a lot of useful stuff when you're excited over a good get-away or something.

"Tipping, boss—how come?" I asked him. "I've never tipped anything over for you, have I?"

"Watch your step, boy—that's all I'm saying." He had to cut it short, somebody breezing into his office just then.

So I shifted out of the work duds, washed up, and drove this heavy-motored, slate-gray-varnished hearse—no glass, but housed-in on all sides—out to a big rambling bungalow, that squatted in the middle of five acres of its own with a two-car garage to match at the back, in Coconut Grove. "Run 'er into the garage," orders the man that hired me, sitting alongside to give the directions. "We head for Jacksonville at sunup," says he, when I shut off the motor. "No need for you to come out here again; I've got a man that'll drive 'er from here down to that all-night garage on Twelfth Street, where you'll find me, all ready to roll, at daylight. Better turn in early to-night, son; you're going to do consid'able hearse-driving to-morrow, I'll say."

It was then that my Miami boss' words popped back into my mind.

"Cap," says I, "I don't have to tell you what a steamy hot drive it is from Miami to Jacksonville, at this season. I'm only a bus doctor, without any ambition, that I know of, to butt into the undertaking business. But if we're not going to leave any unpleasant impression behind us on the Dixie Highway, I hope you don't do any piking with the ice. Because, if you do, by the time we make Fort Pierce, or Melbourne, anyhow, with an inside passenger that ain't properly iced——"

"You leave the icing to me, that's an icer what is, Jerry," he picks me up there, the grin that takes its own time about it trickling again over his hard-bit face. "All you've got to do is to flick this funeral phaëton into Jacksonville some time to-morrow night. Maybe, if you do that without tripping, the fifty you've got now will have a little matey to play with when the ride's finished."

Me, I'm on Miami's Twelfth Street before daylight the next morning, all dolled up for a hearse ride—outside—in my fresh-washed Palm Beach cake-eater's suit; and, sure enough, as per schedule, there was the gloomy, big, slate-gray cemetery sedan pulled up in front of the all-night garage. In your dialect you'd say it had kind of a grisly look standing there in the dim light of the gasoline-pump globes, and I'll say in mine that I'd have felt a whole lot chipperer, not being hearse-broke as yet, if it had suddenly changed before my eyes even into one of those nineteen-twelve Detroit droskys with a chronic miss and a permanent wheeze.

The hearseman, hearing me coming up behind, climbed down from the driving seat where he'd been dozing, and his habiliments of woe, as you'd call 'em in cliff-brow chatter, didn't add any gayety worth mentioning to this early morning Miami scene. If you can make the late Captain Kidd in black doeskin pants and one of those almost-ankle-length undertaker's spinnaker-skirted frock coats and a tungsten-hard white-bosomed shirt and a lay-over collar and black string tie and boiler-metal black derby hat, you've got him. I say Captain Kidd—you know the pictures of that sea financier—because that's the kind of crumbled, peaked, fish-eyed face he wore, atop of a long, loose-jointed frame like a crane's on a screen: a hearseman as bleak-looking, since you're inquiring, as five o'clock of a frosty morning in Council Bluffs when you get there with your Chicago left-over. As for his undertaker's rig on this hot dawn that followed a sweltering night, I'd as soon motor the Dixie Highway, on a blistering day, from Miami to Jacksonville in an airman's leather suit and a buffalo overcoat and a drum-major's shako; but a hearseman, of course, has got to dress the part.

I looked under the motor hearse to see if there was any drip-drip; and there wasn't.

"Sure you haven't been stingy with the ice, cap?" I asked my hearse boss.

"So long as I ain't stingy with the gas, son, there'll be no need for you to break your little heart a-worrying," was his rebate. "Let's nudge in here and have a bite of breakfast," and he led the way into one of those motormen's never-closed, high-stool beanaterias, where the behind-the-counter hasher that's never seen you before calls you Mac.

I hadn't had any breakfast, and I'd been hungry when I got up at that, but now somehow I wasn't. Maybe it was the hearse waiting outside. I tried to figure, to account for the absence of any drip through the floor, that perhaps there was a deep, non-spilling drip pan or something inside the hearse. But even this kind of figuring didn't seem to whip up any wolfish craving in me for food. But the cap, he ate! It was the first time I'd ever seen a man in the undertaker's uniform, with his hearse out in front, partake of food, and I'll say it's going to be the last. A long, lean undertaker, with a good heel hold on the lower rungs of his high stool and his frock blanket practically touching the floor, dredging into pork chops and fried spuds and scrambled eggs at daylight in a low-ceilinged, all-night feedery where the cookstove-helped temperature's ninety-eight and rising—*and* with the hearse waiting out in front—makes a picture that I'm going to wedge away from in future, if the wedging remains as good as I'm expecting it will.

"Now we'll fill 'er up with gas, and then we'll roll," says my hearse boss, pushing his iron hat far back and picking his teeth enjoyably as he paid the check.

A roadster, thick-covered with dust, was backing alongside the gas pump ahead of the hearse as we came out, so we had to wait. The roadster's driver, a bulky man with close-clipped gray hair under his black slouch hat and with his lower teeth projecting about half an inch farther than his top ones, showed a lot of interest in the hearse while the garage lad was filling his gas tank. He stood, with the backs of his hands on his hips and his big hat pushed back, and looked and looked and looked at the funeral van.

"Makes a man think of his finish," says he, after two or three minutes of this silent looking, to the cap, who, to get the good of his three cups of coffee, is smoking a triple-jointed thirteen-inch stogie.

"Liable to," says the cap, licking a raveled spot on the stogie wrapper.

"Occupied?" asks the thickset man, nodding toward the hearse.

"Yep—occupied," says the cap, biting three or four inches off the stogie to make it draw a little.

"I wonder," says the bulky man, scratching under his hat, "if it's anybody I know."

"Not liable to be," says the cap, tossing the stogie and taking a chew of tobacco. "Unless you're acquainted with the Chinamen down south of here."

"Oh, a Chinaman, hey?" says the heavy-built man. "South of here, you say?"

"Yep—down Cape Sable way," says the cap, lighting another stogie to go with the eating tobacco. "Dried-up old Chinaman. Must ha' been ninety at least. Died day before yesterday. In the sponging business down that a way—biggest sponge fisherman at Cape Sable. One of these here moneyed chinks."

"Planting him here in Miami?" asked the blocky man, looking more interested than ever.

"Nope—Jacksonville," says the cap, grinding his second nondrawing stogie between his palms and stuffing it into a corncob pipe.

"But you're not going to haul him all the way to Jacksonville in a hearse!" broke out the driver of the dusty roadster.

"Some tote, but that's what I sure am going to," says the cap. "Starting right now—soon as I can get some gas."

But the blocky man muffed this hint to get his roadster, which by now was ready for rolling, out of the way.

"The East Coast Railroad was in operation when I went to bed last night," says he, looking puzzledlike. "It's a wonder you wouldn't save wear and tear on a hearse by shipping your cashed-in chink to Jacksonville in a baggage car."

"That ain't done, with classy Chinamen," says the cap, his tarpon eyes looking a little glittery with impatience by now, but holding himself in. "High-grade Chinamen won't have their carcases shipped by rail, if they can help it, railroads being foreign-devil stuff to them. So Charlie Fank Ying—that was the old sponge-fishing chink's name, Charlie Fang Ying—fixed it to have his deceased self toted up here to Miami from Cape Sable by truck, and now I'm hearsing him to Jack-

sonville—just as soon as ever I can get some gas, I am."

The thickset man, grinning, made the hint this time, and hopped into his roadster to pull it away from the gas pump. But, when he got out of the way, he braked again, long enough to stick his head around the side and say to the cap:

"Don't ram me from behind with that rumbler, will you? Because I'm heading north myself right now, and I'd kind o' hate, if only on account of the jinxy look of the thing, to take a rear-end slam from an overland hearse hauling Chinese ballast," and he screwed a cigar into his undershot chops, waved da-da with an ironical pudgy mitt, and, stepping on his gas, shot down the shadowy street.

The cap, after having been some put out over the delay in getting gas, would be peeved a little, I expected, over this parting persiflage of the thick-built man. But the cap fooled me by showing again his cagey slow-fuse grin. Not only that, but his words, which he sort of mumbled as if to himself and to nobody else, surprised me.

"Smarty-smarty-had-a-party," was what the cap said softly to go with the grin, and then I hauled the hearse alongside the gas pump.

The seventy-mile spin to West Palm Beach over the asphalt road was mere jogging in an hour and a half for an engine—you'll have to ask the cap why he'd had that kind of a motor installed in a hearse—that could have rolled the whole seventy in one hour flat. We smothered everything north-bound on that stretch, and I'll say they gave us road room when I gave them the horn. But one of them, a dinge driving a fliv and doing about fifteen per, refused to hear the horn for about two miles, keeping the middle of the asphalt path. So I waited for a good piece of side road and shot around to the left of him, anyhow. When he saw the slate-gray wheeled mausoleum, going three for his one, looming, alongside of him, rocking from side to side and with the carved wooden plumes towering over him, he gave his fliv wheel one hard wrench to the right and steered smack-dab into the palmetto jungle, skittering over guava bushes, date palms, kumquatt trees, and the like, and he may be in that jungle yet for all I know.

But I couldn't help wondering how all this speed and side-to-side swaying was agreeing with our inside passenger.

"Must have him pretty well clamped down, haven't you, cap?" I asked my hearse boss.

"Clamped down," said he, "is kee-rect."

"Up the line a piece, when we leave the asphalt road and get into the ruts," I tried to probe, "there'll be jolts hard enough to start the bolts of the drip pan, if that's what's——"

"If no bolts come loose on the front end, where you're riding, you should sob yourself to sleep about drip pans, son," says the cap to this, crumbling another stogie for his corncob.

"I reckon," I took another chance, still a little low in my mind about what might happen to a deceased ninety-year-old Chinaman hearse-touring Florida on such a hot day, "you'll be shipping a fresh supply of ice at West Palm Beach, or have you got enough to last, without this outfit being disgraced, till we make Rockledge or Daytona?"

"Ice," says the cap, smoking contented and gazing straight ahead, "is the least of my bothers. And if *he* ain't hollering," jerking a thumb backward, "why should you?"

So I laid away from the pump, it being plain by now that, whatever else was going to happen on this hearse ride, I wasn't going to be weighted down with information.

Going easy under wraps we pulled Fort Pierce, a hundred and twenty-eight miles, in four hours. It was a good spot to refill the gas dish, and the garage boss himself, his men being busy, did the pumping. The garage boss was one of these askers.

"Sho is a wawm day fo' ridin' inside one o' them there," says he in Crackerese to the cap, grinning at the hearse.

"Warm is right, but I ain't heard any complaints from inside as yet," says the cap.

"Miami party?" asks the asker, muffing the cap's stuff.

"Nope—Fort Lauderdale party," the cap surprised me by replying, Fort Lauderdale, which we'd passed through, being twenty-six miles north of Miami and about a million miles north of Cape Sable.

"Ah, wonduh who-all hit kin be? Ah know some folks in Fo't Lauduhdale," says the garage inquirer, proddi g for news.

"You wouldn't know this here Syrian," says the cap, eating off a fresh chew. "He'd only come to Fort Lauderdale—victim of Turkish rough stuff or something—from Syria a month or so before he got sick at his brother's grocery store, where he worked.

Died yesterday o' bubonic plague. That's the reason I'm hearsing him—railroad won't handle bubonic-plague cases."

The garage boss dropped the handle of the gas pump as if it was blistering his fingers.

"Bubonic plague!" he kind of gurgled, his face about four shades chalkier than it had been five seconds before. "Look a-heah, man, did you-all git that bubonic-plagued Syrian ready fo' this heah ride?"

"Had to, help being hard to get down this a way at this season," says the cap, sort of reflective.

"Move this heah pest-house hearse away from heah, boy, and don't you-all waste no time about it!" the garage boss bawls at me. "You-all has got yo' nuhve with you, suh"—to the cap—"fetchin' yo' wagon, that's jes' nachully bound to be alive with these heah bubonic-plague rat fleas, like the newspapers tells about, alongside mah gas pump. Ah ain't takin' no bubonic-plague rat-flea money," he gulps, when the cap offers him a five note for the gas—and I'll brake here long enough to state that this was the first and only time I ever saw a Florida garage man reject any kind of kale whatsoever. "You-all kin send me a check—and have somebody else write the check—fo' nine gallons of gas. Step on eh, boy," to me again, "and git this heah disease-breedin' bus away from mah garage."

Just as I stepped on 'er I glanced again at the garage doorway, where I'd noticed standing, as we drove up, the blocky-built man who'd been told by the cap in Miami, a few hours before, about the aged Chinaman from Cape Sable who was getting this hearse hire through Florida; and the thickset man, who'd been listening in on the cap's conversation with the garage boss about the dead-from-bubonic-plague Fort Lauderdale Syrian, was trying too hard, I thought, to look as if he hadn't heard a word of the talk.

"Cap," says I to my tranquil-looking seatmate when we'd got up the path a piece, "I understand the folks that write for the movies get badly overpaid for that kind of easy-coin dashing off. It's a wonder you wouldn't go into that money-stealing business, instead of wasting your talent planting Chinamen and Syrians and the like—sometimes planting a Chinaman and a Syrian, it appears, in the one grave, or hauling them at one and the same time in a single hearse, anyhow. You'd be a knockout as a screen writer, cap, with your kind of a sure-fire imagination."

"Don't you be starting restless ambitions inside me, boy, at my age," says the cap, his slow-percolating smile showing once more. "So long as I wring a modest livelihood from the business I'm engaged in now, I ain't begrudging these here movie geniuses their easy-gained wealth."

"A Chinaman and a Syrian in the one hearse don't bother me any, providing there's enough ice to go round," says I, "but that bulky gent who heard only about the Chinaman in Miami this morning must have wondered where we picked up Number Two."

"Yes, I seen he was wondering," the cap surprised me by saying. "A little wondering, here and there, ought to help that bird in his business." Then his voice dropped, and once more I heard him chuckle softly to himself: "Smarty-Smarty-had-a-party."

Just then there came a hurry-up horn blare from behind, and when I got out of the way the dust-caked roadster, doing fifty on that bumpy patch of road, shot ahead of us with a bone in her teeth, the thickset man waving da-da as he flashed past. The cap's grin took in both ears then.

"Had a party, and no-body ca-a-ame!" he finished his chuckled chant.

The only way I could figure it—the cap's chirping to himself this way, I mean—was that the strain of the undertaking business must have slightly affected his dome, which might account, too, for his confusion of mind at times as to the identity of the inside tourists he was hauling in his hearse. It didn't seem likely—I hoped, in that heat!—that there could be two of 'em boxed up back there in the big windowless slate-gray sedan, a Chinaman from Cape Sable and a Syrian from Fort Lauderdale, at one and the same time and both headed for Jacksonville. But by the time we reached Daytona, according to the cap, we were riding, not two, but three!

I pulled up in front of an Orange Avenue garage in Daytona for gas. The garage proprietor presided at the pump, and, seeing that ours was not a local hearse, made the customary inquiries.

"Some sizzling day for hearse-touring," he remarked. "Come far?"

"Come from Stuart," says the cap, calmly naming a town more than a hundred miles north of Miami.

"Stuart—Stuart—let's see, Stuart—I wonder if you're hauling anybody I used to know down in Stuart?" fumbles the garage man for information.

"Reckon not," says the cap, yawning. "Party I'm hauling only wintered once or twice in Stuart. Old New York millionaire."

"Millionaire!—'zat so?" says the garage man, big-eyed. "Where you riding him?"

"Jax," says the cap, smothering the second yawn.

"Consid'able hearse ride, from Stuart to Jax—'bout two hundred and fifty miles of hearsing," remarks the garage boss. "Railroad bridge at Stuart down—or something?"

"Nope—railroad bridge was O. K. when I left," says the cap. "Just an idee this old captain of finance had about riding on Mr. Flagler's railroad. Seems him and Mr. Flagler got into some kind of a clinch—matter of railroad bonds or something like that—twenty or thirty years ago, after they'd been pals for years. When they become enemies, this here millionaire that I'm hauling took a oath that he'd never ride again, alive or dead, on Mr. Flagler's East Coast Railroad. So, now that he's deceased, his family's deferring to his oath, as you might say, by shipping him by hearse to Jacksonville, from where he'll be taken to New York on the boat."

I heard kind of a choke, followed by somebody blowing his nose right hard, back of us just then, and, rubbering around the side, I saw the thickset man pulled up in his dusty roadster just behind us, fanning his good-natured-looking fat face with his black slouch hat while waiting for gas.

"The stocky-built gent in the dust cart seemed amused, kind o', over your Number Three, cap," says I when I pull into Daytona's Beach Street, heading for the concrete bridge over the Halifax River. "I suppose by this time he's got the idea, like I have, that this is a long-haul overland excursion you're giving to-day, with nobody barred that's dead enough."

"I seen he was amused," says the cap. "Amusing people like him's one of the easiest things I do. And you should chafe, son, whether he's amused or not."

Just as I was making the turn from Beach Street onto the bridge something whisked around me to the left, and again a pudgy hand waved a greeting at us as the dust-swaddled roadster took the track of us on the bridge.

I waited for him to sound his well-known "Smarty-Smarty——" slogan again, but he didn't. He just smiled like somebody with an ace in the hole, and let it go at that.

"A li'l' pep now, son," said he when we whirled from the bridge into the Ormond road. "You ain't done so bad so far for a first-time racer for the Hearse Cup, and that other fifty I mentioned is yours already. But jes' let's you and me and our friend inside," nodding backward, "pull Jax by a leetle after sundown—what say, boy?"

"Friends inside, you mean, cap," says I, stepping on 'er. When, a couple of minutes later, we see old Mr. Rockefeller—yes, the real one—sitting on his front porch as we flash past his winter house on the Ormond river front, I'm wondering whether ever before in his long life he has noticed a funeral van flitting by his residence at fifty miles per lunar hour.

When we hit into the long sand rut, south of the brick road, between Ormond and Bunnell, I had to throttle that clip down, of course, to the thirty-five I'd been averaging all the way from Miami; but thirty-five in a high free-board hearse on roads like those and always in top gear, no matter how she swayed or skidded, isn't exactly snailing along, if you're asking me. It was three in the afternoon when we left Daytona, with a hundred and thirteen miles to Jax still to cover, and it kept me so busy trying to make this last leg by sundown that I forgot to worry about such small-time stuff as ice for the excursionists inside and such. You can get used to any old thing, even hearse picnics, with or without ice, when your mind's occupied.

So we pulled the outskirts of south Jacksonville by sundown according to the watch, but with no sun showing. A thunderstorm and a cloudburst, working like little playmates together, held us up there on the last short leg to the St. John's River ferry to Jax. Even before I could steer the hearse under the shelter of a big moss-plumed live oak beside the road, the cap and I were almost drowned on the seat.

Two other motor vehicles, refugees from this solid-sheet rain, had hauled ahead of us into the shelter of that wide-branched live oak. One of them was a ten-ton truck, piled high with messy-looking household furniture; rickety chairs, frazzled sofas, the kind of beds you'd rather not stretch out on, and the like. The driver of this truck, a tough-

looking, unshaved birdikin in a perspirey blue hickory shirt and corduroy pants, was enjoying himself, during this little holdup under the tree by teaching a parrot in a cage, which he held in his lap, a fresh line of cuss words.

The other motor vehicle under the tree was a certain dust-caked roadster which I believe I've mentioned once or twice previously. Its fat-faced driver, leaning back from the wheel and fanning his jowls with his slouch hat, greeted the cap and me like old friends when we pulled alongside him.

"How's your Cape Sable Chinaman?" he asks the cap, cordiallike.

"Slick as a wet lizard, so far's I know, not having heard any murmurings," says the cap, cordial right back at him.

"I'll say you've given one Chinese antique a hearse ride—three hundred and eighty miles from Miami, stops for gas included, by the light of one sun," the blocky gent praises us, glancing at his watch. "If that ain't a world's record for a funeral fiacre you can frisk me!"

"All in the day's work, neighbor," modestly replies the cap; and just then the rain quit as suddenly as a rattle of riflery at the cease-fire order, which is a way Florida rain has, and a minute later the sun, resting on the Western rim, blazed out.

The hard-looking truck driver, sticking the parrot cage back in the litter of household junk he was hauling, climbed down from his seat with his crank handle.

"I wouldn't give hell room for one of these here Baptist birds," says he, grinning through his two-weeks' tangle of face wire at the cap and me and the blocky gent; meaning, we took it, that the respectably raised parrot hadn't responded to his cuss-word tuition. Then he cranked his truck, the heavyset gent in the roadster worked his starter button, I following suit, and in that order, truck, roadster, and hearse, we slid slow over the flooded South Jacksonville streets and rumbled on board the St. John's River ferryboat for Jax.

Was I tired? You tell 'em!

Not so tired, though, that I couldn't sit up and take notice of what happened half a minute after the ferryboat had nudged into the stream. Darkness had come, and a few lights had been lit in the motor-vehicle aisle of the boat. The blocky gent from the dusty roadster, which was braked right ahead of us in the aisle, suddenly appeared alongside the hearse seat. He was smiling, but there was a cold glitter in his squeenched-up eyes at that.

"Neat work, my crafty friend," says he, matter-of-factly addressing the cap, "but you lose."

Over my head, of course. I couldn't begin to make it. But I felt the cap stiffen beside me. The cap, though, taking it out in staring at the blocky gent, kept his face closed.

"Some loss, I'll say—but it's all in the day's work, as you remarked back on the road," went on the thick-built man, watchful as a bobcat and never taking his eyes off the cap's hands. He was guessing—but I didn't figure that out till later—that the cap might make a move for a gun. But the cap didn't raise his hands from his lap. "And a high-notch wholesale Bimini booze bootlegger, that's been getting by with it pretty tidy," continued the bulky gent, "has no kick a-coming if he's asked to donate an occasional bus load to the government—even if, at the same time, the hearse he hauls the booze in is confiscated for the greater good of the greater number."

Business of my young mind being illuminated by a blinding, if belated, shaft of light! But the cap, not appearing to have any repartee ready, kept still.

"The one hundred and forty cases of Saskatchewan Club booze that you've got in that cemetery sedan—I counted the cases, stretched out comfortable back of a sand dune, while you were having 'em loaded into the hearse from the Bimini night-voyaging lugger—makes a sad loss, I admit," goes on the blocky man, rubbing it in some, I thought, as he flashed his badge of a Volstead Vidocq or Prohibition-enforcement sleuth. "At the current price of Saskatchewan Club stuff, which in this neighborhood is fifteen bucks per copy or bottle, your cargo loss, this trip, according to my clumsy figuring, is exactly twenty-five thousand two hundred dollars—not to mention your hereby-confiscated hearse, which, with the high-powered pep engine you've got in 'er, ought to be worth three or four thousand of any undertaker's money."

I was beginning to dislike this bulky gent. He was enjoying himself too much to suit me. There's never any need, according to my dope, for a man to become sneery just because he's got the nudge. But the cap took it quiet and dead game. Which was

why, even though it looked now as if I might lose out on that other fifty I'd been promised, I was for the cap as the cards lay.

"The reason why I let you shoot the stuff up here to Jax, instead of grabbing it down yonder in Miami," the stocky-built government agent goes on enjoying himself, "is that the government's storage facilities for the handling of confiscated booze are inadequate down there, while here in Jax we've got a confiscation coop with loads of room for all you can lose to us. And that," says he, looking around and noticing that the ferryboat is just entering her Jacksonville slip, "is where you're going now, under arrest; to the government storage stadium for Bimini goods, jungle 'shine and such like, where we'll leave the hearse and your Cape Sable chink and Fort Lauderdale Syrian and New York captain of finance"—the cap, crestfallen as he appeared to be, had to show his slow-spreading grin here—"after which I'll convoy you to the Jax jug. Bail, here, for bootlegging is pretty high, but you're heeled for that, of course." Then he addressed me. "You're pinched too, son, as an apprentice or assistant Bimini bootlegger."

If the cap could keep still under all this, so could I. It pleases a natural-born gloater only too well, providing him as it does with additional gloat material, if you bleat in a crisis. So the cap and I, with clamped faces, let him pour it in.

He poured it in till the blow-off, too. Leaving his roadster on the ferryboat dock in charge of a dinge dock hand, he slid into the hearse seat with the cap and I, and I tooled 'er, according to his guidance, through the gay-lit Jax business streets to a dark section of the town, where the Volstead gumshoer got down and unlocked the motor-vehicle door of a dismal-looking warehouse, giving us a flash at the gun he'd taken out to guard against any temptation I might have had to step on 'er suddenly and flicker around a corner.

"Now," says this gloaty government agent to the cap, when he'd switched on the lights and I'd run the hearse inside, "let's have the key to this limousine of mourning, and you can take a last sad good-by peek at your one hundred and forty cases of perfectly good Saskatchewan Club."

The cap, in detaching the hearse key from his key ring, saw his chance, with me standing close by in easy range; he screwed his left eye into the cagiest, craftiest wink that I ever saw on a human chart and tipped it at me smack-dab. It didn't look to me like this was just the spot for a wink; but somehow, from that instant, I hoped for the best. The government agent unlocked the rear door of the hearse and swung it wide with a flourish. Then his undershot jaw fell till it practically dragged on the ground.

"Fooled, by blazes!" he gurgles, the words coming from somewhere deep in his throat and sounding like a death rattle.

The light shone clear and bright in the interior of the hearse. I ain't seen the inside of many hearses, but this one sure did have a vacant or vacated look. Just bare walls and clean floor. There wasn't a pin or a splinter in there. It was as hollow as an empty tooth.

After driving the unconfiscated hearse back to the business section of Jax and bedding 'er down comfortable in a good garage, the cap and I—un-arrested, or dis-arrested, or whatever you call it when, after being pinched, you're turned loose perforce by your pincher for lack of a pinching reason—went to a very superior hotel where, it seems, the cap rents his two handsome rooms and bath by the year.

We took turns wallowing in the tub's hot water to sweat out our hearse-ride stiffness. After his bath, the cap dolled up in a champagne-colored Shantung suit over a nifty pink-and-lavender-striped silk shirt, with a soft collar and white shoes; in which rig, barring his Captain Kidd countenance, which couldn't be disguised, he looked like a slightly string-beanish hot-sport bond broker starting on his summer vacation. Huddled deep and cozy with a cigar in a tapestry-covered easy-chair, I'll say he no longer resembled an undertaker. After an hour or so of this comfortable lounging, he summoned a waiter and ordered a highly kapoo dinner for three to be served within the half hour in his sitting room.

The third candidate for this feed showed all right within the half hour. He, too, was silk-shirted and Shantung-suited. It took me a minute or so to make him, seeing that, instead of that thick tangle of face wire I mentioned a while back, he had a shave now that was about two days under the skin. In his present apparel you'd never have taken him for the driver of a ten-ton truck; all of the tough look I spoke of had vanished with his whiskers.

"All stowed?" the cap asks this ex-truckman the instant he strolls in.

"All stowed—where they'd never find it with fifty man-o'-war searchlights," replies this instructor of parrots.

"Good trip up?" the cap asks him.

"Elegantest little east-coast ride I ever had," answers our diner Number Three. "Came through a-whistling, with not a thing happening, in twenty-two hours flat from Miami; from eight last night, when we finished transferring the stuff from the hearse to the truck, to six this evening—poor time, I s'pose, for a ten-ton truck! And I took it easy on the ride up at that. Nothing to worry about. It was a pipe that that government fox would wait for you to start north with the hearse."

"He waited all right," says the cap. "You'd no sooner left Coconut Grove with the truck than he came slinking by the bungalow in his roadster, to see if the hearse was still in the garage. I'd left the garage door open so he'd be sure to see it. Of course, if I hadn't set sail with the hearse this morning he'd probably have smelled a mice; and if he'd flashed his badge on me in Miami and taken a look inside the hearse, after you left with your load, he'd have wired ahead to have you stopped on the road and the beans would have been dumped. But the hearse held him. He hung on its heels, or a little ahead of it, all the way up. By way of convincing him that he had me hooked, I dished out different little narratives, here and there at stops for gas, about the kind of inside passenger I was hauling. That showed him what a hot liar I was—and it amused him."

"I was a little worried for a minute," says the ex-truckman, "when he pulled under that tree in South Jax. Didn't know but what something might have happened to wise him up. But I knew it was all right when you breezed along with the hearse right behind him; it was a cinch then that it was the hearse he was going to grab, not my truck."

"Some bait, that hearse—for one trip only," says the cap; "but we'll have plenty of time now to think out some other new one. This Volstead lynx thought he was shooting it into me pretty hard, when he made the pinch on the ferryboat. I wonder how he'd have felt if he'd known then—I came near telling him about it when he found the hearse empty, but concluded not to—that the stuff was aboard the truck he'd snuggled alongside of under the South Jax tree, and that on the ferryboat it was anchored within three feet of the front end of his roadster?"

"His feelings worry me something fierce," says our third party at dinner, looking far from worried. "By the way," he goes on, "I gave that top dressing of furniture junk to a dinge family over on the edge of town near where I stored the stuff. Gave 'em the parrot, too—the son of a swab bit my finger when I was saying good-by to it!"

The waiter, just then, came in with his tray. The first thing he put on the table, after spreading the cloth, was a big bowlful of crushed ice, for some iced tea that had been ordered. The cap, getting out of his easy-chair, picked up this bowlful of ice and brought it over to where I was sitting.

"Here, son," says he with his slow grin, "take this—you that never heard about embalming and that's always so dam' worried about ice!"

Other tales by Mr. Cullen will follow in early issues.

THANKS TO THE GEOGRAPHY

ONE day, during the last session of Congress, the House had up for discussion an appropriation bill to pay the expenses of a party of Federal officials who had been traveling in Alaska on government business. When the item covering the sleeping-car bill was reached, Representative Champ Clark sprang to his feet with a thunderous objection:

"Say, Mr. Speaker, that's too much money! Does the gentleman in charge of this bill mean to try to tell this House that it is possible to expend that much money on sleeping cars in Alaska?"

"I do," said the member thus addressed. "Up there, you know, the nights are six months long."

Magic

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "Picaroons," "A Man of Iron," Etc.

Whether it is an island in the South Seas or a great city, the spell of one's homeland holds, and the sight of a homeland face, when far afield, can work wonders in the human heart, as Tauti and Uliami lived to learn

IN Tilafeaa there lived, many years ago, two young men, Tauti and Uliami by name, and brothers in all things but birth.

Tilafeaa is a high island, very large, and many ships come there for copra and turtle and beche de mer, and at night you can see the reef alight with the torches of the fish spearers, and there is a club where the white captains and the mates from the ships meet with the traders to drink and talk.

The town is larger than the town here at Malaffii, but more spread, with trees everywhere, and between the houses, artus and palms and bread fruit, so that at night the lights of the town show like fireflies in the thick bush.

Tauti's house lay near the middle of the great street, near to the church, while the house of Uliami was the last in all that street but one, a pleasant house under the shadow of the true woods and close to the mountain track that goes over the shoulder of Paulii and beyond.

It was at the house of Uliami that these two chiefly met, for Uliami was the richer man and his house was the pleasanter house and he himself was the stronger of the two —not in power of limb but in person. You will have noticed that, of two men equal in the strength of the body, one will be greater than the other, so that men and women will come to him first, and he will be able to get the better price for his copra, and in any public place he will find more consideration shown to him.

It was so with Uliami. He was first of these two as he might have been the elder brother, and, though first, always put himself last, so great was his spirit and love for Tauti. When they went fishing together, though he caught more, it was always Tauti that brought home the heaviest basket. The ripest fruit was always for Tauti, and once, at the risk of his own, he had saved Tauti's life.

As for Tauti, he was equally fine in spirit. Though Uliami might fill his basket the fullest, he always tried to contrive that in the end Uliami had the better fish and fruit, and once he, too, had risked his life to save a man—and that man was Uliami.

Now since these two were inseparable and had given in spirit the life of the one for the life of the other, nothing, you will say, could separate them but Death which separates all things.

II.

One day Tauti, coming up alone from the fishing and taking a byway through the trees, came across a girl crouched beneath the shelter of a bread fruit whose leaves were so great that one of them could have covered her little body.

It was Kinei, the daughter of Sikra the basket maker, and she was stringing flowers which she had plucked to make a chaplet. He knew her well, and he had often passed her; she was fourteen, or a little more, and had for nickname the "Laughing One," for she was as pleasant to look at as the sunshine through leaves on a shadowed brook. She was so young that he had scarcely thought of her as being different from a man, and she had always, on meeting him, had a smile for him, given openly as a child may give a pretty shell in the palm of its hand.

But to-day, as she looked up, she had no smile for him. He drew near and sat down close to her and handed her the flowers for her to string. Then, as he looked into her eyes, he saw that they were deep as the deepest sea, and full of trouble.

He made inquiry as to the cause of the trouble and Kinei, without answering him, looked down. He raised her chin and, looking at him full, her eyes filled with tears. Then he knew. He had found Love, suddenly, like a treasure, or like a flower just opened and filled with dew.

On leaving her that day he could have run through the woods like a man distracted and filled with joy, but, instead he sought his own house, and there he sat down to contemplate this new thing that had befallen him.

Now, in the past, when any good had come to Tauti, no sooner was it in his hand than he carried it to Uliami to show; and his eyes now turned that way. But, look hard as he would, he could not see Uliami, for there was now no one else in the world for him but Kinei.

He could not tell his news, but hid it up, and when Uliami met him and asked him what was on his mind, he replied "Nothing." And so things went on, till one day Uliami, walking in the woods, came upon Kinei with Tauti in her arms.

He would sooner have come upon his own death, for he, too, had learned to love the girl, but his love for her had made him as weak as a maiden and as fearful as a child in the dark of the high woods, when there is no moon. Love is like that, making some men bold as the frigate bird in its flight, and some timorous as the dove, and the strongest are often the weakest when taken in the snare.

Uliami, having gazed for two heartbeats, passed away like a shadow among the trees and sought his own house and sat down to consider this new thing that had come to him. Any bad fortune of the past he had always carried to Tauti to share it with him, and his eyes turned toward Tauti now, but not with that intent.

At first, and for some time covering many days, he felt no ill will—no more than a man feels toward the matagi that blows suddenly out of a clear sky, driving him off shore to be drowned.

Then came the marriage of Tauti to Kinei, and a year that passed, and a son that was born to them.

And then slowly, as the great storms rise, the storm that had been gathering in the heart of Uliami rose and darkened, and what caused that storm was the fact that Tauti, in his happiness, had forgotten their old-time bond of brotherhood, and was so happy in his wife and his little affairs that Uliami might as well not have been on that island.

Tauti had robbed him not only of Kinei but of himself; Kinei had robbed him not only of herself but of Tauti—and they were happy. But the storm might never have burst, for Uliami was no evil man, had he not one day discovered that Kinei was no longer faithful to Tauti. She was of that sort, and the devil, who knows all things, did not leave the matter long to rest, but took Uliami by the ear and showed him the truth.

Now what the devil does to a man that man does often to another. Uliami showed Tauti the truth, and in such a manner that Tauti struck him on the mouth.

"So be it," said Uliami, wiping his mouth. "All is ended between us, and now I will kill you—not to-day, but to-morrow, and as sure as the sun will rise."

Tauti laughed.

"There are two to that game," said he. "As you say, all is ended between us, and to-morrow I will kill you as sure as the sun will set."

Then they each went their ways, not knowing that their words had been overheard by Sikra, the father of Kinei, who had been hiding in the bushes by the path where they had met.

III.

This Sikra was only a basket maker and knew only one trade, but for all that he was the wisest man on that island, and the most cunning, and the most evil. And Sikra said to himself, "If these two men kill one another over Kinei and her conduct, all may be discovered openly which is now known only secretly and to a few."

He went to the lagoon edge, and there, in the shelter of the canoe houses, he sat down, and, with his hands before him, began contemplating the matter, twisting the facts, this way and that, with the fingers of his mind, just as the fingers of his body had been accustomed to twist the plaited grass, this way and that, into the form of his baskets.

He knew that this thing was a death feud, and that by the morrow's sunset one of the two men would be no longer alive, unless they were separated and one taken clean away from that island. But more than that, he said to himself, "Of what use is there in taking one away, for if Tauti is left he will maltreat my daughter and search more deeply into this matter and bring more confusion upon us. And if I were to kill Uliami to-night in his sleep, as has just occurred to me, would not the deed be put down to

Tauti, who, in trying to free himself, might in some way bring the deed home to me? And if I were to kill Tauti, might not the same thing happen?"

Thinking so, his wandering mind crossed the lagoon to the two ships there at anchor —a schooner and a brig—and both due to leave by the flood of the morrow's dawn. It was then, with the suddenness of the closing of a buckle, that a great thought came to Sikra, making him laugh out loud so that the echoes of the canoe house made answer.

He rose up and, leaving the beach, made through the trees in the direction of Tauti's house. There, when he reached it, was Kinei, seated at the doorway. He knew, by this, that Tauti was not at home, and so, nodding to his daughter, he withdrew, making along that street toward the sea end where presently he met his man leaving the forge of Tomassu, the smith, who makes and mends in iron things and sharpens fish spears and knives. Tauti had a knife in his girdle, and, noting it, Sikra drew him aside into the lane that goes through the bushes of mammee apple, past the chief trader's house to the far end of the beach.

Here he stopped, when they had passed beyond earshot of the trader's house, and, placing his finger on the breast of the other, says he:

"Tauti, what about that knife you were having sharpened just now at the forge of Tomassu?"

"To-morrow," said Tauti, "I have to kill a pig."

"You are right," said Sikra. "He is a pig. I heard you both when you were talking on the path, and I heard the name he gave my daughter, and I saw you strike him. But you will not kill him to-morrow."

"But why?" asked Tauti.

"Because," said Sikra, "he has left the island."

Tauti laughed, disbelieving the other.

"Since when," asked he, "has Uliami taken wings?"

"An hour ago," replied Sikra. "I rowed him over to the schooner that lies there in the lagoon; most of the crew were ashore getting fruit, and the rest were asleep, and the captain and his mate were at the club drinking, and the hatch was open and Uliami crept on board and hid himself among the cargo. His lips were white with fear."

"But Uliami is no coward," said the other.

"Did he return your blow?" asked the cunning Sikra.

"That is true," replied Tauti, "but hiding will not save him. I have sworn his death and my hatred is as deep as the sea. I will go on board the schooner now and tell the captain what sort of cockroach lies hidden in his ship; and when they bring him out I will kill him."

"And then the white men will hang you," said Sikra. "Child that you are, will you listen to me?"

"I listen," said Tauti.

"Well," said Sikra, "you go aboard the schooner now and become one of the crew. They are in need of hands, as, indeed, is also that brig that lies by her. Then in a day or less, when Uliami knocks to be let out, you will be on board and on some dark night, or peradventure at the next port the schooner reaches, you can do the business you have set your heart to."

Now this counsel fell in not only with Tauti's desire for blood, but also with his wish to be shut of that island for a while and the wife who had betrayed him.

He thought for a moment on the matter, and then he fell in with the idea of Sikra, and, not even returning to his house, just as he was, let himself be led to the far end of the beach, where Sikra, borrowing a canoe, rowed him to the schooner, whose captain was right glad to have him, being, as Sikra had stated truly enough, short of hands.

IV.

Sikra, having got rid of one of his men, paddled back ashore, and, waiting till dark had nearly fallen, took himself to Uliami's house. Here he found Uliami seated with a fish spear across his knees and a whetstone in his hands; a knife that had just been sharpened lay beside him.

"You are busy?" said Sikra, "but your labor is useless, for the man you would kill has flown. Hiding in the bushes I heard all that passed between you and Tauti. He has left the island for fear of you and has crept on board the brig that lies at anchor in the lagoon. With the help of a friend who is one of the crew, he has hidden himself in the hold with the cargo.

"Then," said the other, and almost in the words Tauti had used, "I will row off to the brig and tell the captain what sort of reptile has hidden in his hold, and when they drag him forth I will kill him."

"And the white men will hang you," said Sikra. "Child, listen to the words of Sikra, who is old enough to be your father. Go on board the brig pretending nothing, become one of the crew, and then, when Tauti knocks to be let out, you can have your way with him some dark night, or peradventure, at the first port the ship touches at. I wish to be shut of him as a son-in-law for many reasons, but I do not want him killed on this island."

Uliami brooded for a moment on this. Then he rose, and, taking only the knife, followed the other to the beach.

It was now dark. When they reached the side of the brig the captain was called, and glad enough he was to get a new hand and willing to pay three dollars a month, which is better pay by a dollar than what they were giving on the plantations—and paid in dollars, not trade goods.

Uliami climbed on board, and then Sikra put back ashore, where he sat on the beach for a while, looking at the lights of the two ships and holding his stomach with laughter. Then he made for the house of Tauti and beat Kinei, and took possession of all the belongings of her husband. Next day he went to the house of Uliami and took the best of the things there, assured in his mind that neither Tauti nor Uliami would ever get back to that island again.

V.

Now when a man finds himself in his grave he may like it or not, but he cannot get out; and so it is with a ship.

Uliami presently found himself in the fo'c's'le of that ship where the hands were having their supper by the light of a stinking lamp, and so far from eating, it was all he could do to breathe.

Neither did the men please him, being different from the men he had always met with. There were men from the Solomons, with slit ears and nose rings; and there were men from the low islands, whose language he could scarcely understand; and he would have been the unhappiest man in the world, just then, had it not been for the thought of Tauti so close to him hidden among the cargo and fancying himself safe.

At the same time, on board the schooner, Tauti was in the same way, wishing himself in any other place, but upheld by the thought of Uliami hiding from him, yet so close.

Then, with an empty belly, but a full mind, Uliami turned in, to be aroused just before break of day by the mate. On deck he was put to haul on ropes to raise the sails, and on the deck of the schooner, lying close by, he might have seen, had there been light, Tauti hauling likewise.

Then he was put to the windlass which pulls in the chain that raises the anchor, and as the sun laid his first finger upon Paulii the anchor came in and the brig, with the tide and the first of the land wind, drew toward the reef opening and passed it. Uliami, looking back, saw Tilageaa standing bold from the sea and the reef and the opening with the schooner passing through it, and he wished himself back for a moment, till the remembrance of Tauti came to him and the picture of him hidden there among the cargo.

He reckoned that he would knock to be let out as soon as the ship told him by her movement that she was well on her voyage, and, being on the morning watch, he managed to keep close to the cargo hatch with his ears well open to any sound. At first the straining and creaking of the masts and timbers confused him, but he got used to these, but he heard no sound. An hour might have gone by when a new thought came to Uliami. He would lay no longer waiting for the other to make a move, but go straight to the captain and tell him that a man was hidden there under the hatch, for he was more hungry for the sight of Tauti's face and the surprise on it at their meeting than a young maiden is for the sight of her lover.

At that moment the captain himself came on deck and began to look at the sun, holding to his face a thing so strangely formed that Uliami would have laughed, only that laughter and all gay thoughts were now as far from him as Tilafeaa.

The captain was a big man with a red face, and when he had done looking at the sun, and when he heard what Uliami had to say, he swore a great oath, and, calling to the mate, he ordered the tarpaulins to be taken off the hatch and the locking bars undone, and then the hatch was opened, but there was no man there.

Then the captain kicked Uliami, and the mate kicked him, and at that very time, or near it, they were kicking Tauti on board the schooner for also giving them word that a man was hidden in the cargo.

Of a truth these two, who had set out so gayly to kill one another, were receiving payment through the hands of Sikra; each of these men had seized the devil by the tail and they could not let go, and here he was galloping over the world with them, from wave to wave, like a horse over hurdles, for the brig and the schooner, though separated by many leagues, were going in the same direction.

VI.

They passed islands, and there was not an island they passed that did not make Uliami feel as though he had swallowed Paulii and it had risen in his throat.

As first, and for many days, he noticed in his ears a sound which was yet not a sound. Then he knew it was the sound of the reef that had been in his ears since childhood, but had now drawn away and gone from him, leaving only its memory. The food displeased him, and the work and the faces of his companions, and he would have given his pay and all he possessed for a sniff of the winds blowing from the high woods, or a sight of the surf on the shores of Tilafeaa.

He had only one companion—his anger against Tauti. He saw now that he had been served a trick, and put the whole matter down to the wiles of the other, little thinking that it was Sikra who had played this game against them both.

VII.

One day the brig, always butting like a ram against the blue sky and empty sea, gave them view of a mountain and land, stretching in the distance from north to south as though all the islands of the ocean had been drawn and joined together making one solid piece.

Then presently, as they drew in, Uliami saw a break in the land near the mountain. They told him it was the Golden Gate and the city of San Francisco where all the rich men in the world lived, but he had little time to listen to their tales. For they were now on the bar, and the brig was tumbling this way and that, and the mate and captain cursing and kicking those in the way, and giving orders to haul now on this rope, now on that.

Uliami had been used to swearing and cursing on board that brig, but, when they got to the wharf, what he heard overpassed all he had heard in that way, as though all the curses in the world, like all the men, and all the houses, and all the ships, had come to roost at that spot.

But Uliami did not mind. He was filled with one great desire—to go ashore to see for himself the great houses and the rich men and the new things to be seen. Next morning when the crew were paid and he had received five dollars as his pay, he joined up with Sru, a man from the low islands, who had been friendly to him on the voyage, and the pair, crossing the plank, set their feet on the wharf, and Sru, landing, made for the first tavern. That was the sort of man Sru was, old in the ways of harbors and ports, and with a liking for rum. But Uliami had no stomach for drink and, presently, he left the other and found himself in the streets round the dockside.

It was very windy here and his thin coat and trousers flapped around him as a flag flaps on its staff, and the dust blew with the wind in great clouds. And, just as things touched by a wizard change and alter, so the mind of Uliami began to wither in him, for here there were no rich men to be seen, only dirty children playing their games, and there was not a child that did not see in him a man new to the place. They called after him, ridiculing him, and the houses were not proper houses set in gardens, but all of a piece and evil-looking beyond words.

Then pursuing his way he found himself in a broader street where cars ran without horses and where there were so many people that no one noticed him.

And that was the most curious thing that had happened to him yet, for at Tilafeaa every one had a nod or a smile or a word for every one else, but here the people all passed along in two streams, rapidly, like driven fish, with not a word for each other, nor a look nor a smile, so that, in all that crowd, Uliami felt more alone than in the woods yet not alone—for here were men and women, almost in touch, by the hundred and the thousand.

Then the shops took him where the traders exposed their goods, not in the open but behind windows of glass, each ten hundred times bigger than the window of glass in the church at Raupee. But the goods exposed were things, many of them, which he had never seen before, and they caused no desire in his mind, only distress and more loneliness, till he came to a shop where great

bunches of bananas hung just as though they had been new cut down from the trees at Tilafeaa.

Here he hung, disregarding the other fruit exposed, and with tears filling his eyes, till the man of the shop spoke to him roughly, asking him what he wanted and bidding him be gone.

VIII.

Now at Tilafeaa the day was always cut out in pieces, with things to do in each piece, and on board the brig it was the same, but here the day was all one, with nothing to do but walk from street to street, among people blind to one another and always hurrying like leaves blown by a wind.

Uliami stood a while at a corner and watched these people, and it seemed to him, now, that they were each, like the cars that went without horses, or the boats in the bay that went without stern or side wheels, driven by some purpose that no man could see.

He felt that it was no good purpose that made men disregard one another and push one another aside and be blind to a stranger as though he were a ghost they could not see. He felt sick at heart, for even the sun had changed and here its light fell on nothing good. The great buildings and the little, it was all the same, they were equally hard with the hardness that lay in the faces of the people.

It was on noon when, wandering like a lost dog, he found himself in a most dismal place passing along by a great wall. Beyond the wall lay a building reaching the skies with chimneys that smoked and fumed, and here in the lane lay refuse and old empty tins and such truck with the sun shining on them and the light of it turned to mournfulness and desolation. Turning a corner of this lane he came face to face with Tauti, whose ship had come in to the bay only the morning before, and who, like Uliami, had been wandering hither and thither, like a lost dog.

Each man had still his knife in his girdle, and thus they stood facing one another, as they had stood when they parted last, in the woods of Tilafeaa. And surely, for a killing, no place was better suited than this, where there was no one to watch or take notice or care except the devil of desolation lurking in that lane, which of all places in the city seemed his truest home.

For a moment, as they stood, all things were shattered around them; everything wiped away but themselves, and their minds sprang back to the point of anger as a bow springs back to the straight, and who knows what might have happened between these two, but at that moment from the great building there came a howl like the voice of the whole city howling out in pain because of its own desolation.

It was the voice of the horn that is blown at midday for the work people, and as Tauti and Uliami looked round them in fear and wonder it seemed to them the voice of the dust, and the high walls and the streets, and the rubbish on the ground, and the hard-faced people on the foot walks. When it ceased, and they faced one another again, they were no longer alone, for that voice had reached Tilafeaa, and the high woods had come trooping to its call right across the sea, and they were standing as they had stood when they parted last in the company of the trees and amid the beauty of the flowers, and all anger had passed from their hearts where there was nothing now but the grief of exile and love.

Surely that was magic greater than the magic of the pictures that move, or the machines that speak, and surely places are the true gods that rule over man, for the voice of the city had brought an island from a thousand leagues away, and the island had brought love to Tauti and Uliami.

No man could have reconciled these two.

But Tauti died. Before ever he could get back to Tilafeaa a fever took him. It was many years ago.

I am Uliami.

Another story by Mr. Stacpoole, "The Monster," will appear soon.

"Old Harmless"

By Roy Norton

Author of "David and Goliath," "The Box," Etc.

Uncle Bill loved his gulch, and David and Goliath loved Uncle Bill. When trouble came they promised to stick by him to the bitter end—which wasn't so bitter, after all

IT was a long distance from the beaten roads to where "Old Harmless" had his cabin; quite over the top of ridges, down across intervening valleys, around mountain shelves where a pack burro might not slip with impunity, and with now and then a gurgling little stream to ford that became a dangerous place when spring freshets ran high and filled a gulch. It was not a place that any one other than a recluse might have chosen for permanent domicile, but to Old Harmless it was Heaven. He was convinced that somewhere within its borders there was wealth.

"Yes, sir, I reckon that some place in these here hills, right about the rim of this gulch, thar's a ledge of gold that orter go about ten thousand dollars a ton!" he was wont to explain to the partners, David and Goliath, when they visited him by climbing to a high, steep ridge, traversing the crest of a rugged, barren range, and then dropping down long, steep hills into the valley where Old Harmless dwelt and strove with infinite and inexhaustible patience and optimism. "And that ain't exactly all of it, either. You see, I diskivered this gulch in 'fifty-eight, and I took a right-smart lot of pay outen this flat, and there was some other fellers came, and they called it Harmon's Camp. Named it arter me, you see. An' they built some stores and—by Matildy!—they was a post office here oncet, where a feller could go and git his mail. If he had any to git."

Always at this point he would shake his head with an air of melancholy. And always the partners would appear sympathetic, and interested, as if this were the first, rather than the hundredth or so, time they had heard this tale. Always one of them politely said, "Psho! What happened to her, Uncle Bill?" And always Old Harmless brightened up, and rambled on.

"Well, you see in them days nobody stuck around a flat after what was easiest ter git was worked out. Everybody jest naturally went somewhere else ter find somethin' else that was easy ter git and so, bimeby, thar wan't nobody left here at Harmon's but me. Yes, sir, nobody but me. An' bein' young an' foolish, bimeby I went, too. Shook her. But—I allers kept comin' back. Then, when it seemed as if thar wan't nothin' left anywhere, and all them railroads kem to Californy, and there wan't no other place left to go, I come back here to stay. An' so—here I be. Right here. An'—I reckon I'll stay here till I die. It ain't so much the findin' gold, with me, as it is that I'm so used ter this here place. Seems like I know every tree in this here flat, and they're all friends of mine. Why, I talk ter 'em, I do. They was one blow down, last spring, one that I always called 'Old Sam,' because he was so big and husky and had been here so long before I came, and he looked ter me like he might be the granddaddy of all trees, and I got ter sort of love him.

"It sounds mighty foolish, but on the mornin' after the big storm when I saw that Old Sam was done, I sat down on him an' felt like cryin' and was sort of deespirited, because it was as if I, too, was a-gittin' old and some day all the other trees, these friends of mine, would wake up in the mornin' and find that I'd gone, too, and wasn't never goin' ter be seen around, or heard talkin' ter 'em any more."

Invariably, at this finish, as if suddenly aware of his loquacity; his betrayal of sentiment; his slipped confession, he would recover, cackle, pretend to make a joke, and hide his abashment. And invariably the partners joined in his laugh, but it was never a laugh that reached their eyes, for always they knew that he had voiced his heart. Each of them, shy, outwardly rough, inwardly sentimental, had known hills and

trees they had loved. They, too, lived in the world of outdoors, where everything of life has its characteristics, its entity, its individuality, its struggle to live. They, too, sometimes believed that trees observe, confide, or perhaps love comrades.

"I kin always scratch up enough dust for bacon and beans, by workin' the old dumps with my old Long Tom or a string of sluices," Old Harmless once explained. "Nobody bothers me here. Nobody ever comes to see me but you two young fellers; but I ain't lonesome. And some day, maybe I'll find the ledge that throwed the gold in this here gulch, and——"

When he stopped and stared at the crests of the hills, as if thinking of such an achievement, David asked impulsively: "And—and what'll you do then, Bill?"

The patriarch rubbed a hand across his eyes as if disturbed and perplexed, and then said, "do then? Do then? I'll—I'll—why, I don't just know what I'll do. I wouldn't want a lot of people here in this camp of mine. They might spoil things. But—I'd like one of them talkin' machines that sings songs and makes bands play, and all that. If I was rich, I'd git me one of them things and git some feller ter learn me how ter run it. Then I'd take her out under the trees on nice days and play all them tunes, and—— Do you fellers reckon trees hears things like that and likes 'em?"

The partners gravely admitted that they had never considered such matters, and humored his whimsies, by admitting that they hoped trees did hear, and that Old Harmless might find the ledge, and buy the phonograph.

On a certain Christmas Eve they made their trip in the moonlight, when the great shield of snow beneath the still and motionless trees lay pale, or patterned with the infinite beauty of lacework wrought by shadow in nature's inimitable, delicate intricacy. Their snowshoes squeaked crisply. The exalations of their breathing thrust tiny clouds of gray vapor ahead of them; but of all these physical manifestations they were oblivious, because the giant carried under his arm, as tenderly as if it were an infant, a square box, and behind him came the sturdy, squat figure of David, his partner, taking two steps to the giant's one, panting, and with equal care clutching across his shoulder in a sling another box filled with records.

"I reckon," David panted, "that he'll be tickled to death with that tune called Clementiner, seein' as it's about an old cuss who mined hereabouts in 'forty-nine."

"Humph! Met my love on the Alamo suits me better," Goliath grunted.

"Sh'd think you'd had enough of wimmen," said David scornfully.

"They ain't got nothin' whatever to do with tunes," Goliath replied with such emphasis that his partner read the danger signs and made no further comment. And preference for tunes meant nothing when they witnessed the joy of Old Harmless, for it amounted almost to stupefaction.

"As fur as I kin see now," he said, after listening to the entire collection of records, "they ain't much else on this earth that I specially hanker fur. If I don't never strike that there ledge—and she's sure here somewheres!—I kin always scratch up enough dust ter buy grub and what clothes I need, and I live in the all-firedest purtiest place in the whole gosh-dinged world, and now I got somethin' to sort of keep me company, in that box you boys has brought me! Yes, sire-e-e! I reckon I'm about the happiest man on this earth."

At intervals the partners brought fresh records across the ridge to the abode of happiness, and the gratitude and contentment of Old Harmless seemed never to wane, although the wonderful ledge was no nearer discovery than it had been for twenty years. Sometimes they questioned him, curious as to his complacency. Themselves determined and persevering men, they yet knew that even to any persistence there is an end; but here was one who had for more than fifty years dreamed a dream, and worked to bring it to reality, with a courage that was undismayed by failure.

"You beat me, Uncle Bill," David declared, with a shake of his head. "I should think that by this time you'd be about ready to give up findin' that ledge."

"Give up? Me give up? Why, son, I'm as positeeve there's a ledge here as I am that I'm alive!" exclaimed Old Harmless, emphasizing his assertion with a slap of his gnarled hand on his lank and bony knee. "Spring's a-comin' ag'in, and when the rain washes off the dust and top layers, and shows the rocks in bright colors and marks out the formations, I'll find her, all right! Yes, sir-ee! I'll find her."

"But why ain't you found it before this—

in some of all the other springs when it rained, Uncle Bill?" David persisted, eying him shrewdly from beneath his thatch of red eyebrows.

"One man cain't look at every foot of all the hillsides, in one spring, or a dozen of 'em, kin he?" Old Harmless snorted as if derisive of the younger man's sagacity. "I'm workin' them hillsides by sections, I am. And—by Matildy Ann!—I don't seem able ter do as much as I uster; but I'm pluggin' along. I'll git her yet!"

"But you don't seem to git nowhere and the——"

"Git nowhere? Me? By heck! I've gotten farther'n most men. I've got one whole side of a gulch prospected. I've paid all my bills. I got grub enough right now ter run me for more'n a year. I got the finest cabin in the world. I ain't never done a human bein' any wrong in all my life. I ain't never harmed a woman and—when I had money I eddicated two nevvies and a niece. I ain't never spoke ill of no man. And if you think, son, that the Lord Almighty's goin' to let a feller like that down, you're a damn fool. That ain't the way He does things. No, sir-ee! He's a pardner of mine, the Lord is, and I got an old book here what proves it!"

And flurriedly, indignantly, he jumped to his feet, grabbed a battered old Bible from a shelf, and banged it down on the table in front of the skeptical David; banged it so hard that the tin dishes thereon rattled and danced and gyrated. The partners could not but respect his unbending faith.

"David, you shut up!" growled Goliath, admonishingly, and scowling at his partner until his heavy black eyebrows met above the bridge of his high, thin nose.

"Maybe we had better quit argifyin', and hear them new tunes Goliath and me brought over," said David, sagaciously changing the subject. And immediately thereafter Old Harmless was mollified, and sat with open mouth, distorted fingers combing his long, white beard, and one hand cupped behind his ear as if intent upon assisting that very acute organ, attuned to great silences and tiny sounds, to drink in all the magic that issued through a huge tin horn. No further reference was made to their discussion until just before the partners departed when the old man said, as if ashamed of his vehemence, "Davy, you did git me riled up a while ago, and—and—I'm right sorry I talked so hot. It ain't befittin' a man of my years ter git his mad up that a way, and if I said anything ter hurt your feelin's, son, I takes it that you understand that I'm an awful quick-tempered man."

And all the way over the trail David chuckled as if greatly amused over what to him had been nothing more than a joke.

"You shouldn't have argued with that old cuss that way," Goliath rumbled, as if sensing his partner's thoughts. "He believes the Lord's his partner, and he don't like to have nobody throwin' stones at Him."

And David's face softened and his eyes became thoughtful and he said in a highly hushed voice, "Goliath, I reckon you're right. And—I ain't so damn certain but what the Lord is a partner to a man like old Uncle Bill, after all. I'd orter be ashamed, and—I am!"

The spring season came as usual, with nature's immutability. The snows wilted and sogged, and gave way to gurgling rivulets that trickled in innumerable hidden channels, until moist bare spots broke black and open, as if fighting to find the sun. The trees began to throw out shoots of green and migratory birds returned after their winter's absence. The partners found the trail more difficult to Harmon's cabin, and less idle time upon their hands.

Their attention was returned to Old Harmless in a peculiar way. It was when the county sheriff rode into their clearing one afternoon, dismounted, and called them from the pay dump on which they stood.

"Great Scott, Jim, what's up? What brings you here?" David said, shaking his hand.

The sheriff grinned, as if amused, shook hands with Goliath, and said, "That old patriarch over the ridge—old Harmon. He's—he's gone loco. Got anything to eat? I'm hungry as a wolf. Haven't had a mouthful since five o'clock this morning. If you can spare me a snack, I'll tell you all about it, while I'm sponging off of you two fellers."

It was while David cooked the bacon and Goliath mixed flapjacks that he explained.

"It seems," he said, "that old Uncle Bill ain't got any more title to that ground up there than a man has to something he never saw before, or heard of before, in all his life. That land was patented more than forty years ago, and the taxes have been paid regularly by the heirs of the original owner. Must have been that they didn't

know that Bill Harmon was livin' on it, or —maybe they didn't care a cuss seein' as they wasn't using it. Anyhow, they sold her out, lock, stock, and barrel, to Hiram Newport, down in Placerville. You know him, I reckon. Lawyer. Lends money on mortgages, and owns a bank of his own."

"Dirty old skinflint!" David exclaimed.

"Course we knows him. Pirate!" Goliath rumbled.

"Well, it seems old Newport had a scheme up his sleeve, and he goes back East somewheres and gets some feller that makes a specialty of buildin' reservoirs and power plants, interested in this land. And uncle Bill's place being in a big gulch with a narrow outlet that could be dammed easily, is a sort of key to the whole blamed thing. Feller that Hiram goes to takes an option. Sends out some engineer experts of his to pass on it. They goes up with a few men to make a survey. Old Harmless is at first sort of dazed, then when these engineer fellers tells him what's up, he tells 'em he owns that gulch and for them to get to hell out of there. When they don't hike the old man gets his dander up and it's sure up all right —just as if bein' peaceful and quiet for longer'n any one can remember had sort of bottled it up for fair, and now he's got the cork out.

"Uncle Bill goes into his cabin and shows up with his Winchester and—you know how that old feller can shoot. Well, he shoots the hat off one engineer's head, takes a second shot at a mighty costly theodolite they'd planted, and scores a bull, then with a few shots just above their heads sort of hastens their gallop as they're takin' down the trail. They come down to me and demand the protection of the law. I laughed. It seemed so foolish for anybody to be afraid of Old Harmless who'd never fought anybody or anything for more'n forty years. I thought I'd have to go up and see about it, however, so off I goes, all alone."

He stopped, scratched his head, and grinned as if amused with his own experience.

"By heck!" he exclaimed, slapping his hand on his knee. "That old cuss was plumb full of fight! A catamount hadn't nothing at all on him. I tell you, boys, uncle Bill's gone mad. I rode up to his clearing and toward his cabin, and then the door opened and there he stood with that gun of his in his hand, and he yells, 'No need ter come any farther, sheriff. I been expectin' you. Me and you's been good friends—up ter now, and I'd hate like sin ter have to draw a bead on you. But I ain't goin' ter let you come no closer. This land is mine. I'm goin' ter keep it. I'm goin' ter fight fer it. Maybe in the end you'll git the best of it, but it won't be so long as I can twist the fust finger of my right hand over a trigger. You go back and tell the fellers that sent you that all I ask is to be left alone ter gyard what's my own. It's mine, and they ain't nobody at all can take it away from me without a fight.'

"Well, I didn't quite know what to do. I was so surprised like. I didn't even have a shootin' iron on me, and I saw he meant business. I tried to argue with him. No good! Uncle Bill is gone loco! And the hell of it is that I ain't got no use for that old scoundrel Newport, and that I wouldn't hurt Old Harmless for all California, because I like him, and—yet—I'm sheriff. Wish I wasn't!"

With an air of dejection he bent forward and twisted his hands together between outspread knees, thought for an instant, and then looked up at the partners.

"So," he said, "I come away—right fussed up. Then I happened to recollect that uncle Bill's awfully fond of you two fellers. He's always shootin' off his mouth about how good you been to him, and how you give him a phonograf, and—one time he told Mike Kelly, who runs the saloon, that he didn't care so much about discoverin' that ledge he's always hoping for on his own account, but that he'd be willing to croak if he could find it and make you two a present of it!"

He straightened up and became seriously intent on his business again.

"I'm the sheriff," he said. "I swore I'd enforce the law. Uncle Bill's got to get out of there, if I have to take a posse and shoot him out. I won't do that until everything else has been tried, and found no good. You two have just naturally got to go up there and tell him so, and show him how he's got to go, because he can't fight the law. He'll listen to you two men, and he won't listen to nobody else. You got to show him that he ain't got a leg to stand on, and that I've got to do my duty what I swore to do, and that I'm goin' to do it no matter how much it hurts. Get me?"

The sheriff stared inquiringly at the two

partners, who shook doubtful heads, consulted each other with their eyes, and appeared distressed. It was David, who, as usual, did the talking for both, who spoke first.

"We'll go, willin' enough, sheriff, because we see just how it is; but—I'm awfully afraid you've put a job up to us that we can't get away with. Honest, I am! You see, it's this way. Uncle Bill's a funny old feller. Got queer notions about things. He loves that place up there, not so much for what it's worth, because money couldn't buy it at all; but because he talks to the trees, and has a notion that the same birds come to 'im every year, and all that. They're all like children to him, and they're all the family he's got. Uncle Bill told me one time that his place up there was his idea of heaven, and that if he died and the Lord Almighty'd let him, all he would ask would be to just come back there and keep on livin' and workin'. Said he wouldn't mind it even in spite of his rheumatiz, which he gets most awfully bad in wet seasons.

"You got to look at that from his viewpoint, and put yourself in his place. Well, if you was to get to heaven, and the place suited you mighty fine, and you'd got sort of used to it after livin' there for about fifty years, and along came some big, husky angel with a nickel-plated star on his chest and undertook to chuck you out, when you thought you hadn't done nothin' wrong, I reckon—I reckon, sheriff—you'd fight, too—wouldn't you?"

The sheriff somberly admitted that he "Reckoned he would."

"So!" said David. "That's just what we're up against. But—me and Goliath'll go over there and try to do some persuadin'. Only, sheriff, it's goin' to take some time. Maybe two or three weeks, and maybe we can't do it at all. He's powerful set in his notions, Uncle Bill is."

Again the sheriff scratched his head and ruminated.

"It ain't business," he grumbled, "but I can put things off for a whole month, I guess, rather than start a war on that poor old cuss. And then if he doesn't go—by Jehos'aphat! He must! Even if we have to tote him out on a shutter." He stopped and groaned. "Lord! This is the most unpleasant and toughest job I've had to tackle since I been sheriff, and this is my fourth term in office. Road agents and train robbers is easy compared to this, because then you expect to have to shoot and don't mind it at all; but to have to shoot Old Harmless—— Good Lord! It's awful!"

David sat thoughtfully scowling at the floor.

"How can you put it off a month?" he asked, as if working over a problem.

"Well, you see, I can just naturally neglect arresting Uncle Bill on the charge of bein' too free with his rifle, and as far as throwing him off the land is concerned, Newport will have to first of all bring an action in court for ejectment and demand possession, and all that, and—by Jingoes!—maybe that could be dragged on for months, if Uncle Bill got a good lawyer! But—just the same—in the long run, I'm afraid he'll have to go. Now, if we could square up this shootin' business, which comes first of all, it would make things a lot easier for me. If the engineers were to be fixed up some way so——"

David suddenly jumped to his feet and announced his conclusion, as if he had discovered a plan. "That's the first step. I'm goin' to try it. I'm goin' on in with you and talk to these men. Goliath, ain't you got any cawfy made for the sheriff? You don't reckon he's goin' away sayin' that all we give him to drink was water, do you?"

All through the sheriff's repast the three discussed plans; but when the sheriff rode away the little red-headed man accompanied him, walking alongside the horse and clinging to a latigo, or taking turns at riding until they could reach a place where an additional mount could be secured. And it was late in the evening when the sheriff and the miner, fellow conspirators in a good cause, rode through the shaded street of the county seat and parted company in front of the hotel.

"It's up to you now, Dave," said the sheriff, bending from his saddle and staring across at the lighted shop windows on the opposite side. "Of course, you mustn't tell 'em that I'm in on this. I'm supposed to be hot and anxious to get any old goat that drags a gun in this country. Sabe?"

"Um-m-huh," David replied. "If I have any luck you'll get word to-morrow mornin' that all charges is withdrawn. And then it's up to that old skinflint, Hy Newport, to begin his court business. That's right, ain't it?"

"That's the way of it," said the sheriff. "So long."

"So long," said David, and muttered to himself, "There goes one good sheriff what gets my vote every time he runs!"

He found the two engineers in the hotel lobby, and decided that they were real human beings. Moreover, fortunately for his mission, they appeared to be in good humor and were laughing at something which was being told them by their companion, who proved to be a mine owner with whom both Dave and Goliath were friends.

"Old Tom Darrow," said David to himself, sliding toward his prey, and then to his astonishment he heard Darrow exclaim, "There's one of 'em now. Dave, come over here and meet a couple of friends of mine."

The moment was opportune, and David had never been accused of being dilatory in action.

"Mighty glad to meet you," he said, accepting a proffered chair. "In fact, I came clear down here from the hills to see you. Ia's about old Uncle Bill Harmon—Old Harmless, they call him."

"Harmless be hanged! That old devil is about as harmless as an angry tiger, I should say," exclaimed one of the engineers; but his laugh encouraged David to proceed with his mission. And so earnestly did he plead for a dismissal of the incident, ably seconded by Darrow, that the engineers were impressed.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said the chief. "If I'm paid for my theodolite, and my partner is supplied with a new hat, we'll go tomorrow and tell the sheriff to drop it. As a matter of fact, we got a pretty good rough knowledge of that gulch and its possibilities before harmless Harmon discovered us, and opened up with that cannon of his."

Before he had finished talking David had recklessly dragged his blue shirt tails free from his trousers and was fumbling at a money belt concealed beneath.

"Cash talks," he said tersely, as he produced his belt, and entirely unconscious of the amazed grins of two or three other spectators in the lobby, jerked the belt loose and proceeded to tuck his shirt tails back into a more conventional shape. "I don't know what a theodolite costs; but there's nigh on to a thousand dollars in this leather, and if that ain't enough, I reckon Tom here'll lend me some till I can get to the bank to-morrer mornin'."

The engineers, amused, named prices far more modest than David had expected, and he breathed a huge grunt of relief.

"Well," he said, "that's mighty nice of you. You won't lose nothin' by bein' good fellers, if ever you come my way. I'm off now. Got to get back to-night, so's to try to persuade Uncle Bill not to shoot up anybody else. It's gol-darned expensive, shootin' up folks is."

And despite their urgent dissuasions he departed, considerably relieved in mind; but it was nearly dawn when he awoke Goliath in their cabin to tell him of his success.

Very diplomaticaly the partners decided that the best time to visit Old Harmless would be in the evening, lest he be alarmed or be rendered suspicious by their appearance at an unusual hour. They trudged into his clearing, with David in advance carrying two or three phonograph records they had been waiting to present. They discovered that the windows of the cabin had been barred with heavy saplings, and then, as they rounded the cabin, found the defiant Uncle Bill sound asleep on a bench in front of his door, with his patriarchal beard sweeping over his chest, and his rifle resting across his lap. He looked pathetically old and tired. When aroused by their hail he sprang to his feet, peered at them and made certain who they were before he laid his rifle aside, after which he told them of his distress. They listened patiently until he had talked himself to a mournful and dejected silence, and Goliath watched David, wondering what decision his partner would make, and what he might say.

"Well, Uncle Bill," David said at last, "it's tough luck. You say the sheriff told you that old Newport owns this land and——"

"Claims it! Drat him! Claims it! But that there don't make him own it, do it?" roared the patriarch, shaking his fists upward in exasperation.

"So," David went on calmly, and paying no heed to Uncle Bill's anger, "I reckon it'll have to be decided by the courts."

"Courts be damned!" roared Old Harmless. "Let 'em try to take it away from me and drive me out of here. Me, that found this place first, before any other white man ever come here! That diskivered the diggin's, and worked 'em, and saw this when she was a camp and——"

In vain the partners discussed the question with him. In vain they assured him that he could not fight the law with a rifle.

In vain David told him that the sheriff was compelled, however reluctantly, to do his duty. And so at last, after a long silence, he said, "Well, Uncle Bill, if you're bound to have a war, of course you'll get the worst of it. First they'll send sheriffs. Then if you fight all them off—never can tell!—why, Uncle Bill, I reckon they'll call out the whole United States army, and bring cannons and rifles and batterin'-rams and all them things, and just naturally wipe you and the whole dinged valley off the map. But—just the same, whipped for sure before you start, bound to get shot all to smithereens, if you'll do what Goliath and me tell you to do, we'll be with you when it comes to a finish, won't we, Goliath? We'll just oil up our rifles and guns, Uncle Bill, and come right up here and fight with you."

The old man gasped, and then tearfully seized and wrung their hands. He was speechless and helpless with gratitude. David let him subside and winked slyly at Goliath before he went on.

"But," he said impressively, "there ain't to be no shootin' of any kind till the court's had its say. Maybe that old leech Newport won't do nothin' at all, Uncle Bill."

"Then—then—what'd you do if you was me?" queried Old Harmless bewildered.

"Do? I'd just keep right on workin' as if nothin' had happened. And if anybody comes around, let 'em alone, or tell 'em it's your land, and they're welcome to look at it. Tell 'em what nice trees you got, and let 'em hear you play the phonygraft, and if old Newport comes tell him you're puttin' it up to the court to say who owns this gulch, and that you'll not have any truck with him till it does say, and that Goliath and me's on your side, and goin' to fight it clean through with you? Will you do that?"

They extracted a very reluctant promise from Old Harmless, but got it nevertheless, and devoted the remainder of the evening to restoring his peace of mind. Indeed, they scorned the idea that there was danger of his being ousted from that wonderful home of his, and at last left him in a more hopeful mood than they themselves enjoyed.

"What did you tell the poor old feller all that stuff for?" Goliath demanded, when they were well clear of the cabin on their homeward way.

"Deeplomacy, pardner!" David explained. "To keep him from killin' somebody and—to give us time to think up some way of helpin' him. Time's what we need now. The sheriff told me that if it comes to court, a lot of things can happen. So you see, if it comes to law, and Hiram gets the title we've still got time to—wonder if me and you could buy him off?"

"If we had enough money," the giant growled. "But if there's one of these big companies in on the deal, and they want it badly, I reckon all you and me could dig up wouldn't make 'em do any more'n grin."

They plodded along in silence for a while, and then David said, "Well, if worst comes to worst, we'll have to gentle old Uncle Bill down, and get him used to it as best we can, and bring him over to live with us."

"Of course!" Goliath assented. "That goes without any gab. Poor old feller!"

They were still distressed and perturbed when they bade each other good night and crawled into their bunks. And for the next three or four days they could think of or discuss nothing save their perplexity.

Distraction came unexpectedly, with the arrival of a visitor who was brought to their cabin one afternoon in a hired conveyance, and who shouted a boisterous greeting. They did not recognize him at first, and then David exclaimed, "By the great horn spoon! It's Heald. Heald that we got out of Mexico with."

"What? That feller we grabbed out of —— It is! Sure enough!" Goliath exclaimed as they rushed forward to shake hands with a man whose life they had saved at the imminent risk of their own necks. "What on earth brings you here, Heald? Thought you was in Colorado?"

"Was, the last time I wrote you," said their visitor with a quiet grin. "Told you men that if ever I came within a thousand miles of you, I'd look you up. I certainly owe you that much, don't I? And so I'm here. Can you put me up for a week or so? I want to fish a little and maybe shoot at something and—talk over old times. I want to rest."

Beyond that strange adventure in which they had saved his life, they knew little of him, save that he was a strangely, reticent man, evidently capable, courageous, and sometimes a wanderer. They had accepted him as being somewhat like themselves, an adventurer into strange places, accustomed to vicissitude, and well-enduring. That

he had remembered them through the years with occasional letters, and once or twice a Christmas gift of a box of cigars or something similar, was merely surprising. The fact that they had imperiled their own lives in his behalf had not impressed them as being any reason for the remembrance; but they were eager to welcome him as an old friend. They were prepared to act as hosts without apologies for the roughness of their hospitality, and he, in return, accepted it as if it were that to which he was entirely habituated.

It was in the dusk of the evening, when they had settled lazily into the crude, homemade and comfortable chairs outside the cabin, and when they had exhausted their reminiscences, that David mentioned the subject uppermost in his mind, and explained how he and his partner had been sympathetically perturbed by the misfortunes of Old Harmless.

"Maybe," said Heald, "I can help you out on that, some way. I'm—I'm a pretty good lawyer myself, and I've had some experience in land titles."

They had not surmised that he was a lawyer, for never had he told them of his personal activities, or occupations; but now they turned toward him as does a swimming, shipwrecked man to a life raft. He sat and listened as they gave him the details of the situation, sometimes asking a shrewd question, sometimes smoking silently and thoughtfully, a stolid, motionless figure lolling back in his chair. The glow of his pipe alternated with darkness as regularly as the blinking of a lighthouse lamp at a distance.

When they had concluded, they waited for him to speak in a prolonged silence, and hung upon his words as if upon a decision. Ignorant of the complexities of the law, they hoped that he might at once advise them and set their minds at rest, and were annoyed when he said, at last, "Of course, I can't very well say, offhand, what should be done. I suggest"—he stopped, puffed some more, discovered that his pipe was nearly empty, leaned over and thumped the bowl against the chair leg, refilled it, and by the time the partners were straining with impatience resumed—"I suggest that you take me over so that I can talk with this old man Harmon, and see what he has to say about it. A lawyer can scarcely have a client without consulting him, can he?"

His dry, matter-of-fact tone did not offer the partners as much hope as they craved; but they had to admit his logical attitude.

"We'll go over there to-morrow night," said David. "That is, if you can stick such a long walk."

Heald laughed.

"I've walked a few hundred miles in my time," he said. "I don't think I'm too old to do a few miles more. It seems you fellows are mightily interested in this man you call Old Harmless, and—I owe you a lot—it strikes me; a lot that I've never found any way to repay. Why, if it weren't for you two, I'd not be here to-night. I'd be dust under a Mexican wall long before now. And so—if I can do anything for you, or a friend of yours—— Yes, I think we must go over to-morrow, so that I may become acquainted with Uncle Bill. I think I'll like him. There are some real and simple souls left in this world, after all."

On the following day he proved to be a far more competent pedestrian than the partners had surmised, and when they stopped at the edge of the clearing and looked up the narrow gulch that, bottle-necked, opened out to their view, he stood and for a long time looked at it, his eyes roving from the great stone gates upward to the crests of the hills, to the great snowclad peaks in the background, and thence slowly across to fix themselves on the homely old log cabin from whose stone chimney smoke lazily curled, indicating that Uncle Bill was preparing his evening meal.

"It's a beautiful place. It does seem almost a pity to spoil it," he said quite as if soliloquizing, and then slowly trudged forward.

"You'll maybe have to go slow with Uncle Bill," David cautioned him, "because he's sort of sparin' of talk with strangers. But if——"

"He can talk enough once he knows and likes a man," Goliath hastened to add, as if fearful that Heald might be discouraged; but Heald merely nodded his head and appeared thoughtful.

"We may have to hang around a long time, or maybe come again before he gets limbered up," David remarked.

"But he'll talk after he knows you—that is—if he decides he likes you," Goliath urged, and this time Heald smiled at the partner's solicitude.

"Perhaps you'd better leave most of it

to me," he said. "All you need to do is to introduce me as a friend of yours."

The partners agreed. They had no time for further commment, for the keen ears of the patriarch had made him aware of their coming, and he appeared in the doorway, blinked at them, and then called heartily, "Well, well, well! Ef it ain't David and Goliath again! And——"

He stopped and stared at Heald as if apprehensive lest the advent of a stranger meant bad news, but was reassured in the warmth of their introduction.

"Anybody who's a friend of these boys," he said gravely, "is sure ter be a real man and a friend of mine. So, mister, you're welcome. Come on in and I'll hack off some more ham, and hot up some more beans. Baked a new batch of bread ter-day, but she ain't as good as I could have made her if I'd a-knowed I was goin' ter have company."

"Do you feed everybody that comes this way?" inquired Heald.

The old man turned from cutting the ham to stare at him with something like indignation that such a question should be asked.

"All my life," he declared, not without dignity, "there ain't never been a man, woman nor child, white or red, tan or yaller, come through my cabin door and gone away hungry. I've tried ter be hospiterble ter some I didn't like. An' I've whacked up my last ounce of grub with a friend, and never felt sorry because my own guts cried for food and there didn't seem ter be any more on earth." He stopped with his knife in mid-air, studied Heald's face for a moment and abruptly asked, "Young man, I call you that though you might be fifty year old, which is young for me—young man, do you believe in the goodness and kindness of the Lord Almighty? Well, if you do, you'll know that I ain't never come ter want. Somehow, when things looked mighty black and hopeless, He always came along and helped me out! Just as if He'd said, 'Hello. Had so many folks ter look after and think about I've had ter overlook old Bill Harmon and it seems he's havin' tough luck. Must help him out a little now.' And, mister, He always did." He stopped abruptly, made a frantic lunge for the dutch oven, and as he jerked the lid off with his knife and released a cloud of steam said, 'Damn it! In a minute more them beans'd been all burned ter hell and gone!' "

As if his spasm of loquacity had exhausted itself he relapsed into a silence that was maintained throughout the meal that followed, despite Heald's palpable attempts to draw him out. Heald himself appeared to have given up, and the partners fidgeted restlessly, because he had made no reference to the land dispute, or old Harmless' side of the controversy. They were surprised when, as they were leaving, Heald turned to the patriarch and said, "Wonder if you'd mind if I came up and bunked with you a night or two, Harmon? It looks to me as if there might be some trout in this stream of yours that runs down the center of your gulch."

"I'd welcome you, or any friend of David's and Goliath's," the old man said with grave simplicity. "Come right along. There is trout there, but I ain't never had time ter catch 'em. Come right along. But—but I'd sort of like ter haye you promise you won't catch no more'n what we kin eat, because—well—you see they're just the same as you an' me. They like ter live—and—this is a mighty fine place ter live in. It is! And I like ter think that even the fish down there in my stream is friends of mine in their way, and knows me."

The moon had pulled up across the divide when the visitors returned home; but the partners could not induce Heald to discuss Old Harmless, and almost his sole comment was, "Remarkable old man! Remarkable! I suppose he has to have every ounce of grub he uses teamed up there, doesn't he?"

"Packed up on an old burro he's got. Not teamed," Goliath answered. "Road up there's all overgrown now."

"Um-m-mh!" said Heald thoughtfully. "And yet no one goes away hungry, and—when you fellows show me the way up there to-morrow, I think I'd like to take along a pack of grub, if you'll sell it to me."

But they indignantly protested against a sale, although the pack of food went with Heald when they made the journey on the next forenoon.

The partners waited three days, then four, before they again visited the homely old cabin over the ridge. They found Heald and Uncle Bill sitting out in the moonlight listening to the phonograph, and smoking industriously. Heald's pants were tucked into his boots, and they noticed that he had discarded his suspenders for a leather string, and that the collar of his flannel shirt was

open as if he had finally discarded neckties. He looked far less tidy and neat, but far more comfortable than when he had arrived.

"Ain't you comin' back with us?" David whispered when Uncle Bill left them for a moment, and in the moonlight they saw Heald's grin.

"No," he said. "Not to-night. The fact is, I'm getting to be just like Uncle Bill. I like it here!"

"Has he talked yet?" Goliath asked, stretching his neck toward Heald.

"Somewhat! Somewhat!" declared Heald with an even broader grin.

"Anything we can do for you?" asked David.

"No, I'm all right. But—yes, there is! I almost forgot. I've some letters I wish you would take down to the nearest rural box and drop in for me to-morrow. And if there's anything comes for me, it will be dropped in your box, and you might keep them till I come down, or—maybe it will be better to bring them up when you come again. No, I'm going to stay here a while longer. I like this place." He stopped, and then chuckled as if amused. "For sporting it's rather a failure. You see Uncle Bill doesn't like to have me catch more than six trout per day. He doesn't know it, but I've been fly-fishing with a barbless hook for two days now, and throwing some beauties back into the stream rather than hurt his feelings. S-s-sh! Here he comes."

After the partners left that night Heald and Old Harmless sat for a long time, smoking, and saying never a word, as if quite content with each other's voiceless company. The moon had lifted upward and the great gulch was still save for the distant crooning sound of the brook that seemed doing an elfin dance over rocks and bowlders.

"The phonygraft is wonderful," said the old man at last; "but—but somehow I always come back ter that there music you hear out there." He pointed with the stem of his pipe at the stream. "It's the only music that I don't seem ter ever hear twice alike. It's got tunes that's always new. Sometimes they're angry tunes, in the spring time when the snows is meltin'. Then in about a month it's a busy tune, as if it was sayin', 'Got ter git all this extry water off'n my hands, Bill, and hustle it along ter the sea, and after that when things is right again, and summer comes an' there ain't nobody here but God and me an' you, I'll try ter sing you the same songs you've loved for more'n fifty year.'

"Sometimes that there creek sings things that hurts a little, as if croonin' for them that's asleep up on that flat bench over there on the west side of that shoulder you can see. When there was a camp here in this gulch in the early 'sixties we got the smallpox. It was purty bad. Most everybody skipped out, but them that was sick—and me. I stayed on ter nuss 'em, because, you see, if I hadn't found gold here, nobody would have come, and nobody would have died, and—and—so I felt sort of responsible like and—just stuck it out. There's eighteen men and one woman—not what I reckon some folks might call a good woman, although I know her heart was all right—that are all asleep on that hill. I buried 'em all myself when there wasn't no one ter help. And I kept up the place where they was asleep until one time I was away from here four or five year, and when I come back there was a lot of rhododendrons growin' over 'em, and then I knowed that, although I'd been gone the Lord hadn't forgotten 'em, and —purty soon the rhododendrons'll be in bloom again. The patch that grows the biggest and purtiest flowers seems to be over the camp woman's grave."

Heald sat staring off at the hillside, wondering at all the unconscious heroism of the tale. He was scarcely aware when Uncle Bill's voice added, "Sometimes in my dreams it's all the same as it was; the cabins and the tents with the smoke curlin' up from 'em; the fellers I knew gassin' about their clean-ups; the evenin's in the dance hall. And sometimes I see it about three in the afternoon, with the clink-clink of shovels heavin' dirt into the sluice boxes, and then I hear the ring of Tim Gray's hammer and anvil, up there where that tall tree stands, where he had a blacksmith shop; and the stage comes in and some of the boys knocks off work and goes up ter see if there's any news from home for 'em.

"Harmon's Camp, they called it then. And I was Bill Harmon—not Uncle Bill. I lifted a pack burro, pack and all, on a bet, one day in them times. Yesterday I had ter rest three times before I could roll a bowlder the size of a barrel out of my way. But—I'm here yet!" He turned toward his guest and said fiercely, in his thin, old voice, "And kin you blame me for fightin' when they try ter drive me off'n this place

that's mine? I know it ain't right ter shoot, but—— Good Lord! ain't it mine? Kin you blame me?"

"I can't!" said Heald, in a voice that sounded as if subdued by reverence. "But if——"

"There ain't no buts! There ain't goin' to be none! You see how it is, son. I'm here. It's the only place that's home ter me. And so I'm goin' ter stay. If they think they've got the best of it, I'll still have 'em beat, because they wouldn't cart a poor old cuss like me away from here ter plant him! They'll just naturally dig a hole off somewhere on the hillside and stick me in the place I love and—here I'll stay—where I've always wanted ter stay—and—and the stream down yonder'll know I'm there and sing me the same old songs, and I'll never be lonely in my sleep."

He could not see that Heald was troubled and perplexed. He could not understand that his mere possession was not title to this place.

"Hope," said Heald thoughtfully, "that they never put you off. I can't say any more. But—Uncle Bill, I will do my best, whatever comes."

"I know that, son! I'm sure of it! But—from all you've said ter me—it—it begins to look as if I've got ter depend on Somebody higher'n you or the other boys—Somebody that ain't never failed yet ter see me through!"

And then, with a heavy, weary sigh, he arose and trudged away to his bed.

It was but two days later when the partners brought Heald a bulky package of letters, that he read beneath the lamp in the cabin while the others remained outside, passing broken remarks, and sitting in habitual silences. He came outside with the announcement that the time had come for him to depart.

"But—it's all so all-fired sudden," said Old Harmless. "I've got—I've got sort'o uster you and—the grub's all right, ain't it?" he finished with an anxious look toward his guest.

Heald laughed. "The grub's so good, Uncle Bill, that if there's any way on earth to eat more of it, I'll come back. But I've got to go to-night, and be in Placerville to-morrow. Can't loaf forever, can I?"

"Nope," the old man reluctantly admitted, "I reckon you cain't. It's when a man is young that he orter be up and movin'. But—by heck!—I'm goin' ter miss you—I am." His good will still sounded in their ears when they took the trail; but the partners found Heald strangely disinclined for conversation as they threaded their way over the crests of hills, where all was bright and clear, and then descended into the shadows of the great trees where the paths were dim. It was not until, tired and glad to be in their cabin again, they reached home that the partners learned the results of Heald's mission. The lamp on the table shielded their faces as they sat on the edges of their bunks, and unlaced their boots preparatory to going to bed. Outside, through the open door the moon still shone, and the trees stood quietly as if asleep. The silences of the open spaces surrounded them—the stillness that pervades untrammeled spots, and corners where all is clean and undefiled. Heald spoke as if impressed with all this, as if he had newly learned a great reverence.

"I've found it out! I've caught it," he said. "I knew it would reach me some time, this thing that's bigger than all else a man may ever learn—the love that passeth understanding. I've been blind. Most of us are. Uncle Bill has caught the truth."

He came across and lifted the shade from the lamp, as if to see the partners' faces while he talked. He bent over the crude pine table and rested his shoulder weight on the underturned knuckles of his hands, bent forward, staring at them as if challenging dispute. A great respect was in his voice, a softness of finality when he went on.

"Uncle Bill has seen things that are given to but few. He has seen that all else save the love of an invisible but understandable God is worthless; that a man may pile up gold; may achieve ambitions; may lift himself to temporary power, and yet have failed if there is not one place that is all his intimate own. He has found it. It's his! It shall stay his so long as he lives, by God! Or else I, too, have failed!"

He lifted his right hand, clenched it into a driving fist, and brought it smashing down upon the table top. David and Goliath started from their seats, wondering.

As if their start of surprise had rendered him conscious of his vehemence, Heald paused, swallowed as if choking back unpent emotions, straightened and looked away. As if embarrassed he said, "I'm sort of upset! I've thought so much. I've learned so much, from Uncle Bill."

As if by pretext, that he might resume the normal, he walked across to his coat that he had hung upon a peg, took some papers therefrom, scanned them, and, when he spoke again, his voice was placid and undisturbed.

"You chaps helped me out, one time, when otherwise it would have been a finish for me. That's one point. You brought me up against Bill Harmon, for which I thank you, and that's point two. Point three is that I'm the one who is behind the big reservoir scheme—the man who puts up the money. Newport brought it to me in New York, and I took an option. I sent my experts to look it over. Uncle Bill made a fool of himself. My experts wired me and I came on, not only to look this project over, but to meet you two men who had befriended me. The two matters fitted into each other, and I wished a rest; something to do besides piling up money."

He tossed the papers in his hand upon the table, and then pointed at them.

"Those," he said, " are the deeds to all the land in that part of the hills—the land that Hiram Newport pulled together and sold to me. It was to close the deal that I sent through you some letters and checks, which you mailed. The deeds you brought back. The whole of it is mine. But—listen now, and mark it down. It's my word! It's a thing I never break.

"So long as Uncle Bill lives, he's never to know that the land up there isn't all his own! So long as he lives there's never a tree in that gulch shall fall by the hand of any man! Never a dam be build across that brook! Never a bird's nest be pulled down from a bough! Never a trout taken from the stream, without his consent. I don't want nor need money of the kind that comes from an operation like that. Uncle Bill is to be unmolested as long as he lives——"

He came to a full stop, stared at the table top, then at the amazed partners and said whimsically, "That is—unless I molest him, which, Heaven knows, I hope not to do! I've found a new hobby of my own. You two can help me out on that, maybe."

"What is it?" they blurted out, still mazed in wonderment.

"I'd like to have you persuade him to let me build a big log addition to that cabin of his, up there in his and my gulch, and make it as comfortable as money can do, for Uncle Bill and me; something that he'd like and could enjoy. Some place that I can come to when I want to get away from making money, and meet nothing but a fine and honest, a homely and real old man. I can afford it. The big reservoir can wait. And"—he concluded impetuously—"I don't care if it waits until both Uncle Bill and I are gone, because that place is ours—his and mine—and what any others may think will not matter to us at all! From now on Uncle Bill and I are partners in this thing—that is—if he'll let me into a partnership that he is convinced includes at present himself and the Lord Almighty! A partnership like that can't be beat, after all, and it's about the only one for which I'm hankering."

The next story in this series, "Through the Snows," will be in the December 20th issue.

THE HUMOR OF MR. CARLE

RICHARD CARLE, the actor, has a great and unassailable reputation as a perpetrator of biting wit and stinging repartee. Moreover, he skillfully conveys the very strong impression that every bright and scintillating thing he says is the product of his own unaided brain.

William Collier, another comedy star, is also no mean performer with the amusing tongue and fruitful intellect. One day, when he was lunching with half a dozen friends at the Waldorf, he solemnly enunciated a sentence that was in reality a whirlwind of mirth, gayety, and giggles.

"Immense! The best I ever heard!" spluttered one of the audience. "Is that one of Dick Carle's?"

"No," denied Collier solemnly; "not yet."

The Malmarte "Works"

By H. P. Downes

Author of "Sleazy and the Malmarte," "Olla Podrida," Etc.

There is no doubt that Adolph Prunier's wonderful "energos" apparatus developed a tremendous amount of heat. It also developed a tremendous bill for the Octopus Oil Company

RELIHAN, the city editor of the *Evening Mercury,* was nursing a well-developed grouch. With head drawn down between his shoulders, and shivering slightly, from time to time, he was trying to work but making a poor fist at it. He turned to an assistant busily scribbling away at a neighboring desk.

"When do they turn the heat on in this blooming town?" he jerked out querulously.

"On the fifteenth, Mr. Relihan. That," the assistant added meticulously, "will be precisely one week from to-day."

The editor was about to reply when there was borne to his ears the sound of commotion arising outside of his sanctum. He recognized the strident voice of the office boy raised in expostulation. Assuming the mask with which he was accustomed to fend off unwelcome visitors, he swiveled around in his chair to face the door.

The boy at the portal was summarily thrust aside. A well-built but undersized fellow, with full, round face, nose slightly upturned, and myriad crow's-feet framing merry, twinkling eyes, advanced toward the desk. Though garbed in clothes that easily carried the lines of the exclusive tailor, the visitor was still affecting a straw hat of the Panama variety. Relihan's mental comment was: "Accustomed to money, but broke." Aloud he said:

"Well?"

The visitor drew a letter from his pocket and, with an infectious smile, presented it. A glance at the signature and Relihan's eye went up with interest. It was from an old buddy in the South, "Juke" Morris, who had swum out of the editor's ken these many years; and its purpose was to introduce the bearer, Billy Sleazy. Any courtesy or assistance that might be furnished the latter would be appreciated. The editor looked up.

"Sleazy?" he mentioned hesitatingly. "Seems to me I have a hazy recollection of the name. You are a reporter—you write?"

"Only my own name and a few things like that, Mr. Relihan," was the response. "My education was along other lines." He grinned, bent forward, drew up his left hand in the position of one holding reins over a steed, and gave the imaginary animal a vigorous hand ride with the other. "Jockey," he remarked.

Relihan nodded. He recalled the connection. Then he glanced in a puzzled way at the letter. Sleazy waved toward it airily.

"Juke told me," he said, "that perhaps you could use me as a go-get-'em; phone in the stuff and all that, you know. I know this town," he explained, "and about everybody in it."

"But there isn't much money in that sort of thing—for you," said Relihan tentatively.

"I know; but listen, Mr. Relihan; I am just about 'clean;' been staying down in Greenwich Village for months; hall bedroom at two-fifty per—week, not day; remembered Juke and wrote to him; hence the letter; and"—he grinned again—"the truth is that everything I touch 'coppers' on me. Any kind of job at any money would seem good to me, just now."

Relihan pursed his lips thoughtfully. The letter from Morris he regarded, in effect, as a command. He was that sort of friend. Besides, he was commencing to like the jockey for his own sake. He even determined to stretch a point in the matter of salary. He made an offer that the ex-jockey accepted at once. They were terminating the interview in desultory converse when Sleazy, looking at his watch, allowed a smile of satisfaction to cross his face.

Simultaneously a raucous voice, giving vent to vigorous expletives in broken English, was wafted over the transom. Pres-

ently the door swung open. Pausing at the entrance was a shock-headed, stoop-shouldered individual, fleshy to the point of obesity. Down the front of vest, greasy in the extreme, minute particles of food adhered from a previous meal. With a half wild stare he envisaged the office.

Sleazy laid a restraining hand on the editor's arm, and laughed significantly.

"That fellow is from the Village, Mr. Relihan," he said. "Quite a character down there, I understand—been there a long time. They say he is an inventor of some sort. He is called"—he searched his memory for the name—"Adolph Prunier."

At the mention of his name the visitor laughed immoderately, striking his chest repeatedly with clenched fists.

"Ha! you know him then, Adolph Prunier!" he vociferated. "Soon the whole world shall know. For yesterday I finish him at last, the child of my brain, my *energos*—the mos' revolutionary scientific brinciple of the ages. To-morrow I show him in his berfection." He stopped, and as he strove to obtain command of himself, his eyes flickered weirdly. Then he added quietly: "Your pardon, sirs. I work so hard, I study so much, that I am—what you say—unstrung."

"What does the little energos do?" inquired the editor with a note of pity.

"Ha! I haf forgot. I do not mention, is it not? Before the horse, the cart I get. What does he do, hey? In a word he destroy forever all the use of coal, of wood, of all that produces energy in form of heat. A new brinciple of science haf I discover; and from himself, within, the energos does this. You understan', gentlemen?"

"A sort of perpetual motion?" interjected Sleazy, laughing.

The wild gleam again distorted the inventor's face, but with an obvious effort he controlled himself.

"That is what I haf to contend with for years," he said sadly. "Always when I explain, they laugh at me. Bah! it is nothing. For they laugh also at Copernicus, at Galilelo, at Fulton. But now I no longer explain—I show, I demonstrate. To-morrow in my shop at ten o'clock I prove my theory. You will come to see, yes?" And from his pocket he produced a soiled card.

"We shall send some one, certainly," said Relihan soothingly. "Sleazy, suppose you drop in there at the appointed time."

"Thank you," said Prunier gravely.

"Where do you go from here, Mr. Prunier?" inquired Sleazy.

"To the other papers; and then, when you all shall haf told the truth, they will come—the savants, the college professors—those who know. After, to Adolph Prunier, comes the plaudits of the populace on the Appian Way and the wealth of Midas!" His face lit up with an expansive smile. "I thank you again. Good-by!"

Relihan gazed after the retreating form, thoughtfully plucking at his nether lip with thumb and forefinger.

"Sleazy," he remarked presently, "in this business it is always advisable to maintain an open mind. Whatever else this Prunier is, you may be certain he is the type that obtains results. Look him up a bit before attending the demonstration to-morrow."

"You think there may be something in the energos after all, Mr. Relihan?" asked the jockey eagerly. "If it proves out in any way, will you"—he twisted for the expression—"play the account straight or will you laugh at him between the lines?"

The editor laughed.

"We'll see, Sleazy," he answered enigmatically.

II.

When Sleazy, a half hour later, left the office of the *Mercury,* he proceeded uptown via the subway, and came to the surface at Times Square. Dropping into a hat store, wherein he was well known, he purchased a modish fall hat, displaying a plethoric roll of money to the polite clerk. Standing before the mirror, he drew a solitaire diamond ring of purest water from his vest pocket and affixed it to its proper finger. A glance in the mirror, a smoothing of his tie, and, once again in 'character' with himself, he shrugged his shoulders in complete satisfaction. Then, following a runway as well defined as a rabbit's in the woods, he made his pleasure rounds until evening.

Presently, as the clock on a neighboring hotel marked the hour of seven-forty-five, he debouched again to the square. Pausing for a moment on a corner, he looked circumspectly about; no person he knew was in sight. He turned sharply and, leaving Seventh Avenue behind him, plunged toward the river. A few minutes later, he stopped before a dilapidated brown-stone-

front house, formerly a dwelling but now given over to trade. A sign swinging at right angles to the second-floor window informed passers-by that A. Stern pursued the vocation of watch repairing within.

The workshop of A. Stern, in keeping with the sordid surroundings, was poorly furnished. A few clocks fastened to the walls; a show case containing a few odds and ends; and over against the window a workbench, at which the proprietor, his back to the door, was peering, with glass to eye, into the mechanism of a watch, were the salient features of the place. The watch in question was patently owned by a bulbous-nosed person who was even then shifting from one to the other foot in impatience for A. Stern to have done with his task.

Not until the bulbous-nosed one had left did the proprietor turn an eye toward the entrance. He nodded nonchalantly in the jockey's general direction, then proceeded to gather up his tools against the closing time. As he moved the little gadgets hither and yon there was a deftness and certainty in the play of his hands, a marked coördination of effort, as it were, from which a shrewd observer would be justified in drawing certain inferences; in point of fact, if old-time Federal agents were present they would have recognized in the person of Stern an internationally known engraver of 'queer' money, called, universally, "Flash Bill."

"Is Greyson 'in' yet, Flash?" inquired Sleazy.

"A half hour ago."

"And Adolph Prunier?"

"He comes and goes by the other door." Stern lit a cigarette, thoughtfully flicking the match to and fro. "What do you think of the energos, Billy?" he questioned. "Can we fetch it?"

Sleazy laughed with certainty.

"You remind me of Li Hung Chang, Flash," he observed. "You know he wouldn't go to the races because he said he was already convinced that one horse could run faster than another. Fetch it? When nothing is left to chance there can be no chance of failure. As certain as the rise and fall of the tides are the operations of the Malmarte."

"Thanks, Billy; it's good to hear you say so," returned Stern earnestly.

He glanced down the stairs and nodded. Sleazy stepped behind the show case. A pair of frayed and dingy curtains hung over the casement of a door. Withdrawing these, his fingers sought a push button. From afar off came the faint tinkling of a bell; instantly, like the cover of an office desk, a partition rolled upward, disclosing a gorgeous vista of beautifully appointed clubrooms; a flunky in livery stood close at hand. Sleazy and Flash Bill passed within; and behind them the partition sank noiselessly into place.

Leaving his companion to his own devices, the jockey made the journey of the premises in search of his intimate, Greyson. The rich carpet gave no sound to his footfall. He passed in turn a billiard room with two ornate tables, a library with hundreds of volumes on the shelves, a well-stocked buffet bar, and many sleeping rooms, each with individual baths.

The Malmarte, preying on the world, had concealed itself with infinite cunning from the world. Owning in fee simple the edifices in which it was housed, every precaution had been observed to camouflage its habitat from prying eyes. Two adjoining dwelling houses, occupying the same relative positions on different blocks had been extended in the rear to form a single whole. No windows broke the sheer, unprepossessing side elevations; day and night the rooms were flooded with mellow artificial light, springing from fixtures so cleverly placed as to be invisible to the eye.

At this precise time liveried servants, with solemn mien, were passing to and fro on errands; gathered together in little groups, prosperous-appearing men, some in evening attire, were engaged in quiet conversation; and here and there, at a table near the buffet, at a lounge in the library, solitary individuals were communing with themselves. But above all, enveloping the place as an atmosphere, was an indescribable impression of tense expectancy.

At the opposite end of the place Sleazy encountered Greyson. Silk-hatted, frock-coated, debonair, a fine figure of man, the latter was engaged in conversation with a horny-handed, grim-faced individual, garbed as a workman. The jockey nodded to both. The three joined at once in colloquy—sharp, technical, the checking up of a week's work. The third person, a tinsmith by trade, was called Avery.

Presently came the chimes of a cathedral clock ringing the changes on the hour of eight; and, immediately afterward, the low

but insistent buzzing of a gong. Instantly the lethargic torpor of the Malmarte was translated into vigorous action. From widely divergent directions the members pressed to a common door, and as each passed the portals he registered "Present." At a director's table in the front, six men were already seated. The seventh and vacant chair was preëmpted by Greyson.

There was, as gavel wielder, George Dalforth—he who as president of the Amalgamated Bank had looted that institution and served his time for it; flanking him on one side, Abe Cohen, the great criminal lawyer, long since disbarred, toyed with pencil and paper; on the other sat Roy Berkman, the actor, who had ended a brilliant career by eloping with the wife of Marsmon, the millionaire, she dying shortly thereafter under mysterious circumstances; next to Berkman was Myerson, some-time "Czar of the Tenderloin;" in the remaining seats, besides Greyson, were "Big John" Coffee, the politican, and, in sheer mentality the peer of all, Adolph Prunier.

"We shall now listen to reports," said Dalforth evenly. He consulted a typewritten memorandum before him to call: "Sleazy!"

The jockey arose from his place in the center of the room.

"My connection established, and the proper assignment made," he said.

"Morris is thanked," said Dalforth. "He will also attend to-morrow and 'cover' for you as occasion warrants."

From the extreme end of the room, among the servants, a cadaverous figure arose. With a prefatory hollow cough, and in a thin voice, he remarked:

"I am very weak, Mr. Dalforth. I doubt if I shall be of any particular assistance."

The chairman whispered with his fellow members.

"We are very sorry, Morris," he said at length, "but nothing must be left to chance. You will, however, drive the taxicab." The "the" was stressed above the other words.

Morris bowed in finality as he resumed his seat.

"Avery!"

The tinsmith, who had been unable to find a chair and who was in consequence standing back against the wall, slouched forward a single pace.

"I kin," he said, "make any size container for the energos with my eyes shut, I'm that used to it now. Me and Prunier has been tru de t'ing so often, all he had to do is nod to me, now and den."

A ripple of tolerant laughter ran through the room. The gavel tapped.

"Mr. Greyson," said Dalforth.

"We have now," began Greyson, "been installed in the finest suite of rooms in the new Monmouth Building, for over four weeks. Through the acreage we have obtained near the Octupus Oil Company's holdings in Tennessee, with which, by the way, we should be able to do something later on, I have been able to come in direct contact with Jeroloman, the chairman of the board of directors of both the oil company and the building corporation. I may say that this contact was obtained by offering our property to Jeroloman at about half what it cost us; and incidentally"—he paused to laugh—"our expenses at the Monmouth Building run on at the rate of a thousand dollars a day. The sooner, then, the fifteenth of the month comes upon us, the better off we shall be."

"And the—er—physical connection?" suggested the chairman.

"Will be made in ample time," said Greyson. He waved his hand toward Coffee.

"Big John," he added, "was fortunate enough to find a skilled contractor who was so circumstanced as to be able to take over immediately the contract of the dilatory sub-basement Monmouth man."

"And by the same token," interjected Coffee blandly, "another job or two at that price and my friend is on the way to the bankruptcy court."

Greyson bowed in understanding. The others, conversant with the situation, smiled. Then there was a shuffling of feet, followed by intense silence. The eyes of the assembled Malmartites were fastened on Prunier. At the mention of his name he arose slowly. No heed was given to his slovenly figure; only the man behind was seen.

In a voice almost devoid of accent he first paid a tribute to those who had been of such able assistance to him in the plans which, he was now well convinced, were about to come to early fruition. If, during the past few months he had seemed to his fellow workers to be hasty or choleric, he wished to offer as an apology that he had been under something of a strain. For, as they knew, he had been compelled to devote long days and still longer nights to research

work, familiarizing himself with all the authorities having to do with the subject. If they were successful in their efforts, the millions that should accrue to them would have birth in their loyal efforts alone; if, however, by any chance, failure should come, he——

"You cannot fail, Adolph!" came as one voice from many throats.

"No, gentlemen; we cannot fail. Bunglers alone are the prey of untoward circumstance." He swept the room with steady glance. "Not those," he measured, "who make such circumstance their servant and not their master. There is no such thing as failure when the Malmarte works."

The applause that followed was punctuated by the arrival of a hawk-nosed, spectacled fellow who paused, panting, just inside the door. The chairman looked at his list.

"You are late, Muller," he reprimanded. "Your report—briefly, please."

"I couldn't possibly get away before," apologized the newcomer. "You see," he laughed, "Professor Chalmers, at King's University, has become so attached to me that he doesn't want me to leave his sight. We have been working on novel experiments. My professor has become obsessed with the subject and——"

He smiled and went on formally:

"I beg to report that all our plans at the university are perfected in every detail."

"Very well, Muller," commended Dalforth. He surveyed the assembly.

"There being no further business," he asserted, "this meeting stands adjourned to October the sixteenth, at the same hour."

III.

At ten o'clock on the following day, striding along as one who was late, Sleazy turned a corner in Greenwich Village. He glanced at the house numbers and followed them along until he came to four-hundred-eight. Before this number, a ramshackle, brick-fronted, two-story building, with entrance flush with the street, he paused to glue his nose against the single window that graced the front.

He perceived what was evidently a blacksmith's shop at some time. A forge, an anvil, and, hardby, an old-fashioned Franklin burner, were in the foreground. Along the rear wall, disposed in such attitudes as would make them as comfortable as the contracted quarters would permit, were several reporters; and puttering about between the forge and the anvil, tossing a word of command, now and then, to his assistant Avery, was Prunier. The reporters wore a bored air, at the noting of which Sleazy smiled grimly. Then, pushing his straw hat to the back of his head, he hastened through the door and ranged himself alongside the others.

"My name is Sleazy," he explained to his immediate neighbor, "I'm a new man on the *Mercury*." Whereat the other smiled and borrowed a cigarette.

Prunier paused in his meanderings to count noses. Then, apparently satisfied, he bowed formally to the assembled scribes.

"Cerebus speaks," observed the jockey's neighbor in an undertone.

But Prunier had caught the words. His pent-house eyebrows moved upward curiously.

"No, gentlemen," he said measuredly, "I no longer speak; I show. Afterward, when I shall haf demonstrate the energos, if you wish, I will speak. For a new principle of science haf I discover; and you shall behol' in the making the mos' revolutionary invention the world has known."

He nodded shortly to Avery. The latter, by alternately pushing and pulling, urged a rectangular kitchen table toward the center of the room. He was at some pains to have it come on even keel, and finally brought this about by resting the four feet in depressions of the dirt floor, evidently scuffed through by the hoofs of countless stamping horses. On the top surface of the table he rested a piece of sheet metal, cut to exactly the same dimensions.

Then, working rapidly but methodically, Avery brought forth a second sheet of the same material which he proceeded to cut in well-defined patterns. Taking these to a rimming machine, he bent the several edges this way and that, fashioning a cubical box. This he placed upon the sheet of metal on the table.

As he rested from his labor for a moment Prunier stated:

"You will observe, gentlemen, that the box is now hermetically sealed, the interfolding edges precluding the ingress of air. Why I do not solder the edges shall appear presently."

At a second nod from the inventor, Avery, with an ordinary punch, formed a round hole in the end of the box nearest the specta-

tors. Into this he inserted a half-inch iron tube, possibly six inches long, with a stopcock equidistant from the edge of the cube and the end of the tube. A treatment of some plastic substance was given the tube at point of contact with the device. This became hard instantly.

Prunier waved a hand in dismissal of his assistant, who promptly repaired to the anvil to busy himself in forming a second cube, smaller in size, however, than the first; and, after the manner of his kind, he filled in the intervals between the strokes of his hammer by allowing it to tap-tap on the anvil's edge, producing the metallic and pleasing sound characteristic of that sort of place.

The inventor, in the meantime, without speaking, had removed an air pump, to which was attached a registering device, from a mahogany box near at hand. Turning the stopcock to the "open" position, he attached the air-pump tube to the bottom; watching the register, he pumped vigorously. At a certain point he desisted.

"So!" he muttered heavily to himself. "All is now ready." Affecting an expression of relief, he commanded sharply: "Now, gentlemen, attend!"

With a movement so swift as to belie his bulk, he drew from his bosom a bulb syringe, removed the tube of the air pump, and with almost the same motion injected the contents of the bulb into the nozzle of the stopcock. Presently was observed a faint, yellowish tinge running up the side of the cube; and immediately thereafter heat waves, pouring from the contrivance, shimmered and danced against the light from the window.

"Behold!" cried the inventor in exultation. With an all-embracing gesture of both arms, he faced his audience. "Men," he rumbled hoarsely, "so long as grass grows and water runs will this energos of mine, of itself, continue to produce and give off heat!"

"What?" cried some one incredulously. "Not perpetually?"

"Forever!" reiterated Prunier. "So long as the air herein contained is impregnated with that which you saw me inject in the cube, so long will the energos operate. But see, the stopcock is open. Let but the energos be tampered with, and an infinitely small measure of air escape and, pouf! it ceases to function. No patents shall I haf to take. The energos protects itself."

He laughed immoderately and continued:

"For the whole world, then, will I, Adolph Prunier, produce heat, steam, what you will. Of no use hereafter will be coal or wood in generating energy. For all time I haf change that. You shall the world tell; and to-morrow—the next day perhaps—shall come the savants, the college professors. Them also will I show even as you."

"And commercially, Mr. Prunier?" suggested Sleazy, pressing forward in his eagerness. "What will be the commercial benefits?"

"Ha! I forget," said the inventor happily. "I haf not explain. Observe: in but a few years, all men-of-war, all railroad engines, all automobiles, shall be propelled by the energos; all"—he shrugged his shoulders helplessly—"everything."

The scribes whispered among themselves. Sleazy, in the center, was jerking out various suggestions. It would not at all do to be too gullible. For himself, he remembered reading of the Keely Motor. Would it not be advisable to have the inventor demonstrate the energos under conditions which they, themselves, should prescribe? After all, this was his shop. Presently, with evident diffidence, a reporter asked:

"Is that substance, element—whatever it is—you injected in the cube, expensive, Mr. Prunier?"

"No; as cheap as dirt. Why?"

"Then another—ah—test might be made?"

For answer the inventor beckoned to Avery. As the assistant left the anvil a faint hissing sound was heard, to be drowned at once by the clattering fall of a half keg of nails inadvertently pushed over by the clumsy Sleazy.

In a trice the second container was charged as before. The coal was raked from the forge, the cube placed therein, and fresh coal drawn about it. Instantly a molten mass was spluttering away.

"A forge is made to furnish heat," said Sleazy dryly. "I wonder now if this same cube was placed elsewhere, would it function in the same manner."

"Ha! the young man is suspicious," said Prunier, nodding his head in satisfaction. "That is what I like. Entirely is the energos in your hands, gentlemen. Will some one a suggestion make?"

"The stove," mentioned the diffident scribe.

" 'The stove;' admirable," vouchsafed the

inventor. He looped an iron band under one end of the cube, seized the other with a pair of thongs, and conveyed it to the venerable Franklin burner. Happily it fitted to a nicety, impinging on the fire bricks on bottom and sides with but little space to spare.

"Every blace the same," was Prunier's dictum, as the stove glowed red.

Now, when Sleazy first entered the shop he had observed a reporter seated on a chair, without back or bottom, in a corner of the place. He was a sharp-faced fellow with a whimsical expression. During Prunier's various demonstrations he had evinced no interest whatever, whistling pensively the while. Worried in a measure by the other's indifference, the jockey approached him casually.

"The energos seems to work rather well," he mentioned tentatively.

" 'Seems' is good; at odd times there has been an overtone in the fat one's song that grated on my ear."

"You think——"

"That works the energos never so well in here, yet outside—that's it; I fancy to get one outside we would have to step over Prunier's dead body, not to mention, in passing, his handsome assistant."

The jockey looked surprised; then elated.

"By Jove!" he laughed, "that would be the tip off on the whole business, wouldn't it? I wonder—but let's try."

But the inventor was acquiescent.

"Certainly," he said, "take it any blace you like. There is nothing to conceal; no —what you say—comeback. Any blace, it burns on—forever."

"Gad!" exclaimed the doubting Thomas. He turned to Sleazy. "I'm cured," he smiled. "Suppose we take it downtown and around to the offices—a series of New Year calls, so to speak."

The suggestion found prompt acceptance. But how convey it? The agile-minded Sleazy mentioned a taxi.

"It will burn the floor out," negatived Thomas.

"The kind with the iron slats near the driver for holding trunks," said a third. "I noticed a nest of them around the corner as I came in."

A self-constituted committee of two, Sleazy and Thomas fared forth. As it happened there was only one cab of the kind sought. This was at the end of the line. The driver was a cadaverous fellow who, once awakened, gave forth a hollow cough. No difficulty was experienced in driving a bargain. The convoyed energos had proceeded several blocks when the driver pulled his car against the curb.

"Hey!" he called out, "this blooming thing is burning my legs. What's the big idea, anyhow?"

"That's what it's made for," threw out Sleazy. "Drive on."

"All right; but, believe muh, if you could tone her down a bit, I wouldn't mind having one for the winter. Some burner, believe muh!"

The reporters during the journey downtown discussed in detail the efficacy of the energos. To a man they believed in it; and, as Sleazy had said to Relihan, they determined to play it "straight." As the taxi stopped before the *Mercury* building, the driver chuckled heartily.

"I'll be glad to get shunt of that dingus," he said. "It seemed to pick up speed as we came along." He bent over it with curiosity; then straightened up with a jerk.

"Zowie!" he shrilled, "the bottom of my car is all charred. Get it off here quick."

The jockey and Thomas dove for their tongs at the same time; but the impatient chauffeur could not wait. He thrust the device away from him with his shoe. There was a scratching noise, followed by an explosive pouf; and immediately the color faded from the surface of the cube. In consternation the reporters gathered in a knot as Sleazy turned the box over. In the bottom was a round hole, obviously caused by a nail protruding from the floor.

" 'Let but an infinitely small measure of air escape, and pouf! it ceases to function,' " quoted Sleazy solemnly.

"There is another one; let us go back and get that," said Thomas.

"Not in my taxi," returned the driver truculently.

"What is the use?" asked some one else. "Sleazy, pick up the *corpus delicti* and turn it in with your stuff. We will trot off and get out our own copy."

The jockey looked from one to another helplessly. His face pleaded for assistance he was loath to ask. Shifting on his feet uneasily for a time, he finally ventured:

"Boys, I am a new man on the *Mercury*. You know how I must feel going into the boss with only this piece of metal to back up the story I've got to tell. Suppose you

fellows run up with me and lend me the weight of your presence." He paused to thrust a bill into the palm of the taxi man, then added:

Come on; corroboration is all I want."

Moved by the favor of the taxi fare Thomas, unethical though the request was, put in an assenting word; and the others, possibly similarly motivated, nodded in unison. And with Sleazy in the van, toting the defunct energos, they trooped up the short flight of steps leading to the office of the *Mercury*.

IV.

The final editions of the evening papers carried the story in toto. Some, it is true, placed it in inside pages; while others, wherein the account appeared on the first page, prefaced it by a minimizing or deprecatory "Is this——" headline. Nevertheless the reporters for the morning papers scurried around to Prunier's shop in hot haste. Although the hour was late, they found him and Avery still in the place.

But the inventor was tired, having had a long day. He begged to be excused. The day after to-morrow, however, he would be pleased to demonstrate; and he asked as a favor that the press invite "those who knew —the savants, the college professors" to be present. Once these had passed judgment on the energos the world at large could no longer doubt.

At the appointed time the physicists attended, for the most part, grave, taciturn, solemn-faced. By reason of his age, dignity, and standing as a scientist, Professor Chalmers, of King's University, was chosen as interlocutor.

When Prunier had finished both his manifestation and dissertation he turned directly to the professor.

"Is there," he asked gravely, "any substance or element known to science that, when commingled with air, will produce the effect I haf shown?"

"There is none," agreed the professor.

"Or that when so united will of itself produce energy for a day, a week—indefinitely?"

"No; but, you will pardon me, Mr. Prunier, the duration of your principle, beyond the comparatively short space of time we have seen here, yet remains to be established."

"True," smiled Prunier. He turned the stopcock of the specimen resting on the table before him. Instantly the radiating heat waves disappeared. He went on:

"You will oblige me, professor, by taking this box with you to your laboratory. This afternoon I will go and recharge it. Then under your own eye you shall see it operate —till comes to you the end."

Bowing soberly at the sacredness of the trust imposed on him, the professor wrapped the specimen in a newspaper and, attended by his fellows and sundry reporters, bore it off in triumph.

When the last retreating form had vanished from sight, Avery, on whose brow a gentle dew had gathered not caused by his labors at the anvil, shrugged his shoulders thoughtfully.

"Now it's touch an' go with us, Adolph," he asserted; "a single slip at the college and the——"

"Ha! no chance," exploded the inventor. "For, look you, the past year is the professor under the dominance of Muller. In matters beyond the domain of physics he is but a child. Already the stand for the energos is prepared. We cannot fail!"

The door opened. The last word in sartorial elegance, Greyson entered, accompanied by a little, oldish man with seamed face and lanthorn jaw. In the glance with which the latter swept the place, his eye encountered that of Avery. The tinsmith withdrew into himself as if he had received a physical shock.

"Mr. Prunier?" inquired Greyson tentatively, looking from one to the other.

Adolph bowed.

"My name is Greyson," said the speaker; "and this"—he indicated his companion—"is Mr. Bradish Jeroloman, the chairman of the board of directors of the Monmouth Building."

"I don't know him," said Prunier stolidly; whereat Jeroloman emitted a shrill cackle, meant for laughter.

Greyson's eye went up in polite surprise.

"The Monmouth Building," he said painstakingly, "is owned by the Octopus Oil Company; and hence I may say that in effect Mr. Jeroloman represents both concerns."

"Of the oil company, I think I haf heard," said Prunier slowly, after laboriously searching the recesses of his memory.

"No doubt," returned Greyson pleasantly. "Now, then, we have been reading of your discovery—the energos, is it not? Of course,

if it will do what the papers claim for it, it is more or less valuable as a commercial proposition. We are disposed to make you an offer for it. We shall incorporate a company capitalized at five millions of dollars, to which will be issued to you stock to——"

"Stock I don't know," mentioned Prunier intransigently; "but cash, him I know."

Jeroloman cachinnated again.

"How much?" he asked sharply. From the corner of his eye he marked Greyson's crestfallen attitude at the transition from stock to cash.

"Two million dollars, for the proven formula and sufficient of the substance to energize the world."

Jeroloman, without conscious effort, made a mental calculation. As one of the directors of the Inter-City Rapid Transit Company, he was well aware that this system expended each year for coal more than the amount demanded by Prunier. And if—if the energos was genuine, the purchase price was a mere bagatelle. Figuratively, he smacked his lips.

"Your price is high, sir," he said aloud, "but possibly—probably—your terms may be met. However, it will be understood that to consummate a transaction of this character we can be satisfied with no perfunctory test. The conditions to be met by the energos will be ours.

"As you may elect," said Prunier.

It was now the tenth of October, he explained. On the fifteenth, in accordance with the terms of the Monmouth leases, heat would have to be supplied to the tenants. The furnaces were installed ready for operation. Would Prunier undertake, as a test, to generate sufficient steam to heat the whole building? If so, he would consider that the necessary conditions of purchase had been met.

"It is simple," was Prunier's ready answer. "To-morrow I make the calculations; in two days more I fashion the containers; say another day or two for delays and what not; and, behold, on the fifteenth the steam goes up the pipes! Then," he added, "I get the money, eh?"

"On the sixteenth," said Jeroloman.

"Very well; I will haf with me everything. For the Monmouth Building, big as you say it is"—he stooped and gathered a handful of dust from the floor, which he allowed to trickle through his fingers—"only so much of the substance is needed—forever."

"Gad!" ejaculated Greyson, in wonderment.

"Eh, what's that?" The financier straightened up. "So it is, Greyson; so it is. But, after all, no more wonderful than the phonograph, or the electric bulb, or wireless telegraphy. It occurs to me now to wonder why it hasn't been done before."

A wreath of smoke got in Greyson's eye. He turned his head aside and smiled.

V.

When Jeroloman, having arrived at his office the following morning, had divested himself of his coat and hat, he touched the call button on his desk. Bellknap, his secretary, glided in as though on castors.

"Parks," commanded the financier.

An instant later the head of the Octopus Oil's secret service advanced with a typewritten document which he placed on the desk; and, as was the custom, seated himself during its perusal. Jeroloman read:

Prunier, Adolph—supposed to be of French birth, rented the premises in Greenwich Village on October first of last year; nothing is known of his prior antecedents; his assistant, one Avery, was hired two weeks later by means of an advertisement inserted in the *Evening Mercury,* a copy of which is attached; the shop they occupy was formerly the place of business of a blacksmith named Moran; the equipment of the shop was purchased from Moran's widow.

Prunier is known in the neighborhood to be conducting experiments of some sort, having to do with a heating device; both he and Avery have living quarters over the shop, buying their supplies at near-by shops; they live very frugally, Avery doing the purchasing; the latter is regarded as being none too bright, and is understood to be somewhat deaf; Prunier spends his leisure time in reading books of a scientific trend; he formerly went to the branch public library for such reading, but complaint was made as to his unkempt appearance, by other visitors; he was asked to be less slovenly in attire or to leave; he left.

One of his model inventions is now on exhibition at King's University; at eight-thirty o'clock last night Professor Chalmers' assistant in charge of the laboratory showed this device, from which intense heat was emanating at the time; the latter believes in it implicitly; at nine-thirty o'clock last night Prunier's shop was visited by a man arriving in a Rolls-Royce car; from guarded inquiries put to the chauffeur it was learned that the visitor was Mr. Louis Pell, a junior partner of the banking house of Klem, Lobb & Co.; after leaving, Mr. Pell was driven to King's University.

"H'm," said Jeroloman thoughtfully. "H'm," he repeated, "Klem, Lobb & Co., eh? On the trail, of course, but a little late—a

little late, I think. Let's see——" and his voice dribbled off into silence. Presently he roused himself.

"Have some one watch the device in King's University," he directed. "If it ceases to function, report to me at once; if it operates continuously, no report will be necessary. And, Parks, do you personally spend your time from now until the sixteenth of the month in the sub-basement of the Monmouth Building. That's all."

The chief had reached the door when he heard his name called.

"And, Parks, when the opportunity affords," said Jeroloman, "I wish you would look into that new assistant of Bellknap's. I have been going over his references, and they seem to me to be too good."

The detective bowed. The offshooting vagaries of the boss' mind were a never-failing source of speculation to him. Meditatingly, he made his way to the Monmouth Building. Pausing for a time outside the basement entrance, he listlessly observed some workmen completing the task of filling in the tunnel between the manhole and the building. Then he went to the basement.

To his surprise he found Prunier and Avery there, busily engaged in taking the measurements of the duplex, giant boilers. The former was calling out distances which Avery jotted down. The contractor for the tunnel work, his job done, was gathering together his tools. Parks was commencing to connect things up. He watched Prunier curiously.

The contractor, emerging from the subterranean depths, crossed the street. Big John Coffee, smoking a cigar to while away time, was awaiting his coming. The contractor touched his arm.

"All done, John," he reported laconically. "But it's funny, isn't it, how many people there are in this town with nothing to do but ask questions?"

"Yes?" said Coffee.

"If it wasn't for the cop on the block, shoving them away from the manhole, we would have been hard put to it at times."

Coffee chuckled unctuously.

"Danny is certainly a good boy; that's the reason he is where he is," said he enigmatically.

The fifteenth of the month broke clear and cold. Prunier and Avery came to the Monmouth Building drawn by a one-horse rig. On the back of the conveyance reposed a battered trunk. With infinite care the two bore this to the basement; and, once placed there, Avery seated himself on the top. By invitation of Jeroloman, Professor Chalmers was in attendance. There were present also several other elegantly dressed, sharp-visaged men among whom Parks was surprised to see Mr. Pell. The rest, directors of the building, he knew by sight.

At length, Prunier nodded to Avery, who descended from his coign of vantage and opened the trunk. It was perceived to be filled with a bluish-tinted substance of apparently about the same constituency as fine talc powder. This, with rare delicacy, the men assembled did not attempt to touch. The inventor produced his syringe, and, from a second box, a pair of jeweler's scales. The scales he handed to Avery.

"Gentlemen," he then said, "there is no need for me to now ascertain the cubical contents of the containers which I haf built in boilers here. That haf I done already when I made them. And when I installed them, I may add, a representative of Mr. Jeroloman was present."

He glanced at the financier, who nodded in corroboration.

"Hence there can be no chance for fraud. The conditions under which I now demonstrate are those exacted by Mr. Jeroloman. So——"

He desisted, to turn to Jeroloman.

"Will you oblige me," he said, "by pouring from the trunk into the scales sufficient of the substance to just bring up the adjusted weight?"

Jeroloman, assisted by Avery, did so. While Prunier was charging the bulb, the latter, surreptitiously consulted his watch. As the inventor turned toward the trunk again he observed that Avery had negligently hooked a finger through a buttonhole of his coat. Prunier's eyelid fluttered once.

In silence he blew the measured substance into the tube brought before the furnace door. Presently came a gentle knocking sound from within, increasing in volume as the moments passed. The engineer of the building, in overalls, watched the steam gauge. In one minute it registered thirty pounds; in two, seventy; in three, one hundred sixty.

The engineer was shifting on his feet uneasily.

"Mr. Jeroloman," he whispered huskily, "these are new boilers, and I'm afraid to trust them further." He consulted the dial again. "Heavens!" he roared, "we will be blown sky-high."

"The escape valve," said Prunier quietly. "Turn the escape valve." The engineer complied. "Now," said Prunier, "the steam will remain at that figure—forever."

Jeroloman's eyes were flickering strangely. The yeast of cupidity had risen to its full measure.

"Come; we will go through the building," he said.

"For my assistant and myself," said Prunier tersely, "we stay here until to-morrow."

The engineer and Parks evidently thought the same way, for they did not move. The others, however, took the elevator to the top floor. They entered several different suites of offices; in each the rooms were superheated, with windows being lowered from the top. When they came finally to the corridor to descend, Pell lagged behind to grasp Jeroloman's arm.

"Great Scott, man," he begged, "this is too big a thing for one man or one corporation. Let us in on it; at your own price if you will, but let us in."

"Not now," said the other; "possibly later on—but not now."

The guests separated on the main floor; but all that day and until well on of the next the two Malmartites kept the tryst; and with them remained the engineer and Parks.

The next day Jeroloman came, followed by two attendants stooping under the weight of an enormous bag.

"You may all go," said the financier.

The engineer went to seek much-needed repose, but Parks had curiosity to remain a short time outside. In a half hour Prunier and Avery emerged carrying the same bag. A taxi, with a cadaverous driver in the seat, was drawn alongside the curb. Without a word Prunier threw the door open and the grip was propelled within. Prunier and Avery followed. As the former pulled the door to, he called out happily:

"Home, Juke!"

Parks was astounded; not so much, it is true, by the inventor's salutation to the chauffeur, as by the indescribable change that marked his face. For the first time since Parks had seen him the mask he affected had slipped off.

Instantly suspicion, illusive, ill-defined came to the detective. Subconsciously, almost, he drew from his pocket a wallet containing numerous neatly folded newspaper clippings having reference to the energos. A pregnant idea had flashed across his mental horizon. He ran over the clippings quickly, comparing and checking one with another. From one account a sentence sprung out before his eyes:

"As the assistant left the anvil a faint, hissing sound was heard."

Head on one side, Parks remained in thought a moment.

"A hissing sound is produced only when something under pressure—heat, steam—escapes," he mused. "Now that, certainly, is contrary to the theory of the energos. I wonder——" He turned to enter the building again, hesitated for a time, and then, without more ado, retraced his steps to take the elevated uptown. Presently he was before the door of Prunier's shop. The door was locked, but the window looking on the street was down from the top.

"Prunier's 'home' evidently did not mean this place," was his mental comment.

Without taking the trouble to look around, Parks entered the shop through the window. The deal table stood in the center of the room in the same position as it had occupied during the course of the several demonstrations. He attempted to move it sidewise, but it stuck fast; a straight upward pull, however, brought it free. Looking curiously at the spot, Parks whistled sharply in surprise; then he hastily upended the table. The four legs were hollow, with iron tubes running through the centers. With a piece of steel he poked around in the dirt floor to uncover, where the legs had rested, four other corresponding tubes leading he knew not whither.

With a grim smile, the detective directed his attention to the top of the table. He observed that this was much thicker than it should be ordinarily; a condition that would not be evident, nevertheless, owing to the sideboards, when the table was in proper position. He tapped it with his piece of steel; a hollow sound was given off.

It was the work of only a moment to pry off the lower boards. Cunningly fashioned and lying as closely together as space would permit, were literally dozens of minute devices each with a projecting nozzle brought well-nigh, but not quite, flush with the top

of the table; and all connected with the tubes that ran through the legs. Detaching one by force, Sparks examined it thoroughly. He had seen similar contrivances, but on a larger scale, a hundred times in the hands of plumbers or painters. It was, in effect, a Bunsen burner.

The fire bricks of the Franklin stove and the fireplace of the forge had been rigged in the same fashion; both with central hollow cylinders lost in the floor or masonry. In casting about for the probable terminals, Parks' eye fell upon the rickety stairs leading to the regions above. He mounted at once; a squalid room, with a tumble-down cot in the corner, emanated foul odors; and in a corner he came upon a giant foot bellows, with interconnecting attachments joining several cylinders leading downward, and one nosed into the gas lead pipe. He sought no further.

Emerging from the shop, the detective dropped into the nearest drug store to call Professor Chalmers on the telephone. The professor's voice disclosed great mental perturbation. He informed Parks straightway that his invaluable assistant Muller had vanished and that, coincidently, the precious energos had ceased to function—which, at this juncture, occasioned his caller no astonishment.

The Octupus Oil man drummed with his fingers in indecision for some time. The result of his cogitations was the calling of a number not listed in the telephone directory. Following this he left the store hastily and, calling a passing cab, was driven to upper Fifth Avenue. He entered Jeroloman's house close upon the heels of Professor Chalmers.

With the professor in an anteroom, Parks discovered a second individual who was twirling his hat nervously, fidgeting in his seat, the while, in manifest impatience. Shortly a servant came with the announcement that Mr. Jeroloman would see them in the library. The financier was just finishing a telephonic conversation. They heard him say into the mouthpiece:

"All right, Pell; I will have the 'ad-interim' agreement sent around to your office the first thing in the morning."

He looked toward the stranger.

"Well?" he asked.

"Mr. Jeroloman," the nervous one jerked out, "I shall be very brief. As you see from my card, I represent the Inter-Urban Steam Purveying Company; and, as you, of course, know, our business is to furnish steam to such buildings as may contract with us for our service." Feeling the financier's cold-gray eye boring directly through him, his voice ran off in a series of incoherent "er's."

"Yes; go on," returned the other blandly.

"Well, yesterday our meters recorded an unaccountable lossage of steam. We—er—found that our street main had been tapped and that—er—we were supplying heat to the Monmouth Building."

Jeroloman never batted an eye.

"It is evidently an error of a contractor," he mentioned evenly. "Of course, the matter will be adjusted to your full satisfaction. Mr. Singleton is, I believe, the president of your company. Will you have him get in touch with me personally, to-morrow? Thank you very much for calling."

Bowing deferentially, the visitor withdrew.

"Chalmers," said Jeroloman, "I'm very glad you have called. There is a matter of certain research work in connection with the Octopus Oil I wished to talk to you about; the subject is of vast importance to us and the—er—honorarium will be placed at your own figure. Will you see me to-morrow about this?"

The professor, bowing deferentially, withdrew; he knew the price of silence.

Then Jeroloman and Sparks went into executive session. But the outcome never reached the ears of the press. For Jeroloman, for reasons of his own, had seen to that.

WHEN HAYS SITS DOWN

WILL HAYS, the energetic and peppery chairman of the Republican national committee, is not a big man physically; and, like many small men, he does everything possible to overcome the handicap. For instance, in his Washington office he has a chair which was built especially for him, with the object of diverting attention from his lack of bulk. The height of its seat is so arranged that the visitor might easily mistake Hays for a tall man. Moreover, its width is such that the chairman escapes the danger of appearing too small to fill a chair.

Lost Wagons

By Dane Coolidge

Author of "Maverick Basin," "Fate and the Fighter," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

After making friends with Julia Cleghorn, Ira N. Ketcherside's beautiful secretary, Tucker Edwards, from Death Valley, California, sells the San Francisco millionaire his Lost Wagons Mine for ten thousand dollars. Returning to Gold Trails, he quarrels with Pete Hogaboom, a crooked promoter, who claims half the proceeds of the sale because he once tried to sell the mine. At his camp at Lost Wagons Tucker meets old Buck, owner of the last twenty-mule team in existence, whom he has befriended, and lends him eight hundred dollars. Then Ketcherside arrives with Julia and a staff of experts, and Tucker, who has no faith in the mine, is surprised to learn that a company to develop the property has been incorporated for two million dollars. The stock is placed on the market, rises rapidly, and a boom is on. Julia advises Tucker to buy some stock, but he refuses. Then he and Ketcherside quarrel over water rights which Tucker holds, and which Ketcherside must have.

(A Four-Part Story—Part II.)

CHAPTER VII.

A GROUCH.

THE rarest thing in life is a really cheerful loser—in fact, he does not exist. He may seem to be cheerful, but a psychological test would reveal the tumult within. The gamest gambler in America—a man who lost fortunes without a change of countenance—dropped dead at the race track and the autopsy examination revealed his muscles drawn tense as whipcord. He had stopped his own heart by repression. Tucker Edwards was a gambler, and he claimed to be a game one, but as he rode off down Death Valley he raised his fists to the sky and said it—out loud, to the ravens. He was sore, that was all there was to it.

No longer did he profess to be touched in the head, or to doubt the perfect sanity of Ketcherside. He knew the old promoter was crazy as a fox, and playing the red to win. Red is the color of life, of hope, and joy and all the passions that carry us on to our destiny; and he, crafty schemer, had discovered the fact that a man lives in a world of emotions. No matter how grim and matter of fact he may seem, nor how wedded to the strict rules of business, he will follow a rainbow with the simplicity of a child if he is told of a pot of gold. Lost Wagons was a gold mine in a land of golden treasures—a land that had produced its Comstock and its Mohawk, its Tonopah and Goldfield and Gold Trails—and at the sound of that word "gold," so insistently reiterated, the dream of the rainbow returned. Ketcherside knew that mankind demands a dream.

But for Tucker Edwards, the man who had discovered Lost Wagons and sold it for ten thousand dollars, the sight of his success was like gall and wormwood, it struck in and poisoned his soul. He headed off down Lost Valley, driving two pack mules before him and riding his big, black Jack; and each day as he rode farther the madness seemed to rend him, filling his breast with rage and hate. He cursed Ketcherside and his mining expert, his superintendent, and his chauffeur, his photographer and his man who wrote lies; and he even cursed the girl who had helped him sell his mine, though not with the same bitter venom. He cursed her more as he cursed the horde of suckers who ran into the net in such shoals; the seamstresses, the stenographers, the janitors' wives, the workingmen who tried to play the game. He pitied her for it, somehow.

It was not natural, not right, for a nice girl like that to lend her charms to a scheme to defraud; and, sooner or later, when her snowball was big enough, old Ketcherside would forget to warn her. Her roll would go in with the rest. And then she would perceive what a fools' paradise she had lived

in and have to begin all over again, with nothing. But as she went to her daily task she would have visions to haunt her, of the thousands she had helped to defraud —old men and doddering women, the incompetent and demented; and young folks, just beginning to save. Well, that was her affair—it was none of his business—but she would never throw the hooks into him. He would keep his ten thousand in his jeans.

Past Mesquite Springs, and Surveyor's Wells and Stovepipe Hole, he rode on without meeting a man; and in the immensity of Death Valley his soul-clamor ceased and he longed to meet one of his kind. He had spit out his venom and his wound had healed whole. Later he could go on and seek some other mine and forget how he had been flouted and robbed.

Even in the fall, though, when the valley is at its best, few travel those perilous ways; and at last in disgust Tucker swung a great circle and came back to Mesquite Springs. It was a scant eight miles from his old camp at Lost Wagons and the mules were eager to go on; but as he rode in up the wash a squat figure came to meet him and there was nothing to do but stop. "Shorty" Swingle was out hunting burros.

"Hello, Tuck!" he hailed, standing on the bank of the wash with a pair of broken hobbles in one hand, "have you seen anything of my asses?"

"Not a thing," answered Tucker, as Shorty's dog ran down to meet him. "Hello, Queenie, how's tricks with the dog?"

Queenie jumped up against his stirrup and yelped ecstatically, and Shorty reached for a rock.

"Come back here!" he yelled raising his voice to the mountaintops. "That dod-blasted dog is spoiled—by grab, she'll make friends with an *Injun!* Come here, dad-rot you, or I'll kill ye!"

"What's the matter, Shorty?" grinned Tucker, overjoyed to hear a human voice. "Ain't the world been treating you right?"

"It's them knot-headed burros!" declaimed Shorty Swingle volubly, following after him as he rode into the water. "They was around here all night, trying to git into my grub pile; and Queenie, the little divvle, stood in with them. I seen her myself make a rush at old Johnny, and when she seen who it was she jest jumped up and kissed his nose and let him git into the grub. But when she seen *me* rise up she run back and jest flew at him and druv the whole bunch of them off. That made Johnny mad—and Jinny and Jack, too—and they pulled out up the wash, and I trailed 'em plumb to your camp. All them Injun burros there had trompled out their tracks so I went and looked up on the bench; and then I come back before some thieving danged Shooshonnie rode down here and cleaned me entirely. Where the heck have you been for so long?"

"Oh, down below," answered Tucker beginning to unpack his mules. "Is old Buck around there yet?"

"Buck!" yelled Shorty, "w'y he's hauling freight! Oh, everything is all changed around. The blamed country is staked for forty miles, north and south, and plumb up into the hills. W'y they's a bunch of them stampeders even located the flat, where there's a thousand feet of gravel, straight down; and I'm a son of a goat if a Johnny-Bull Englishman didn't order me away from your spring. You're jumped, Tuck, sure as shooting—even ordered the Injuns away!"

"I'll fix him," nodded Tucker, "don't you worry about that. What's going on over at the mine?"

"The mine! W'y say, you wouldn't know the place—they're working it day and night. Making a road, sinking a shaft, building a cook house and everything—and hauling out the timbers for the hoist. That Jim Farley, the superintendent, is making the dirt fly; I'm telling you, she's a regular, boom camp."

"Oh—sinking, eh?" said Tuck, "how does the ore hold out? I don't look for it to go very deep."

"I don't know about that," answered Shorty Swingle vaguely, "they don't allow any outsiders about. Got it guarded day and night, and a seven-strand, barbed-wire fence all the way around the cut. But she's a boomer, all right—the stock was three-eighty the last time old Buck left town.'

"Three-eighty!" raved Tucker, his wounds breaking out afresh, "where the hell and damnation do they get that? Do they figure that that little ore shoot is going to produce eight million dollars, or have they just gone nuts?"

"I dunno," mumbled Shorty, "but that Emslee H. Brinkmeyer, the big mining expert, says the indications are good at depth. They've had two other experts to examine the property and they both of them re-

ported favorably. And there was an Injun come in with a lump of pure gold that he said he'd found in the wash."

"Ahrr—old stuff!" scoffed Tucker. "That was old Horse-shootum. He's been packing that nugget until it's worn smooth—didn't he ever show it to you?"

"Ah, now Tuck," reasoned Shorty, "don't always be a-knocking. It don't look right, coming from you. The byes are all saying that it's jest because you're sore over selling out for ten thousand dollars."

"Well, it isn't," denied Tucker, "because if I had it to do over again I'd sell for the same money, or less. I know that mine, see—I ought to, I located it—and I tell you she's going to pinch out. I was scared, to tell you the truth, when Pete Hogaboom stole that last ore, for fear he'd knocked the bottom out; and when I offered to dig some more old Ketcherside threw a fit and told me not to touch it. How much ore do you have to have to earn eight million dollars, after paying the overhead and everything? W'y, Shorty, if that whole hill was thousand-dollar rock——"

"Ah, nah, nah!" clucked Shorty, raising a restraining hand, "don't run on us, you're out of your mind. Ain't this Ira N. Ketcherside a multimillionaire, and ain't he backing the company? W'y the miners are all taking their wages in stock—I reckon you know what *that* means? It means that she's good, and danged good!"

"Yes, the poor, chuckled-headed fools," burst out Tucker vindictively, "that's what keeps 'em on the end of a muck stick. But you wait till she breaks—because that stock is going down—and hear them cousin Jacks squeal."

"Aw, you're partial," charged Shorty Swingle as Tuck squatted by his packs and began opening up canned goods with his jackknife, "you can't bear to see the other man win. I'm an old-timer, see—I was leaded at Leadville, and crippled at Cripple Crick, and so on, down the line—and I don't believe in knocking. What if it ain't exactly right—don't it bring money into the country and make a market for other good mines? I've got a sale on right now, with a party from the East, if I can ever ketch them burros and git started; but it seems like the devils jest *knowed* where I was going and tuk the back trail to spite me. They never could stand for Tucki Mountain."

"No?" responded Tucker, going on with his cooking, and Shorty sat down on a pack box.

"Plumb skeered of it!" he shouted, "ever since I first went up there and located that lost spring, on top. I come in over the summit and followed down that big sheep trail where the Injuns go in to hunt, and right there by the spring there was fifteen or twenty mountain sheep, hid away under a ledge of rock. It's a steep pitch at the last, and I was hanging on by me eyelids when the burros made a rushlike for the water—and then, by Jiminy Christmas, all them sheep jumped out at once and the asses tuk one look and flew. They stampeded, by cracky, in every direction, bucking their packs off down the mountain; and I spent all of three days gathering up my outfit and never did find the potaties. O-oh, they're skeered of that Lost Spring—bad!"

Tucker got a good laugh, and that eased his feelings, but as he was cleaning up his dishes his mind wandered back to Lost Wagons.

"Who is this guy," he asked, "that you say has jumped my claim? Some crazy cousin Jack, or something?"

"A-ah, no!" exclaimed Shorty, "he's a regular Johnny-Bull Englishman. They say he's working for the company."

"What company?" echoed Tucker, suddenly dropping his dish rag. "You don't mean he's working for Ketcherside?"

"That's what they say," admitted Shorty, "but the workmen there deny it. They're digging a ditch to some troughs."

"A ditch, eh?" repeated Tucker, and then he fell to packing. "Why didn't you say so, in the first place?" he cursed.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. SINJIN.

There are times in life when a man must fight somebody or lose his self-respect, and Tucker started toward Lost Wagons with blood in his eye and a grim exultation in his heart. So it had come—the company had jumped him. No longer need he hide his diminished head lest men should say he was sore—the company had stolen his water. And, besides, there was his house and his pasture and everything—didn't that give him a squatter's rights? It sure did, and it sure would—if his gun was working good and this Johnny-Bull Englishman got gay.

But the Johnny-Bull Englishman had vacated the mill site, after posting his legal notice, and Tucker camped unmolested by his old pile of canned goods until morning revealed the sign. It was nailed against the gatepost and, after reading it fleeringly, Tucker tore it down and stamped on it. Then he picked it up and looked at it again, before he kindled a fire with the boards.

"St. John!" he muttered, "who in Hades is St. John?"

He put the sign on his fire and was watching it burn when a man came up from below. He was obviously unarmed and his manner was far from menacing, though he came on firmly to the gate.

"Say," he said, "I'm only a workingman, but it's the company's orders that no one can camp here—we need all the water."

"Oh, you do, eh?" snarled Tucker striding out to meet him and looking him boldly in the eye. "Well, let me tell you something then, Mr. Man. I *own* this water, see, and if you want another drink you go take a walk to Mesquite Springs. It's too bad if your company is so hard up for water it can't give a prospector a drink. I've been around here three years, and I've seen all kinds of tightwads, but this is the ab-so-lute limit. Here's that water roaring down there——"

"Oh, it ain't my fault!" explained the man, "I'm just working for wages, putting in them tanks down below——"

"Well, all right, then, my friend," suggested Tucker coldly, "I'm not out to kill any straw boss; but if you and your fellow workers want to keep a whole hide my advice is to leave here—soon. I'll be down there directly, and if I find any of you trespassing——"

"We'll go," returned the man, and they did.

When Tucker stalked down there their camping place was vacant and he could see them, heading across for the mine. He cut the ditch which had diverted his water and turned it back onto his alfalfa and then, as no one came to dispute his ownership, he saddled up and started for town, fighting mad. On the slope of a long hill he met Buck with his two wagons, eighteen mules, and the two big-wheelers. He was off greasing his wheels, having warmed up the boxes by his pull up the grade from Gold Trails; and when he saw Tucker he stood staring for a moment, then gave vent to a blasphemous welcome.

"Well, hello, thar!" he hailed, "where you been all the time? We been looking for you everywhere. Mr. Ketcherside wants to see you," he said importantly.

"Oh, he does, eh?" replied Tucker, resorting to blasphemy himself. "Well, what does the so-and-so want?"

"About that water right," nodded Buck, "been looking for you everywhere. Told me to tell you the minute you got in. How does the team look—pretty good?"

He draped his blacksnake round his neck and went up over the wheel, picking his jerk line up as he mounted.

"Watch this now!" he said, and pulled slowly on the line, then gave it a little jerk.

"You—*Bird!*" he yelled to his far-off leader, who promptly tightened the chain. "Huh, Buck! Git up thar, Crowder! Look at that now, will ye—see them pointers begin to lift? Gee up now—watch 'em!" *Bang!*

The bang was the brake, suddenly released from its tension, and at that signal the swing mules clutched and hung; the great wagon lurched forward, only to fetch up abruptly as the dead weight of the trail wagon jerked it back; then it, too, heaved forward, the mules leaned low and pawed the earth, and old Buck was on his way.

"How's that?" he yelled back, and Tuck grinned his admiration—a chalk line would have touched every ear. But as he watched them over the hill Tuck rubbed his nose dubiously—what was the cause of all this hurry? Was it the demand for heavy timbers and six-inch water pipe at the famous Lost Wagons Mine, or was it a desire on the part of Mr. Buck to avoid a prolonged conversation?

"He's broke!" he pronounced and nodded his head sagely. Yes, that was what was biting old Buck. He was broke, and he owed Tucker money. He had promised to pay it back with the first money he earned, but he had found other uses for his lucre.

But what a town it was now, which Tucker presently swung into. The street was fairly swarming, and the crowd around the broker's office was frantic. Men fought their way in and others fought their way out; but the crowd stayed there, watching the stockboards. The big bank building was finished since he had been away—yes, finished and furnished and moved into—and across the plate glass of the ground-floor rented office was the gilded sign: Lost Wag-

ons Mining Company. He stared in—it was finished in red! The place was crowded with people, waiting patiently to put down their money. Or, at least, so it seemed to the envious Tucker Edwards, and he came through the front door furiously.

"Not so fast, sir!" rasped a voice as he stormed the inner entrance, and a firm hand stopped him at the gate. The voice was the voice of Crosby but the hand was that of a workingman—a sunburned, gnat-bitten hand—and the doorkeeper that rose up to bar his way was still another person. He was burned a dull red, huge smoked glasses obscured his eyes, his blistered arms were bare to the elbow; and a pair of smart puttees put the finishing touch to a costume that a moving-picture director might have envied. Yet it was Crosby—Tucker knew him, in spite of his disguise—and instantly the old antagonism cropped out.

"Ow!" he mocked, "if 'ere ain't James again. Say, you tell Ketcherside I want to see him!"

"Mr. Ketcherside is busy," answered Crosby stiffly.

"Well, come to think about it, Pussy, I don't need him. I'm looking for a man by the name of St. John, that came out and jumped my mill site."

"Oh—ah—why really," stammered Crosby, showing signs of a panic, "there is no one here by that name."

"Well, I'm looking for the man!" shouted Tucker furiously, "that located that Lost Wagons water right. I don't care what his name is, or whether he's got a name—he was working for this dog-robbing company. I tore down his sign and I fired them jaspers out of there, and now I'm looking for *him*. And I just want to say I've got my opinion of a company that will refuse a man water on the *desert!*"

He stopped, his eyes bulging, and as he laid his hand on the gate, Julia Cleghorn darted out of a doorway.

"Why, what's the matter?" she asked as the crowd in the outer office was augmented by a rush from the street, and Tucker drew himself up and scowled.

"I'm looking," he said, "for C. S. St. John, the man that jumped my water for the company, and——"

"Why, here he is," she answered, turning to the cringing Crosby, "only he doesn't pronounce——"

"I am not responsible," announced Crosby frigidly, "for this vulgar, American pronunciation. My name is not Saint John, but Sinjin."

"Ow—Sinjin, eh?" said Tucker, breaking into a broad grin and reaching out with a practiced hand. "Well, come with me, Sinjin—I want you."

"Just a moment!" interposed Julia as he caught him by the neck, and Tucker paused as she faced him. "Mr. St. John is in no way responsible—he was acting under orders from Mr. Ketcherside."

"I don't doubt it," nodded Tucker, still holding to his man, "but he told me Mr. Ketcherside was busy."

"He'll see you," she smiled. "We've been looking for you everywhere. Won't you come in—open the door for him, Crosby."

Crosby touched the secret spring that opened the low gate, and Tucker released him regretfully.

"I'll be back," he said as he passed down the hall, but Crosby was gazing sternly into space.

CHAPTER IX.

IN STOCK.

The inner office of Ira N. Ketcherside was an exact replica in little of his wonderful directors' room in San Francisco. There were the same rich tones of red, the same deep rugs, the same polished table and stuffed chairs; and against the paneled wall there was a picture of a gentleman dating back to the time of Rembrandt. Ketcherside himself was sitting at the polished mahogany table, deep in conference with Brinkmeyer and Farley.

These men of large affairs develop a wonderful acuteness in sensing their visitors' moods, and after a single upward glance Ketcherside abruptly dismissed his hirelings and Julia as swiftly showed them out.

"Well?" observed Ketcherside, gazing inquiringly at Miss Cleghorn.

"Mr. Edwards was having a controversy with Crosby at the gate regarding the Lost Wagons water rights, and I suggested that he see you about it."

"Quite right," approved Ketcherside, "please do not go, Miss Cleghorn. Now, what can I do for you, young man?"

He met Tucker's glare with a smile so disarming, and at the same time so bafflingly self-confident, that Tucker was almost swayed from his purpose; but the memory of his wrongs came back with a rush and

he stated his case, though weakly. There was something about Ketcherside, a kind of psychic influence, which made a man hesitate to oppose him. Yet if Ketcherside exercised this power he did so without effort for he was smoking dreamily the while.

"Have a cigar," he offered, drawing a case from his pocket, but Tucker shook his head.

"Well," began Ketcherside, after pondering a minute, "I suppose you want some kind of a settlement. What value do you place on your water right?"

"One hundred thousand dollars," pronounced Tucker boldly, and Ketcherside did not flicker an eyelash.

"Um," he mused, "well, that is a fair price if I were where I had to buy it; but, fortunately for me, I have already acquired title to it, through the claim of Mr. St. John. I don't know, Mr. Edwards, whether you have kept up with the new laws which have been passed regarding water rights; but it is the law in California that no water can be held unless it is used within ninety days. Not only used, but diverted from its channel; and that you have failed to do."

"Yes, but I used it," objected Tucker. "Didn't I irrigate my alfalfa? And I dammed it to water my mules."

"All very well," smiled Ketcherside, "but you located it as a mill site. Has it ever been used for that purpose?"

"Well—no," acknowledged Tucker. "But I used it for my alfalfa. Don't that give me a squatter's rights? I made that place my home, and I used the water—and, by grab, I'm going to hold it!"

Ketcherside raised his eyebrows slightly and smoked on in thoughtful silence.

"Well, I'll tell you," he said. "I try to avoid trouble, although my attorneys are engaged by the year. Whatever litigation I have doesn't cost me a cent, but I always endeavor to be reasonable. Those squatters'-rights laws are interpreted rather broadly and you may, conceivably, have a certain claim to the land, though not, of course, as a mill site. I'll give you a thousand dollars for a quitclaim."

"Oh, a thous-and dollars!" mocked Tucker, suddenly stung to the quick to discover how lightly he was held. "Well, you can keep your thousand dollars. I'm going back and hold down that claim."

"Well—two thousand, then," suggested Ketcherside.

"Aw, keep your danged money," burst out Tucker rudely, and turned and started for the door.

"Just a moment!" spoke up Ketcherside, and as Miss Cleghorn intercepted him Tucker whirled and poured out his wrath.

"I'll show you!" he threatened, "you think you can come out here and grab my water and even drive the Indians away from it; but out here on the desert you can't keep a man from water—it's his right, if he don't get it, he'll die. But I'll fix you, dadburn it, so you'll know what I'm talking about! You can go to Mesquite Springs for your water."

"Now, Mr. Edwards," broke in Ketcherside, not the least bit perturbed, "I am in the midst of a very important conference; but you talk this matter over with Miss Cleghorn, my secretary, and anything she agrees to I'll O. K. Is that fair? Very well, then; good day."

He bowed them both out, and Tucker took a long breath—he was learning their system now. Sinjin put up the rough stuff, Miss Cleghorn was the pacifier, and Ketcherside pulled the strings. He had them all thoroughly trained. But she could not put one over on *him*.

"Say," he demanded as she led him to her office, which was just down the hall from Ketcherside's, "how the devil can you work for that 'pothecator?' "

"Why," she said with a twinkle in her eye, at the same time giving him a chair, "do you think he's really dangerous?"

"Is he dangerous!" he repeated, and sat shaking his head warningly as she burst into a merry laugh. "That's all right, kid," he said, "have a good laugh, while you're winning; you'll sing another tune when you lose. And don't try to pull any of this sweet feminine stuff on me—we're here to talk business, see?"

"Sure, I see!" she retorted, "and I'll begin right now by telling you a few things about Mr. Ketcherside. He'll spend a million dollars to fight you in the courts if you try to hold him up for that water right. But if you make him a reasonable price he'll try to meet you halfway—I've never known it to fail."

"Fair enough!" returned Tucker, "and now listen to me while I tell *you* a few things you don't know. And after I've given you the dips, spurs, and angles, you'll know whether I'm bluffing or not. When it comes

to law, there ain't any in Lost Valley—we fight it out, man to man. It's three days by trail to the county seat at Independence and the sheriff won't come back with you nohow—he considers us the same as in Nevada. So, as far as law is concerned, a million dollars won't buy you anything, and, meanwhile, I'll be holding that water."

"Well, I never would have thought," she burst out vehemently, "that I'd find *you* doing anything like this. You know, when I first saw you—but, oh, well, what's the use? How much do you want for your water?"

"Ten thousand dollars, cash," he said evenly and regarded her with a slow, disdainful smile.

"I'll give you five thousand in stock, at the market value," she answered, blushing hotly, and then his lip did curl.

"Yes—stock!" he scoffed. "Now held at four-eighty. Do you think it's really worth it?"

"You can get that much for it, right out on the street—but please don't get started on *that*. I know what you'll say, by heart."

"Well, let it go," he said, rising slowly to his feet, "I see we'll not come to any agreement. And since the company has jumped my claim I'll just jump it back again, and you can, all of you, politely go to the devil."

He made her a mocking bow and was well out the door before she caught him and drew him back.

"Now you sit down there," she commanded panting, "and let me tell you something—I thought at least you were a gentleman!"

"Nope—not rich enough!" he jeered.

"You make me so *mad,*" she began, and then she seemed to swallow her rage. "But he told me to buy that water," she ended.

"Ten thousand—cash—will do it," he answered briefly, and she sat down and regarded him intently.

"Do you think it's worth it?" she asked.

"Yes," he stated, "it's worth a hundred thousand—you can't run your mine without it."

"We wouldn't have jumped it," she went on, after a silence, "if you hadn't gone off in a rage. We hunted for you everywhere, and then we had to do it or Personality Plus would have got it."

"And he'd've held you up for a million!"

"He'd have tried to," she replied.

"Well, gimme ten thousand," he said.

"In stock?" she asked, making a quick dab into a holder; but he shook his head and frowned.

"Cash," he repeated and paused.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded impatiently, "are you crazy, or superstitious, or what? You can take this stock and go right out into that anteroom and sell it for ten thousand and more. I'll give you——"

She stopped to figure on a pad, but he broke in on her abruptly.

"Never mind," he said. "*You* sell it. Say, what's the matter?" he went on as she looked up at him blankly. "Is the company broke, or what?"

"'Are we *broke?*'" she echoed and then she laughed. "Why, we've taken in two million dollars!"

"Well, gimme some of it, then," he said. "I'm not taking any chances on that stock."

"But why?" she cried. "Surely you must have a reason—and everybody else is just crazy for it. Why, it's been going up steadily ever since the books were opened, and yesterday and to-day it's simply soared!"

"Yes, that's the way it does," he nodded. "Just before the market breaks and goes to pot. I'll tell you why I'm shy of that Lost Wagons stock—I'm the only man that's been down the hole. I know the values ain't there."

"No, but listen," she coaxed, "do you want to know a secret? It's what's behind all this buying. One of Mr. Farley's men picked up a lump of solid gold right there below the mine—and Mr. Farley picked up another piece. So you don't need to worry about the market."

"Aww," he began, and then stopped and thought. "Well, gimme the stock," he said.

CHAPTER X.

TUCKER BITES.

Tucker went out past Sinjin without even looking at him, boiling over with rage at himself; for he had matched his wits against Ketcherside's and his will against Julia's, and here he was with the stock. He didn't want it, wouldn't have it, was going to get rid of it; but in spite of all his roughness, his blustering and loud threats, they had slipped it to him anyhow. They had compelled him to take the stock. No, worse than that, Julia had smiled at him coaxingly and actually made him think he wanted it. He

fought his way through the jam, leaving his mule to stand neglected, and bought a drink at the Happy Days Bar. Bullfrog Smith spied him and hustled down to shake hands, leaving his barkeepers to wait on the crowd.

"Well, Tucker, me b'y," he exclaimed almost affectionately, "I'm sure glad to see you back in Gold Trails. You picked a live one that time, when you went in to Frisco and brought this Ira N. Ketcherside to camp. We're sure glad to see you, Tuck, and—have another drink—say, d'ye remember that stock I bought? I bought it at one-ten and, so help me, Tuck, if it ain't up to five-ten, right now!"

"Five-*ten!*" echoed Tucker, laying down the sheaf of stock that he had intended to offer to Smith. "Since when has it been up to five-ten?"

"Since this minute!" smirked Bullfrog. "Since you and I've been talking—d'ye see my stock board, up there?" He pointed to a blackboard stuck up against the wall and, as Tucker looked it over, he beheld the stupendous record which Lost Wagons had made that day. It was selling in blocks of ten and twenty thousand, and always it was going up and up. It had not broken a point that day.

"Hah! Lucky b'y!" cried Bullfrog, patting him heartily on the back as he noted the red and gold of the certificates, "so you've made a few hundred yourself! But hold on to it, b'y," he whispered into his ear, "she's just beginning to boom! Have you heard the news? They've struck gold, solid go-old—nuggets—right there in the wash below the mine."

"Any quartz sticking to it?" demanded Tucker eagerly, and Bullfrog shook his head.

"Not a bit," he said. "It was pu-ure gold."

"You'd better sell," advised Tucker. "I've been hearing about those nuggets for years."

"Sell!" barked Bullfrog, "and what for would I sell when the stock's advancing by leaps and bounds? Sell nahthin'! When they hear in Chicago that we've struck pure gold—she'll go up to twenty dollars a share!"

"No, but listen," reasoned Tucker, "I know all about those nuggets, been tracing 'em back for years, and the best I could do was to locate the Lost Wagons—that gold isn't found in place. Probably all that's left of some little stringer that's been washed away down the gulch."

"Hey, listen here!" snarled Bullfrog, "you've been out of town, you ain't wise to what's going on. Have you heard about Pete Hogaboom? He's worth half a million dollars, all made on Lost Wagons Extension. Stock's selling at one-twenty and going up every day—all on account of that ore that Pete stole. He puts it in his window, saying nothing of where it comes from, and advertises Lost Wagons Ex. Did it go? The stock is booming in Chicago and New York and they're eating it up in Frisco—and he hasn't got a pound of his own ore. No, they're buying, Tuck; and you buy!"

"No, I'll sell!" declared Tucker, coming back to his first decision. "How much will you give me for this stock?"

He shoved over the engraved certificates, but Bullfrog gazed on them dubiously.

"Don't want 'em," he said. "Tie up too much ready money. I'm playing the market on margins."

"How do you mean?" inquired Tucker, pocketing his stock reluctantly, and Bullfrog proceeded to enlighten him.

"You take a thousand dollars," he explained mysteriously, "and go to one of them brokers. By paying down ten per cent and leaving him keep the stock you can buy ten thousand dollars' worth; and every time she goes up, instead of the regular increase, you make just ten times as much. That's the way we're all doing it, now."

"Yes, but suppose she goes down!" suggested Tucker craftily.

"She ain't going down!" Bullfrog assured him with savage vehemence.

He shoved him away and turned to satisfy the clamor of men who were shouting for the drinks, and Tucker went out on the street. Above the little battened shack where Personality Plus used to lurk like a spider in the doorway, there was now a lurid sign, Lost Wagons Extension, and below it Lost Wagons Annex. And about the doorway, where Hogaboom had watched for live ones, there was a crowd of men ten deep. Tucker shouldered his way through them and arrived at the window where the ore was spread out in view, and he recognized the Lost Wagons rock. There was the same burned-out iron, the same peppering of fine gold, the same little globules of pure metal—and the crowd was drunk at the sight of it. All the money that they had or could borrow from their friends or realize by selling distant property was going

down on Lost Wagons and Extension, but to Tucker it still seemed unreal. He had been on the ground, and he knew.

Again it came over him, that old feeling that he was sane and that all the world about him had gone mad, and he took his mule down to the corral; but the legs of his boots still bulged with stock certificates—and his roll of money was hid there, too. All the money *he* had made from this mad carnival of buying could be tucked into the leg of one boot; the question was, which way was best? Should he trade in this stock which he had received against his will and retire with his hard-earned cash; or should he play the game with these madmen?

As he rambled up the street he saw Pete go by him, disguised in the habiliments of a gentleman. The high boots were gone, and the grubby suit of khaki, and he was wearing a flashing diamond pin; and if he saw Tucker Edwards he did not turn his head but headed straight for the Oasis Café. This was a gaudy new restaurant, where the waiters wore dress suits and raced about with the nimbleness of monkeys; and as Tucker stood at gaze he saw Ketcherside inside, and with him was Julia Cleghorn. They were in a private box, built in against the wall, and their manner was perfectly decorous; but Tucker went up the street with his lip curled back viciously—and suddenly he was seeing red.

The crowd at the broker's office had dwindled at the noon hour, and the broker himself came to wait on him, for Tucker was the discoverer of Lost Wagons.

"Howdy do, Tuck!" he hailed. "Come to buy a few thousand? It's never too late, you know."

"I've come to sell," answered Tucker shortly, and the face of the broker changed.

"Well, of course," hedged the broker, "you know I don't *buy* stock—but I'll accept it to sell on commission. Nobody's buying stock outright, they're all buying on margin, and a damned narrow margin, at that. But I'll tell you what I'll do, Tuck, if you want to get action, I'll accept your stock the same as cash."

"Nope," shrugged Tucker, "I'm not here to gamble—I'm here to get my money."

"That's the scarcest thing in camp," replied the broker shortly; "you'll just have to wait, that's all."

"Well, here," began Tucker, "suppose I'd play my whole roll and *make* a hundred thousand on Lost Wagons—who's going to pay me then?"

"The whole United States," replied the broker confidently, "it's just that we haven't got the money. We've got the credit, and the stock—and the values are all there—but we can't get the cash in fast enough. Why, they're wiring in money from Chicago and New York, but you can't send a greenback over the wire. Do you get the idea—we ain't short of money, it's just the immediate cash. Ten thousand dollars—there ain't that much in camp. No, Tuck, you'll have to wait."

"Oh, they ain't, eh?" challenged Tucker reaching down into his bootleg, and he laid his whole roll on the counter.

"Jumping Judas!" exclaimed the broker, "where did you get all that money? Say, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you ten per cent off on all the Lost Wagons you'll buy just to get the use of that money. No, now listen, here's how I'm fixed—every time I sell stock on margin I'm supposed to put up the balance myself. For instance, if you'd buy Lost Wagons on a ten-per-cent margin, I'd have to put up ninety per cent more in order to get the stock—and if I didn't buy the stock I'd be bucketing the order and—you know, that's taking a chance. But in just a few days now, as soon as they can haul it in, our bank here will be jammed full of money; and then, I give you my word, I'll pay you your winnings if they come to *two* hundred thousand."

"Yeah—two hundred thousand," grunted Tucker scornfully, but in his heart he was far from being sure. How had Pete Hogaboom amassed half a million dollars in less than a month of plunging? By playing the market on a margin.

"Well, let's talk that over," he said at last, and the broker's eyes gleamed and were veiled.

CHAPTER XI.

SOMETHING WONDERFUL.

After Tuck had bought in the stock it had gone up, then sagged a little and leaped up higher; and then, in a mad scramble, Lost Wagons had gone down like a ship that founders at sea. It had sunk abysmally, so that no buying could save it and no margin protect the hardiest swimmer; whereupon Ketcherside had called all the brokers' loans and stripped them; then, when they were

all drowned, the great hulk had emerged again in response to strong support from Ketcherside. But while his buying orders had brought the stock up to par they could not force it beyond—the good ship had been snagged on the rocks.

What mysterious reef it was which had wrecked all their hopes and left the camp without the price of a drink, no one could more than guess; but a strong rumor was afloat that the corporation commission of California had announced an impending investigation. Some disgruntled miner, so the story went, had complained that he was paid off in stock; and he had added to his letter the disquieting information that there was no ore in the mine.

The stock hung at one-ten, right back where it had started from, but as the wires began to work bringing in news from the East, they recorded a sensational rise. In spite of heavy selling and a savage bear attack, Lost Wagons went up with the ponderous sureness of a ship that has found itself again. The ticker recorded two, and two-fifty, and three; and then with a surge the stock mounted to five-fifty, where it rode on an even keel. All that day they sat and looked at it, the blear-eyed and disheartened gamblers who had been the drowned rats of the wreck; and then with one voice they cursed Ira N. Ketcherside, who had left them belly up in his wake.

Disquieting rumor set forth once more, and this time it was the brokers who added their tongues to the babel. In the rapid rise and fall, and the sudden quick recovery at the end, they discerned all the symptoms of a raid; and a swift check-up of the winnings showed Ketcherside holding the money bags, hence the conclusion that he had done the deed. He had shaken them all down, taken the last dollar from all of them, and now was right back where he had started from.

There was quite a little talk, and some conspicuous drunkenness, and Ketcherside kept close to his office; but as Gold Trails sobered up he walked forth as usual, quite oblivious to the fact that men avoided him. But there was one in his employ who could not but notice the change, and especially when Tucker Edwards stalked by her, and in something near a pique she whirled and stood looking at him until he turned and met her gaze.

"Well?" he challenged, after they had stared for a minute, and she hurried away from him in tears. Not common, vulgar tears, that run down fair cheeks and herald grief and rage to the world; but tears that stay unshed, poisoning all life with their bitterness, and Tucker saw to it that he met her again. It was just after dusk, when she followed her custom and started off for a walk down the gulch, and Tucker was coming back from feeding his mule after a period of meditation at the corral.

"Well, well," he greeted, before she could brush by him, "out gazing at the beauties of Nature? Some killing you pulled off yesterday."

"What do you mean?" she answered distantly, yet not entirely displeased at this evidence that his heart had softened, and Tucker leered at her wisely.

"Too bad about you," he observed at last. "But that's all right—we had it coming to us. Some of the boys are actually talking about going to work."

She laughed in spite of herself at this picture of dire distress, and then her face went grave.

"What—why *you* didn't lose all your money, too?"

"Nope, I've got ten cents left," he said.

"Why, my goodness!" she burst out, "why didn't you come and see me? Didn't I promise you I'd tell you when to sell?"

"Yes, and I notice also you were almighty particular to pay me off in *stock*. Nothing to it, I just had to take it!"

"Well, you could have sold it, couldn't you?" she demanded indignantly, sensing the anger behind his words. "What do you want to blame it on me for?"

"No, I couldn't sell it," he said, "and you knew I couldn't sell it! Why didn't you go out and sell it yourself? You knew it was no good, except to turn in at the broker's, but you shoved it off on me, anyway. I suppose you made a clean-up, yourself?"

"Yes, I did!" she admitted defiantly, "and if you'd had any sense *you* might have. I sold when it was high and bought it again when it was low, but, of course, you wouldn't come near me! I went out and tried to find you but——"

"Well—all right," he broke in gruffly, "I'm not blaming you. Come on! Where you going—down the gulch?"

"Yes, I'm out for a little walk," she answered weakly. "I get so tired, cooped up there all day."

"Better come along with me and be a prospector," he suggested with his old, engaging smile. "Have to live on jack rabbits and run 'em down yourself, but who minds a little thing like that?"

"Oh, I'd just love to!" she quavered. "But, of course, I couldn't do it. Do women ever prospect for mines?"

"Not that I know of," he said. "Mostly stay around the towns and let fellers like me bring it to 'em. Well, I may find another one, at that."

"Are you going out again?" she asked him soberly. "Oh, dear, I wish I could go. And that old Mr. Buck, I hardly got to see him—do you think I could meet him, some time?"

"Why, sure," he grinned. "What do you want to see him for? He's liable to touch you for a five—and that reminds me, Buck owes me eight hundred dollars! Well, say, ladies, that ain't so bad!"

He slapped his leg and she burst out laughing.

"Well, you're awfully brave," she confessed admiringly. "I was going to offer you a little loan myself. Because it was really you that got me to come to this country, it sounded so kind of—fascinating. But now, of course——"

"No, I won't need the money," he answered shortly and walked on in ruminating silence.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked when the silence became oppressive, and he roused up and glanced at her sharply.

"I'm thinking," he said, "about that thieving old Ketcherside—he's got my whole twenty thousand dollars. He bought my mine, and he bought my water, and now he's got all the money back—how the devil do you work for that rascal?"

"He isn't a rascal—and you don't need to swear! Mr. Ketcherside is a perfect gentleman."

"He's a dog-goned thief!" answered Tucker hotly, "and he don't care who he takes it from. We all lost, I reckon—except you."

"You don't seem to like me," she suggested dangerously, and he was quick to change his ground.

"Yes, I like you fine—or, at least, I would like you if you didn't work for that widow-robbing Ketcherside."

"What, leave Mr. Ketcherside? Why, if it wasn't for him I wouldn't have a dollar in the world. I'd just be working on a salary. But now I've got—well, I won't tell you how much, but I could retire on the interest to-morrow."

"Well, why don't you do it, then?" he came back insistently. "Can't you see what he's done to me? Why wait till he does it to you?"

"Well," she began, and then she paused awkwardly. "We are very good friends," she said.

"Oh!" he sneered, suddenly becoming mean and venomous. "Well, excuse *me,* then, Miss Cleghorn, for saying a word against your dear friend——"

"Now, that will do!" she warned. "Please don't pretend to misunderstand me—I said we were very good *friends.*"

"Yes, excuse me," he mocked, "it must be fine to have a friend that can even match the color of your hair; but if I were in your place I'd rather make less money and come by it a little more—yes, honestly."

"Why, don't you think it's honest to follow the market and make a profit from Mr. Ketcherside's tips? Because that's all I've done, and it's perfectly legitimate—there are hundreds of people that follow him."

"Well, if it looks honest to you it ought to satisfy me, but—well, I don't like it, that's all."

"And is that the reason," she demanded impulsively, "why you've never come to see me? Because I did want to know you, you seemed so kind of different, but ever since I've been here you've acted—hateful!"

"Yes, I am hateful," he acknowledged, "and I reckon I always will be, as long as you're working for that crook. He's a bad one, kid, don't you trust him too far——"

"Oh, you think——" she began and then she laughed softly. "I didn't think you'd be jealous," she said.

"Well, I am," he declared, "if that's what you call it—I can't stand it to have you working for that fellow. Them millionaires are all the same."

"Yes, they're awful, aren't they?" she jested light-heartedly. "But you don't need to worry about me. I guess I know how to protect myself."

"Oh, you're wise, I can see that," he conceded diffidently, "and, of course, I'm not in your class; but all the same, now you've made this big killing——"

"Well, I'll think the matter over," she said.

"Good enough," he agreed. "Say, it's getting dark down here—don't you think we'd better go back?"

"Oh, I'm not afraid," she laughed, "with you here to protect me. But I suppose we'd better turn back. When am I going to see you again, soon?"

"Well, I don't know," he said. "Not soon at all, I guess. I'm going way across Death Valley. But say, if I go broke I'll know who to come to——"

"Yes, I'll stake you," she promised. "And if you should find a mine——"

"I'll give you a job," he said. "You can be my secretary then and write all my letters. John D. Rockerfuller will be my errand boy, and Ira N. Ketcherside——"

"Oh, don't!" she entreated, and leaned against him reproachfully. "You know we were going to be *friends.*"

"*Who* was?" he demanded, pushing her roughly away from him; and then he caught her back regretfully. "Oh—you and *me,*" he said. "Say, I always misunderstand you. Ain't you afraid of the dark, Little Bright Eyes?"

"Not with you," she sighed. "Isn't it wonderful!"

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER NUGGET.

It *was* a wonderful night, and love is a wonderful thing, but Tucker did not take it too seriously; so many things had happened to jar his hold on reality that he accepted Julia as one thing more. It was just like stepping from the dirty street of Gold Trails into the glamour of the Picture Palace; and after Julia was gone it seemed, at first, as if he had witnessed a very good film. He was the rough-and-ready hero and she the charming heroine, and what was more natural than that she should lean against his breast and stay silent till he gave her a kiss? That was the way it was always done. But back at the corral, when he stopped to think it over, he fell a-tremble and saddled up his mule.

The night was like black velvet as he rode out across Dry Lakes, and the cold wind cut like a knife; but there was a tumult in his heart that drove him on through the darkness, oblivious to stars and wind. What did it mean, after all, this shy friendship and trust which she had so naïvely thrust upon him; was he such a wonderful man, or was she just lonely, or was there something else behind? Certainly there was nothing that she could hope to gain, for already he was reduced to ten cents—and she, perhaps, worth a hundred thousand—but somehow it didn't seem reasonable. And yet it was even harder to think of Julia Cleghorn as a cold and calculating vampire. She just didn't seem that kind.

Tucker lived the scene over a hundred times—the lonely gulch, the restless wind, and her—and then like a stab he remembered old Ketcherside and a curse rose unbidden to his lips. Tucker reined in his mule and thought.

"Aw, gwan!" he cried impatiently, and as he spurred on through the night he consigned all millionaires to perdition. It was part of their system to take the best of everything, and Julia was just one more—she had stepped into the pathway of a Juggernaut. But it had not run over her, and he had given her fair warning; if she followed his advice she would be safe. And if she persisted in spite of it—well, that was her lookout.

The sun came up as he was studying on a wild scheme to expose Ketcherside to the corporation commission; but Ketcherside had already been exposed once and the stock was back to five dollars—so much for the Blue Sky laws. No, the thing to do was to discover another mine and sell it to some money-mad promoter; and then he could call on Julia without having it appear that he had his eagle eye on her bank roll.

He looked up, and sighted Buck and his team. They were just coming up the wash, having left Lost Wagons at dawn, and Buck threw on the brake regretfully.

"What's this I hear?" he complained, "about you going broke? Well, I can't pay that money back, now. They've jest fired all the men that were working at the mine, and the first peep I make they'll fire *me.*"

"What for?" demanded Tucker, who was feeling none too amiable. "Ain't you taking a whole lot for granted?"

"Well, maybe I am and maybe I'm not," answered old Buck cautiously. "What do you mean—about your wanting your money?"

"Not much!" replied Tucker, "because I sure need every cent of it. But what would they want to fire *you* for?"

"For wanting my pay in cash," returned Buck mysteriously. "Don't these corporation methods beat hell? But it's the living

truth—they've fired all their miners because they wouldn't take their pay in stock."

"No!" exclaimed Tucker. "And are you taking stock, too? Well, say, you must have a wad of it. How much freight you getting—two hundred a ton?"

"No—fourteen eighty-five," confessed old Buck shame-facedly. "I haf to compete with these trucks."

"Well, what do you care, then?" cried Tucker indignantly, "if you do lose the dog-goned job? Say, you go into the office and tell 'em you want your money. I'm broke and I've got to raise a stake."

"They're a hard outfit," pronounced old Buck shaking his head despondently, "sometimes I think I'll quit. Only hauling one way—they ain't got no ore—and working for fourteen eighty-five. But I'll tell you, Tuck, I've got these mules to provide for and—say, I might pay you part of it in stock."

"No, you won't," snapped Tucker "do no such thing. That stock ain't worth hell room—not here. It may be in Frisco, where they've a regular Stock Exchange, but over in Gold Trails it's only good when you buy. Can't you trade some in at the store?"

"Well, I might," conceded Buck; "they been right accommodating, since I paid them off. But—oh, shucks, Tuck, I ain't got the stock. I've been gambling like the rest of 'em, on them cussed margins, and the slump must have viped me out, too."

"You bet it did," nodded Tuck, "it got every one of 'em. But *I* can't say anything, Buck. I dropped nine thousand two hundred, and ten thousand dollars' worth of stock that they paid me for a quitclaim on my mill site; so get me what you can, and fetch me out a quart of whisky—I might get snake bit, any time."

"All right!" shouted Buck, hastily throwing off his brake and bursting into a torrent of profanity; and as his mules lined out he gazed at them admiringly, jerking his head at the departing Tuck.

"The danged old walloper," muttered Tucker to himself as he rode on down the cañon, but his anger at old Buck was short-lived. When he arrived at his camp there was the sign on the gate again, and above it: No Trespassing Allowed. The gang of workmen were back, diverting the water from his alfalfa patch, and Shorty Swingle was camped outside the fence.

"What you doing out there?" Tuck yelled at him derisively. "Come on in—to Hades with this sign!"

He yanked the sign from its moorings above the location notice and hurled it wrathfully to the ground, and then, as the straw boss came up to warn him off again, he stuck out his chest and waited.

"Aw, go chase yourself a mile!" he bawled provocatively after the straw boss had spoken his little piece. "Why don't you come here and *put* me off?"

"Well," began the straw boss, and left the rest of it unsaid, for, after all, he was not hired to fight. And here, if he was any judge, was one young man who was just spoiling for a chance to start something.

"Come on in here!" commanded Tucker after he had thrown the gate open and led his mule inside; and Shorty Swingle, who had been looking on fearfully, followed after him with a wide-mouthed grin.

"Well, Tucker," he hollered, pitching his voice at fortissimo "I hear you sold your water right!"

"Got beat out of it!" exploded Tucker, "beat out of it by the company. Paid me off with a bunch of bum stock. And then, when I couldn't sell it I gambled it off, like the rest of those yaps in town. But this here's my camping place, and no man can put me off of it—unless this gentleman here would like to try?"

"Oh, no," responded the straw boss, who had paused to listen in, and Shorty leered knowingly at Tuck.

"That's the stuff," he said. "Say, when you were coming down the cañon did you see anything of my asses? They was all here yesterday and I was fixing to start this morning when Jim Farley come through from the mine.

" 'Well, Shorty,' he says, 'gitting ready to pull out?' And I seen old Johnny look up.

" 'Psst!' I says, 'the burros will hear ye!' And, sure enough, in the marning they was gone. I remember one time——"

"Aw, you and your danged burros!" exclaimed Tucker impatiently. "Why don't you let your ears grow a little longer and be done with it? Say, who the jumping Jehu has been stealing all my canned stuff? And, cripes, all the bacon is gone!"

"Yes, and everything else," nodded Shorty. "It was them thieving cousin Jacks from the mine. Jim Farley got his orders to fire every one of 'em and make 'em walk to town, and they come through here cussing

mad and made a raid on your grub pile. Jim Farley is quitting, too."

"He is?" cried Tucker. "What's the matter with Jim? Didn't he like the way things were run?"

"He did not!" returned Shorty. "I had quite a talk with him, having known him when he was 'supe' at the Mohawk; and he told me, on the level, they wouldn't let him sink for fear of knocking the bottom out of the mine. That mining expert, Brinkmeyer, wrote a report on the Lost Wagons that Jim says is nothing but bunk; and when they made him fire his men because they'd been talking too much, he went in and called for his time."

"Well, *good!*" declared Tucker, suddenly taking an interest in life.

"W'y that guy Ketcherside," shouted Shorty, speaking for all the world to hear, "is the closest man that ever squeezed a dollar. Jim had to account for his *nails*, and every little thing, and his books was gone over with a miscroscope. This Sinjin son of a goat that jumped your water, would come out and inspect 'em almost daily; and he got so swelled up he tried to tell Jim about *mining*, and wouldn't know gold if he saw it. Well, Jim was gitting a bellyful, with this Sinjin and all, and when this break come in the stock, leaving him flat with the rest, he give up in disgust and went out. And the word they give me now is that *Sinjin* is to be the 'supe,' and there won't be a white man on the job. Work nothing but Bohunks, that can't speak the language, and see if *they'll* complain to the commission!"

"Who was telling you all this?" demanded Tucker eagerly. "Is Sinjin coming out here for supe? I'll soup the bloody blaggard—and I'll singe the beggar, too. Oh, boys, I'm —going to stay *right here.*"

"L'ave him alone," counseled Shorty. "Have you heard about them nuggets? Well, psst—old Horse-shootum found another one."

"Another one!" echoed Tucker, and Shorty nodded meaningly.

"L'ave him alone," he said, "and we'll pluck him."

CHAPTER XIII.

HORSE-SHOOTUM SAVVIES GOLD.

Revenge is a base passion and, just for that reason, it satisfies something deep in human nature; it cuts, like vinegar, into the oil of self-complacency and like a sword it lays presumptuousness low. But, where the dog hair is deep on the human breast, it strikes down the just with the unjust. Crosby S. St. John was a painfully upright man, whose books always balanced to a cent, but he was working for Ketcherside and that was reason enough for Tucker and Shorty Swingle to hate him. He went past late that day with a truckload of Bohunks, and they planned petty larceny all night; but with the dawn Tucker was up and looking for his mules, for he had felt the call of the trail. Let Shorty and Horse-shootum comb the wash for lost nuggets—he was out to locate a mine.

Not that he loved Sinjin more or the nuggets of gold less, but he scorned a petty revenge. It would be pleasing, of course, to find the nuggets by night and sell them to Sinjin by day; but there was bigger game afoot, larger issues to be met, a greater grudge to be fed fat at last. Ketcherside was the man whose heart's blood he was after, and the only bait to hook him was with a mine. Yes, find another mine—even salt it, if necessary, with some high-grade ore from Lost Wagons—and then ramp into town with both hands full of gold and sell him the hole for a million. Soak him good and then clear out, taking Julia Cleghorn with him, and let the human Juggernaut plow on.

Such were Tucker's fond dreams, and he waited impatiently for old Buck to return with his grubstake; for where he was going there were neither stores nor houses—he was headed for Tucki Mountain. It stood out black and forbidding above the haze of Death Valley; and the sandstorms of Lost Valley, when they beat against its base, barely lapped to the mouths of its cañons. It rose up like a sentinel, dividing Death Valley to the south from the long, sandy reaches to the north; and only in three places could water be found by anything less agile than a mountain sheep. But rich float had been discovered along the bed of the Washboard, and somewhere up the cañon was the vein.

After the Lost Gunsight Mine, the Breifogle, and the Lost Spanish, this mine up the Washboard was the most sought after by prospectors, but so far it had not been found. Tucker decided to start out alone.

All he needed was the grubstake which Buck would get him at the store, along with

the bottle of whisky; but the sun was sinking solemnly behind the ridges of Dry Mountain before the long string of mules hove in sight. They swung through the portals and down the long wash, and then across the flat to Lost Wagons; and as Tucker sat waiting he heard through the dusk the words of a song that he knew:

> Oh, mother dear, kiss me good-ni-ight,
> For I my evening prayers have said.
> I'm tired now and sleepy too-oo,
> So put me in my little bed.

"The dog-goned old walloper!" he yelled to Shorty Swingle, "he's gone and drunk up all my whisky!"

The team pulled up the wash and swung north toward the mine, and as they took the sharp turn the nigh pointers and swing mules leaped over the tense chain like cats. They scrabbled off at right angles, holding a crook in the chain; and the great wagons lumbered after them, holding the ruts to a nicety, but old Buck said never a word. He had slumped down on his load and was oblivious to it all, still crooning his childhood's song. The leaders straightened out the chain and listened expectantly, swiveling their ears to catch the final "Whoa!" but the song which he sang was familiar to them, too, and with one accord they stopped. They knew when Buck was drunk.

"Where's my grub?" demanded Tucker when he had swarmed up over the wheel and roused old Buck from his dreams; and then in disgust he turned and unhooked the mules and gave them their water and feed. Buck had failed him again, there was no grubstake in the wagons and the whisky was a total loss.

"Well, for cripes' sake!" railed Tuck, after he had got Buck into camp. "Haven't you got any pride or nothing? Here I lend you my money and take care of your mules and treat you, by grab, like a gentleman, and here you turn around and drink up all my whisky and don't even bring out my bacon. How the devil do you think I can get along in camp——"

"Oh, I'll fix you!" promised Buck, "I'm kind of dizzy right now—old man, ain't as strong as I was—but you wait till morning—got to git a little rest, first. Say, I'm sleepy—whyn't you put me to bed?"

"The crazy, drunken fool!" cursed Tucker bitterly and went off and left him to sing.

Tucker roused up with the dawn and sat gloomily on his snake bed, surveying the wreck of all his hopes. His great pile of canned goods had dwindled to almost nothing, even Shorty had raided his tent; and the two huge wagons were loaded with freight consigned to the Lost Wagons Mine. There was bacon there, to be sure, and flour and sugar, but it was carefully crated and baled; and if any crate was broken into it would cost old Buck his job, so there was the end to that. Of money he had none, so there was no use going back to town, and without provisions he could not start on his trip; and every day, while he waited, Julia was alone there with Ketcherside and the Juggernaut machine was moving on. He dropped down and went into the tent.

There was lots of corned beef, and a case of tomatoes that would help him eat the beef; a big sack of weevily corn meal, a jug of bitter sorghum, and left overs, tramped into the dirt. But, well, the Indians seemed to live on it, so a white man ought not to die—he threw the stuff together and began to pack.

"Hooo—hum," sighed a voice, and old Horse-shootum sifted through the fence, "hoo—hum, Injun hungly—no got nothin'."

"Aw, shut up!" snarled Tucker without glancing up. "Well, here—you want some more corned beef?"

"Injun col'," he complained, huddling over the fire, "no got coffee—shugee—nothin'!"

"Well, neither have I!" answered Tucker viciously. "Here, smell of that bottle!" he said.

Horse-shootum clutched at the bottle, which old Buck had emptied, and then laid it away regretfully.

"Meee findum mine," he announced and waited expectantly, but Tucker did not respond. "Hooo—hum," sighed Horse-shootum, and after fumbling interminably he produced a piece of gold from his clothing.

"Lemme look at that!" rapped out Tucker, suddenly roused from his meditations by the glint of the precious ore; and as he examined the nugget, he discovered a coating of lime, stuck fast to one side of the metal.

"Where you ketchum?" he inquired, holding his voice down carefully, but Horse-shootum had been watching his face.

"How much you pay?" he demanded. "Maybeso Injun showum. Him gol', savvy? Injun savvy gol'!"

"Ye-es, Injun savvy lots of things," jeered

Tucker absently, for his mind had begun to race. It rushed through a thousand facts in the course of a minute, and he handed the nugget back. But one thing he knew—the gold at Lost Wagons took its origin from a limestone formation. There was ore somewhere, in place, or, if not in place, then recently washed from the vein; but at the end of his brain storm he still failed to see how he could turn that information to his advantage. The Lost Wagons Mine was sold, and held at ten million, and all the other ground was held, and Personality Plus would be no easier to deal with than Ira N. Ketcherside himself. It would be interesting, of course, to follow this savage and find where he had discovered the gold; but, in the first place, he would never show it and, in the second place, if he did, it would only make Ketcherside rich.

"How much you want—that rock?" asked Tucker at last; and at the end of half an hour, after boiling him up some coffee, he bought it from Horse-shootum for his tent.

"You ketchum more?" inquired Tucker. "You ketchum more gold? Well, you look out—new superintendent come. No likum Injun—*muy malo hombre,* savvy? He takum gold away, understand?"

"Him takum 'way?" leered Horse-shootum craftily. "No good—me sellum sto'."

"Store takum 'way, too," warned Tucker mendaciously. "Gold come from mine—you savvy? You bringum gold to me—I pay you plenty, understand?"

"You give Injun glub?" demanded Horse-shootum, pointing at the remnant in the tent, and Tucker nodded briefly.

CHAPTER XIV.

INGRATITUDE.

Tucker Edwards had mules, and he kept one of them tied up, but they were restless and fretted to be gone; and when he made a dry camp at the mouth of Washboard Cañon, the two left their mate and departed. He rode them down at last and continued on to Stovepipe Hole, where he watered them well and returned; but the day was gone, and part of the night, when he got back to his tarp-covered packs. He explored the cañon hastily, prospecting the bed rock for gold until he came to a hundred-foot waterfall, and with his gravel in sacks he rode twenty miles west till he came to Emigrant Springs. Here was water in plenty but not a blade of grass, the wild burros having fed it down clean; so he pastured his animals far up in a side cañon and washed out his dirt at the spring. It showed colors of fine gold and, his first quest being satisfied, he set out to discover its source.

Up over a winding trail he toiled to the top of Tucki Mountain, as level as a plain and waving with bunch grass, but as dry as the Jornada del Muerto. Yet a trail went down somewhere, for Shorty Swingle had found it, and it led to his camp at Lost Springs; so Tucker took a chance and, heading his mules down a sheep path, struck the water a few minutes before dark. No mountain sheep were there to stampede his mules, and the grass was growing rank among the rocks; but the ground was so rough that it was dangerous to hobble them, though the moment he released them they would be gone. Some presence seemed to lurk there that kept them snuffing the air and plunging in mad panics among the rocks; and at the end of two days, spent in climbing from cliff to cliff, Tucker decided that his destiny lay elsewhere. The Lost Breifogle might be found, and even the famous Gunsight, but the Washboard was hid from an eagle.

He spent two long weeks around Emigrant Springs, mostly hunting for his mules, and living on corn pone; and finally, in a rage, he threw on his scant packs and turned their heads toward home. They took the trail at a trot and jogged on for miles, crooking their necks and bounding for joy; and as Tucker rode on behind them something told him that it was well, that there was nothing on Tucki for him.

They passed through the box cañon with its mysterious caves and its walls painted yellow and red, and when they broke into the open the leaders stood at gaze, their ears pointing rigidly ahead. Miles and miles of wash bowlders stretched out before them, leading down at last to the Sink; but Tucker could see nothing, either living or dead, in all that desolate space. He scanned the dim trail, where it circled Black Point and became lost in the sand hills beyond, and all the barren reaches of the wash; but whatever it was lay beyond his ken and he yelled at his leaders to go on. Then he lapsed into a reverie while his mules jogged gayly on, swinging down into the Valley of Death.

What a world they lived in, these long-eared mules, a world that was all their own;

they sensed things undreamed of by the man who hazed them on, things the half of which were never revealed. Perhaps it was the taint of some distant, gruesome carcass, which the kit foxes had not wholly devoured; or of some hidden man, lying in wait for him in the sand hills, or running crazy among the mesquite trees below. Or perhaps it was Shorty Swingle and his four trick burros, coming down the long valley to the north; old friends from up above, where Lost Wagons lay hidden behind the dim shoulder of the hills. It was either friends or good luck, for they still hurried on until at last they rounded Black Point. Then once more the leaders stopped, their quivering ears pointing, and far across the valley he saw a line.

It was more than a line, for, as he watched it, it moved, creeping wormlike along the edges of the hills; as if a wraith of the old days of twenty-mule teams had risen up through the quivering mirage. But the old borax road was now a mere wagon track, crusted over with glistening alkali, and a twenty-mule team was as likely to be there as—— Tucker squinted down his eyes and gazed. Yes, sure as the breeze that was blowing against his cheek, that line was a twenty-mule team; the mules had seen it, too. And they could smell the mules, had smelled them for an hour on the wind that sucked up the wash. The team rounded a white hill, and he saw the squares of the wagons, two big ones and a water tank behind. But—could those wagons be Buck's?

It was a long way from Black Point to the camp at Stovepipe Hole, but Tucker rode hard and got there first. He bailed out the hole hastily and scraped the slime from the sides, so that the water would run in fresh, and then he unpacked and hobbled out his mules, keeping well out of sight at the last. The great team circled the point and pulled in across the flat and, as they came past the old bottle house where the stage station had once been, Tuck stepped demurely out.

"'Lo, Buck!" he hailed. "I thought you'd be coming. Git down and I'll help you unhitch."

"Whoa—*what?*" yelled Buck, setting his brakes with a crash, and Tucker gave way to a grin.

"Git down," he said, "and I'll help you unhitch. Where you going—Mohave or Daggett?"

"Who told you?" demanded Buck, "that I'd be coming this way? I don't want no funny business, understand?"

"No, that's all right," placated Tucker, "going to camp here to-night? I cleaned out the water hole for you."

"Oh, you're clever as hell," snarled old Buck ungraciously. "But lemme tell you something, young man: I been trying all my life to git me a stake, and what I've got is mine!"

"Oh, sure, sure!" agreed Tucker; "don't pay no attention to me. How's everything up at the mine?"

"Are you working for them dastards?" rasped old Buck dangerously, and Tucker shook his head.

"Nope," he said, and lasped into silence as old Buck reached back for his gun.

"Well, you may think you're smart," observed Buck at last, "but what's mine is mine, understand?"

"Sure," assented Tucker, and turned away to light a fire, at which Buck put down his gun. He was proceeding now with businesslike directness to unhook his long team of mules and, as he drove them down to water, Tucker glanced into one of the wagons and was relieved to discover baled hay. Maybe the old man wasn't so crazy, after all. He peeked into the other one, which was half full of grain; but as he was stepping down off the wheel Buck yelled at him savagely, and he ducked as if he had been shot.

"You keep out of them wagons!" ordered Buck peremptorily, and Tucker nodded obediently. Then, to avoid further offense, he retreated to his own camp and began preparing a frugal meal. Frugal was hardly the word for it—it was downright miserable—nothing but corned beef and weevily corn pone. No coffee, no sugar—nothing. Buck tied his mules to the tongues and poured their grain into the canvas feed troughs, and then he came over and surveyed Tucker's supper with an air of intolerant amusement.

"They don't feed you very good," he commented at length, and Tucker laid down his knife.

"No," he said, slightly ruffled by the scrutiny, "but I notice you're provided with the best. You may be crazy, Mr. Buck, and you may be drunk, but I'd advise you not to crowd me too far."

"Well, you don't need to git mad about

it," defended Buck, suddenly subsiding. "I thought you was working for the company."

"Help yourself," retorted Tucker with biting scorn. "Think anything you want to —it don't make any difference to me. You're so dad-burned fancy a man can't look into your wagon without getting a call-down like a hobo—did you ever stop to think that you owe me eight hundred dollars? And you lived on my grub for months."

"Well—hell!" protested Buck; "ain't I going to pay you back?"

"Ye-es! You came clean down here, didn't you, just to give me the money! Garn, you make me tired."

"Well, I'll pay ye," complained Buck, "only I can't do it now—that is, without cramping myself bad. I've got the money, or a part of it, right here in my pocket—that is, I've got forty dollars—but I've got to buy hay for my mules at the ranch and get——"

"Aw, forget it!" snarled Tucker, "and go get me some of that coffee. I never thought you'd hold out like that!"

"Oh, coffee, coffee!" spoke up old Buck briskly. "Why, certainly, why didn't you mention it? Got some nice bacon, too, and some——"

"Bring it all!" thundered Tucker. "I'm starving, I tell you. And, say, what about that whisky?"

It was a shot in the dark, but it made a dead center, for Buck began to palter and evade.

"Here's some jam," he called as he opened up his grub box. "By grab, Tuck, sorry to see you so low."

"Yes, too bad about you!" yelled Tucker. "If you're so dog-goned sorry, why don't you come through and bring out that *whisky?* Dod-rot you, you old walloper, your heart's so frozen in your breast, you'd let a man die of the snake bite!"

"You been snake bit?" yelped Buck. "Well, why didn't you say so?" And he dug deep and fetched up a bottle.

"That's the stuff!" sighed Tucker as he reached out and sampled it, and he pushed Buck away with one hand. "Here, have one yourself," he suggested.

"No! Ain't drinking!" declared Buck, driving the cork in resolutely. "That's what's ruined my life, this whisky! But now that I've made a stake—well, I'll join you in a little one. You've been a good friend to me, Tuck."

"Think so?" jeered Tucker. "Well, you danged old, drunken reprobate; what's all this I hear about a stake, then? If you've struck something good, why don't you let a man in on it, instead of——"

"Oh, nothing, nothing," broke in Buck, his hand beginning to tremble. "Here, have another drink—have a drink!"

"No!" answered Tucker, and gazed at him searchingly. "Buck!" he threatened, "dad-blast you, you're lying to me! Haven't I always been your friend?"

"Yes, you have," conceded Buck. "But I'll tell you now, Tucker, I cain't let you have that forty dollars. I want it, and I need it, and I've jest got to have it, or I can't buy no hay for my mules. And it's a long, hard trip, from Furnace Crick to Barstow——"

"Oh, that's where you're going," said Tucker.

"Yes—I'm going to Barstow," admitted Buck reluctantly, at the same time taking a drink. "But don't tell nobody, Tuck, up above. Because they might wire ahead and then——"

"What you been doing?" demanded Tucker, suddenly sensing something big, but Buck shook his gray beard dourly.

"I've been working all my life!" he cried out vehemently, "trying to provide for my last, declining days. I'm an old man, Tuck, and——"

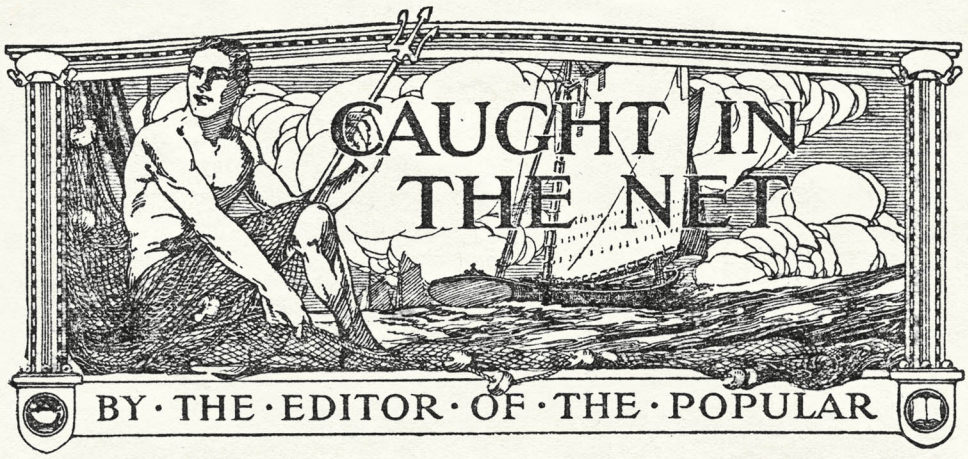
"Yes, and you owe me eight hundred!" reminded Tuck.

"Oh, I'll pay ye!" whined Buck. "What's eight hundred dollars? I'll pay ye when I git to the railroad. But—say, I came off from up above without collecting my freight money. I could give you an order for that."

"Ah! You and your freight money!" scoffed Tucker heartlessly. "Do you remember that time when you was lost, down in the wash, and I rode down and brought you in? Did I hold out on anything I had? No, I gave you the best of everything; I put your mules in my alfalfa and let 'em eat it plumb to the ground. And then I took your wagon and went and stole 'em some grain. Did I hold out on any of that? But now you, you old screw——"

"Well, I'll tell ye," yielded old Buck. "Gimme a drink."

TO BE CONTINUED.



WELCOME ARRIVALS

IN our present need of all sorts of labor, the latest immigration figures afford considerable encouragement. While the number of foreigners leaving our shores continues large, the tide seems to have definitely turned in our direction once more. In August last there was again an increase in the number of those entering the United States from foreign countries, through the port of New York. Our net gain through that port, for that month, in immigrant population, was 21,000—58,000 coming in as against 37,000 going out. In September, the receiving station at Ellis Island was at times taxed beyond its capacity.

These newcomers continue to include a large number of women and children. While doubtless many of these women will have to give most of, if not their entire, attention to their family and household duties, it is to be hoped that some of them will be available for filling to some extent the sadly depleted ranks of domestic servants. The improvement in the general labor supply, by reason of the male arrivals, needs no comment.

Cause for renewed optimism in regard to the general labor supply situation is by no means confined to the figures of arrival and departure cited above. The figures for the port of New York, from practically the first of this year to August 31st, have been increasingly encouraging, from month to month. While in the first month of the year there was recorded only a slight gain in our foreign population and, in February, a small net loss was registered, the ensuing months, up through August, showed distinct gains for us. In March there was a net gain of arrivals over departures of over 10,000; in April, the same; in May, only a little less. By June the net gain advanced to 12,000. In June was realized a gain of 23,000, and the balance in our favor for August, as cited above, was not far behind this figure. For the whole eight-month period the increase in incomers over outgoers, at the port of New York, amounted to nearly 95,000.

Compared with the figures for the last six months of 1919, for the country as a whole —referring to arrivals and departures in all parts of the country and not confined to the port of New York alone—these 1920 reports are very heartening. During the last half of 1919 we registered about four thousand more departures than we did arrivals. It is satisfying, however, to note that of the immigrants of this 1919 period all but about 20,000 were classed as skilled labor, while of those who left us only about thirty per cent were rated as skilled—as welcome a fact, in its way, as the increase in this year's inflow. Canada sent us some 45,000 of the 1919 immigration—more than any other one country. The next largest contributor was Italy, with nearly 29,000. Mexico sent over the border to us about 23,000 and the quota from the British Isles was in the neighborhood of 18,000, the balance coming from the various other countries in smaller scattering numbers.

GOLDFIELD IS STILL WITH US

SEVERAL months ago it looked to us as though the famous mining town of Goldfield, county seat of the renowned gold district of Nevada, was fast becoming a deserted camp. In illustration of this we stated that Goldfield's luxurious "desert" hotel had sung its swan song and was to be taken down. We were right in taking the prosperity of a community's best hotel to be fair indication of the place's vitality, but later advices inform us that the report of that swan song was premature. We learn that the hostelry in question, under new management, still busily continues to be one of the best between Denver and the Pacific coast—a fact which we are glad to cite merely as significant of the distance Goldfield really is from dissolution.

Indeed, far from being defunct, we are told that Goldfield has not looked better, in a mining way, for years, than it does now. Properties in general are reported as appearing very good, both in Goldfield proper and in the outlying gold district as a whole—eloquent of which state of affairs is the news that the "Deep Mines" will sink a shaft to the 2000-foot level and that the "Tonopah Divide" is down to the 1000-foot level and is crosscutting. Also, though out of operation for the past two years, the mill which has shipped most of the gold bullion out of Goldfield—the "Con" mill—is again dropping its stamps, every day, in the same old way. Evidently the camp is not in the least as yet to be classed as one of the West's "ghost cities." No more so, writes one of our correspondents, is its near-by northerly neighbor Tonopah, where all the large mines are running and the bullion shipments show a greater production of the white metal than ever before.

It has possibly passed out of the memory of many that gold was discovered in Tonopah before it was in Goldfield, by about a couple of years—the discovery of the metal in Goldfield not coming until 1902. In 1904 the whole Goldfield district produced 800 tons of ore, which yielded gold to the value of $2,300,000. In 1907 the output had jumped to $8,408,396. Incidentally Goldfield holds a place in our history records independent of that which it has earned through its purely business activity. It will always be associated with the figure of Roosevelt, who, in December of 1907, sent Federal troops there to control the dangerous situation which had arisen out of the troubles of that year between the miners and owners. Not only does the camp abound in vitality yet, but it shares with the coal center of Homestead the distinction of having been so exceedingly full of vitality as to have necessitated the chastening rod of Uncle Sam himself, though Roosevelt refused to let that rod hang over Goldfield any longer than for the time necessary for the organization of a State police force, which was effected within a couple of months. It is not strange that a place so rich in "pep" in its youth is still far from ratable among the "dead ones." We hope it long continues to be so.

CAMERA HUNTING SPORT

THE pleasures of outdoor hunting are available to all who would seek them, and the modern sporting weapon is more often a camera than any other instrument. The bow and arrow is so nearly extinct in the hunting field that it is a curiosity. Marks are taking the place of living flesh for the bullets of powder-driven projectiles. But there are more and more cameras abroad, and snap pictures outnumber the shots with firearms. There are more cameras than sporting weapons, and the great trophies of the camera chase are found ten to one, a thousand to one, compared with the deer heads, moose heads, and bearskin rugs.

There is no closed season on taking pictures, but there is a certain element of sporting chance in the game. One cannot go about promiscuously photographing, for example, pretty girls along the seashore, without sooner or later running against the great American fist, the hand like a bunch of bananas.

It takes as much skill to capture a good picture as to capture a good deer head. Not only are the light and shade elements, the mechanical difficulties, and the light-streak mishaps baffling, but there is a vast field of skill, inspiration, and luck to work with; there is a certain moment when a wave breaking is fair game for the camera, bringing us a lovely bit of art. On either side of that moment, the result would be commonplace.

In a crowd, one flash will reveal a pictorial moment, and, once caught, the photograph of it becomes a monument of the sporting genius of the picture hunter. The leading citizen is most commonplace as he strolls along the main thoroughfare, but there is a brief instant when his own bearing, and that of his enemy in passing, reveals his power and the enemy's weakness. Hunting the critical moment with a camera is real sport!

THE DESERT'S CUPBOARD

ARCTIC regions with their barren waste of snow and ice, offer the explorer a better chance for his life than does the great American desert, whose shifting sand hills are continually uncovering the bleached skeletons of its victims. Bones of white men, these are, for the burning waste of sand and cactus, while a death-trap to the white men, is a friendly land of plenty to the digger Indian. His racial genius for trailing down nature's life-saving secrets enables him to find food and drink beside the parched remains of his heedless white brother.

Does thirst come upon the red man? He has but to open up one of the barrel cactus, that dot the desert at convenient intervals, and help himself to its stored-up water. Is he hungry? He dines off the flower buds that grow in a pretty circle around its lid; boiled, these buds make a delicious dish tasting much like chestnuts. The barrel itself serves as a convenient cooking vessel. Indeed, if the various cacti were the only plants on the desert, the Indian would have a perfectly balanced ration, ranging from proteins to honey-sweet confection.

However, practically every plant that grows on the desert furnishes a fruit or seed or root good for human consumption. Most highly concentrated foods these are. For nature, careless and spendthrift though she is in well-watered countries, is a conservation extremist in the arid places of the earth, forcing upon her desert growth a ruthless economy that eliminates all unessential tissue even to leaves. As a result of this economic efficiency, the mesquite produces a bean that bears the unique distinction of having a fifty-per-cent food value. Yet it is excelled by the chia seed, a handful of which, ground and roasted, will support a man through a day's continuous running.

In addition to supplying food and drink, these versatile plants of the desert provide all necessary material for Indian handicraft: fiber for basket weaving, cord for snares and slings; and certain accommodating vegetables go so far as to grow seeds in the shape of rivets, screws, and springs. The need of toilet articles is not overlooked. Hairbrushes grow on bushes; and no drug-store soap can excel the Yucca root for the shampoo.

In fact, the desert rivals a Chicago mail-order house in the variety of ready-made wares. Everything is carried in stock from fever medicine to glue pots and oil-soaked torches. And long before our "pepsins" and "spearmints" were invented, it was hanging as chewing gum on the bushes for the spoiled aborigine. Also, it hospitably supplies him with "coyote tobacco." And there is a bootlegging cactus growing in a fluted column some twenty feet high, which, for his moments of relaxation, distills an intoxicating drink that rivals the notorious mescal in power of kick. In certain instances this indulgence amounts to rank favoritism; for there is a sickly sweetish flower, resembling our obnoxious jimpson weed, which is said to endow the eater with clairvoyance, enabling him to read his opponent's cards!

Nature is never niggardly, but in places like the desert, where economy is absolutely necessary, she may lock the cupboard so that only those who have the patience to find the key may eat and drink.

PRACTICING FOR SHOOTING SKILL

THE old-time cowboy, "bad man," "two-gun man," and all the other supreme shooters, shot their firearms regardless of expense. They became skillful, as did Wild Bill, by constant practice every day, with their weapons. The conspicuous trees along the highways in Jesse James' country were fairly shot to pieces by passing horsemen. The old muzzle-loading Colts, the later cartridge guns, were emptied thousands of times through their muzzles. But there is a great change where gun marksmanship is still a necessary skill for any reason.

In the border cattle country, home of the .45 Colts, and now the land of the .45 automatic, many a man practices with a smaller weapon. Instead of shooting the expensive .30-.30, a .22 rifle serves quite as well. Even the big revolvers and heavy automatics give way to the .22 automatic and single-shot pistols. One can shoot a .22 caliber more than 150 times for the same cost as shooting a .45 caliber fifty times. Economy is the road to good marksmanship.

If one would learn to shoot, 10,000 shots with a .22-automatic pistol will prepare the way to becoming "good" with a .45 automatic. One needs to shoot only fifty or a hundred times with a heavy weapon to "get the hang of it," if he has practiced with the small, light, inexpensive loads of the first-class .22 pistol. Even Uncle Sam trains the naval shooters of 14-inch guns by auxiliary barrels that fire a one-inch shell, instead of the half-ton projectiles. For smaller cannon, the .30-caliber government rifle cartridge is used.

One who shoots ten shots a day with a .22-caliber rifle will in a year or two become a good marksman; thirty deliberate, well-aimed shots a day, rain or shine, blow high or low, makes an expert; one who goes afield with a .22 repeater, shooting English sparrows or starlings, finds hunting skill and marksmanship that insures success against deer or bear.

POPULAR TOPICS

IN the last century about thirty-four million immigrants have entered the United States. From the British Isles there came 8,205,676; from Germany, 5,495,539; from Italy, 4,100,740; from Austria-Hungary, 4,068,448; from Russia, 3,311,406; and from Scandinavia, 2,134,414.

NEW YORK CITY'S population is growing so fast that its transportation facilities are having hard work keeping pace with it. Last year the subways carried 1,333,000,000 passengers. It is estimated that by 1945 they will have to carry five billion passengers a year. To make this possible it is planned to add many miles of subway to the present system, at a cost of about three hundred and fifty million dollars.

SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE MEREDITH reports wonderful results from the establishment of new crops in the United States. A quarter of a million dollars spent in establishing durum wheat has resulted in an annual crop valued at fifty millions. California rice cost $200,000 to introduce, and yields a crop worth $21,000,000 annually, and forty thousand dollars spent in introducing Egyptian cotton has resulted in a yearly crop valued at $20,000,000.

WE don't know whether or not prohibition had anything to do with it, but the figures say that coffee consumption in the United States, for the year ending June 30th last, increased 399,000,000 pounds over the preceding year—a per capita increase of 3.71 pounds. The latest figures say that we consume 1,358,000,000 pounds in a year—a per capita consumption of 12.7 pounds.

THE potential water power of the United States is estimated at 49,536,460 H. P., of which only 19.8 per cent, or 9,823,540 H. P., is at present developed. Water-power development of navigable streams, now contemplated under new Federal bills, would add 2,000,000 H. P. to the present total.

JAPAN insists upon keeping right in the van of the march of progress. The "Yankees of the East" now have decided upon the electrification of their railways, at a cost of 200,000,000 yen. This improvement will make it possible to reduce the number of locomotives in service by forty per cent.

THE French automobile industry, which employs two hundred and fifty thousand workers, is in bad condition. Gasoline and tires have each increased three hundred per cent in cost, and the price of lubricants is abnormally high. As a result many people who used to ride now walk. The interdiction of the importation of American cars, until conditions have changed for the better, is talked of.

BEFORE the outbreak of the World War we sent abroad between sixty-five and seventy per cent of our raw cotton. We now export only forty per cent of it. In the last six years we have increased our exports of manufactured cotton goods six hundred per cent. In 1919 they reached $151,997,524.

FIFTY years ago Australian sportsmen introduced the English rabbit into their country. Bunny throve so well and multiplied so rapidly that he soon became a costly resident. In the last thirty years, it is estimated, the rabbits have eaten more than a billion dollars' worth of food, and have ruined many farmers. Many methods of killing them off have been tried, as many as 600,000 rabbits having been killed in one drive, but to no avail. Doctor Pasteur, the French scientist, tried to do away with them by innoculating some with chicken cholera, a contagious disease, and turning them loose, but even that didn't help much. During the droughts of the last few years countless rabbits died of starvation, and conditions are better now than they have been for many years.

THE American Association of Port Authorities says that in the next three years seven hundred and fifty million dollars will be spent in the development of North American harbors. Two-thirds of this sum will be spent in the United States.

THE population of New York State is now 10,384,144. In the last ten years there has been an increase of 1,270,530, or 13.9 per cent. Over half the people of the Empire State live in New York City, which has a population of 5,620,048, and which shows an increase of 17.9 per cent for the last decade. The assessable wealth of the city, for 1921, is estimated at close to ten billion dollars—greater than that of many foreign countries. It costs $340,000,000 a year to run the big town.

IN the present state of the world, strong armies and navies are very necessary. Also, they are very costly. In 1914 we spent $140,840,614 on our navy; in 1920 it will cost us $432,000,000. In the same period the cost of our army has increased from $99,074,601 to $377,246,944. Great Britain's army will cost her $600,000,000 this year—almost three times as much as in prewar days, but it is said that the cost of her navy will be less than it was in 1914. France will spend 2,735,000,000 francs on her army and navy. Italy's figures for 1920 have not been announced, but her budget for 1921 calls for $235,000,000 for her navy, and $200,000,000 for her army. In 1914 Japan spent $46,000,000 for her navy and $49,000,000 for her army. Her 1920 naval expenditures have not been announced, but in 1921 she will spend $176,000,000. This year her army will cost her $205,000,000.

NO prices have been quoted recently on kingly thrones, but it is quite certain that one could be picked up at a bargain in Russia, Austria, or Germany. Probably it would cost considerably less than a seat on the New York Stock Exchange, which is now worth ninety thousand dollars.

More Ways Than One

By Giles L. Corey

Everything comes to him who waits. But if Charles W. Bridgman had known what was waiting for him he wouldn't have come

CHARLES W. BRIDGMAN'S snicker-snee knew no brother. He would come gullumphing back through the gloaming with your financial head and would set it to dry in his wigwam, chortling the while as gleefully as if it was another's. Nature had armed him cap-a-pie for tilting on the Field of the Pots of Gold, and, like a small boy with a gun, he was ever out for blood. Being a pothunter pure and simple, he had no foolish notions of sportsmanship and would shoot a sitting cottontail with a scatter gun and without compunction.

Perhaps the messiest butchery of his long and profitable career was the slaughter of Billy Young.

Billy, aged twenty-one, arrived in Indianapolis with a draft for twenty-five thousand dollars, his entire patrimony, fresh from the careful hand of his late guardian. The Hoosier State had never produced a more verdant specimen than Billy, but the saving grace was that he knew that he was green. He was come to the city to make his fortune, of course, but he was cannily resolved not to invest his capital until he had learned the ropes.

Fate, the flirtatious goddess, guided his hopeful feet, per medium of a male-help-wanted ad, to the office of the Empire Manufacturing Company, which was looking for an honest, bright, ambitious and industrious youth to assist with the clerical work and to grow up with the business, for the sum of five dollars per week. The chance to grow was just what Billy was looking for and his modest claim to the other qualifications, backed by his general appearance, got him the job.

The Empire Manufacturing Company, a corporation, was engaged in the manufacture and sale of a patented novelty needed in every well-regulated household, and its capital stock was owned by Bridgman, except two shares which were held by his wife and brother to make up the required number of incorporators.

Billy went to work in his quiet, steady-going way, and his honesty, brilliance, ambition, and industry were attested by frequent, though very small, raises in salary, it being Bridgman's unfailing rule never to pay more than half what an employee was really worth. Billy acquired no outside interests aside from reading a good deal and going to the theater once or twice a week, and his application enabled him to learn the business thoroughly in little over a year. He learned, too, that it was growing rapidly and that its profits were over one hundred per cent.

Consequently he was voraciously hungry for the bait when Bridgman said, one day, that he was going to sell the business, as he could not afford to let his other interests suffer to fool with a little concern like that. Billy at once asked him what the stock could be bought for, and, though Bridgman was a director of the bank in which Billy's funds were deposited, it may have been only a coincidence that in making a price on the stock he accurately sized Billy's pile.

The following morning the deal was closed, the stenographer and the foreman lending their names to keeping up the corporate character of the company. When the Bridgmans were well away from the office, Bridgman said to the others, "It is, indeed, fortunate that one is born every minute and that some of them grow up." He patted the pocket containing the check for Billy's twenty-five thousand dollars with all of the satisfaction of a gourmet rubbing a paunch with good capon lined.

On an afternoon about three months later, Billy felt the urge to study history. He got the corporation minute book out of the safe, lit his pipe, tilted back his chair, settled his feet on a convenient table, and began at the beginning. He had turned but two leaves when pipe and feet clattered to the floor and the book and Billy's elbows occupied

the table as he breathlessly read the minutes of the first meeting of the board of directors.

Therein he read that whereas one Charles W. Bridgman was the sole owner, by assignment before issue, of letters patent of the United States of America, securing to him the sole right to manufacture and to vend a certain improved article which it was deemed advisable for the newly formed corporation to make and to sell; and, whereas, the said Bridgman had proposed to execute a lease of such entire rights to said company for a period of three years from date and to pay the sum of ten thousand dollars for the entire capital stock of said company, it was moved, seconded, and carried by a unanimous, affirmative vote that such proposition be accepted. Billy read this minute three or four times. Then he grabbed his hat, picked up his pipe, and hastened to the offices of Judge Urmston, an old friend of his father.

"Well, Billy," said the old lawyer, after reading the record and asking a few questions, "you have been scientifically, artistically, and hopelessly skinned—skun, I should say, as that word best fits the brutally primitive manner in which it was done. You were well-enough informed as to the business end of the deal, but you were out of your element on the legal side of it, and you have come to me too late. You knew when the patent was issued and you merely assumed that the company had acquired entire title to it and that its monopoly was secured to it to the end of the life of the patent. Instead of that, you have to quit business on the tenth day of next month. You were bound with constructive knowledge of what the corporate records contained and Bridgman made no direct misrepresentation to the contrary.

"Bridgman is a shrewd, calculating individual, and he is careful to keep within bounds. He knows all this, of course, and he knows, too, that there is no way for you to get at him. I suspect that the next you hear of it will be an offer from him, or, more likely, from some outside party who will claim to have bought the patent, to buy your plant. No doubt your special tools, machinery, and patterns are of no use to any one else. About all that is left for you is to drive the best bargain possible for your outfit. I'm more than a little sorry, Billy."

Two days later a stranger came into Billy's office and asked for Mr. Young.

"That's my name," said Billy.

"My name is Holton," said the stranger. "I have been interested in your business and have bought the patent you are operating under," he continued, in rather a blustering way.

"I've been expecting to hear of its sale," quietly answered Billy.

"You know, of course, that you have to quit business on the tenth of next month," insisted Holton.

"Yes. I know that," agreed Billy.

Holton seemed at a loss for a moment, and then he said, with great emphasis, "I'll give you a thousand dollars for your plant. You know that your patterns and your special tools and machinery can't be used by anybody else."

"I know that," said Billy, "but you can't get your patterns made for twice that sum, to say nothing of the rest of the equipment," urged Billy.

"That don't make any difference. You can either sell it to me at my price or sell it for junk," angrily replied Holton.

"That's what I will do, before I'll give it to you," retorted Billy.

"I can see you doing that," sneered Holton. "Here is my card. My offer holds good until the tenth of next month. On the eleventh it will drop to five hundred."

"You tell Mr. Bridgman, please, that I refuse to be skinned at both ends of the line," said Billy. "If you make a reasonable offer, I'll accept it. Our equipment cost over seven thousand dollars, and is practically as good as new. At present prices you can't duplicate it for ten thousand."

"I know all that," said Holton, "but you must not forget that I am your only market. Think it over and call me up," he finished and went out.

Billy had already ordered that all separate parts be assembled, and he had sold his entire stock of manufactured goods by the fifth day of the following month, selling, also, such tools and machinery as were of general use. Then he had the costly patterns and special tools and machinery broken beyond repair, mixed the parts with such other scrap as he could gather up, and sold the entire lot to a junk dealer. He arranged to keep the office until he closed his business.

On the fifteenth, Holton again came to see Billy.

"Good morning, Mr. Young," he said. "You didn't accept my offer of a thousand dollars for your plant, but I'm no piker and will give you another chance. Five minutes from now the price will go down to two-fifty," and he dramatically took out his watch.

"I'll sell you the entire contents of my shop for a quarter and buy us each a drink of near beer with the money," said Billy, throwing open the big door and showing the shop bare of everything."

"What in thunder did you do with all those patterns and all that machinery?" excitedly yelled Holton.

"I sold what I could and I junked the rest, just as I told you I'd do. You see, Mr. Holton, one man's loss is not always another man's gain," said Billy, with unalloyed joy at Holton's sputtering discomfiture.

After storming for several minutes, Holton started for the door.

"Hold on," said Billy. "I'll buy, anyway. Let's go 'round the corner to the Dutchman's."

'You go to the devil," was Holton's parting shot.

When Billy had collected his accounts and had paid the company's debts he found that he had a little over two thousand dollars. He then sold his office outfit. When it had been carried out he locked the door, dropped the key into his pocket, and said, "Thus endeth the first lesson."

He took the key to the owner of the building, called on his few friends, and dropped out of their ken.

Passing years dealt kindly with Bridgman, and sixty found him with a comfortable fortune, two boys who were chips of the old block, and the desire to take things easy, the first step in that direction being the usual one—a winter in southern California.

Always on watch for opportunities, he was quick to recognize the boom symptoms of Los Angeles and at once set about opening an office in that growing city. He let the boys take turns at either end of the line and gravitated back and forth as he felt like it.

Several years before Bridgman's advent in the Golden State, the government had established a date-palm experimental farm at Mecca, near the northern end of the Salton Sea. The experiment had demonstrated that that particular reach of the Colorado Desert, known as the Coachella Valley, was well adapted to raising the ancient staple of the Arab's diet. Several tracts of land had been planted to date palms and the industry was being energetically touted by promoters and speculators.

While back East one time, Bridgman learned of a mining plant out on the desert about fifty miles beyond Mecca, in which some of his friends had invested a good deal of money and which had lapsed into innocuous desuetude during the process of long-winded litigation.

Everything was grist in Bridgman's mill and he thriftily concluded to kill two birds with one stone and made a pilgrimage down to Mecca when he got back to California. He spent two or three days going about over the valley, escorted by divers hopeful gentlemen. He did not care a rap about the cultivation of the toothsome date, but he thought that there might be a chance to get comfortably in on the ground floor of some of the schemes.

The first evening at the hotel Bridgman noticed a big, broad-shouldered, lean-flanked, black-whiskered man, who, like himself, did not seem to belong to the place, and seemed more like one of his own sort. Later in the evening they sat down together and started talking. The stranger told Bridgman that his name was Garcia, and that he was a Spaniard, born in Mexico, and educated in the United States. Noticing Bridgman's puzzled look, Garcia explained that those of Spanish blood, though born in Mexico, looked upon the native Mexican about as the poor white is looked upon in the South. He said that he was spending a few days' vacation before going down to New Orleans to prepare for a campaign in South America.

"You know, Mr. Bridgman," explained Garcia, "the average Spaniard is a very poor business man and a much worse salesman. He couldn't sell ice in hell, on ninety days' time. I have been in the States most of my life, have gotten out of the rut a bit, and have learned a good deal about American business methods, and, speaking both English and Spanish, I can make a pretty good fist of it."

Bridgman told his new-found friend of his intention to go out on the desert, and Garcia promptly offered the use of his car and chauffeur, saying that he was going up to Los Angeles to be gone a few days and that

both car and man would be idle. Bridgman gladly accepted the offer.

The chauffeur, named Jimmy, was about twenty-five years old and was a native son. He assured Bridgman that he knew the desert and, after looking at the road map, that the trip could easily be made in two days. In answer to Bridgman's inquiry as to when they could go, Garcia said that he would leave the next day and that his man and car were at liberty at any time. Bridgman then gave Jimmy some money and told him to get supplies and be ready to start the next morning.

They got an early start and about noon stopped at Dos Palmas Spring, the only place where good water could be found between Mecca and the Colorado River on the old Chuckwalla Trail. At the spring they found a teamster who was on his way back from a mine well down toward the river. Bridgman soon mentioned that he was from Indianapolis.

"I found the body of an Indianapolis boy about two miles from here, some years ago," said the teamster. "His name was Worth Merritt. Perhaps you knew him."

"Certainly, I did," exclaimed Bridgman. "I knew his family well. I heard that Worth died out here on the desert. Tell me about it."

"It was simply another case of desert insanity," said the man. "He came out for his health, you know, and lived with friends down in the Imperial Valley, which was just being opened up. He wanted to be outdoors, of course, and soon got interested in hunting turquoises, garnets, and other semiprecious stones. One night his horse came in without him. The saddle was gone and the reins were tied up on the horse's neck. They started looking for him right away. There was a strong wind that night, and the horse's tracks were covered before morning.

"They kept looking for him for two or three weeks but found no trace of him. While gathering wood one day, about two years afterward, I found the body. He had nothing on but his vest. His watch was in the vest and that was the way we identified the body. He had thrown away the rest of his clothes, and he still had hold of a stirrup. He had dragged his saddle around over the desert until the leather was worn off the tree. That's the way they all do—nine out of ten—when they realize that they are lost. They throw away their canteen and shoes first and hang on to some fool thing that is no use in the world.

"If Merritt had just given his pony her head, she would have taken him home or brought him here to the spring. If a man would only keep his head, he'd be all right. Up there, almost due northeast, you can see the mountains at San Gorgonio Pass, and down there, almost due south, you can see Signal Mountain, over in Mexico. You can see those landmarks from any place in the desert, unless you're behind a rock or something else. But, by George, men won't keep their heads."

"Gee whiz, man!" exclaimed Bridgman. "Is that mountain in Mexico?" He lost all interest in desert lore at once, and as suddenly recalled all the wild and woolly stories that he had ever read and heard of the ubiquitous Pancho Villa and his marauding bands.

The teamster cast a sly wink at Jimmy and proceeded to enjoy his noon hour in thrilling Bridgman with all sorts of blood-curdling stories of Mexican atrocities, explaining that the international boundary was only a day's ride from them. By that time Bridgman was ready to abandon his expedition. But the teamster was really a good-hearted sort and felt remorseful about scaring the tenderfoot, and he assured Bridgman that there was no need to fear trouble up there, as Señor Esteban Cantu, the governor of Lower California, ruled his territory with an iron hand, and, being a "good hombre," he had never let the revolutionists get into California. This was confirmed by Jimmy and, at last, Bridgman's fears were allayed enough to get him to continue their journey, but all afternoon the biggest thing on the desert was the big, blue bulk of the Mexican mountain.

Bridgman had been supplied with maps, directions, and photographs, and they had no trouble in finding the mine, which was located on a plateau about three miles off the trail. Just as they were almost at the foot of the trail leading up from the bottom of the cañon to the plant, there was a sudden jolt as the left, hind wheel of the machine slipped over the edge of a rock and investigation showed that the axle had been broken. They at once realized that their machine was useless. Jimmy did not say much, but Bridgman grew almost hysterical. He had never before confronted a personal danger and never before had he been so much as

a mile beyond civilization, except in a comfortable Pullman.

"Mr. Bridgman," said Jimmy, "I know now just what that man meant by desert insanity. We've got to keep our heads."

Bridgman realized the truth of the warning and soon pulled himself together. He was neither a coward, nor was he naturally excitable, but the utter helplessness of their predicament had thrown him into temporary panic. He was soon able to join Jimmy in planning their next move. It was plain that the only way to get out was by walking, and Bridgman was wise enough to know that it was foolhardy for a man of his age, soft from a lifetime of inactivity, to attempt to walk the thirty-five miles back to the spring.

"There is nothing to do, Jimmy," he said, "but for me to stay here and for you to go back and get help. Let's see what the house looks like."

Much to Bridgman's relief, they found a comfortable, three-room shack, furnished with chairs, tables, a cook stove, cooking utensils, cots, and bedding. Then they went back to the machine and took stock of their supplies, finding that they had two loaves of bread, a small box of crackers, about two pounds of bacon, half a pound of coffee, and three boxes of sardines. It was then about five o'clock, and Jimmy suggested that they have supper and that he start on his way, as it would be bright moonlight and much pleasanter walking than during the day.

To this Bridgman agreed. Greatly to his credit, he realized that Jimmy would need more food than he would, and he set aside for himself only about one-third of their stock. Jimmy got a haversack from the house and packed his supplies in it, with a heavy blanket, and a big tin cup for making coffee, filled a big canteen and started on his long walk. When he had disappeared down the cañon, Bridgman began looking about him.

To the south was a wide break in the mountains and across the yellow sands, seeming but a short distance away, glimmered the waters of the Salton Sea, across which still loomed the big Mexican mountain. To the west an extension of the San Bernardino Mountains ran out for several miles. To the east the Chocolate Mountains glowed with every color and shade that the wildest impressionist ever mixed on his palette. In a few minutes the lonely watcher saw the evening mists rising from the distant waters and the purple shadows creep out of the nowhere and up into the cañons. The sun was but fairly down when, suddenly, the mist over the distant water was turned to luminous cotton wool and the floor of the desert to frosted silver, with every rock and tree sharply picked out in India ink, as the moon came up over the mountains to his left.

Despite his unromantic nature and the seriousness of his situation, the majesty of the scene was great enough to make Bridgman forget himself and for the first time he realized that man was but a puny thing in the great universe. He thought, too, of what manner of men they must have been, those old prospectors who dared the wastes, the dangers, the loneliness, and the toil that were their lot. Against the background of his own unusual and dangerous plight their courage and hardihood stood out in wonderful hues.

While engrossed with these thoughts, without warning and seemingly from within arm's reach, came the ringing staccato of a coyote's bark. The trill of a machine gun would not have been more startling. In an instant Bridgman was inside the house and had bolted the door. From across the cañon another coyote answered, and the frightened man would have sworn to any number of them from half a dozen to half a hundred.

Shortly after midnight Bridgman saw a flickering fire out on the desert and knew that Jimmy was out there. It made him feel better, but the fire soon went out, the moon dropped over behind the mountaintops, and nothing was left but darkness, fear, and the coyotes. He awakened from what seemed to be but a moment's sleep to find it broad, glaring day, and daylight had never been more welcome.

They had calculated that it would be at least three days before Jimmy could get back, and Bridgman wisely portioned out his food to last four days. Then he got breakfast and took a nap. When he awoke he looked over the plant and got lunch. By that time he again felt pretty well satisfied with himself and smiled as he remembered the terrors of the night. He lit his pipe and dragged a chair out to the shady side of the house to enjoy the view.

He immediately found the desert of absorbing interest, if not so enjoyable as he expected. From around the mountains to

his right came stringing a cavalcade of horsemen. They were riding without any semblance of order, and bright flashes of light reflecting from their trappings showed that they were armed men. They swept out across the sand in apparent haste. When they had gotten well out onto the desert another body of horsemen, khaki clad and riding in line, followed them from around the mountain. These Bridgman at once recognized as a part of the regular army of his country. He then, for the first time, regarded it as a national asset, having hitherto classed it with the governor's staff and the militia. When the first body of men got well to the left of his field of vision they began bunching and facing about, and around the mountains to the east came another band to reënforce them. With these Bridgman saw two field guns.

Although miles away, they seemed very close, and the lone spectator began to believe that it was one of the desert mirages that he had heard of, but had not believed in.

The guns were rushed to the front, unlimbered, and had each spurted forth two great clouds of smoke, but still not a sound was heard. The watcher was then confirmed in his belief that he was looking at a wonderful mirage. Then, simultaneously with the third smoke spurts, the desert silence was ripped asunder by the roars of the first shots. There was an instant of silence and then began a continuous roar as the echoes were tossed back and forth in the mountain crescent from which prison it seemed impossible for them to escape. He could see that the small arms were now in use, but he was unable to hear them for the diapason of the cannonade. He could see, too, that men and horses were falling rapidly on both sides. The fight did not last over a minute, for the handful of soldiers were forced to retreat, leaving more than half their number on the sand. As the soldiers passed out of sight to his right the Mexicans began their march to the east, leaving a few men with three wagons, presumably to gather up the wounded and to bury the dead.

Bridgman, however, did not wait to see. He rushed madly across the plateau and up the mountainside to the north. It was fortunate that both legs and wind failed him when they did, for he was still within sight of the house when he dropped from utter exhaustion and began to fight off the ton weight that pressed on his laboring chest. As soon as he had time for thought, he realized that it was certain death for him to try to get away from the mining plant. He crawled behind a rock and lay until it was almost dark, when he began dodging back toward the house. Stealthy watchfulness was rewarded by finding that no one was about and the moon soon showed but a deserted desert. When the coyotes began their wend nocturne he but barely heard them.

Verily the well-nigh fatal wounds of today become but the pin pricks of the morrow.

When his clamoring stomach would no longer be denied, he felt about for such food as he could eat without cooking. He dared not light either his fire or his lantern. He munched and watched as long as the friendly moon gave light. There was no dozing in the dark hours before dawn. Once a vagrant, playful, little breeze wandered up the cañon and rattled the door. He almost collapsed.

Quick, brilliant morning showed nothing moving on the desert floor and he prepared breakfast. When he loaded his pipe he found that he had but enough tobacco left for another smoke. That jolted his mind back to the matter of supplies, and he soon realized that he had exceeded his allowance. There was left but three slices of bacon, a small piece of bread, and two or three spoonfuls of coffee.

While ruefully regarding his scant store a deep voice said, "Good morning, Mr. Bridgman."

He whirled about to see his friend Garcia standing in the door with outstretched hand. But it was a different Garcia from the one he had known. Back at Mecca the Spaniard had worn a blue serge suit with a black, slouch hat and tan shoes. Now he was dressed in a gaudy uniform covered with gold braid, and in high, fancy boots with heavy, jingling spurs; bandoliers of cartridges as long as a man's finger crossed his broad chest; on one hip swung a heavy revolver, and on the other a big sword; on his head was a wide sombrero incrusted with silver filagree and conches. But, notwithstanding the change in his appearance, Bridgman hailed him with delight.

"This is my regular business get-up, Mr. Bridgman," explained Garcia. "I'm on one of my selling trips now, and have to dress the part. Come with me and I'll show you

how I make a sale," he continued, turning to the trail leading down into the cañon.

Bridgman followed closely, volubly telling how he happened to be alone and striving to give the impression that he expected help at any moment. Garcia did not say much. He led the way down the cañon about a mile, and then up a trail to the top of the south wall where it was but about five hundred feet high. When they reached the top, they saw a large encampment not over half a mile away. Garcia raised his hand an instant, handed his companion a pair of field glasses, and told him to watch the camp.

No sooner had Bridgman focused his glasses than he saw a gaudily dressed officer go to one of the several tents and pull aside the flap. Out of it came an elderly man and woman and a young girl, no doubt father, mother, and daughter.

"Those are three of my customers," said Garcia. "They have been refusing to do business with me, but my men are now going to deal with another customer and I think that when they get through with him these people will be quite ready to talk turkey, as you Americanos say. Watch closely."

The officer went to another tent and opened the flap. No one came out. He motioned peremptorily. Still, no one emerged. He turned to the men and apparently gave an order. Two men, evidently privates, as they wore only frayed trousers, shirts, belts and hats, left the crowd that was watching the proceedings, entered the tent, and dragged forth a man who fought them for every inch of the way, though his hands and feet were tied. The men jerked him violently over to a rock and seated him upon it, continuing to hold him by the arms.

The officer stepped in front of the prisoner and said something, and the latter positively shook his head. The officer stood aside and gave an order to a man who was apparently awaiting it. He walked close to the prisoner. There was a quick flash of steel and Bridgman saw the blood gush down over the prisoner's white shirt. The officer spoke to him again and he nodded ready assent. Then a man came up and began swathing his head with bandages.

During this time the first prisoners were standing close by. The officer now turned to them, sweeping the sand with his sombrero, and they, too, nodded eager acquiescence and were bowed ceremoniously back to their tent.

"That's quick work," said Garcia. "You see, I offered Mr. Wharton and his family their liberty for a price and they indignantly refused. Very fortunately, we picked up the other man this morning. He is a mining engineer and was coming in from the Happy Jack Mine. I used to know him down in Mexico, and he was as insolent, overbearing, and contemptuous as most gringos are who come into our country. It is really a pleasure to do business with him. My officer offered him his right ear for a thousand dollars. He didn't want it that bad, and we cut it off. Simple, isn't it? Then my teniente, that's Spanish for lieutenant, offered him his nose for twenty-five hundred dollars, and you saw how quickly he accepted. After that the others came to terms very promptly, you noticed. Let's go back to your camp," and Garcia started back down the trail.

"By George!" said Garcia, after walking a minute or two in silence. "There is nothing like trying it on the dog, as your theatrical folk say.

"You see," he explained a moment later, "I am fortunate enough to be able to keep in with the right set in my country, no matter who is president pro tem. I am much better educated than most of the generals, and I speak English and know American ways. Therefore, I am a very valuable man. But I got tired of it and made up my mind to go to Cuba and settle down. My teniente and some of my men want to go with me, and we are making this little raid on our own hook to get the money we need to get out of the old country and make a start in the new one.

"When we get back across the border I'll give my teniente one-fourth of the proceeds of the expedition, divide another fourth among my boys and quit this life of hard work. We have nothing to fear from your government. That little bunch of soldiers can't get reënforcements and get back until we are well away. They won't be allowed to follow us across the line, and my men think that they are afraid to follow. We can stop a hundred yards across the line and make faces at your whole army."

Bridgman followed speechlessly. There was not a lingering shadow of doubt that Garcia was telling the truth or that his band of villainous cutthroats would be at all backward in enforcing his demands. When they got back to the house Garcia produced a

bottle and handed it to Bridgman. Surely no one ever needed whisky more than he did and few ever took a bigger drink. Next Garcia offered a case filled with big, black cigars.

"Well, my friend," said Garcia after the weeds were going, "I was fortunate in getting you to come out with my man and machine. The accident was bona fide, all right, but if it hadn't happened you would have found the man and half of the grub and water gone next morning and the machine disabled. I don't suppose that you have much money with you, of course, but we can do business, anyway. I'll take your check and have written a letter to your son which you can sign so that there will be no trouble about cashing it. You'll have to stay here several days, but you'll be provided for, and I'll send a man out for you when I get my money and have time to get safely on my way. Here's an invoice that I have prepared of the goods that I want to sell you," handing Bridgman a neatly typewritten sheet reading as follows:

MR. CHARLES W. BRIDGMAN, DR.
TO
SR. JUAN FRANCISCO GARCIA, CR.

To

5 lbs. bacon	$ 100.00
2 lbs. coffee	50.00
5 loaves bread	25.00
1 qt. Scotch	100.00
3 tins salt horse	100.00
5 boxes tobacco	25.00
10 gals. aqua pura	50.00
1 shotgun with cartridges	50.00
1 right ear	2,500.00
1 left ear	2,500.00
1 right hand	20,000.00
Total	$25,500.00

When his victim finished reading the invoice, Garcia handed him the letter he had written:

MECCA, CAL., July 25, 1913.

MR. CHARLES W. BRIDGMAN, JR.,
Los Angeles, Cal.

DEAR CHARLEY: This letter is dated at Mecca because that is the nearest post office. I am out on the desert and must say that I find desert life of unflagging interest.

I have been out at the mining plant and am going on into Imperial Valley, and shall go from there across to San Diego, which means that it will be ten or twelve days before I get home.

I have found some personal property that I was glad to buy and have given my friend Señor Juan Francisco Garcia, the bearer, a check for twenty-five thousand dollars ($25,000.00) in payment therefor. Of course, you will see that the check is taken care of.

With love, I remain, YOUR FATHER.

"Notice, Mr. Bridgman," said Garcia as the former looked up, "that I observe regular business traditions. The five hundred dollars that your supplies cost just amount to the regular two per cent cash discount, and your check is for even money. I have you write that you are going on across the desert, so that there will be no chance of any one looking for you out here."

Bridgman took the offered fountain pen and signed both check and letter as a matter of course, and he never signed a check more willingly. Garcia left him, and about an hour later returned, driving before him a laden burro from which he unloaded not only the supplies inventoried, but, also, a Winchester rifle, box of cartridges, some fruit, a box of cigars, a small bag of sugar, several cans of milk, and three or four late magazines.

"Good-by, Mr. Bridgman," he said, "I hope that you will enjoy your visit. If I have no trouble in cashing your check, you'll be taken out of here in a few days. If any trouble is caused me, of course, you'll have to get out the best way you can."

"Good-by, Mr. Garcia," responded Bridgman heartily. "There will be no trouble whatever, and I wish you success down in Cuba."

"Thank you," said Garcia, turning to the trail.

Strange to say, there was no fear left in Bridgman's mind. He never doubted for an instant that the Spaniard would keep faith with him, and this confidence was prompted by the man who had robbed him going down the trail and leaving his victim with a heavy rifle. Of course, it would have been suicidal for Bridgman to shoot Garcia, but, somehow, it had the psychological effect that it was planned to have. At the turn of the trail Garcia looked back, exchanged a friendly wave of the hand, and passed out of sight.

Bridgman took a drink, lit a cigar, and quietly set about making himself comfortable during his time of waiting. He ate and slept as he felt inclined, explored a bit, being careful never to get out of sight of the house, shot a rabbit or two and some desert quail, and tried a long rifle shot at an inquisitive, big-horned mountain sheep, and, with Guerin's Centaur, might have said, "As for me, I sink into old age, calm as the setting constellations."

On the fifth day he saw a dust-shrouded

freight outfit plodding up the Chuckwalla Trail, and it made a much greater impression than the most elaborate parade that the lone spectator had ever seen. He watched it until dark and then sat and looked across the intervening miles at the camp fire until it died out. He awoke before sunrise the next morning and hurried to the window to watch their preparations and start, before getting his own breakfast. Then he ate outside where he could watch the wagon until it passed out of sight.

Four days later he saw an automobile coming up the trail. It was visible but little over an hour and in about the same time after it passed out of his sight, Bridgman saw it turn the bend in the cañon. In a few minutes more it pulled up at the foot of the trail. There was but one man in it, who looked as curious as a man well could, but who asked no questions. He merely stated that some one had wired him fifty dollars from Frisco to come out to the old mine and get a man and a broken-down machine.

Bridgman had no desire to be advertised as a victim, even of Mexican bandits, and neither to his rescuer nor to any one else did he give any word of explanation.

Back in Indianapolis some six months later he went into a moving-picture house to while away an idle hour. He took a seat leisurely, tucked his hat under it, and looked at the screen. From that instant his eyes were glued there, and he never moved until he left the theater over two hours later, for on the luminous sheet was shown the Mexican officer leading the Wharton family out of their tent. This was followed in proper sequence by the other scenes that he had witnessed. After that was shown the rescue of the girl and her fellow prisoners by her brave, dashing lover at the head of a band of reckless, straight-shooting cowboys aboard wildly bucking bronchos. Then the fair heroine and her bold, handsome lover passed on to live happily ever after.

Came a Charlie Chaplin picture followed by animated cartoons and some advertisements.

A flickering instant, and flashed an ornate title card:

THE BORDER OUTLAW.
AN ADVENTURE WITH RAIDING MEXICANS.
Scenario by ROBERT A. DILLON.
Directed by WILLIAM H. YOUNG.

Then Bridgman knew why he had had the haunting feeling of familiarity when with Garcia, and he knew, too, that he had been found by the long arm of coincidence reaching through twenty-five years and across twenty-five hundred miles.

THEY ALWAYS FALL!

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL, inventor of the telephone and, therefore, himself something of an authority on real miracles, was discussing the human being's tendency to fall for impossible ideas and "wonder" stories. The Ponzi fiasco in Boston had given him his text.

"It's the same old story," he said; "the people like to be fooled. It's amazing to recall the things they have been willing to believe. There was Professor Loeb's 'discovery' of living organisms in his laboratory. When that was announced, everybody had visions of men and women ready-made. Frankenstein had come true.

"Then there was a surgeon who claimed that, by tying together different nerves in the human body, people could hear pictures and see music. And a photographer convulsed the world with his claim that, by photographing the retina of a mummy's eye, he had developed pictures of the events and people of an ancient time.

"We like to have new thoughts to play with, it seems, as children like new toys. We can believe anything—and don't mind being fooled."

The Cloak of Circumstance

By Howard C. Kegley

This story delves deep into the human heart. Few men would have done what Pennington did considering the penalty attached. Perhaps still fewer would have written to him the letters McManus wrote

IT was ten o'clock at night. There was not another soul on the streets of Ashland when Mark Pennington, cashier of the Security National Bank, turned his key in the lock, stepped in, and strode toward his private office. A faint gleam of light filtered through the frosted-glass window of the president's private office. Pennington was startled. He paused for a moment as though undecided whether to advance or retreat. In that moment a door swung open suddenly, and President McManus looked out.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Pennington?" he observed, with some manifestation of nervousness.

"Yes, me," mumbled the cashier. "I dropped in to get together some papers in connection with the Talbert will case. I'm going to Chicago to-night. Hope to get that matter settled up and out of the way this trip."

McManus closed his door without comment, and returned to his desk. A yellow file envelope with a pink strip of tape attached to it lay before him, and several pieces of bank paper were spread out upon the desk blotter. One after another he regarded them with absorbing interest. Taking a pencil from his vest pocket, he jotted down a column of figures, footed it up, and then pushed all of the papers away.

Placing his elbows upon the edge of his desk the bank president dropped his chin into his palms, closed his eyes, and covered his face with his fingers. For several minutes he sat thus, absorbed in deep meditation. The shuffling feet of a lazy night watchman who sauntered past the building finally aroused the banker. With a quick glance round, he picked up the papers, sorted them into their proper order, replaced them in the file envelope, and tied the pink tape around it. Then he walked boldly across the room to the safe, slipped the envelope into a small steel cell, and closed the vault door with a bang.

McManus had been gone for three-quarters of an hour when Pennington got to the end of his second cigar. He tossed the stub into a cuspidor beside the desk, glanced out of the window to make certain that nobody was looking, and then approached the safe. Spinning the dial with a practiced hand, he unlocked it and swung wide the door. His hand dived into a dark little tunnel and came out clasping a yellow file envelope with a piece of pink tape tied around it.

Once again at his desk, the cashier untied the tape, spread the papers before him, took a pencil from his pocket, and began figuring. He scratched his head thoughtfully and regarded the total with some misgivings. Biting the end from a fresh cigar, he touched a match to the tobacco and began blowing great rings of heavy smoke into the air.

"Eighteen thousand dollars!" he ejaculated, at length. "Five forged notes, due all the way from three months to three years from now. What easy marks the directors are!"

There was a black traveling bag at one end of Pennington's desk. Wheeling around in his chair, he grabbed it up and placed it upon the table. Replacing the notes in the yellow envelope, he flung the parcel into the bag with the same indifference that a gardener manifests as he tosses a brickbat over the fence into his neighbor's back yard. Then he threw his overcoat over his arm, clapped on his hat, walked out into the night, and slammed the door behind him, forever.

Ten days later, when the bank examiner submitted his report to the directors of the Security National, he declared that an eighteen-thousand-dollar shortage existed, and demanded that Cashier Clay Pennington be held responsible for it. The Bank Protective Association assigned Detective "Dorrie"

Dahlrymple to the task of locating the missing bank official. Dahlrymple was as smooth as any of them, when it comes to sleuthing, but in the Pennington case he labored under the handicap of time which is the all-important element when absconders are to be tracked.

Pennington had been absent four days before suspicion was directed to him, and it was another ten days before the bank examiner recommended that a detective be employed on the case. In that length of time the missing cashier might have put thousands of miles between him and Ashland, and no doubt had.

A liberal expense account is of little consequence if the trail has grown cold. Dahlrymple set out determined to get Pennington, but after three months of ceaseless activity he abandoned a chase which had never yielded a clew. He filed a complete history of the case, and indexed an elaborate description of the missing cashier and his personal habits. Then he laid the case aside to await the time when the defaulter might step into his trap through gross carelessness.

Month after month, and year after year, as the detective came across his history of the Ashland bank case in shuffling his index cards he repeated to himself the solemn vow that he would some day lead Pennington back to his native heath with a ring in his nose.

Pennington had been missing nine years, and the incident had almost been forgotten when a Wells Fargo express driver delivered at the Security National Bank, one morning, a shipment of gold which amounted to eighteen thousand dollars plus six per cent interest compounded annually for nine years. It exactly covered the shortage for which Pennington was blamed.

"Fresh tracks at last," the detective murmured, when he heard of the gold shipment. "Not a red-hot clew, but something to work on, at least."

He traced the shipment of money to San Francisco. It had been sent there from a bank in Manila. The bank in the Philippines did not know the name of the man who had shipped the money anonymously, but it was possible to obtain a fairly good description of him.

They said he was more than six feet tall, broad-shouldered, with almost white hair, and an air of authority which marked him as a leader among men. He looked to be sixty, parted his hair in the middle, and smoked black Manila ropes. There was a suspicion that he resided in the tropics, and he appeared to be somewhat familiar with banking methods.

"He is somewhere in the Pacific," mused Dahlrymple, "but the Lord only knows where. Probably he thinks that sending back the missing funds with interest in full will let him out, but the Bank Protective Association doesn't do business on that basis, and neither does the United States government. He will have to journey back to his native heath and take his medicine like a little man whenever I lay hands on him."

Feeling that it would be a waste of time to continue his search for Pennington in the Philippines, Dahlrymple arranged with the captain of a trim freighter for a voyage to Tahiti. He inquired how long it took the boat to make the trip and was told that it covered the distance in eight days, when it did not make a stop at Amapia, the principal port of the island of Guarjel.

"Will we stop there this trip?" the detective inquired.

The captain nodded.

"Why should we put in at that port? What does it mean to us?" continued Dahlrymple.

"It means a heap to the company that owns his line of steamers," was the retort. "Amapia is the main coaling station between Tahiti and the Philippines. The company operates its own coal mines and can supply its boats with fuel cheaper than it can be had elsewhere. Then, too, we often fill out a cargo there."

"What does the blooming island of Guarjel amount to, anyhow?" the sleuth pursued. "I never heard of it, but it must cut some ice, if it can support a string of steamers and supply them with coal from its own mines."

"Guarjel amounts to a great deal when it comes to commercial activity among the islands of the Pacific," was the captain's answer. "It didn't cut much figure until eight or nine years ago, but it is certainly a little hive of industry now. Ross Eberhart was the fellow who put the 'jel' in Guarjel."

"Who is this Eberhart?" continued the inquisitive passenger.

"Eberhart!" exclaimed the ship's officer, with considerable display of importance, "is the Aladdin of Amapia. He has his hand

upon the throttle of every important industry of the island, and everything he touches turns to money."

The captain paused for breath and then continued:

"He owns this string of steamers, controls the Guarjel Mining Syndicate, is president of the Island Plantations Company, runs the Amapia Rubber Corporation, manages the Amapia Street Railway & Interurban Company, owns the controlling interest in the Hidalgo Hotel at Amapia, operates three big wholesale grocery, dry goods, and furniture houses, directs the Tropico Lumbering Corporation, has a controlling interest in the Amapia Specie Bank, and otherwise keeps his finger upon the pulse of at least a dozen enterprises of lesser importance.

"Eberhart came in and took hold of the rubber plantation industry after a syndicate of Cubans had planted half a million rubber trees and gone broke waiting for them to become productive. He bought up the Amapia Rubber Corporation stock on a shoestring, managed to hang on for a couple of years, and then began to cash in at a tremendous rate when the automobile business in the States got into full swing. Since then he has instituted practically all of the developments that have taken place on the island. It now ranks as the richest and most progressive small island community in the Pacific, and Eberhart has made it all that it is to-day."

Dahlrymple was deeply impressed with the information which had been so willingly supplied by the ship's captain. He lost no time in arranging to stop off in Amapia until the steamer should make its next trip to Tahiti. The Hidalgo Hotel, a magnificant structure of Spanish architecture, two stories high, was the only tourist stopping place in Amapia, so the detective secured comfortable accommodations there.

He found Amapia to be a city of about forty thousand inhabitants, ninety per cent of whom were dark-skinned, but somewhat enlightened natives. There was a prosperous air about everything. The streets were paved and electric lighted. Sanitation conditions were excellent. The buildings were all of one and two-story type, and quite generally of rough-cast cement finish.

Amapia, the capital of the tropical island, was spread out like a palm-leaf fan at the foot of a range of low, lava-spattered mountains. In its earlier days it had been practically effaced by a volcanic eruption, but no one would have believed this had they seen the community when Dahlrymple first set eyes upon it. There was the throb of industry everywhere. Rice, rubber, and sugar-cane plantations had been intensely developed.

The detective was not long in learning that Eberhart made his home at the Hidalgo Hotel, and was agreeably surprised at dinner the first night when he caught sight of the island's capitalist. Ten years had wrought considerable change in the man, but a person with failing eyesight would have recognized him instantly as Mark Pennington, former cashier of the bank in Ashland. Pennington's heavy crop of hair was as white as snow. It added great dignity to his impressive appearance. When he lighted his black cigar after dinner he puffed vigorously and emitted great clouds of smoke in which he appeared to seek the solution of the morrow's problems.

Dahlrymple avoided watching the capitalist close enough to excite suspicion. He contented himself with letting himself into Pennington's room next day with a pass-key, and investigating his personal belongings for further evidence that he was the missing bank cashier. After making a careful examination of many books and papers he went to the cable office and sent the following message to the Bank Protective Association:

Closing in on Pennington. Expect early results.

Next day Dahlrymple dug into the commercial life of Amapia a bit and discovered that Eberhart's finger prints were everywhere. The capitalist had firmly established himself in the community. He was highly respected on all sides, and regarded as essential to the financial prosperity of the island. As head of three big wholesale houses and several lumber mills in Amapia he provided food, clothing, and shelter for nearly all the inhabitants of the island. As director of the only bank there he had hundreds in his debt, but bore the reputation of being generous and helpful rather than flint-hearted and miserly.

After dinner, the evening of Dahlrymple's second day on the island, a hotel clerk approached him and inquired if he would be willing to take another room in the hotel for a few days.

"The management is making some neces-

sary alterations in the house," was the explanation, "and it is desirable that the walls in the room you have been occupying be tinted."

The detective heartily agreed to being transferred to another room on the second floor, having the assurance that he could have his own room again in a few days.

"The porter will go with you now to transfer your belongings," remarked the clerk, with a polite bow.

Dahlrymple accompanied a bus boy to his room and hastily threw his belongings into his traveling bags. These the youth took up and carried down a long hall while the detective followed close behind. Presently the boy paused in front of a door and turned a key in the lock. The tumbler turned easily. Picking up the grips again he gave the door a push with his knee and stepped into the room. Dahlrymple entered at the same moment. The room was fearfully dark.

The detective reached into his coat pockets for a match with which to light a candle. As he did so the door closed suddenly behind him and two men seized him by the wrists. A desperate struggle ensued, and during the scrimmage Dahlrymple's coat was jerked off. He fought manfully for his freedom, but at the end of a five-minute struggle he was completely overpowered. His unknown assailants held him pinned to the floor while they gagged him, tied his hands behind his back, and bound his ankles together securely. This done, they leaped to their feet and fled from the room, slamming the door and locking it behind them.

For perhaps an hour the detective lay wondering what fate had in store for him. It required no unusual power of deduction to figure out that Eberhart had discovered the investigation in progress and had taken prompt action to halt the inquiry. Dahlrymple was deeply curious to know what the probable outcome of the incident might be. It occurred to him just then that the operator at the cable office might have seen danger in his message to the Bank Protective Association, and that Eberhart had got his first intimation of the detective's presence through that source.

What would the capitalist do with him? Would he be carried far back into the mountains and there be turned loose to wander into the hands of savage tribesmen, or would he be placed on board one of the company steamers and set ashore upon a distant island where cannibals or lepers might seal his fate. The outlook was exceedingly dubious. The detective knew that his only hope lay in making his escape from the room, so he undertook to free himself from the ties which held him, but he found that his captors had evidently made quite a good job of it, for the stout twine did not respond readily to his mighty efforts.

Fortunately for him the twine around his ankles had been wound diagonally and he was able after a while to create some slack in it by moving first one leg and then the other backward and forward. He worked on the theory that friction would gradually unravel the hemp twine, and his impression was correct. In two hours he had succeeded in freeing his feet.

The next job was to work the thongs off his wrists, but this was not as easy a task as that of getting his feet loose. Stumbling around the room in total darkness he sought something against which he could rub the ties in order to saw them in two. The only thing he could find that would serve the purpose was the corner of an old curio cabinet. By rasping this with the heels of his shoes the detective created a rough edge which served the purpose of a file when he rubbed against it the cords which held his wrists secure.

While the dreary hours of the night dragged their length along, Dahlrymple, with the muscles of his arms cramped and aching, sawed and scraped his wrists upon the corner of the cabinet, chafing his skin as often as he shredded a fiber of the twine ,and making the blood come where he jabbed his flesh against hardwood splinters. Gray streaks of light were beginning to penetrate the darkness of the room when the detective finally twisted his wrists free and stood unfettered. Vengeance was in his eye. He was for seeking out Eberhart immediately and demanding to know by what authority he had perpetrated such an outrage. It was a matter which would be taken up with the American consul at the earliest opportunity.

Striding across the room, Dahlrymple stooped over to open one of his suit cases and secure a revolver which he had placed there before transferring his belongings from one room to the other. As he bent over, a low rumbling sound fell upon his ears and the floor seemed to pitch toward one end, causing him to sprawl upon one of his suit cases. Instantly the thought came to him

that he was suffering from an attack of dizziness, superinduced by exertion in freeing himself.

He regained his feet and moved toward the bed, intending to lie down until his dizziness should pass away, but before he could move out of his tracks the floor pitched in another direction and there was a twisting motion which caused the joists of the building to creak and groan in every joint.

A cold fear possessed the detective. He staggered toward the window with legs as unsteady as those of a sailor upon the hurricane deck. The floor of his room was pitching, lurching, and revolving so rapidly that he could gather his thoughts for nothing save the impression that an earthquake was in progress. It was all happening so rapidly that he could not make out in what direction the seismic vibrations were traveling.

As he reached the window and looked out a great flash of fire lighted up the eastern sky. It appeared to be several miles away. That it was a volcanic eruption there could be no doubt, for almost instantly great clouds of black smoke tinged with a fiery red issued from the distant mountains, and the floor beneath his feet began pitching and rocking again.

Panic-stricken hotel guests ran screaming down the halls, and in the streets Dahlrymple could make out shadowy figures of natives darting out of tottering buildings and fleeing toward the harbor. Shaking from fear, the detective ran to the window again, intending to open it and leap out into the street, but before he could lay a hand on the sash the structure was given a sudden wrench which threw him off his feet. Above the sullen rumble of the frightful eruption Dahlrymple could hear the cries of the injured and the groans of the dying. The streets were littered with débris which had crumbled down upon the people of the city.

Another tremor sent an avalanche of plastering upon Dahlrymple, from the ceiling. A final and mighty upheaval tore the floor from beneath him and he felt himself going down, down, down. It seemed as though he fell a great distance, but in reality it was probably no more than twenty feet. The terror of it all was suddenly removed, for his fall was broken by the contact of his body with a heap of débris which had been thrown together when the sides of the building collapsed beneath him.

Darkness came swiftly, and consciousness left him with great masses of twisted doors, splintered floors, and wrecked furniture piled upon him. When next he was able to realize what was going on around him, he was lying on a cot in the public park, surrounded by scores of other cots around which many physicians and nurses worked, giving first aid to those who suffered serious injury when the quake occurred.

From a woman who paused for a few moments at an adjoining cot to adjust a bandage Dahlrymple learned that half the town had been obliterated by the volcanic eruption and earthquake, and that hundreds of citizens had been buried by a flood of molten lava which had inundated the residence section lying lowest in the valley. Scores had been killed and injured by falling buildings when the earthquake rocked the island, and great numbers were burned to death in the fires which followed.

Dahlrymple was suffering from a slight concussion of the brain and a few bruises which were scarcely worthy of notice. The nurse said he could leave his cot whenever he felt disposed to do so. Burning from the injustice of having been bound and gagged apparently at the instigation of a thieving bank official, the detective made his way, with great difficulty, through the principal street of the city, in search of Eberhart.

Red ruin was everywhere. Smoldering embers marked the spots where dozens of prosperous business houses had stood. Only an occasional business block had withstood the quake, and the detective noted with disgust that these were enterprises owned or controlled by the island capitalist. They had stood because they had been the most securely built. The avenue was choked with the remnants of what had represented the commercial life of the most industrious small-island community in the Pacific. Ruthless destruction confronted the detective on every hand.

The guard at a street intersection accosted him and warned him out of a certain danger zone. Dahlrymple tarried to remark that the calamity had apparently wiped Amapia off the map and that suffering was certain to be intense, with no early relief in sight.

"Oh, but you forget Señor Eberhart, the Americano," replied the native, in fair English. "You must know that he has thrown open his wholesaling house for the grocery, the dry goods, and the furniture. There is already the committee which has given out

much supplies to every one who comes for assistance. Señor Eberhart has provided relief hospitals in the parks. He takes no account of the expense. I am told he will supply lumber to rebuild every dwelling. He is what you call it—the free hand.

"Even now he is at the reservoir intake, giving the directions for the repair on water system. Everything he has given to Amapia. His warehouses were alone left standing. Clothing, groceries, furniture, and, indeed, other very necessary things are being given out by him while any remain, and there is no account to keep. Positively no. All is free, so like the air."

Dahlrymple left the native in the midst of his enthusiastic outburst, and went in search of Eberhart, expecting to find him near the reservoir intake, but happening suddenly upon him while rounding the corner of a pile of wreckage which had once been the leading drug house of the city. Eberhart stood at the center of the rock pile, with his right arm in a sling. He was directing a number of natives who were digging out such supplies as absorbant cotton and adhesive tape and gauze, which were badly needed at the emergency hospitals. There was a quick glance of mutual recognition as the eyes of the two men met. The capitalist recoiled a trifle. It was evident that he was taken completely by surprise.

An awkward moment passed between the two men. The detective was quick to note that he had to deal with a man of few words, so he went straight to the point. "I want you," he began.

"Not so badly as the people of Amapia want me just now," was the curt reply.

"You'll go, of course," Dahlrymple continued.

"Gladly, of course, when I have finished my work here," was the retort.

'You'll come at once!" insisted the detective.

Each took a step or two forward. Dahlrymple, sensing trouble, reached for his hip, expecting to find his gun there. He had forgotten that it was last within his reach in the room where he had been imprisoned. The banker saw that his opponent was unarmed, and stepping forward with quick stride, he threw himself into a defensive position. Dahlrymple sought to grab him by the collar, but got a smart slap in the face from a broad, beefy palm, for his trouble.

The blow stung him keenly, and the sleuth answered it with a sharp drive to the face, with clenched fist, but scarcely had the blow fallen than a fist seemingly as hard as a sledge hammer struck him full upon the chin, whirled him halfway around, and dropped him to his knees, badly befuddled. He regained his feet with considerable difficulty and rushed at the banker, arms swinging wildly. With his free arm Eberhart parried the shower of blows as best he could, dodging some of them and taking a few, but handing back as good as he received.

The men who had been working under Eberhart's direction rushed to his rescue, resenting the attack upon their leader, because of his disabled arm, but his only word was for them to stand clear, as he lunged forward and dealt the detective a heavy blow in the solar plexus. Dahlrymple staggered and stumbled. He rushed forward, intending to clinch, doubling himself up like a jackknife, but the stalwart banker doubled him back the other way with a quick wallop on the point of the chin, sending him sprawling among the broken bricks and other rubbish, where he laid for several minutes, flat on his back, and dead to the world.

When the detective opened his eyes he was alone in the street. Eberhart and the dark-skinned laborers had gone their way to continue the rescue work. In the broad light of noon the sleuth sat amid destitution and disorder, pondering over the recent happenings, and rubbing many painful spots upon his anatomy.

Presently he was brought back to his senses by a long, hoarse whistle blast which drifted up from the harbor. It was the *Falcon,* making ready to put out. She had been riding at anchor in the outer harbor since the previous day, and was now bound for San Francisco by way of Honolulu. A shrill whistle from far down the bay announced that the *Petrol* was approaching to tow her safely out to sea.

Standing at the *Falcon's* rail, as she glided gracefully away from the dock, Dahlrymple gazed back over the scene of havoc and horror. The boat got under way quickly, as though anxious to quit the scene and set its face toward home. The Golden Gate beckoned, and the *Falcon's* mute reply was "Full speed ahead."

When what remained of the ruined city had vanished from view the detective bethought himself of his luggage which was

lying among the ruins of the hotel. Hatless, he presented a sorry sight, and was wholly unpresentable in polite society. He congratulated himself that he had a coat, and stroked a sleeve of it almost affectionately. The nap of the cloth felt strange to his touch, and he now looked at it closely for the first time since he had picked himself up from the ruins of the hotel and rescued the garment from the débris.

It was not his coat. That was quite apparent. In fact, it was a blue coat, and he had been wearing a gray suit. The coat was too small for him, too, he observed. Then it dawned upon him that in the excitement following the volcanic eruption and earthquake he had grabbed the first garment that had come to his notice, like a man who jumps into his clothes and runs to a fire, only to discover in the course of time that he is wearing the trousers hindside foremost.

Dahlrymple slipped his hand into the inner pocket of the coat, in search of identification. There were some papers and letters in it. The letters were addressed to Mark Pennington, and some of them were grimy with age. One of these was from McManus, president of the Security National Bank of Ashland.

It was more than I had a right to expect of you as a friend. When Clara ended our youthful rivalry by marrying me I supposed that your deep interest in her died. Her sickness called for several trips to the hospital, and the expense, as you know, was greater than I could bear. There was no alternative. I simply had to forge the notes and discount them to raise the money and save her. When a crisis in my affairs seemed very near your sudden departure protected me from exposure and saved the good name of my family. You will, of course, be glad to know that Clara has completely recovered her health, and that I have succeeded in numerous investments, so that I am now financially able to repay you at least to the extent of the financial sacrifice you made for our sake. We expect to spend a few weeks among the islands this winter, and I hope to see you at that time.

With a puzzled expression on his face the detective pondered over the contents of the letter for several minutes. He read it and reread it. Then he crumpled it up in the palm of his hand and strode toward the radio station of the *Falcon*.

A few minutes later the wireless was buzzing and sputtering over a radiogram addressed to the Bank Protective Association by its foremost criminal catcher, and these are the words it clicked out into the vast expanse of ether, with New York as their destination:

Mark Pennington, former Ashland bank cashier, among victims of volcanic eruption at Amapia!

POWER OF "THIRD" PARTIES

LAST January, when the politicians of the nation were hearing more than they wanted of mysterious plans for the formation of a "Hoover party" and for the appearance of a "Labor party," they looked into the precedents and discovered that "third" parties had developed, at various times, a great capacity for giving trouble to one or both of the "old-line" political groups.

The first of the "new" or "third" organizations was the Anti-Masonic party which put into presidential nomination William Wirt, in 1832. The best he did was to carry Vermont. But in 1844 the Free Soilers enabled James K. Polk to beat Henry Clay, and in 1848 they lifted Taylor into the presidency over Cass.

In 1854 the Know Nothing party sprang into life, carried religion into politics, and won out in several States, but could not elect a president. After the Civil War the Greenbacks jumped the reservation, later merging into another "third" party, the Populists. Later on still came the Progressives, or Bull Moosers, whose desertion from the Republican ranks made Woodrow Wilson president.

No wonder the "regulars" prick up their ears when they hear "new party" talk!

Breaking and Entering

By Roy W. Hinds

Author of "Little Deeds of Blindness," "Say That Again, Please," Etc.

We have all heard of honor among thieves, but here is a new kind of it—and a very appealing kind. Tom Faley proves all over again that none of us are all good or all bad

THE creak of a stealthy footfall on the stairway awakened Bonder. There followed a moment of silence—a moment in which his arousing senses had time definitely to determine that the sound was a reality and not the coin of a dream. Then Bonder heard other footsteps outside his door, and a gentle brushing, as though a body were moving along the wall. He got out of bed softly, trying not to awaken his wife. The scant furnishings of the room were dim and sketchy in the gloom. A wavering thread of light from a street lamp sifted into the room and fell athwart a rickety cradle in which a baby slept.

Outside the night was dark and wind swept. The tops of tenement houses across the dingy street loomed bulkily. In one of the opposite windows a pale light glimmered. A momentary fear clutched Bonder's heart. No matter what the import of the strange noises in the hall, no matter what peril lurked just outside his door, the father felt that the baby was involved first.

He straightened up with a jerk. Barefoot, he tiptoed out of the bedroom. A multitude of thoughts crowded Bonder's consciousness in an incredibly short space of time. In a twinkling he had somehow linked the sounds in the hallway to the days when "Duffy" Bonder was a prowler of the night—a burglar. He was Duffy no more. In his rejuvenated respectability he was Duffield Bonder. But now he felt that the old days, in human guise, had crept up the tenement stairway and stood outside his door.

The senses of a burglar, attuned to every whisper and rustle of the night, have within them almost the power of sight. A burglar's nerves are ever alert, whether awake or asleep. That is why Bonder's kaleidoscopic thoughts hit upon the assumption that he soon would be brought face to face with his past. The police were not outside Bonder's door. The police would hammer fearlessly, peremptorily, upon the door. The summons that presently came was scarcely more than a tap, given cautiously. This was followed by a gentle scraping, as though the applicant for admission were using a finger nail.

Bonder softly closed the bedroom door, instinctively wishing to shut his family away from his caller. He tiptoed to the door, placed his hand upon the key, thrust his lips quite close to the door crack, and called gruffly:

"Who's there?"

Came a hoarse whisper from outside: "Tom Faley."

Bonder still hesitated.

"It don't sound like Tom Faley," he said presently.

"Tom's here," the voice outside assured him. "This is Bob Cleve talkin'; but Tom's here." The man hesitated a moment and then announced abruptly: "He's hurt."

Bonder opened the door. The hall was half lighted by a single gas jet spurting a slender flame. Bonder saw three men. Two of them supported their companion. Bonder recognized the latter as his old friend, Tom Faley. He motioned quickly with his arm and the two men lugged Faley inside. Bonder closed and locked the door. He noticed that Faley's head drooped weakly. He led the way into the living room and helped to make Faley comfortable as possible on the couch.

Bonder drew the shades and lighted a gas jet. He recognized one of Faley's companions as Bob Cleve, a man he had known slightly in the old days. The other man, a stocky fellow with scowling features, he had never seen before. Faley was a tall, strongly built man about the age of Bonder; thirty perhaps. His companions were somewhat older, and showed in a more marked degree the ravages of dissipation and the wear and tear of their precarious manner of life.

Bonder surveyed swiftly the man lying inertly on the couch. Then he hastened to

the bedroom, for he had heard a stir there. His wife was awake and sat on the edge of the bed. She knew something of his old way of life, and the strange sounds of the night were ominous to her. She had drawn the cradle close, and now hovered over it apprehensively. One hand clutched her bosom in instinctive misgiving. With the appearance of her husband she strove for calmness.

"What is it, Duff?" she whispered.

"Everything's all right," he assured her bravely, though he had some doubts on that score himself. "You stay here—and rest easy. There ain't nothing goin' to happen to you, nor him"—he glanced at the baby—"nor to me, either."

He returned to the living room, more fully dressed. Tom Faley's companions were busy over his wound. The injured man moaned softly, not from pain but from weakness. He had been shot in the right breast, and had lost so much blood that he was barely conscious.

"I don't think it went through his ribs," muttered Cleve. He probed about the lacerated flesh with none too gentle a finger. "Seems like it hit him on the glance, though it tore him up pretty much."

Bonder hastened to the side of his old friend. He soon established the fact that the bullet had not entered the man's breast. It was a deep flesh wound. They got water and clean cloths and soon had on a bandage that stopped the bleeding. Faley opened his eyes now and then, dimly conscious, yet too weak to talk—and too weak to care much what happened him.

"How'd this happen?" Bonder asked Bob Cleve.

"A policeman got him."

"Ain't they likely to come here lookin' for him?"

"No," said Cleve; "we dodged 'em. That's why he bled so. We kept him goin' till we was sure everything was clear—and then we come up here. You needn't worry, Bonder; not for a while anyway."

Bonder frowned. His gaze traveled from one face to another. His voice was a trifle severe when he asked: "How'd you happen to come here—to my house; with my wife and baby here?"

"He's a friend of your'n, ain't he?" Cleve rejoined.

Bonder's eyes sought the pale face of the wounded man. He surveyed his features earnestly. At length he admitted, in a voice softened no doubt by friendly recollections:

"Yes, he's a friend of mine."

He turned nervously to Cleve and his glowering companion and gazed coolly into their eyes.

"You know," he said, "I'm goin' straight now; and this—this thing ain't goin' to do my wife and baby no good."

For the first time the third man spoke. "Who's goin' to know it?" he demanded.

Bonder studied the man, and decided that his gruffness perhaps was merely his manner of speaking and not due to any ill nature respecting himself or the present situation.

"Who's goin' to know it?" Bonder repeated. "I don't know who's goin' to know it." Then he ventured: "I'll bet Tom Faley never asked you to bring him here."

"Maybe he didn't," Cleve interjected.

"You brought him here on your own hook," Bonder suggested.

"Yes, we did," Cleve told him. "You see, Bonder, we walked him through the streets and alleys till his legs give out, and then we lugged him along, tryin' all the time to leave a dead trail. Finally we come to this neighborhood; and, thinks I, Faley's old friend Bonder lives here. We didn't want to hurt you and the family; and we don't want to now. But I couldn't think of anything better to do than bring him here." He added defensively: "We had to get him under cover somewheres. He was drippin' blood now and then, and it wasn't safe to lead him around—to say nothing of the danger of him dyin' on our hands. We didn't know till just now that the bullet didn't sink in deeper. We thought sure we'd have to have a doctor, but"—he glanced critically at Faley, who had sunk into deep slumber—"but I guess he can get along without a doctor. Don't you see, Bonder, we had to get him under cover somewheres?"

"Yes," said Bonder reluctantly, "you had to do that."

"And we couldn't get him home. He lives way up in Harlem now, and, besides, we'd be afraid to let 'em know at his hotel that he was wounded. The police know one of us was hit—and they'll hunt the town for a wounded man."

"Where'd it happen?"

"We was workin' on a 'can' in Fourteenth Street. They sneaked up on Sears here"—he jerked his thumb toward the stranger—"who was doin' the outside. Sears got us a flash

quick enough, and we got out of the coop, but they plugged Tom before we could shake 'em. It knocked him sideways, but he didn't lose his feet—and we didn't know he was hit bad till he quit runnin'. Then we see that he'd lost a lot of blood. They'll know one of us was hit all right, as they'll see the blood."

"And they'll hunt for a wounded man," said Bonder reflectively.

"Yes," Cleve admitted, "they'll do that. But I thought—I thought maybe you could put him up here for a few days; long enough for him to get some of his strength back. He'll need plenty of milk and eggs, and regular food like that, but we'll see that it gets here to the house. As long as he don't need a doctor, nobody will find it out, will they?"

"There's neighbor women runnin' in here all the time."

"Can't you keep 'em out? Tell 'em the baby's sick, or something like that."

Bonder studied the burglars thoughtfully.

"Cleve," he said finally, "you and me never knew each other very well, and I never knew this man at all. You know, I got married and been goin' straight ever since. I've been workin' for small money—a year's wages now don't amount to as much as I sometimes made in one night in the old days. But I'm goin' straight—and I like it.

"If I was the only one, I wouldn't hesitate a second—but I ain't the only one. I've got the wife to think about, and we got the baby to think about. It's a dangerous thing that you ask me to do. It might mean that my wife and baby lose me and their home. It might mean their lives; and I ain't goin' to decide one way or another."

The burglars gazed upon him in bewilderment.

"What're you goin' to do?" Cleve inquired.

"I'm goin' to leave it to the wife," Bonder replied.

The burglars stared in amazement.

"Don't do that, Bonder; we——"

"I'm goin' to leave it to the wife," Bonder persisted.

And his wife soon dressed and joined the strange group in the living room. She was rather a frail woman, one who had worked hard; but she had the calm serenity of a mother and a wife happy despite the drudging struggle for livelihood. Her gaze fell first on the wounded man, and instinctively she drew a step closer to him.

"He's all right," her husband said. "We fixed him up."

Then she studied the other strangers. There were no introductions. The burglars pulled off their caps, and fumbled at them nervously. Their feet shuffled as they slowly withdrew to far corners.

"Mary," said Bonder, nodding his head toward the sleeping man, "that man is Tom Faley. You never heard me speak about him—as I ain't never talked to you of my old friends. Well, he was a friend of mine when I—when he and me worked together. You understand, Mary—we worked together before you and me was married.

"He was the best friend I had in the world. He took care of me when I was sick, he fed me when I was hungry, he give me a place to sleep when I was broke. Twice he saved my life, when he could've run away and got out of danger himself. But he didn't run away. He stuck—and took a chance on bein' killed, just to save me. There ain't no use to say any more—he was the best friend I had in the world. If it wasn't for him, maybe I'd be dead, or in prison.

"Now he's been wounded. He was committin' a crime, robbery it was, and was shot by a policeman. His friends here can't take him home, and they can't take him to a hospital. If he's caught, they'll send him to prison soon's he gets well. If he's caught here, they'll likely send me to prison with him. I'm goin' to leave it to you—shall we take a chance and give him a place to stay till he's strong enough to look after himself?"

The woman's eyes turned toward the bedroom. So did the father's. For a few moments there was no sound save the mournful breathing of the wounded man.

Presently the mother spoke. "You can't go to prison," she said.

"No, I can't," said Bonder, "and if we keep him here, it may mean that I'll have to go."

"Will they—the police—will they know he's here?"

"That's a gamble—maybe they will and maybe they won't."

"And still," she mused, "he was your friend."

"The best I had."

After a time she suggested: "If you think it's safe, I'm willing for him to stay—a little while—and I'll do my best to get him well."

"I can't say whether it's safe or not."

Then she asked: "How would we feel if we turned him out, and he died, or—or was arrested and sent away?"

"I hate to think how I'd feel," Bonder rejoined.

"Then I think we—we'd better keep him here, for a while," she decided, "and be careful."

Bonder breathed deeply. "That's what I hoped you'd say, Mary," he said simply.

Just then Tom Faley opened his tired eyes. He was somewhat refreshed but still very weak. He stared at Bonder.

"Duffy Bonder—Duffy Bonder," he whispered. "I mustn't stay here, Duffy; it'll get you and the family in bad. I——" His voice failed him as he made an effort to rise. His strong face drew into a sharp scowl as a twinge of pain shot through the wounded breast. They pushed him back gently. Bonder's wife gave him a glass of milk, and he drank it slowly while she held the glass. Then he fell asleep again.

It wasn't much trouble to nurse Tom Faley. For the ensuing two or three days they kept the wound clean. They fed him wholesome food, and his strong constitution did the rest. His friend, Bob Cleve, brought Faley's food to the house. He offered to bring food for Bonder's family, too, but this offer was tactfully rejected. He offered money, and this was declined.

Faley was stronger the second night. The living-room couch had been turned into a comfortable bed. Bonder, tired after a hard day's work at his drudging warehouse job, dozed in a rocking-chair. His wife busied herself at the weary task of patching patched clothing. It seemed as though she were always patching and scheming to get the uttermost wear out of every thread they possessed.

The baby's high chair was drawn close to the couch. The baby was a marvel to the burglar. Never before had he been thrown into such intimate contact with a baby.

At first he was as shy as the infant. He feared even to touch him; feared he might break him in some way. The baby gurgled and otherwise expressed his high spirits in a series of strange noises. The burglar finally extended his heavy hand, and in a moment the baby laid his pudgy fist in the huge palm. The burglar's fingers closed over the tiny hand. Then they got to reaching for each other's hands and pulling them away quickly; a sort of "try-and-catch-it" game. The baby was delighted, and so was the burglar. They got along very well.

The mother smiled approvingly. Bonder, awakened from his doze by the gleeful play at the couch, gazed silently at his baby and his old burglar friend. In a few moments Bonder's eyes took on a moody stare. His manner grew somewhat morose and brooding, but this passed unnoticed.

Bonder watched his wife's efforts to renew the serviceability of the family wardrobe. He saw her eyes pucker over the almost impossible task. When she thought herself unobserved, her face grew sad and puzzled. Bonder looked on silently. His eyes wandered about the poorly furnished room, and at times fell upon the shabby garb covering his own body. On every hand lay evidence of Bonder's hard struggle to go straight.

His eye grew dark when he observed his wife's dress, kindled brightly for a moment when he looked on the happy baby, and faded gloomily again when he thought of the baby's future.

He fell to abusing himself inwardly. Why had he spent the best part of his life in burglary and crime? Why hadn't he learned a trade? Had he worked as hard at a trade as he had at burglary, he'd be a high-waged mechanic now. But he hadn't worked. He was a failure at everything. He was doomed to low wages. He was expert at nothing—except——

Burglary! The thought frightened him, and he put it aside.

The baby was put to bed in his cradle, over his somewhat unintelligible but emphatic protest. He soon succumbed to the drowsy darkness of the bedroom, and slumbered. Bonder's wife retired. The two men were alone—alone for the first time in years.

Tom Faley's voice was weak. He said: "That's a great kid you got, Bonder."

"You hadn't ought to talk," Bonder warned him. "You ain't very strong yet."

"I'd like to do something for that kid, Bonder."

"You better go to sleep."

"I ain't sleepy."

Bonder hitched his chair close to the couch. The two men studied each other. Faley lay inert, for pains speared through his breast when he moved. It was a trifle painful even to breathe deeply, and he talked slowly and laboriously.

"I'd like to do something for that kid, Bonder," Faley repeated.

"What?"

"Oh, put some money in a bank in his name—or something like that. Just a little present, you know, to show I liked him."

Bonder meditated. "His mother wouldn't stand for that," he said.

Faley understood. "Because my money don't come in the right way, eh?" he asked.

Bonder didn't answer the question, and Faley added: "Well, I s'pose she's right. Women have funny ideas about such things —but they're most always right."

Bonder didn't seem inclined to talk, so Faley pressed on: "I guess you could use some money, couldn't you, Bonder?"

"Yes," the other man admitted, "but I can't take money from you, Tom."

The burglar wasn't offended. He turned his gaze significantly over the room. The action wasn't lost upon Bonder.

"I'm badly in need of money," the householder said, "and I can't seem to earn much. Just about enough to keep us alive, that's what I'm makin'; with no chance to lay up anything for the baby." He spoke bitterly, and resumed: "I thought maybe I'd take a correspondence course in some trade, or something like that, but I can't get enough ahead to start it; and I'm workin' so hard, I don't know whether I'd have strength to study, if I did start it." He surveyed his friend's pale face. "You're doin' pretty well, ain't you, Tom?" he inquired at length.

"Yes," the burglar replied. "Things ain't so bad; but the money us fellows make don't seem to do us much good. You know how that is, Duffy—easy come and easier go."

The erstwhile burglar mused. Directly he declared: "If I made any such money now'-days, I'll bet it wouldn't go that way. I'd like to get my hands on a wad of it once again."

"Why don't you take some money off'n me?"

"I wouldn't do that, Tom."

Faley twisted his head toward the bedroom. "She don't have to know it," he urged.

"I'd know it, wouldn't I? D'you think I'd quit stealin' and then ask another man to steal for me?"

"I didn't mean it that way, Duffy. I owe you something for takin' me in here, don't I? Why don't you take it for that?"

"I wouldn't take no money for keepin' you here," Bonder asserted doggedly. "I'm goin' to lean on myself. If I take stolen money, I'm goin' to steal it myself."

The burglar gazed in surprise. "I hope you ain't slippin', Duffy," he said. "I'd hate to have you slip now, after what your wife has done for me. I'd think I was to blame, Duffy; and it'd mean a lot to her —and that kid—Duffy. Don't slip, Duffy. I ain't mushy about them things, but me knowin' your wife, you see, and bein' under obligations to her—it ain't right for you to slip on account of me bein' in the house. I'll walk out now, if you talk about slippin' —I'll walk out if it rips this chest of mine to pieces."

"I ain't slippin'," Duffy Bonder declared, rather ill-naturedly. "I'm just thinkin'."

And he continued to think in silence for some time. Finally he arose abruptly, made Tom Faley comfortable for the night, and went to bed.

"He's slippin'—he's slippin'," Faley repeated inwardly, over and over. "And I'm to blame for it. It's a mean trick—a mean trick."

In the bedroom lay Bonder, half awake and half asleep, dreaming of the riches that lay almost at his finger tips—if he cared to step aside momentarily from all his old resolutions. Why couldn't he step aside for a night, and then hasten back again? Why couldn't——

Next day Bonder plodded heavily through his weary tasks. At home that evening his wife observed his preoccupied manner. She studied, furtively, her husband and the wounded burglar lying on the couch. Then she worried; worried infinitely more than she ever worried about their poverty and their struggles. But she said nothing about her fears. She contented herself with the knowledge that Tom Faley would soon be leaving.

Bonder and Tom Faley were alone again, late that night. Bonder talked frankly of burglary. Tom Faley discouraged the idea —but the idea had taken too sturdy a root.

Tom Faley lay awake a long time that night. He thought deeply of the prospects of Duffy Bonder and his family. His ingenious mind grasped every detail of past, present, and future. His mind was crowded by a multitude of schemes to repay in some measure the debt he owed Bonder's wife. Then he decided that it wouldn't be a bad thing for Duffy Bonder to pull just one more job.

Next night they again talked of burglary. Bonder observed that Tom Faley had changed his views—and he didn't know whether this pleased or disappointed him. At any rate, Duffy Bonder and Tom Faley decided to commit burglary together. Just once, Bonder assured him.

"That'll give me a stake," Bonder said, "something to work on. I'll put it away, and bring it home a bit at a time. I'll tell her I got a boost in my wages. Then we can get a few clothes—and maybe I can do some studyin' for a better job."

Tom Faley went away next day. His stay in the house hadn't brought a ripple from the police, and the Bonder family were happy for that.

For several days Bonder talked encouragingly of his job. There was a prospect, after long work, of a foremanship; but Bonder's wife knew that he didn't view with pleasure the long months of weary toil before that job would materialize.

"It's a hard game, Mary; it's a hard game," he said more than once, and then straightway grew cheerful—thinking of the job he and Tom Faley were going to pull when Tom's wound healed fully.

That time soon came. Bonder, employing a plausible subterfuge to get away from home, met Tom Faley late at night. They arrived at the "plant." It was a tall, brick building in the warehouse district of the city. With a jimmy and a short-handled crowbar they gained access through a window opening upon the alley. It had been decided that Bonder would do the inside work and Tom Faley the outside.

"I want to feel my fingers against steel once more," Bonder said. Now that he had decided to commit burglary, he went about the job with abundant enthusiasm.

"When you get inside," Tom Faley had instructed, "walk straight ahead till you come to a wide door. It's never locked. On the right side of the second room is a steel cage. At the back of the cage, inside, is the door of the box, which is built into the wall. You'll know what to do then."

Bonder, proceeding cautiously and flashing his lamp now and then, came to the steel cage. He paid no heed to his surroundings. He knew the place had been "looked over" previously by Faley, and felt perfectly safe. He couldn't make out much in the dense gloom, and he didn't wish to play the flash lamp more than necessary.

He stepped inside the cage and across it. He placed on the floor the satchel containing the tools he had borrowed from Faley. Then he turned the rays of the lamp over the rear wall of the cage. His searching eyes encountered nothing but a blank steel wall.

He was puzzled. For a few moments he stared incredulously at the wall. Then he decided that he had failed in some way to follow his companion's directions. His finger moved off the flash-lamp button, and once again he stood in thick darkness.

Just then he heard a door close behind him, and the click of a turning lock. A spear of alarm darted through Bonder. He recalled then that he didn't carry a revolver. Whatever happened, he had tried to avoid anything that might lead to murder.

Bonder stepped quickly to the front of the cage. He found himself entrapped. The door of the cage was shut and locked. Not for a moment did Bonder suspect Tom Faley. The certainty that he had been snared in some sort of a burglar trap pressed heavily upon his senses—a trap set by the owners of this establishment.

Thus he was surprised when he heard the voice of Tom Faley, with a suggestion of a chuckle in its low tones.

"How does it feel to get your fingers against steel once more?" Faley asked. He stood just outside the grated door.

"What kind of a trick is this?" Bonder demanded.

"Turn on your lamp," his companion suggested.

Bonder did so. He perceived then that he was in a cell, a regulation prison cell.

"What is this place?" he demanded fiercely.

"It's a cell," Faley informed him; "a regular cell, and I'm just wonderin' how you like it. Oh, you needn't get scared. This ain't no jail—it's just the factory of the Powell Jail Company, and that cell is a model they built to show to county commissioners and State prison boards when they're out buyin' jail fixtures. How d'you like it, eh?"

"I don't like it; and there ain't much of a joke to it. Open that door!"

"Just a minute," Faley rejoined. He grew serious, intensely serious. "I'm just wonderin', Bonder, if you thought I'd help you pull a job, after what your wife done for me. Did you, Duffy?"

"I don't know if I did or not—I didn't think much about it."

Somehow his affection for Tom Faley rose higher and higher, but his bewilderment was too deep yet to permit of orderly thought.

Faley went on: "Well, I hope you didn't. You can go back to stealin' if you want to—but you ain't goin' back with Tom Faley. I ain't no preacher, but I'm enough of a man not to lay sick in a woman's house, and then take her husband back to the things she wants him to quit. I know you, Bonder. You was doin' all right, and wouldn't ever think of stealin' if I hadn't been around. But you got to lookin' at me, and thinkin' of the big money I make—and you fell. And you ain't a man that falls soft. You said you was goin' to do one job and quit, but you couldn't do that. The money would come too easy, and you'd be steppin' out again before long. You'd soon be right back to where you was before you got married—a straight burglar, and nothing else. Well, you can do it—you can be a burglar—but you ain't goin' to get help from Tom Faley."

"That's all right," Bonder protested impatiently; "that's all right. But why all this monkey business. You didn't have to lock me in a cell to talk to me."

Faley chuckled. "You know, Bonder," he confessed, "I always did like to do things up right. I like melodrama, Bonder; and there's nothing suits me like doin' things in a new way. I——"

"What'd you put me in this cell for?"

"Just to give you a chance to think," Tom Faley informed him seriously. "If you steal, you're goin' to land in one of them things some day. I'm goin' to land in one of 'em. That's the end of all the boys, Bonder; and I ain't preachin' neither. I'm tellin' you what we all know. Some of us land in a cell, some of us meet a bullet on the wing, but dam' few of us ever passes out from typhoid or influenza, unless it's in a prison hospital. I don't know just how I'm goin' to finish—but you! Well, you got a home and a wife and a baby—something to work for; and I thought I'd just give you a chance to say whether you'd rather finish in a place like you're in now, or go back and live in your home, and try to make it better."

Bonder remained silent.

"How'd you like to have your wife and baby standin' on the other side of this door, in a regular prison, and talkin' to you?" Faley asked.

"Unlock the door," Bonder said. "You're right, Tom. I'm goin' home—unlock the door."

It was very late when Bonder got home.

"Are you all right, Duff?" his wife called from the bedroom.

"I'm all right, Mary!" he assured her happily. "It's late, and I'll have to hustle to bed. I got a hard day's work to-morrow—I'll have to work hard to get that foreman job; but I'm all right, Mary—I'm all right!"

A Cameron Finlock story by Mr. Hinds, "A Tale of Two Towns," will appear in an early issue.

SYMPATHY IN THE SICK ROOM

WHEN Senator Fall, of New Mexico, went to call on Woodrow Wilson last December for the purpose of reporting to the Senate committee on foreign relations whether the president was physically able to look after public business, an Eastern senator remarked:

"As a sick-room sympathizer for the president, Fall will be a lukewarm proposition. He hates the Wilson policies and he doesn't love Wilson."

"He'll be as cheering to the president," said Harry C. Stevens, the newspaper correspondent, "as a certain little boy was on a more serious occasion. The youngster's grandfather was very ill, had been ill for a long time, and there was some doubt as to whether he could recover.

" 'Willie,' said the kid's mother, 'go into your grandfather's room and cheer him up. He likes to hear you talk.'

" 'Grandfather,' said Willie eagerly, as a starter, 'I'll bet you'd like to have soldiers at your funeral!' "

All's Well That Ends Wet

By Elmer Brown Mason

Author of "Saint and Señorita," "The Black Flamingo," Etc.

A tale of mistaken identity in automobiles. If the mix-up lost old Bill Watkins the son-in-law he wanted, it saved him something almost as important

BY Godfrey, I'm glad to see you back!" Old Bill Watkins exclaimed heartily. "There hasn't been a he-man on the Hematite Location since you left, not a soul for me to tip up a glass with." He placed a bottle on the table, "Here's Tony Terinelli's best. Say when?"

Wayne Hawley said "When," and the two men tossed down their drinks with the deftness due to long practice.

"Now did you like the East?" continued old Bill. "I never was much for Chicago myself, too boiled-shirtish for my taste. I suppose you went in for society, though; attended monkey dinners and drank pussy cafés. I'm darn glad Sally May has finished school and is out in a man's country again. I was scared every minute that she was away that she'd fall in love with some dude and I'd have to kill him. I suppose this prohibition don't mean nothing in a big city. You got all the drinks you wanted?"

"I did *not*," answered the young civil engineer. "This is the first whisky I've tasted since I left the Location." He held out his glass again. "And I'm glad to get back. Chicago don't use it any more. All those Easterners have gone in strong for this spirit stuff, talk to ghosts."

"That comes of cutting off a man's drink," Mr. Watkins stated judicially. "The lunertic asylums will do a big business now. This crazy prohibition thing is goin' to give half the United States the D. T.'s. Well, what did you see interestin', strange, or curious?"

"Not a darned thing," answered Wayne Hawley. "Not a *darn* thing! Spent my time wishing that I was back here. What's happened on the Location? How's Salome?"

"Sally May's all right," responded the girl's father, then switched to a more vital topic. "What do you think? Tony's place was raided, raided in Iron County! Think of it!"

"You don't say!" exclaimed his auditor, deep concern in his voice. "You don't say! What in Heaven's name are we going to do for drinks?"

"That's all right," reassured the mine boss; "that's all right. Tony is goin' to shut down for a month but, meanwhile, he's gettin' me a supply in. Good feller, Tony. I don't take any stock in that story of a couple murders in his place. Even if it's true, it don't prove anythin'. They're some bad men 'mong those who drink, same as they're 'mong those who don't."

"I suppose so," agreed the civil engineer. "Anything else of interest happened?"

"No-o-o-o. Well, you couldn't call it of interest exactly, since he's as quiet as Sally May herself. A geologist, Richard Stacy he calls hisself, is stayin' on the Location, collecting fossils from that brown hematite formation we struck just before you left. Silent sort of middle-sized cuss with glasses. Rides around in a flivver he calls 'Henry' just as though it was a horse. Sally May says he comes from Armour Institute in Chicago. I don't have any truck with him. Don't hold by Easterners."

"Does Salome like him?" Wayne Hawley asked suspiciously.

"Sally May is a good girl and only likes what her pa does," responded old Bill, not without pride. "You needn't worry your fool head 'bout *him*—even though she's rid in that Henry car a couple times. Have 'nother drink?"

"Just one more, if you insist," the civil engineer agreed. "And then I'm going to bed. It's sixty miles from Marshfield to the Location, a hundred and sixty if you measure the length you jump over each bump. I'm dead beat."

The stars that shine down on the State of Michigan differ from all other stars. They do not glow with the warmth of fire but with the sparkling gleam of ice. Those above Iron County, in particular, have a certain cynical hardness as though contemptuous of the petty affairs of mankind. These same stars peered down with even more than their usual cynicism as they watched the drama unfolding on the Hematite Location.

While Wayne Hawley and old Bill Watkins still lingered over the last drink, the side door of the mine boss' house opened a crack and a girl's face peered into the moonlight. A moment's hesitation and she slipped outside, shutting the door noiselessly behind her, and scuttled from shadow to shadow like a furtive gray mouse, till the dark blot of a grove of pine swallowed her up entirely. A moonbeam glinted on a man's glasses as he rose to his feet and the next moment she was in his arms. There was a long silence broken by a very small voice with the inevitable question:

"Do you love me?"

The man assured her he did.

"It's very wicked of me to come out here, Richard. You know how I hate deceit, anything that even approaches a lie."

"I know, darling."

"But I couldn't help it," continued the small voice. "You are so different from other men, so gentle. All the men I've known fight and—and drink. It *is* deceitful, though, Richard!"

"We'll soon end all *that*," stated the man masterfully. "I'm going to see your father in the morning and ask him for the hand of the most beautiful and adorable girl in the whole world."

"Oh, not yet," interrupted the girl with a shiver. "We've—we've only known it ourselves a day. And, besides, Mr. Hawley is back and father wants me to marry him."

"Do you want to?" came from the man, his voice quick with jealousy.

"No, of course I don't, you old stupid. Only it will come as a shock to father."

"It's bound to come as a shock some time, so why wait, Salome? You love me, don't you?"

She assured him that she did.

"When can I tell him?" he urged.

"I—I don't know. I'll—I'll meet you here to-morrow night at the same time. You're going off in Henry for the day, aren't you? I must go in now."

Another silence, during which the cynical stars tried in vain to pierce with their beams the inky blackness of the pine wood, then the slight gray figure scurried out from the protection of the trees, instinctively seeking the shadows, and reached the steps of the house. On noiseless feet the girl stole down the porch toward the side door. There was the sound of voices in the hall, light flared forth as the front door opened, and Wayne Hawley stood before her.

"Hello, Salome! Where have you been?" he called gayly. "Aren't you going to say you're glad to see me back? I've missed *you!*"

"Father will be very glad to have you back," the girl answered primly. "He has missed you a lot."

"How about you?" he asked ruefully. "Haven't you missed me just a little bit?" The big young man was very earnest, very good looking in his sincerity. Salome relented slightly.

"It's pleasant to know that you are back," she temporized, in her small voice.

"That's not enough," the civil engineer insisted stubbornly. "You know that——"

"Oh, please don't say it?" pleaded the girl in a panic.

"You know that I love you, Salome," he went on relentlessly; "that I'm crazy about you. You will marry me, won't you, dear? I didn't mean to ask you now, to startle you, but it just came of itself. You will marry me, won't you?"

"Sure she will," boomed old Bill Watkins' big voice behind them; "*sure* she will! Tell him it's all right, daughter. Sally May always does what I say, you know, Wayne. But, listen here, son! There's just one bottle of whisky left in the house—only 'bout enough to get us through to-morrow. Where you goin', daughter?" But Salome had fled weeping past him before he could stop her.

Some men are born parents—soothe the teething cry with the instinctive tenderness of a woman; some acquire the art of being a parent by long practice; some never get the idea at all. Old Bill Watkins was really the kindest of men, but he never got the being-a-father in its proper perspective. Salome—simplified by him at an early age into Sally May—was the one surprise his wife afforded him. He had resented her advent as something in regard to which he had not been consulted, became accustomed to her

in time, and, without his own knowledge, learned to lean upon her after Mrs. Watkins had placidly passed out from an existence of extreme placidity. Old Bill did his duty by the child; sent her to Chicago to school, albeit with misgivings. But that she should think differently from him on *any* subject was something that he never dreamed possible. Salome's general mousiness of being had served in no way to disillusion him. His greeting, therefore, on the morning following the return of Wayne Hawley was quite in character:

"Kind of surprised you, last night, didn't it, daughter? Wayne popping the question so suddenly. I'd seen it coming for a long time, though. Girls aren't as quick as their fathers at seeing such things."

Salome vouchsafed no answer.

"Well, you got a he-man. I couldn't have picked one I'd like better. It's fine he is on the Location, too. You can both go on living with your old father. That's a blessing, isn't it, not to have to begin your married life among strangers?"

Complete silence on Salome's part, while the fatuous parent continued his monologue.

"I don't believe in long engagements. Suppose you get married the first of next month. That will give you a chance to run down East to Chicago and get your wedding dress. Does that suit you, daughter?"

"No," said Salome briefly.

"Why not?" demanded old Bill in vast surprise. "Oh, I see! You want more time to buy pretties, sew on napkins, and—and things."

"No," answered Salome.

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed her father, an expression of enlightenment combined with amusement on his face. "Don't want to take any chances, but get married at once, so's not to lose him! That's your idea?"

"No," interrupted Salome.

"Well," he continued, paying not the slightest attention to her interruption, "that's what I call sensible. Should have expected it of *my* daughter. What do you say to getting married offhand, next Saturday, hey?"

"No," said Salome.

"What do you mean, no?" old Bill demanded irritably. "I'm trying to get things arranged for you, and you can't say an'thin' but no. You act as though you didn't want to marry him."

"I don't," Salome varied her formula.

"You—you don't! Why, he's the best man in Michigan, the only man I'd *think* of lettin' you marry. What's the matter with him, I'd like to know, Miss Prim?"

"I don't love him," announced Salome.

"Don't love him! *Don't* love him! But I like him first rate. What do you mean, Sally May? What do you mean by it?"

"I won't marry him."

For several moments old Bill gazed at this person who should have been his daughter but who acted like a perfect stranger, an impertinent stranger, his mind struggling up, meanwhile, from an abyss of surprise. Then he found words:

"I see it, now! I see it! That Eastern dude geologist has been putting ideas in your head. A real he-man isn't good enough for you, miss, a man your own father picks out. You prefer that lily-handed Chicago dude——"

"Don't you *dare* speak of Richard that way!" flared the girl.

"Rich-ard," repeated old Bill, "Rich-*ard!* Look here, my girl, I've got to go to the mine now, but when I come back I'll have somethin' to say to you—and to your Richard," and the indignant father rose to his feet and stalked into the front hall. He put on his hat and coat, then hesitated: "Haven't had a drink before noon for twenty years," he soliloquized, "and there's hardly enough to get through the night, but I need one *now.*"

Salome fled to her room, intent on a good cry, but when she reached there put off indulgence in this luxury, in view of the exigencies of the situation—and that it would make her eyes red. Instead she pulled down the curtain all the way on her east window, a signal agreed upon between the lovers that she wanted to see "him"—really, though not so expressed in words, an advertisement that old Bill had gone to his duties at the mine. Then she sat down and, folding her hands, gave herself up to deep thought. When the doorbell rang she greeted her lover, her plans completely perfected.

"Oh, Richard, an awful thing has happened! Father insists on me marrying Mr. Hawley! What—what shall I do?"

"I'll see him at once," said the geologist angrily. "Never heard anything so ridiculous," and he picked up his hat.

"No, no," Salome exclaimed in terror. "He'd—he'd beat you. I couldn't bear it."

"Like to see him try," stated the young man grimly, rising to his feet.

"Richard, if you love me, you'll say nothing to him," the girl cried. "I simply couldn't bear it, I *couldn't.*"

"Well, what shall I do?" demanded the geologist.

There was a long silence. Finally Salome spoke in her smallest voice:

"We might get married."

"Elope, you mean?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"I didn't think you had the nerve," ejaculated the man, in surprise. "You're such a quiet little darling. It will be just splendid! I'll pack my fossils into the back of Henry—they weigh about three hundred pounds—and we'll start at ten to-night. I'll leave the car the other side of the pines, just in the shadow, and come and get you at the porch, so I can carry your bag, and we'll off to Marshfield and be married."

"Oh, I'm scared," breathed Salome, but she made no criticism of her lover's plans.

Old Bill handed over the administration of the mine to his understudy, at seven o'clock, and hastened home to his daughter and a big drink. He got the last before he summoned the first before him. Then he delivered his ultimatum:

"I've always intended that you should marry Wayne Hawley, and I haven't changed my mind. He's comin' over at nine o'clock and we'll decide when the weddin' is goin' to be, and I'll make it soon. Girls don't know what is good for them—that's the reason for so many unhappy marriages."

He paused, prepared for an outburst.

"Yes, father," said Salome meekly, "I'm going to bed now, though. I have a headache."

"Huh!" commented old Bill to cover the surprise of his easy victory.

"Where's Salome?" demanded Wayne Hawley, somewhat later, returning from hanging his wet slicker in the hall.

"She's gone to bed with a headache," answered old Bill Watkins, the while gazing mournfully at the whisky bottle before him, "and there's about three drinks left in the house. If that darned dago doesn't come to-night, I simply don't know *what* we'll do!"

"Did—did she say anything about me?" the man asked, absent-mindedly accepting the glass his host held out to him.

"Say *when?*" snapped the older man. "I'm offering you a drink, not a bath."

"When! When!" apologized the civil engineer. "I didn't notice what you were doing. You were saying about Salome?"

"I wasn't sayin' anythin'. I've said all I'm goin' to say to her, and she's goin' to do exactly as I think best—that's the way I raised her. All we got to do now is to arrange the date of the weddin'. You got any money saved up? Not that it makes a darned bit of difference," he added hastily. "That you're a he-man is good enough for me, but parents are supposed to ask those kind of questions."

The exposition of the state of Hawley's finances was interrupted, however. There was a rustle in the hall, both men turned, and a head was cautiously projected into the room to be followed by the body of a very bedraggled Italian.

"Good eve', Mr. Watkins; good eve', Mr. Hawla!" the apparition greeted them, and placed a bottle on the table.

"Fine work, Tony," commended the mine boss. "But that isn't all you brought, is it? How's business, anyway? Are you goin' to open up soon? I heard the Federal men had left the county."

Tony lifted his eyes to heaven and shrugged wet shoulders in a gesture expressive of despair. "Da business gone to hell," he exclaimed dramatically. "Da Federal mans chasa me all over da counta. I drive da Ford behind da trees near da road. I leva her with you, one, two, three months meybe, before I come back. Five cases da whisk' in her. You pay me two hundred dollar."

"That's an awful price," commented old Bill, "but I got it on me. Let's go bring them cases in."

"No, no," warned the Italian. "Da Federal mans chasa me. You getta da whisk' after I go. What's that?"

A door had slammed toward the front of the house. The three men stood in strained attitudes listening, and then the mine boss tiptoed out of the room. He returned immediately.

"Wind must have blowed open the side door," he announced, "and it's rainin' like hell."

"I go hide," volunteered Tony. "Tomorrow catch da boat at Marquette for da Canada. Come back with da whisk' when da Federal mans gone."

"Well, good luck to you," said old Bill good-humoredly. "We'll have to be easy on the stuff to make it last. Oh, all right,"

and he accepted the handful of bills that Hawley tendered. "Thought of makin' you a weddin' present of your half, though."

Outside the house the Italian raised his hand in what is characterized in "Alice in Wonderland" as an "odious and vulgar gesture." "Now I sella da five cases of whisk' some other place," he assured himself comfortably, and breasted the rain toward the pine grove. As he passed through the trees a noise ahead of him caught his attention, a noise as of shifting gears. He broke into a run, burst from the trees, and gazed wildly about him. A dark bulk to his left caught his attention and, with a "Santa Maria!" of relief, he hurried toward it.

"Oh, I'm scared," whispered Salome, surrendering her suit case to Richard Stacy and raising a face wet with raindrops to his kiss.

"You needn't be," elatedly stated her lover. "Good old Henry is just behind the pines and will carry us gayly to Marshfield. It's going to stop raining soon. Take my hand, dear."

The lovers reached the shadow of the pines. Salome glanced back, her last look at the house of her father she told herself. A flood of light suddenly poured forth from it as a door was opened.

"Richard, Richard, some one is coming after us!" she cried out in terror. "Hurry! Hurry!"

Hand in hand they threaded the blackness of the pine grove. There was the sound of some one coming up the slope behind them.

"Where's that darned car?" exclaimed the geologist. "Oh, right in front of us. Gee, it's dark! Thought it was more to the left. In with you, darling," and he sprang up beside her and turned the key of the self-starter. The engine whirred, the car slid down toward the road. He shifted gears to take the slight rise, turned to the right, and Henry was humming through the rain on the way to Marshfield.

It certainly was hard driving and took all his attention. An hour went by, then another. The rain suddenly ceased and the stars came out and blinked down on the little Ford.

"It's like a dream," said the man finally. "Everything seems unreal, even Henry doesn't feel familiar. It's like a dream, a beautiful dream!"

"Are you sure you love me, that you won't regret—anything?" came the small voice.

He assured her that he was, and that he wouldn't.

Silence.

"I left the light burning and father will never think to feed the cat," spoke Salome. "I've been deceitful, too."

"Oh, no, you haven't," stoutly maintained her lover, with splendid lack of logic. "You have been just perfect. There's Marshfield just ahead. I arranged everything this afternoon. We go straight to the clergyman and there's a train for Chicago at three o'clock."

"I'm so scared," she snuggled close to him. "*How* can I look at you in the light?"

"Just keep your eyes on mine while we are being married and I'll carry you through," he directed. "Here we are. Come, dear."

He helped her out, reached over to lock the car, paused, gave a whistle of utter astonishment.

"What is it, dear?" she asked.

"Why—why this isn't Henry at all," he exclaimed, "it's—it's another Ford. How in Heaven's name——"

The door of the house in front of them opened and a benign and bewhiskered clergyman stood outlined against the light. An expression of incredulous surprise still on his face, the geologist followed his bride to be within.

The ceremony was quickly over. Strangely enough it was not Salome who needed bracing, *her* voice was clear and steady, but the geologist's answers rose several octaves above normal or else were given in a nearly indistinguishable whisper. He was shaking when the final blessing was pronounced.

"Shall we wait here until train time?" asked the new Mrs. Stacy. She seemed somehow to have taken command of the situation.

"An awful thing has happened, dear," answered her husband. "There is nothing to it, we've *got* to go back to the Hematite Location. My fossils are there, I took the wrong car."

The girl's lips tightened as she gazed at her husband, then she laughed:

"Why not," she exclaimed gayly. "We're married so they can't do anything to you—and I'm so worried about father forgetting to feed the cat."

The old bottle had been finished. The new bottle, long broached, had been pushed

back and forth many times between old Bill and his guest. It was after twelve o'clock and the rain had ceased.

"Well, I must be getting to bed," yawned Wayne Hawley. "Are you sure that it's all right with Salome?" he asked for the twentieth time.

"Of course it is," answered the mine boss complacently. "She always does what I say, and she *said* it was all right. But you've got a job on your hands, young man, before you go to bed. You're comin' with me to the pine grove, and we'll run that cargo of booze back here and put Tony's car in the company garage."

"Sure thing," agreed the engineer, and rose to his feet.

Old Bill and his destined son-in-law paused on the slope that dipped down from the pine grove and gazed uncomprehendingly about them. The moon was up, the stars out, and the bare ground stretching to the road was as light as day. Not a rabbit could have hidden on it. Three times they had walked around the clump of trees, four times they had gone carefully through it.

"Well, it isn't here," finally announced the mine boss; "it simply isn't here! That's a nice thing now, isn't it? That damned dago has simply double-crossed us, gone off with the booze after we paid him for it."

They turned and walked through the trees. An upper-story window below them was blazing with light.

"Is—is that Salome's room?" whispered Wayne Hawley.

"It is," answered her father grimly.

Old Bill Watkins returned quickly from his inspection of the upper story.

"She's gone," he said simply, and sat down staring at the man across the table.

"You're sure?" demanded the civil engineer in a whisper.

"Yes, she's gone," repeated old Bill, "and there's part of a bottle left to last two, three months. My God!"

"If I ever get my hands on that geologist person," said Wayne Hawley between clenched teeth. "Oh, let's get out of here and go back to the hill! We may find something there."

"Perhaps Tony cached the stuff," hopefully suggested old Bill.

For hours the two men searched the pine grove, returning again and again to gaze stupidly at the tracks of the two cars that had taken the road at the bottom of the slope. The stars disappeared, the first ghastly light of morning filtered down on them.

There was the hum of a motor in the distance. It grew louder. A car buzzed into sight, turned from the road, came to a stop in front of them. The geologist jumped out and his words were truculent:

"What have you done with my fossils?"

"We gave them to a dago blind-pig keeper to feed the little pigs on," answered the civil engineer, his voice shaking with fury as he advanced on Richard Stacy.

"You—gave—them—to—a—blind—pig—dealer!" repeated the geologist. "You gave *my* fossils——"

The two men met. There was a muffled scream from the car. Wayne Hawley was head and shoulders above his antagonist, but that's all he was. There was the quick thud, thud of blows striking on flesh, the geologist side-stepped and Wayne Hawley toppled forward gasping as a fist scientifically buried itself in his stomach.

"How dare you come back after disgracin' me? How dare you, Sally May?" roared old Bill. "You—you—and not a drop of drink in the house!"

"I was afraid you'd forget to feed the cat," came a calm voice from the car. "And we——"

"Did *you* help steal my fossils?" shouted the geologist, turning on the mine boss.

"Damn your fossils," answered the older man, retreating to the rear of the car. "What do I care 'bout your fossils! I've had two hundred dollars' worth of booze stolen from *me!*"

"I'll teach you," screamed Richard Stacy, swinging wildly at him.

The mine boss dodged, slipped, caught hold of the tarpaulin over the rear of the car, tearing it away as he fell.

"And we wanted your blessing," continued Salome, as though she had not been interrupted.

But old Bill did not hear. His eyes were riveted on what the torn-away tarpaulin revealed: five cases of whisky neatly packed in the rear of the car. He did not hear, but the face he raised to the angry geologist standing over him was beaming with affection.

Another story by Mr. Mason, "Hard-Boiled Whittaker," will follow soon.

Number Six and the Borgia

By Edgar Wallace

Author of "The Daffodil Enigma," "The Black Grippe," Etc.

The mental processes of a great criminal are very different from those of the normal man. Equally interesting is the work of a skilled detective. So when a writer of Mr. Wallace's ability tells of a life-and-death battle of wits between such adversaries, gives us a glimpse of what goes on in the mind of a master wrongdoer, and weaves into it all a love story of unusual charm, the result is a tale that must delight the reader.

CHAPTER I.

I. THE BEGINNING OF THE HUNT.

THE most mysterious and baffling thing about Cæsar Valentine was to discover the reason for his mystery. It was a mystery which belonged to the category of elusive thought, the name that is on the tip of your tongue, the fact that is familiar, yet defies exact remembrance.

When the international police conference held its yearly meeting in 19— in Geneva, and after three strenuous days' discussion which embraced matters so widely different as the circulation of forged Swedish notes and the philanderings of the Bosnian Ambassador—the conference did its best to prevent his assassination which occurred six months later—the question of Cæsar Valentine came up for examination. It was an informal discussion, a mere drift of conversation arising out of the Gale case.

"I don't quite know what is this man's offense," said Lecomte, of the Surete, "he is very rich and very popular and immensely good looking—but none of these qualities is criminal."

"Where does he get his money?" demanded Leary, of Washington. "We had him in America for five years, and he did nothing but spend."

"Neither in France nor in America is that a crime," smiled Lecomte.

"People who have done business with him have had an unfortunate habit of dying suddenly." It was Hallett, of the London C. I. B., who put the matter so bluntly, and Leary nodded.

"That's so," he said. "Providence has been very good to Mr. Valentine. He was in a big wheat deal in Chicago in 'thirteen, and the market went against him. The principal operator was Burgess—John Boyd Burgess. He had a grudge against Valentine and would have ruined him. One morning Burgess was discovered dead at the bottom of an elevator shaft in his hotel. He had dropped nineteen floors."

Monsieur Lecomte shrugged his broad shoulders. "An accident?" he suggested.

"Listen," said Hallett. "This man Valentine got friendly with a banker in our country—a man named George Gale. Gale financed him out of the bank funds—but that was never proved. Gale was in the habit of taking a nerve tonic. He used to bring one dose in a tiny bottle to the office. He was found one night dead in his office with the little bottle in his hand. It bore the tonic label, but it had contained prussic acid. When the auditors came to examine the books of the bank they found a hundred thousand pounds had disappeared. Valentine's account was in perfect order. Gale went to a suicide's grave—Valentine sent a wreath."

"Well," said Lecomte with another shrug, "I am not defending Monsieur Valentine. But it might have been suicide. Valentine might have been innocent. Where is your evidence to the contrary? There was an investigation, was there not?"

Hallett nodded. "And nothing was discovered unflattering to the monsieur! You think he is a bad man? I tell you that I will place the full strength of my depart-

ment at your disposal to prove it. I will have him watched day and night, for he is in France for six months in the year, but frankly I would desire more solid foundations for your suspicions."

"He ran away with a man's wife——" began Hallett, and Lecomte laughed.

"Pardon!" he apologized, "that is not an offense under the Code Napoleon!"

So the conversation drifted elsewhere.

A year later Hallett, of the C. I. B., sat hunched up in his chair, frowning gloomily at a typewritten report which was spread on his desk. He sat for half an hour, thinking, then he touched a bell and somebody came in.

"My friend," said the chief—and when he began "my friend" he was very serious indeed—"six months ago you came to me with certain theories about Mr. Cæsar Valentine. I don't want you to interrupt me," he said brusquely as his subordinate seemed likely to speak, "just hear me through. I like you—you know that. I trust you or I wouldn't send you out on what looks like a hopeless search. What is more, I think your theories have some foundation. I have always thought so. That is why I've put you into training and accepted you for this department."

A nod was the reply. "Police work," said Hallett, "is a big game of solitaire in every sense of the word. If you watch every card and keep your mind concentrated on the game *and* you have luck, it comes out. If you start wool-gathering in the earlier stages you'll just miss putting up the right card, and you'll be stuck with the deuce of hearts that *should* have gone up, lying snug and useless at the bottom of the pack. Patience is everything. Burns sent a man into the mining camps with the scrap of a photograph showing only a murderer's right eye, and it was three years before this fellow of Burns' nailed his man. Lecomte, of the Surete, waited five years before he caught Madame Serpilot, and I myself as a young man trailed the 'Cully' Smith gang for three years, eight months and twelve days before I put Cully where I wanted him—and it will probably take you as long to pull down Cæsar Valentine."

"When do I start?" asked his companion.

"At once," replied Hallett. "Nobody must know of your movements—not even at this office. Your pay and expenses will be sent to you and you will be entered in the books as 'on special service abroad.'"

The other smiled. "That will be difficult, chief, my name——"

"You have no name. Henceforth you will be Number Six, and there will be nothing to identify you with—who you are. I shall give instructions that suggestions, wishes or such S O S messages as you send will be acted upon. Now get out and pull Valentine. This man may be the biggest thing of his kind—and the most dangerous man in the world. On the other hand all the stories that come to police headquarters may be lies. It's a weird job you've taken on. You can't jail a man for living expensively or for running away with men's wives."

"You've got to be bold and discreet, because I have reason to believe he has the most complete espionage bureau in the world. It was discovering that he subsidized a man here in this office that opened my eyes to the possibilities of the case. A man doesn't spend thousands to plant an ear at headquarters unless he has something to fear."

Number Six nodded again.

"Now, here's the world before you, my friend," said Hallett, "and a great reward if you succeed. Find his friends—you can have the entree to every prison in Britain and maybe that will help you."

"It's a big job," said Number Six, "but it is the one job in the world I want."

"That I know," agreed Hallett. "It will be lonely, but you'll probably find a dozen people who will help you—the men and women he has ruined and broken; the fathers of daughters and the husbands of wives he has sent to hell. They'll be pretty good allies. Now go! I've given you the finest intensive training that I can give, but maybe I haven't taught you just the thing you'll want to know."

He rose abruptly and offered his hand and Number Six winced under the crushing grip. "Good-by and good luck, Number Six," he smiled. "Don't forget I shall never know you again if I meet you in the street. You are a stranger to me until you step onto the witness stand at the Old Bailey and give the evidence which will put Mister Valentine permanently out of the game!"

So Number Six went out, nodding to the man at the door—the grim-visaged custodian of the custodians—and for some years Scot-

land Yard lost sight of one, against whose name in the secret and confidential register of the criminal investigation bureau, Hallett wrote in his own hand:

On very particular service. No reference to be made to this agent in any report whatever.

A year later Hallett summoned Chief Detective Steele to his office and told him just as much of his interview with Number Six as he deemed advisable.

"I haven't heard from Number Six for months," he said. "Go to Paris and keep a fatherly eye on Cæsar Valentine."

"Tell me this about Number Six, chief," said Detective Steel, "is it a man or a woman?"

Hallett grinned. "Cæsar has been six months trying to find out," he said. "I've fired three clerks for inquiring—don't tell me that I've got to fire you."

CHAPTER II.

"TRAY-BONG" SMITH.

When in prison at Brixton, England, a man who has no defense, and is waiting his trial on a charge of murder, finds time hanging pretty heavily upon his hands. It was due to this ennui of his that "Tray-Bong" Smith, usually an extremely reticent man, condescended to furnish certain particulars which enables the writer to fill in the gaps of this story which began, for our purpose, in Chi So's tea room, which isn't more than a hundred meters from the Quai des Fleurs.

Chi So was that rarity, a Jap who posed as a Chinese. He ran a restaurant in Paris, which, without being fashionable, was popular. People used to come across the river to eat the weird messes he prepared, and as many as a dozen motor cars have been seen parked at the end of the narrow street in which "The Joyous Pedlar"—that was the name of his joint—was situated.

Tray-Bong Smith had never eaten at Chi So's, but he'd smoked there quite a lot. The restaurant was built on a corner lot and was a fairly old house. It was probably an inn in the days of Louis, for beneath the building was one of the most spacious cellars in Paris. It was a great, vaulted room, about thirty feet from the keystone to the floor, and Chi So had turned this into what he called a "lounge" for his regular customers.

For weeks Tray-Bong Smith had turned into the "lounge" regularly at twelve o'clock every night, to bunk down with a pipe and a few busy thoughts till four o'clock in the morning. There were lots of reasons why he shouldn't wander about Paris at night. At this time some sort of international conference was going on, and it was impossible to stroll from the Place de la Concorde to the Italiennes without falling over a Scotland Yard man who would know him. Whether other visitors would have recognized the gaunt, unshaven man with the shabby suit and the discolored shirts as the man who won the one-hundred-yards sprint and the broad jump at the Oxford and Cambridge sports is doubtful. Certain sections of the police, however, knew him very well indeed.

In a little café on Montmartre where he spent his evenings they had christened him "Tray-Bong Smith" because of his practice of replying to all and sundry who addressed him, with this cockneyfied version of "tres bien." Even when they discovered that his French was faultless and his "tray bong" an amusing mannerism, the name stuck and it came with him to Chi So's, where he was accounted a dangerous man. There were days when he counted his sous, days and nights when he would disappear from view and come back flush with money, changing thousand-franc notes with the nonchalance of a Monte Carlo croupier. But when he was visible at all he was a regular attendant at Chi So's.

If he was regular in his habits, so was Cæsar Valentine. On Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, at two o'clock to the minute, he used to make his appearance in what the habitués of Chi So's called the private box. In one wall, about fifteen feet from the ground, there was a moon-shaped opening, in which had been built either by Chi So or his predecessor, a sort of Swiss balcony. It was unlighted and heavily curtained, and it was suspected that Chi So made quite a respectable income out of letting the box to respectable people who wanted to be thrilled by the dope horrors of Paris and peregrinating journalists who were writing up Chinatown stories.

Cæsar Valentine, as a rule, came through a private door direct into the cellar, but sometimes he would stalk through the "lounge" looking from side to side with that insolent stare of his, and go out through a small door in the wall which communicated, by means of a circular iron staircase, with the private box above. And there he would

sit for exactly one hour, peering down at the smokers, his eyes ranging the white-washed cavern which with its big Chinese lanterns, its scarlet dado, and the brightly covered bunks was not without its picturesque qualities. Chi So said that he was a "beautiful man" and the description was not extravagant. He was invariably in evening dress which fitted him like a glove. about six feet in height, with such a face as the old Greek sculptors loved to reproduce, his head was covered with a mass of small brown curls, slightly—very slightly—tinged with gray. The first time Tray-Bong Smith saw him he thought he was a man of twenty-eight. The second time, when a shaft of light from a torn lantern caught him square, he guessed he was nearer fifty. He had big, brown, melancholy eyes, a straight nose, a chin a little too rounded for the fastidious taste, and on his cheeks just a faint flush of color.

The night this story begins Tray-Bong Smith had turned in at Chi So's by the side door which was used by the smokers and took off his mackintosh in the hall. Chi So was there rubbing his hands, a sly and detestable little figure, in blue silk blouse and trousers, and he helped him off with his coat. "It's raining, Mr. Thmith?" he lisped.

"Like the devil," growled Tray-Bong. "A poisonous night, even for Paris."

Chi So grinned. "You thmoke plenty to-night, Mr. Thmith. I have thome good thtock in from China. Plenty people here to-night."

Smith grunted a reply and went down the stone stairs and found his bunk. Chi always reserved the same bunk for regular customers, and Smith's was just opposite the "private box." O San, the pipe man, gave him his instrument of delight, made and lit a pill, and then hurried off.

There were the usual queer lot of people there that night. Society folks, a woman or two, the old *camelot* who sells the story of his life at the corner of the Rue Royale, and a gentleman whom Smith recognized as an official attached to one of the numerous embassies in Paris. Him he noted for future use and profit.

At two o'clock precisely came Cæsar Valentine, and with him Chi So, who usually accompanied him if he came through the lounge. Chi So's attitude was servile, his voice a wheedling whine, but Valentine said nothing. He strode down between the bunks and paused opposite that on which Tray-Bong Smith lay with wide eyes and wakeful.

Valentine looked for a moment absent-mindedly, and then, turning, walked through the door which Chi So had opened and reappeared a little later in the gallery. There he sat, his white hands on the plush ledge of the box, his chin on the back of his hands, looking down; and it seemed that the unshaven Englishman in the bunk below was the principal attraction, for his eyes always came back to him. At half past two there was a curious stir, a faint chatter of voices from the passageway leading down from the side entrance, and the dull sound of blows. Then Chi So appeared in a panic and came twittering across the lounge to where Tray-Bong Smith was lying. Smith was out of the bunk and on his feet in an instant.

"Mis' Smit', you go quickly; here is the polith—it is for you! Through this door!" He indicated the door leading to the gallery. "Mis' Valentine shall not mind."

Smith was through the door in two strides and, closing it behind him, went noiselessly up the narrow iron stairs which led directly into the "box." Cæsar Valentine turned as he entered, and he spoke for the first time to the man who was destined to play so important a part in his life.

"You're in trouble?" he said.

"At present, no. In a few moments, yes," said Smith and opened his shirt at the front. Cæsar saw the butt of the man's gun behind the linen and knew why Tray-Bong invariably lay on his right side.

"Do you know the way out?" he asked. "I will show you." He pulled aside a curtain and revealed a rough opening in the wall. Smith stepped through and passed along a passage lit by one electric bulb and leading, apparently, to a blank end.

"Straight ahead and then to your right," said the voice of Cæsar behind him. "The door opens quite easily."

The fugitive found the door and stepped out into a small courtyard. Cæsar Valentine brushed past him, crossed the yard without hesitation and, opening another door, they found themselves in a side street. It was raining heavily and a southwesterly gale was blowing.

"Wait," said Cæsar. He fastened a big cloak about his shoulders. "You are younger than I, and the rain will not hurt you."

Smith grinned in the darkness and loos-

ened the sheath knife he carried in his hip pocket. Valentine led the way through a labyrinth of alleys, and presently they were standing on the deserted quay. Paris was in the throes of a coal famine and the lighting had been considerably reduced, which helped, for the quay was apparently deserted. Suddenly Valentine caught his companion by the arm.

"One moment," he said. "You are the person who has the ridiculous nickname, are you not?"

"I cannot be answerable for the absurdity of any names which are given to me by absurd persons," said Smith a little coldly, and Valentine laughed.

"Tray-Bong Smith?" he asked, and the other nodded.

"Yes, I thought so," Valentine was satisfied. "Only I did not wish to make a mistake. Not that it is possible that I can make mistakes," he added, and the man at his side thought at first that he was jesting, but he was serious enough.

Along the quay Smith could see two dim lights and guessed that these belonged to Valentine's motor car. He walked on, a little ahead of the exquisite, toward the car and was less than fifty feet from safety when a man came out of the darkness, gripped him by the coat, and swung him round as he flashed an electric lamp in his face.

"Hullo!" he said in French. "Tray-Bong Smith, *N'est ce pas?* I want you, my ancient!"

Valentine stopped dead and shrunk back into the shadows, watching. Only for a second did Tray-Bong Smith hesitate, then with a swift movement of his hand he knocked the lamp from the man's hand. In another second he had gripped his assailant by the throat and had thrust him back against the gray stone parapet behind which the Seine flowed swiftly.

"You want me, eh?" he said between his teeth and Valentine saw the quick rise and fall of a glittering blade. The man relaxed his grip and slid limply to the ground. Smith looked round to left and right, then stooping, lifted the fallen man bodily in his arms and flung him across the parapet into the river. Only one groan came from the victim and something amused Tray-Bong Smith, for he laughed as he picked his knife from the pavement and threw it after the man into the stream.

Valentine had not moved until the knife was sent flying. Then he came forward, and Smith could hear his quick breathing. "My friend," he said, "you are rapid."

He said no more than this and walked rapidly toward the car and opened the door. The chauffeur could not have seen what had happened, for the quay was badly lit—but there may have been some other spectator. The car moved forward until it came almost abreast of the spot where the struggle had occurred. Smith thought he saw some one on the pavement, and dropped the rain-blurred window to look. The car was moving slowly, and the head lamps of the car had only just flashed out their fullest radiance.

In the light of the lamps was a girl. She was dressed from head to foot in black, and stood peering over the parapet into the dark river. As the car came up to her she turned her head and the man had a momentary glimpse of the saddest and most beautiful face he had ever seen. His shoulders were out of the window, and he was looking back, when he felt Valentine's hand clutch him and pull him back.

"You fool," he said savagely, "what are you doing? Whom were you looking at?"

"Nobody," said Smith, and pulled up the window.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE OF CAESAR.

Cæsar Valentine had several houses and flats in or near Paris. Of this fact Tray-Bong Smith was well aware. He thought at first that he was being taken to Valentine's beautiful apartments on the Boulevard Victor Hugo, but the car went straight across the Place D'Etoiles, and sped down the Avenue of the Grand Armee. It was difficult on such a night to know in what direction they were going, but after a while it was apparent to Smith from the violent nature of the road, that they were going in the direction of Maisons Lafitte. Presently the car turned into what seemed to be a side lane with high hedges on either side. The car bumped and jolted slowly for ten minutes over what could not have been anything better than a cart track, then turned abruptly to the left and through a dilapidated gate.

It was too dark to see the house, and when the car stopped and Valentine's guest descended, he had no time to make any observations. It was a fairly big château; how

big Smith could not tell for Cæsar opened the door with extraordinary quickness and ushered him into a large, dark hall. He switched on an electric light, and the stranger had time to observe a broad flight of stairs leading out of the hall before he was hurried across the parquet floor through another door into a large saloon.

It was one of the few rooms in private houses that deserve the name of saloon. It was lofty and spacious, its walls paneled with white wood; its ceilings were beautifully carved in the Moorish fashion, and illumination came from two rich electroliers. The furniture was not only magnificent, but regal. It is queer what things impress one. Smith always remembered that saloon by its carpet—an immense expanse of purple, heavily embroidered in gold, the ornamentation consisting of fleur-de-lis and a cipher "C." The next thing that impressed him was a beautiful coat of arms above the big open fireplace. Two of its four quarterings held the lily of France, one, three gold bars, and the fourth a bull upon a golden ground.

Cæsar took off his wet cloak and flung it on the back of the chair, strolled to the fireplace, switched on an electric radiator, and stood with his back to the glow.

An imposing figure was Valentine in his immaculate evening dress. Smith approved the snowy-white shirt front and the three pearl studs, the thin platinum chain stretched across the white waistcoat, and guessed the reason for the little mocking smile that curled Cæsar's fine lips.

"My friend, Tray-Bong Smith," he said slowly, "have you ever seen a man guillotined?"

"Half a dozen," said the other promptly. "On to the board, head in the kang! Snick! Head in basket! Vive la France!"

Valentine frowned as though he were annoyed at the flippancy in the tone of his guest. Then he laughed and nodded. "I think you're the man I want," he said. "That is the attitude to adopt toward life. But never forget, Smith, that you must not laugh at authority. Authority is sublime, beyond ridicule, cruel, unjust, tragic, but never humorous."

Smith was slipping off his wet coat as the other spoke. "Put it before the fire," said Cæsar. "Better still, throw it out through that door." He pointed to a door to the right of the fireplace. "Madonna Beatrice will see to it."

Smith obeyed him to the letter, wondering who might be Madonna Beatrice. Suddenly Cæsar looked at him sharply. "Is there any blood on your hands?" he asked.

Smith shook his head. "I aimed at the fifth intercostal space," he said calmly. "There would be little blood."

Cæsar nodded approvingly as his companion examined his hands. "You have not taken much opium to-night," he said. He stepped toward the man and peered into his eyes.

"I never take opium," said Tray-Bong coolly. "I do not go to Chi So's to smoke, but to watch."

Again Cæsar laughed. "An admirable lieutenant," he said. "But you must not be too clever with me, Smith. I have taken a great risk for you. And let me tell you that I also came to Chi So's to watch, and to watch you."

Smith had guessed that already, but said nothing.

"To watch you," Cæsar repeated. "Chi So's business was built on my money. The place is useful to me. He tells me news that I want to hear, and when I learned that an English criminal was hiding in Paris from the police, that he was wanted for murder in America, and for forgery and divers other sordid and stupid crimes, we became interested in you."

"We?" repeated Smith, and again Cæsar frowned and changed the trend of his observations.

"I do not approve of crime; your kind of crime. It is stupid and small and leads nowhere but to the guillotine."

Smith might have offered his own views on crime, but at that moment the door opened slowly and a man entered. He was a little, red-haired man, and his ruddiness extended to his face, which was flaming. Somehow he matched neither Cæsar nor the saloon, for he was showily dressed; a heavy gold watch chain dangled from his waistcoat pocket and his attitude was defiant. Smith, a student of men, guessed that he had been drinking, and was not mistaken.

"Well, Ernest, what do you want?"

Ernest advanced unsteadily into the room and glanced from Cæsar to the watchful Smith. "Hullo!" he said loudly. "Got a visitor, eh?" The voice was coarse and uneducated, and it came to the visitor in the nature of a shock that he should speak so familiarly to his immaculate host.

"Yes, I have a visitor," said Cæsar softly.

For a moment the little man said nothing, then clearing his throat: "I'm going to-morrow."

"Oh, you're going to-morrow, are you?" repeated Cæsar in a mild tone.

"Yes, I'm going to London. Any objection?"

Cæsar shook his head and smiled. "None at all."

"You know where to send my salary, I suppose?" asked the little man.

Cæsar licked his lips. "Your salary? I thought you were leaving my employment?"

"You know where to send my salary, I suppose?" said the little man in a tone of menace. "I'm taking a ten-years' holiday." He laughed at his own humor. "A ten-years' holiday," he repeated. "That's good, ain't it?"

"And I'm to send you your salary for ten years, eh?" said Cæsar.

"You'll be sorry if you don't," threatened the man. "I haven't been here doing your dirty work for three years for nothing. Let *him* do it!" He nodded toward Smith. "See how he likes it. I could write a book about you, Mr. Valentine."

Cæsar laughed. "And it would be very interesting, I'm sure. And have you waited up all the evening, to tell me this?"

"Yes, I have. I've got a lot to tell you, and I should tell you some more if that man wasn't here."

"Keep it until the morning," said Cæsar, dropping his hand good-humoredly on the other's shoulder. "Go back to bed, my friend, and ask Madonna Beatrice to come to me."

"Madonna Beatrice!" sneered the other. "She's a beauty, she is!"

The visitor thought he saw Cæsar's face go pink, but the big man laughed softly to himself and, walking slowly to the door, he very gently pushed his unruly servitor forth. "It is a curious characteristic of servants," he said, "that they invariably imagine they know their masters' guilty secrets. You have probably had a similar experience."

"I never keep servants who share my secrets," said Smith, "and to this fact I ascribe my freedom and well-being."

There was a gentle tap at the door, and Cæsar turned quickly. "Come in, Madonna," he said.

The woman who entered piqued the visitor's curiosity. Cæsar had a reputation for affairs. It was a reputation not particularly creditable to himself. Smith had expected to see a young and beautiful girl, but the woman who came in had no claim to beauty. She was an old woman, squat and fat, her face was dark and disfigured with tiny warts. Her gray-black hair was brushed back smoothly from her head and gathered in a bun behind; and to add to her grotesqueness she was dressed in a robe of bright emerald green, cut square at the breast. About her neck was a huge gold necklace of barbaric design, and her fat hands were covered with jewels. Yet old as she was, and laughable as was her get-up, there was something about her poise that spoke of strength and power.

"Madonna," said Cæsar softly, and he spoke in liquid Spanish, "our friend here is staying with us for some time. Will you see that his room is made ready for him?"

She looked at Smith with her heavy eyes and nodded. But he had discovered something which interested him more than her fantastic attire. He was looking at her foot, that observant man, and saw that she was wearing thick boots. Moreover, they were wet and muddy, as though she had been wandering in the storm.

"Si, señor," she replied.

The visitor wondered why the man called her "Madonna," which is an Italian form of address, when he had spoken to her in Spanish. Cæsar, who was an extraordinary mind reader, answered his unspoken query when she had gone. "Madonna Beatrice," he said, "is both Spanish and Italian, as I will explain to you one of these days."

He made no further reference to the events of the night, but chatted pleasantly enough on crime in the abstract.

"The little criminal is a deplorable object," he said. "I cite, for example, my friend Ernest. Ernest is a blackguard, a card sharper, and a thief. I took him into my service and brought him to France at a moment when the police were searching for him, and when he would certainly have gone to penal servitude for a number of years. If he had been a greater criminal, he would have had a greater mind and a greater heart. Also he would have been on his knees to me all his life, for he has lived luxuriously, he has money to spend at the races—I have even had him taught French."

"Money doesn't buy loyalty, anyway," said Smith curtly.

"I agree," nodded Cæsar. "And yet

money buys most of the things that are desirable in this world. It even buys the appearance and the consequences of loyalty. Money buys allies in war, and a little more money would buy their desertion. It could buy my election to the senate of France if I were a Frenchman—and if I did not hate the French," he added. "With money I could sit in this house and reshape the future of Europe. With money you can buy factions and parties and nations."

He sighed and, turning his back on the other, looked earnestly at the coat of arms above the mantelpiece.

"Whose arms are those?" asked Smith unexpectedly.

"Eh?" He swung round. "Whose arms? You are not a student of heraldry? No? Some day I will tell you. Money is everything, and it is so easy to secure. Observe me! At nineteen I was penniless. I have never worked, I have never speculated, I have never gambled, yet to-day I am a rich man, because God gave me a brain." He tapped his forehead. "Because I am attractive to women, because I am a genius without scruple—and you cannot be a genius and have scruple."

He broke off the conversation as abruptly as before, and led the way out into the hall. "Your room is ready," he said. "To-morrow we will discuss your future. It would not be wise of you to stay in France, and, moreover, I need you in England."

The room into which he showed his guest was furnished simply but expensively. "You would like tea in the morning, of course. You are English," he said. "You will find all the necessities of your toilet on your dressing table, and the madonna will have put your pajamas—ah, yes, there they are. Good night!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHAINED LADY.

Tray-Bong Smith stood stock-still listening to Cæsar's retiring footsteps. Then he examined the room minutely and carefully. There was no lock to the door and no bolt, but that did not greatly worry him. Cæsar would not have brought him to Maisons Lafitte to betray him, he was sure of that. He sat down in one of the two deep chairs which stood on either side of the shuttered fireplace and pulled off his boots, speculating on the plans of his new employer.

For just what reason had Cæsar taken him under his wing? Cæsar had witnessed the affair on the Quai des Fleurs and knew that by harboring the man who had committed the act he had rendered himself guilty by the laws of France. The project ahead must be of vast importance or Cæsar would not have run the risk. If the girl had seen—the girl in black whom Smith had seen peering into the river. She must have seen, or why would she have been standing on that spot, leaning over the parapet? Smith rubbed his chin and frowned. The girl might spoil everything. Suppose she went to the police and a newspaper got hold of the story of this midnight struggle? He swore to himself as he unlaced his wet boots, slipped off his wet clothes, unbuckled the canvas strap which supported the little Colt automatic he carried under his shirt, and put the pistol beneath the pillow.

The silk pajamas which had been left for him were rather long in the leg, but he turned them up, and, switching out the light, pulled aside the heavy velvet curtains which covered the window and looked out. The windows were of the French type which open outward and these he swung wide. There was an easy drop from the window to a flower bed beneath, so that there was no need to worry about a get-away. The rain had ceased and the clouds had thinned, though the wind still blew gustily. There was a full moon, faintly visible, and in the occasional gleam which lit the countryside he was able to take his immediate bearings.

By the light of the moon he looked at the watch on his wrist. It was a quarter past three. In two hours the day would break, but he was not sleepy. He went back to the window to fix in his mind the exact lay of the ground. Immediately facing the window was a broad lawn which ran into the shadows of a poplar plantation. To the left he glimpsed the yellow of the drive which led to the lane up which he had bumped, and to the main road.

He lay down on the bed and covered himself with the eiderdown, but he was not in the least tired. He lay there thinking about Cæsar and speculating upon the future, wondering just what game Cæsar was after, and to what purpose he intended putting his new protégé.

A distant clock chimed four, and he was beginning to doze, when he heard a sound which brought him wide awake again. It was a queer, tinkling sound, like the drip-

drip of a faucet, and it was some time before he located it as being outside of the window. It was the dripping of rain, of course, he told himself—a gutter overflowing on to a window sill; but, nevertheless, he slipped from the bed and stole softly to the window, for Tray-Bong Smith was a suspicious man. At first he saw nothing, though most of the clouds had disappeared and the moon was shining brightly. Then he saw a sight so eerie, so unexpected, as to bring his heart to his throat.

Walking across the broad lawn was the figure of a woman. She was dressed in gray or white—he could not be certain which—and she appeared to be carrying something in her hand. Smith could not see what that something was until she turned and walked back again with the moon on her face, and then he heard the jingle of steel plainly. He shaded his eyes from the moonbeams and cautiously put his head round the side of the window.

The woman was walking with curiously short steps, and this mincing gait at such an hour was so unreal and so grotesquely unnatural that he might have guessed the cause. Her walk brought her to within twenty yards of the window and then Tray-Bong Smith saw and heard.

Clink, clink, clink!

Her hands were handcuffed together, and between her two ankles was a steel chain that jingled as she walked.

"Well, I'm——" whispered Smith. As he stared at her, he heard a low voice, commanding and surly. It sounded as though it came from the shadow of the trees, and the woman turned and walked in that direction. Smith watched her until she disappeared, and then went back to his bed, a considerably puzzled man.

But the amazing happenings of the night were not completed. He had begun to doze again when he was awakened by a shriek—a shriek accompanied by a crash against the bedroom door, that brought him to his feet, gun in hand. The gray of dawn was in the sky, and there was just enough light to see the door moving slowly inward.

Then of a sudden it burst open and somebody fell into the room with a thud, gibbering and sobbing hideously. It made an attempt to rise and poised a moment totteringly on its knees and Smith recognized him. It was the red-haired man, the man called Ernest, but his face was no longer scarlet. It was gray and drawn and horrible. "Cæsar, Cæsar!" he whimpered, and then collapsed in a heap.

Then came a sound of hurrying feet, and Cæsar came into the room. He was in his dressing gown and pajamas, and apparently had just wakened.

"What is it?" he said, and looked down. "Ernest! What are you doing here?"

He shook the inanimate figure.

"I'm sorry, this man's drunk again."

He lifted him in his strong arms as easily as though he were a child. "Do you mind?" he said, and laid him on the bed. "Put on the light, will you, Smith?"

Tray-Bong Smith obeyed, and Cæsar, bending over the man, looked down at his wide-opened eyes. Then he turned to the other.

"He's dead," he said soberly. "What a perfectly dreadful thing to have happened!"

CHAPTER V.

CAESAR REVEALS HIMSELF.

This, then, was the introduction of Tray-Bong Smith to the house of Cæsar Valentine—an unfortunate introduction if the police came to make inquiries as to this sudden death. But the man Ernest—his other name was Goldberg—was notoriously subject to fits. He was, moreover, given to alcoholic excess, and on two occasions Cæsar had had to send for the local doctor to prescribe for his retainer.

What had happened to the man in the night Smith could only guess. It is certain that he had some sort of an attack in the early hours of the morning, had dragged himself dowstairs to the visitor's room—why to his room? Cæsar explained. The room Smith had taken was one which he had usually occupied, and the man's words, "Cæsar, Cæsar!" addressed to Tray-Bong had been intended for his host.

There were the usual inquiries, and the man from Chi So's was amazed to discover how readily the authorities accepted Cæsar's explanation. While the visiting magistrate was in the house, Smith was hidden in a little room in a small tower at one corner of the building. The silent Madonna Beatrice brought him his meals, and if there were servants in the house the visitor did not see them. He was permitted to enter the great saloon that night, and found Cæsar smoking a long cigar and reading a book of poems.

He looked up as Smith entered and motioned him to a chair.

"I'll get you out of France in a day or two," he said. "That matter didn't get on to your nerves, I presume? It is very unfortunate, very unfortunate."

"Unfortunate for all of us," said Smith, taking a cigarette from the table and lighting it. "You saw him after I went to bed, of course?"

Cæsar raised his eyebrows.

"Why, 'of course?' " he asked softly.

"Because he died," replied Smith brutally. "You saw him and had a drink with him—and he died."

"What makes you think that?" Valentine asked after a while, and looked the other straight in the eye.

"For three years I have been a medical student," drawled the guest, "and in the course of that three years I had acquaintance with a drug which is used extensively by oculists. It is a deadly poison, but, unlike other deadly poisons, leaves no trace—except one, which I looked for in the unfortunate Ernest."

Cæsar's lips curled. "Was it present?"

Smith nodded and Cæsar laughed. He was genuinely amused. "You had better see Monsieur the Magistrate," he said mockingly, "and reveal your suspicions."

"There is a very excellent reason why I shouldn't," said the gunman coolly, "only I think it is right, as between you and me, that there should be no pretense. Put your cards on the table, as I've already put mine."

"You put your card in the Seine," said Valentine dryly, "and you did not even send a wreath, as I have done for Ernest."

He rose quickly and began to pace the room. "You shall see all my cards in time," he continued. "I need such a man as you—a man without heart or mercy. Some day I will tell you a great secret."

"I will tell you your secret now," said Smith speaking slowly, and pointed to the coat of arms above the mantelpiece. "Why are those arms in this house?" he asked. "Why is this cipher and these fleur-de-lis embroidered in your carpet, Mr. Valentine. I don't know whether you are a madman, or whether you're sane," Smith spoke in that slow drawl of his. "It may be just a form of megalomania, and I've seen pretensions almost as extravagant. But I think I've got you down fine."

"What are the arms?" asked Valentine.

"They are the arms of Cæsar Borgia," replied the other. "A bull on a gold ground is the family arms of the Borgias; the C. in the carpet was the Borgias' cipher."

Valentine had stopped his pacing and stood now, his head bent forward, his narrowed eyes fixed on Smith. "I am neither a madman nor a vainglorious fool," he said quietly. "It is true I am the last in the direct line of that illustrious man, Cæsar Borgia, Duke of the Valentincois."

Smith did not speak for a long time. He had enough to think upon. In his early days at Oxford he had posed as an authority on the Renaissance, and knew the history of the Borgias backward. In his old rooms, before things smashed to pieces and the lanes of life so violently turned, he had had a copy of a cartoon reputedly by De Vinci, inscribed 'Cæsar Borgia de France, Duke of Valentinois, Count of Diois and Issaudun, Pontifical Vicar of Imola and Forli.' And now he recalled the same bold, womanish face in the man who stood looking down at him, enjoying the sensation he had caused.

"Well?" said Cæsar at last.

"It is strange," said Smith vacantly, then: "From what branch of the family do you descend?"

"Through Giralamo," replied Cæsar quickly. "Giralamo was Cæsar's one son. After Cæsar's fall he was taken to France, through France to Spain, and was educated by the Spanish cardinals. He married, and his son went to South America and fought in Peru. The family was settled in the Americas for two centuries. My grandfather came to England as a boy, and I myself was educated in England."

"It's amazing," said Smith, and felt that it was a feeble thing to say.

It was the Madonna Beatrice who snapped the tension. She came hurriedly into the saloon, without knocking, and Cæsar at the sight of her face walked across to meet her. There was a conversation in low tones. Cæsar uttered an exclamation of surprise, and then he looked round at his companion doubtfully. "Bring her in," he said.

Bring her in? Smith was alert now. Was he to see that mysterious apparition about whom he intended in good time to tackle Cæsar? Or was it some inamorata of his—his question was answered almost before it was framed.

Madonna Beatrice waddled back into the room, and at her heels followed a tall,

straight girl, so beautiful that she took the man's breath away. She looked from Cæsar to him and back again to Cæsar, her head held high, something of disdain in her attitude, and then she came slowly across to where Cæsar stood and brushed his cheek with her lips.

Smith looked at Cæsar. There was a smile in his eyes which indicated amusement and annoyance. Then he turned to his new-found friend and stretched out his hand.

"Stephanie," he said, "this is Mr. Smith. Smith—I want you to meet—my daughter."

His daughter! Smith's mouth opened in an involuntary grimace of surprise, and then, recovering himself, he held out his hand, which she took. Her steady eyes fixed him for a spell, and then she turned away.

"When did you come to Paris?" asked Cæsar.

"To-night," said the girl, and the man Smith could have gasped again at the lie, for she was the girl in black who had stood upon the Quai des Fleurs the night before, and had seen him throw the detective into the Seine. That she had been a witness he knew when he looked into her eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

CAESAR TELLS OF NUMBER SIX.

Tray-Bong Smith was a light sleeper, but he did not hear Cæsar Valentine come into his room at four o'clock next morning. As he felt a hand grip his shoulder he twisted round and he heard Cæsar's laugh.

"You cannot turn so that you can use the pistol under your pillow, my friend," he said. "It would be lamentable if I died as a result of that kind of accident."

Smith sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing is wrong," replied his host. "I've just brought your clothes." He himself was in his dressing gown. "I think they will fit you."

He must have been in the room some time, for afterward the visitor found new garments lying neatly folded on two chairs.

"The heavy overcoat I bought in Paris yesterday," said Cæsar. "You will need that."

"What is happening?" Smith demanded lazily as he slipped out of bed.

"A friend of mine is going to London—a young aviator who travels between France and England for his own pleasure. He has kindly given you a seat in his machine, and I have arranged the passport, which you will find in your coat pocket."

"To London—what am I to do?"

"Wait for me," said Cæsar, "and apply yourself diligently to——"

His keen ear heard a footfall in the passage, and he went out and returned with a tray on which a breakfast was laid. "The Madonna Beatrice," he explained, and closed the door behind him. "What are you to do in London? I will tell you, my friend. I intended telling you last night, but the unexpected arrival of—my daughter"—he paused before the description—"made it impossible."

"I did not know you had a daughter, you don't look old enough to have a girl of that age."

"Possibly not," he said, and did not seem inclined to pursue the subject. "In London—by the way, is there any reason why you should not go to London?"

"None whatever," replied the other. "I have a perfectly clean bill—in England."

Cæsar dismissed the subject with a courteous gesture. "In London you will stay at the Bilton Hotel," he said. "You will communicate with me at an address which you will find in a small notebook I have also put in your pocket. But you will avoid meeting me unless there is an absolute necessity. Your task"—he spoke slowly—"is to find Number Six."

"Number Six?" Smith stared at him.

"Scotland Yard is a great institution," said Cæsar. "I have every respect for its personnel, but not a tremendous amount for its methods. For some reason"—he had seated himself on the edge of the bed and was watching his guest taking breakfast—"Scotland Yard is suspicious of me. I have spent a lot of time and a lot of money in England, and Scotland Yard does not know exactly where it comes from. In addition, there have been one or two unfortunate incidents."

Smith did not ask what those unfortunate incidents were, nor did his employer volunteer any information. "I am one of those men," Cæsar went on, "who like to know the worst quickly. It worries me when I cannot see my opponent's hand. And I spend a great deal of money in discovering just what kind of difficulties I am likely to meet with. I have had a man in the clerks'

department at Scotland Yard for a considerable time; and nearly a year ago this man communicated with me, informing me that the commissioner of the criminal intelligence bureau had commissioned an agent to watch me and examine my private life."

Smith clicked his lips. "H'm," he said, "and this watching gentleman—is he Number Six?"

Cæsar nodded. "He or she is Number Six," he repeated gravely. "Whether it is a man or a woman, I have been unable to discover. The person is described as Number Six in the records—there is some reason for the secrecy. Scotland Yard believes that I am a sinister individual, and it is remarkable that the agent they have chosen is not an ordinary member of the police force, but some enemy of mine—or rather, some person who regards himself or herself as my enemy, for—er—private reasons.

"There are, of course"—he shrugged his shoulders—"people who hate me. There is a man named Welland. You will find his address in the book. I have not met the gentleman recently, but twenty years ago I met his wife." He paused. "I think she was happier with me than she was with him—for a while," he added.

Smith yawned. "If this is a love story, spare me," he said, but the other seemed lost in a reverie.

"Unfortunately she died, and his child, who came with her, also died—it was unfortunate." Cæsar dropped his chin on his palms and looked at the floor, thinking deeply. "It was unfortunate," he said, and looked up quickly. "Welland is in some form of government service. He has told an associate that he will kill me, but that, of course, does not worry me. He may or may not be Number Six. You will be astute enough to discover."

"Is there anybody else?" asked Smith.

"There are the relatives of a certain Mr. Gale," said Cæsar thoughtfully. "Mr. Gale was associated with me in business. Things went wrong and Mr. Gale—committed suicide. It was unfortunate."

Smith nodded again. He had heard of Mr. Gale. "I remember the case, though I didn't associate you with it. Gale was a bank manager, and, after his death, it was discovered that some hundred thousand pounds had disappeared from the funds of the bank."

"It was unfortunate," repeated Cæsar. "People knew that I had had some dealings with him, and his wife made rather a painful scene. She accused me——" he shrugged again. "She died a little time afterward."

"Naturally?" The man from Chi So's flung the question brutally, and Cæsar smiled and dropped his hand on the questioner's shoulder.

"You are a man after my own heart," he said.

He went away soon after to dress, for he had to conduct his man to the private aviation field where his friend was waiting. It was doubtful whether the pilot had any stronger sense of friendship for Cæsar than the payment of a handsome fee could insure, but he was a good pilot, and Tray-Bong Smith landed at Croydon in time for a second breakfast and on the whole was glad to be back in England.

Excessive sentimentality was not to be expected from a member of Mr. Smith's profession, for all his youth, and for a certain refinement of mind he had displayed, yet he left France with just the faintest hint of an ache in his heart. Perhaps 'ache' is rather a strong word for an unsatisfied desire. He had hoped to see the girl again. He carried with him an impression of her no less vivid because it had been taken in a flash—an impression of gray-blue eyes, of a complexion as clear as milk, of faultless features and of lips so red that he had thought for a second they had been "made up." Mr. Smith was not of the impressionable kind, but this impression had just stayed with him in his mind and in his heart, though they had not exchanged more than half a dozen words.

The daughter of Cæsar! Tray-Bong laughed. An offspring of the Borgias! More beautiful than her greatly advertised ancestor Lucrezia—that poor, simpering, colorless thing, who had achieved a place in history to which neither her talents nor her spurious iniquities entitled her.

He dismissed Stephanie from his mind with an effort, and concentrated upon the errand which Cæsar had chosen for him. He was completely puzzled by Cæsar's choice of hotel. The Bilton is not only fashionable, but conspicuous.

When he reached the hotel, he found that not only had his room been reserved for him, but that Cæsar had instructed the manager as to what room he should occupy. "I

shan't be able to put your things into forty-one until the afternoon, sir," said the manager—which was the first intimation Mr. Smith had that No. 41 had been reserved at all. "The room is still in the occupation of the gentleman who is leaving by this afternoon's train."

He took Tray-Bong aside and lowered his voice. "I hope you don't mind my asking you a personal question," he said. "You are not—er——" he seemed at a loss.

"Well?" asked Smith, interested.

"You're not a noisy sleeper? Excuse my asking, sir. I mean, you don't snore?" said the manager.

"Not that I am aware of." Mr. Smith was secretly amused.

"I ask you because Mr. Ross is so particular, and he's been a client of ours now for thirty years, and it happens that he sleeps in the next room to you."

"Mr. Ross? Who's Mr. Ross?" asked Smith. The manager was surprised apparently that there existed one benighted heathen in the city of London who did not know Mr. Ross. Mr. Ross was an American millionaire—not only a millionaire, but a millionaire several times over. He was a bachelor and eccentric, a difficult man and a not particularly generous man, Smith gathered. He spent most of his day at the Reform Club, and though he had lived in and about England for thirty years, he had no friends. Moreover, he occupied the next room, No. 40.

Cæsar had supplied him well with money, and his first call that day was upon a tailor in Bond Street. After he had been measured and had given his orders for a fairly extensive wardrobe, he strolled down to the Strand. He had not been in London for twelve months, and the sight and the smell of it were lovely to his senses.

It was at the junction of the Strand with Trafalgar Square that he met the one man in London he did not desire to meet. Smith saw him some distance away, but made no attempt to avoid him.

There was no mistaking Hallett, of the criminal investigation bureau; a peak-faced man, with white, unruly hair and heavy, gray mustache, it was not a face one could forget. Tray-Bong was passing him, but Hallett stood still in his path.

"Hello!" he said in that paternal way of his. "Back in London, Mr. Tray-Bong Smith?"

"Back in London, chief," said Smith.

"I've been hearing queer stories about you," said Hallett. "Murders and robberies galore." There was a twinkle in his eye, and a twinkle in Hallett's eye did not necessarily bode well for any man. "Be careful, my friend," he said. "There may be very serious trouble for you. Don't say I did not warn you."

"Fine!" said Smith. "But if there is going to be any bad trouble for me, there is going to be some very serious happenings for other people. And if you don't mind, I'd rather not be seen talking to you, chief—it gets a fellow a bad name."

Hallett chuckled grimly and passed on.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STORY OF WELLAND.

Smith went on his way to the Strand. It had struck him as being rather remarkable that Cæsar had given him the addresses with instructions to pursue inquiries which he could have had made by any private inquiry firm in London. After all, it was only necessary that they should supply him with the movements of the suspected persons, and furnish him with sufficient material to prove or disprove the truth of his theory. But there were quite a number of things Mr. Smith did not understand.

On the river side of the Strand and running parallel with that famous thoroughfare is John Street, and it was to 104 John Street that he directed his steps. This was the address which he had found in the little book against the name of Welland. It was an old-fashioned Adam's house, and, scrutinizing it from the opposite pavement, Smith came to the conclusion that, whoever might have occupied it twenty years ago, it was now one of those genteel tenements which abound in the West End. The different pattern of curtains and blinds on each floor strengthened this conclusion, which was confirmed when he crossed the road and found a little pearl button labeled "Housekeeper."

The janitor was an old gentleman of sixty or seventy—a cheerful old soul who wore the faded ribbon of the 'eighty-one African campaign on his waistcoat. "Welland?" he said in surprise. "Good Lord, no! Mr. Welland doesn't live here. Why, he's been gone—let me see, it must be nigh on twenty years ago. Well, that's a curious thing, you asking after Mr. Welland!"

Mr. Smith thought it was curious, too, but asked: "Why is it curious?"

The old man hesitated a moment, then said: "Come in," and led the way down to a basement kitchen. "Did you know Mr. Welland?" asked Tray-Bong, when they reached the janitor's cozy little apartment.

"Know him?" he said contemptuously. "As well as I know my own hand. As nice a man as ever I met, Mr. Welland was. He had the three upper floors——" he shook his head. "Ah, it was very sad, very sad indeed."

"I don't know the whole story," said Smith with truth. It was true, too, that he had never taken Cæsar wholly at his word. If he was a true Borgia, he was a liar, an exploiter of his friends, treacherous to his enemies, and wholly unreliable. Cæsar was using him—well and good. He was out to use Cæsar; and he gave his employer credit for this amount of intelligence, that Cæsar was never in any doubt that his employee's end was a purely selfish one.

Mr. Cummins, the janitor, was in a communicative mood.

"You don't know the whole story, eh?" he said with some enjoyment. "Well, I can't say that I know the whole of it myself. But what I know, I can tell you. Mr. Welland lived in this house, in those identical rooms, when he was a bachelor and before he met the young lady he married. He came back to this house after his honeymoon, and his little girl—poor little soul!—was born in this house. He was a very happy sort of gentleman, but I don't think his wife found the life quite up to her expectations. She was one of these complaining ladies who are always worrying about what other women have in the way of dresses and jewelry, and Mr. Welland, who was an artistic sort of man, used to worry a lot.

"About eight months after the baby was born, Mr. Welland brought a gentleman home to dinner. I know, because, when he had a party, I used to wait at the table, and on this occasion I got into what I call my butler's suit, and did a bit of handing round. A very nice gentleman, to all appearance, was this Mr.—— now, what was his name?"

"Valentine?" suggested Smith.

"That's it, sir," said the janitor. "A nice-looking fellow, but what a rascal! What a scoundrel! A regular West Ender, he was. Plenty of money, carriages, and horses, a big house in Belgrave Square, and what not. Well, the long and the short of it is that Mr. Valentine used to call when Mr. Welland was away in the city. And sometimes he would call when Mr. Welland was home, but not often. Then Mr. Welland and his wife had an awful row—I think it was over a ring which this fellow Valentine gave her—and one afternoon, when the governor came home, she had gone and taken the baby with her. Bolted, sir! Gone off to America, by all accounts, with Valentine, and that was the end of *her!* Mr. Welland took on something terrible. He was like a madman, and I remember as though it was yesterday his coming to me and saying: 'Cummins, sooner or later that man will die at my hands.' "

"What happened to Mrs. Welland?" asked Smith. There was no need to ask, if he trusted Cæsar, but he did not trust Cæsar.

Cummins shook his head. "Died, sir. I only heard of it by accident about two years ago. She and the baby died of some fever—yellow fever, I think it was. It's curious you should come here asking about Mr. Welland," he said, getting onto his feet and going across to a dresser. "I was turning out this drawer only this morning, and I found this picture; one he gave me on his wedding day."

He pulled open a drawer and took out a cabinet photograph, handing it to the visitor. It was the face of an artist, refined and delicate, yet with a strength in its lines that one might not have expected after hearing the janitor's account of the man's breakdown. The high forehead, the long, thin nose, the firm jaw, were features impossible to forget.

"I suppose you couldn't let me have this photograph to make a reproduction?"

The janitor looked dubiously at Mr. Smith, and then at the photograph. "No, sir, I wouldn't like to part with it. You see, it's written on," he said, pointing to an inscription. "I'll tell you what I'll do, though, if you like to pay for it. I'll have a copy made."

"That will suit me admirably," said Smith, and passed across a pound note to seal the bargain.

He went out into John Street puzzled. What was Cæsar's game in sending him to conduct these inquiries? He must have known that Welland was no longer in John Street. It was as certain as anything that he had employed detectives to trace the man.

And yet had he? This imperious and imperial Cæsar had a lofty contempt for the small things of life; and was it not possible that Welland had faded from his mind until the news that Scotland Yard had put some mysterious detective on his track had set his mind wondering as to the shadower's identity.

Cæsar was not to be judged by ordinary standards, Smith concluded, as he walked back to his hotel. He expected to find some sort of communication from him, for Cæsar had said that he was leaving Paris by the midday train, and would arrive that evening. But there was no letter or telegram.

He went up to his room, which was now ready for him, and sat down to consider the somewhat complicated situation. Here was he, Tray-Bong Smith—how quickly the Paris underworld had caught on to that nickname—engaged by one who was probably the most dangerous man in the world, to carry out what was practically detective work on the strength of having thrown a man into the Seine! What sort of villainies he required of him Smith was curious to know. He would dearly have loved to stay on in Paris. The mystery of the manacled woman intrigued him vastly. It was one of the most creepy experiences he had had, he the man without nerves. That she was Cæsar's prisoner, he did not doubt, and that the deep, booming voice that had called her from the shadow of the poplars was the voice of Madonna Beatrice, he was certain. What had this woman done? Why did Cæsar, the last of the Borgias, who had, Smith suspected, so quick a way with his enemies, retain her in custody when he could have so readily and so easily rid himself of the necessity of keeping her locked up?

If Cæsar had come to him and said: "Slay this woman—I have not the courage," Tray-Bong would have understood. That he would have killed in cold blood is unlikely. Tray-Bong Smith did not kill women.

Acting on a sudden impulse, he went out again to the British Museum, where, in the reading room, he revived his acquaintance with the Borgias, for it was certain that Cæsar had not only inherited their vices, but was a faithful copyist of their methods.

The book he chose was a small monograph by an eminent American professor, the best he knew, and it took him an hour and a half to read it from cover to cover. Tray-Bong Smith had always held that the coincidences of life are part of life's normality. That they are not confined to plays and stories, any observer will agree; but the fact that he should be there in the British Museum reading room studying a life of the Borgias on the very day and at the very minute another person should have been waiting impatiently to read that identical book, was remarkable.

He took the book back to the clerk and thought the frock-coated attendant breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'm glad you haven't kept it any longer, sir," he said, scribbled out a ticket, and carried the book over to an old man who was sitting bolt upright in a chair, his gnarled hands on the handle of an umbrella, his stern, lined face turned resentfully in Smith's direction. The old man took the book with a grunt and shuffled off to a reading table.

"You wouldn't think a man worth all those millions would come in and sit here waiting for a book that he could have bought for a few shillings," said the attendant when he returned.

"Worth all those millions?" repeated Smith, looking after the bowed figure.

"That's old Mr. Ross. You've heard of Ross, the millionaire?"

Smith laughed. "I can tell you something more about him," said he cryptically; "he doesn't like people who snore."

Cæsar's lieutenant took another look at the old man before he went out. He was above seventy, Smith guessed, and the main feature of his face was a white beard so closely clipped that he had the appearance of being unshaven. That and his shabby clothing impressed Smith most.

He dined at the hotel and had intended going to a theater, but when he came out into the hall the porter handed him an envelope addressed in typewritten characters to "T. B. Smith."

He opened it. The letter inside was also typewritten. It ran:

> Watch Ross. His lawyers are Baker & Sepley, of 129 Great James Street. If he goes to them or sends for them, he must be immediately destroyed.

In the lower right-hand corner were the words: "Quai Fleurs," which was at once a reminder and an indication of the source from whence the letter came.

So that was Cæsar's game, and that was why he had sent the man from Chi So's to

London and had arranged Room 41 for him. He was to watch this old man, this student of the Borgias, and in certain eventualities he was to be destroyed, and Smith was to destroy him.

The watcher put the letter away in his pocket and grinned to himself. The lordly Cæsar stepped too readily into the character of tyrant. Tray-Bong Smith was to be the hired assassin and have the police of the metropolis on his heels, or else to be exposed for something that had happened in France, and for which he was not liable in England. Anyway, Cæsar was in London. That was news.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NOTE FROM NOWHERE.

Tray-Bong Smith sat in the lounge of the hotel reading the evening papers and watched Mr. Ross come from the dining room and take the elevator to the second floor. After a while he followed, going into his own room and waiting until he heard the snap of the electric switch which told him the old man had retired. He wasn't likely to see his lawyer between the hours of nine and twelve, thought Tray-Bong Smith, and sallied forth into the West End to find amusement.

A man watching the hotel saw him return at eleven-thirty, signaled to the shadow who had followed Mr. Smith all that evening and compared notes. Smith may or may not have known that he was being watched. He might have guessed as much after Hallett's warning. He went upstairs to bed and to sleep, and was on the point of undressing when he heard the soft thud of a door closing, and it seemed that the sound came from the next room. He switched out his light, drew the door open gently, and listened, but there was no further sound.

No. 40, the room occupied by Mr. Ross, was, as he had learned earlier in the evening, not so much a room as a suite. It consisted of two apartments—a bedroom with a bath, and a sitting room which led from the bedroom, and access to which could be had direct from the passage through a door marked 40A.

Smith stepped out into the corridor, walked softly to No. 40, and listened. There was no sound. He went on to 40A and listened again, and after a while he was rewarded by the murmur of voices.

He strolled to the end of the passage to see if there were any hotel servants, but Bilton's is one of those eminently respectable hostelries patronized in the main by elderly people who retire early, and he walked back down the corridor and tried the door of 40. To his surprise it was unlocked and he stepped in, closing the door behind him. It would be a simple matter to explain how he, a stranger to the hotel, had walked into the wrong room.

A line of light along the floor showed him where the communicating door was, and he made bold to turn on the light for a second, and discovered, as he had expected, that the bed was unoccupied and the room empty. He put out the light noiselessly and tiptoed across the room, putting his ear to the door. The people were talking; the one voice gruff and harsh, the second so soft that he could hardly hear a word that was spoken, for it was the voice of a woman. And, somehow, that voice was familiar.

Tray-Bong Smith crouched down and looked through the keyhole, but could see no more than the back of a chair. He listened intently, but could hear nothing intelligible. Once he heard Ross say:

"If they are on earth we will find them," and he thought he heard the old man say, "it is remarkable—I should have been deceived——"

Then most unexpectedly a hand fell on the doorknob and he hurried back through the room and was out in the corridor before it could have been opened. He had no time to close the door, but pulled it to after him and was in his own room in something under two seconds.

He waited patiently behind his own closed door, listening, but there was no sound, and after five minutes had passed he ventured to open it. There he stood in the darkness for nearly half an hour before the two came out. He heard the man say "Good night, my dear. God bless you!" and thought he heard the sound of a kiss. Smith opened the door wider. The lights from the corridor were on full and there was no possibility of making a mistake.

The figure that came past the door was not, as he had expected, a woman—but Ross himself! The old man had gone out and left the woman behind. For a while Smith was too bewildered to make a move, then, seizing his hat from the bed, he raced down the corridor in pursuit of the old man. He must

have gone down by the stairs, for the elevator was descending as he reached the end of the corridor and he came to the ground floor in time to see the figure pass through the swing doors, out into the night. There was a car waiting, evidently for him, for he stepped in, without giving the driver instructions, and it moved off. Smith called a passing taxi.

"Follow that car," he said.

At a house in Portland Place the car stopped, the old man descended and let himself into the big mansion with a key. Smith noted the number—409. He had stopped his own cab well behind the car, which, contrary to his expectation, did not move off. Mr. Smith dismissed his car and, standing in the cover of a doorway, he waited. In half an hour the door of No. 409 opened and a girl came out, wearing a long, black cloak.

Smith slipped from his place of concealment and walked rapidly toward her. She moved as quickly to the car, but the street standard showed her face clearly.

It was Stephanie—Cæsar's daughter.

"Now, what has happened to old man Ross?" said the puzzled Mr. Smith and went to bed that night with the problem unsolved.

Cæsar sent for him the next morning, adopting in his typewritten note that royal-command tone of his which so suited him. The men met in Green Park. It was a bright, sunny day, and Cæsar was dressed in gray. He was something of a dandy in his attire and again the fastidious Smith approved.

Cæsar motioned his confederate to a garden chair by his side. "I didn't intend sending for you, Smith," he said, "but one or two things have happened, and I thought it advisable to see you in order to let you know where you can get into touch with me in any emergency.

"I know exactly where I can get into touch with you, with or without an emergency," said Tray-Bong calmly. "No. 409 Portland Place, I think?"

Cæsar looked at him sharply.

"How do you know?" he demanded. "My name is not in any of the reference books."

"I know," said Smith, with a fine gesture.

"You shadowed me! I was out late last night," said he accusingly, and the other laughed.

"I give you my word that I have never shadowed you in my life," said he. "Anyway, I don't see how I can shadow Mr. Ross and you at the same time."

"But how did you know?" insisted Cæsar.

"A little bird told me," bantered Smith. "Please let me have my mystery, too, Mr. Valentine."

"You shadowed me," he said, nodding, and then dismissed the subject. "What do you think of Ross?"

"A worthy old gentleman," said the other. "I like his appearance."

He made no reference to the fact that he had seen "the worthy old gentleman," letting himself into Cæsar's house with a key. That could wait.

"He is worth from ten to twenty millions," said Cæsar. "He has no heir, he has no will, and on his death his property reverts to the State."

Smith looked at him in astonishment. "How do you know that?"

"I know that," said Cæsar. "That is my mystery." He did not speak again for a moment. He had that queer trick of breaking off a conversation and letting his fancy and thoughts roam at will; but presently he returned to the subject of the old man.

"Men and women work and sweat from morning till night," he said musingly, "year in and year out, for just sufficient food and rest as will enable them to carry on with more work. I do not work, because I have brains, and because I do not regard human life from the same angle as the commonplace person; neither do you. Do you realize that if Mr. Ross at this moment sat down and wrote on a sheet of paper half a dozen lines, signed it, and had his signature witnessed by a chambermaid or a valet, those few lines would make us enormously wealthy men, and give us all the power in the world?"

"You mean if he made a will in our favor and providentially died?" said Smith.

"You're very direct," Cæsar laughed softly. "But hasn't it ever struck you how simple a matter is the transfer of property when one of the conditions of transfer is the death of one of the parties? If you or I were to burgle the Bank of England, there would be no hope for us unless we spent years of unremitting labor in organizing and preparing for our coup—and then the chances are that we should fail."

Smith nodded.

"If you and I wished to forge a little check, say on Mr. Ross' account, we have

to overcome the suspicions and safeguards imposed by dozens of very intelligent men, all of whom would have to be hoodwinked separately. And then in the end we might fail."

"That I have realized," Mr. Smith agreed, with a grimace.

"Is it not a more simple matter," mused Cæsar, "to induce Mr. Moss to sign a document of half a dozen lines?"

"That depends," said Smith. "I should say that it would be a very difficult matter. It would be easier, if you will forgive the directness, to arrange his untimely demise than to induce his signature. Otherwise, if I may be bold, there would be one of your famous wreaths on order."

Cæsar's eyes twinkled. Any tribute to the inevitability of his success pleased him. "At present my object in life is to prevent him signing those half dozen lines for anybody," he said. "I particularly desire that Mr. Ross should die without making any provision for the disposal of his fortune."

Smith looked at him in astonishment. "Do you really mean that?" said he. "I thought you told me that his estate would go to the crown?"

"If he had no heirs," said Cæsar. "Always remember that, if he had no heirs."

"But has he?" demanded his companion. "He is a bachelor——"

"He is a widower," said Cæsar. "He had one child, who was estranged from him, and who died. In all probability, if that child was alive, he would make a will leaving his property to a dogs' home, or something equally absurd."

Slowly an idea was taking shape and form in Smith's mind. Very, very slowly certain dark places were becoming clear. He was a quick thinker, and what were mysteries to most people were not mysteries to him. In some respects even Cæsar could not match his ready powers of induction. Tray-Bong Smith had been genuinely puzzled and baffled by certain experiences in the past few days, but now he began to "see."

"How old would his daughter be if she were alive?" he asked.

"Forty-seven," said Cæsar readily. "Three years younger than I."

So he was fifty. There were days when he looked it, but on this morning he would have passed easily for thirty-five.

"Forty-seven," he repeated. "She ran away from home when she was something over twenty, and married a fiddler, or something of the sort. The old man made a will leaving his property to an orphan asylum—cut her right out of it. When he heard of her death, he tore up the will, intending, I think, to make another one. You see, I am very well informed upon Mr. Ross' private life."

"Suppose she isn't dead?" drawled Smith, and the big man swung round in his chair. "What the hell do you mean?" he asked. It was the first time Smith had seen him display any kind of perturbation.

"Suppose she isn't dead?" he repeated.

Cæsar shrugged his shoulders. "In that case she would inherit the fortune—if he died."

"Would you produce her?"

Cæsar was silent.

"Would you produce her and let her go into an English court and tell of years spent in almost solitary confinement in some forgotten room on your French estate? Would you like her to tell the judge of the high court how you let her out for exercise in the middle of the night, manacled hand and foot?"

Cæsar's face went white and drawn and he looked his fifty, but the man with the absurd nickname went on remorselessly, for he was determined that Cæsar Valentine should put his cards down, face uppermost. "A woman marries a wandering fiddler, you say? I gather that's an extravagance of yours, and means no more than that she married a musician. A fairly prosperous amateur musician, unless I am mistaken, by the name of Welland."

Cæsar winced—the second score for Smith.

"You discover her relationship with Ross, and persuade her to go aboard with you, waiting for the divorce which you think Welland will obtain but which he doesn't. Then the woman gets restless; perhaps her child dies. She certainly remains in the land of the living."

Cæsar was calm enough now, and a cynical smile was hovering at the corners of his mouth. "Wonderful fellow!" he said mockingly. "You have told almost all the truth. The child died, and, in the meantime, Stephanie is born. It is my intention to produce Stephanie as the heiress of the Ross millions. Now you know it all, or you've guessed it all. You're clever, Smith, a cleverer man than I thought. There's a fortune

in this for you if you'll work with me; and if you don't——"

"A quick and a painless death, eh?" smiled Smith. "But watch that my knife is not swifter than your alkaloids."

He looked down. There was an envelope lying at his feet. "Did you drop that?" asked Smith and stooped and picked it up. "It has your name on it."

Cæsar shook his head.

"I didn't drop it," he said, and read the superscription: "Cæsar Valentine."

It was gummed and sealed with wax. He tore open the flap with a frown. Smith saw his face harden and he blinked rapidly. Was there fear in his eyes as he handed the letter to his tool? Smith thought there was.

"Where did this come from?" he gasped and looked around, but nobody was in sight.

There were three lines of handwriting in what is called "pen print;" that is to say, the letters were printed in big capitals. The note began:

Cæsar! You are but mortal. Remember this.

It was signed "Number Six."

Smith read it through with a qualm, but Cæsar, snatching it from his hand, crumbled it into a ball and tossed it away with an oath.

"Welland," he snarled, "if I find you before you find me, beware of Cæsar!"

CHAPTER IX.

MR. SMITH IS BURGLED.

Cæsar sent for Smith that afternoon again, and this time the man went to No. 409 Portland Place, and was shown by a footman into the handsome library where Cæsar was waiting with every evidence of impatience.

"Welland must be found," he greeted the other. "I have put the matter into the hands of a private-detective agency, and I have told them to go ahead, regardless of expense. I am satisfied that the man is still living, because he was seen by one of my agents in York, only two years ago."

"Then why the devil did you send me to search for him?" demanded Smith unpleasantly.

"On the off chance of his having communicated with that address," he said, and probably he was speaking the truth.

"There are two men who may be at the back of this Number Six folly. One is old Gale's son——"

"Gale's son is in the Argentine," interrupted Smith. "He is farming on a ranch."

"Where did you find that out?" demanded Cæsar.

"It was easy," said the other. "The officials of the bank you robbed——"

"I robbed?" said Cæsar quickly.

"Somebody robbed," said Smith, with a wave of his hand. "It is hardly important who did it. At any rate, these officials are in touch with young Gale, who apparently has undertaken to restore all the money that the bank lost. So you can rule out Gale."

"Then it must be Welland," said Cæsar. "It must be Welland! My information from Scotland Yard is beyond doubt. The man who calls himself Number Six——"

"It may as well be a woman," said Smith.

"No woman would dare," said Cæsar. "No woman would dare! No, it is Welland. It is an amateur who got into touch with the chief of the intelligence bureau and persuaded him to let him take on the job. Remember, they have nothing against me at Scotland Yard. They have no proof; they know nothing of any crime that I might have committed. They have only a suspicion, an uneasiness—nothing more."

Smith agreed with him. There was no sense in disagreeing with him.

"Go back to Ross," Cæsar said abruptly. "I will attend to Welland. He has had no visitors?"

"Ross? None."

"Nobody has been to see him?"

Smith shook his head. He could lie as well as Cæsar Valentine. After all, he had certain interests of his own to look after, and did not apologize, even to himself, for the deception. Much more must happen in the tangled skein of Cæsar's affairs before Smith revealed his hand. Cæsar had the satisfaction of having him under his thumb. Smith also had a thumb, and was greatly desirous of meeting his employer on level terms.

Mr. Smith loved life as dearly as any, and he knew that every ounce of weight he could bring to bear upon this singular man at the psychological moment was so much life insurance. The mystery of Mr. Ross and his inexplicable visit to No. 409 Portland Place, in Cæsar's absence, had yet to be solved.

"What would you have done, supposing you hadn't met me?" he asked him suddenly. "Your unhappy Ernest would have been a poor substitute in this game!"

"Ernest served his purpose," said the

other coldly. "He performed certain duties which were essential, but he had a valet's mind. Poor Ernest!" he said softly.

He was not being hypocritical, thought Smith, on his way back to the hotel. Indeed, Smith was certain that the man was profoundly sorry that the necessity had arisen for removing a troublesome servant. There must have been certain coarse fibers in Cæsar's composition which responded to this uncouth little man and his crudities.

What villainies Ernest performed Smith was never able to discover, but that was because the full range of Cæsar's activities had never been wholly revealed. Smith came into the Borgia's life at the climax of a great plot which had been developing for years, and Cæsar had had to get that money to live in the style he regarded as necessary for his comfort, and the unwilling contributors to his income had been drawn from all stages of society.

Watching Mr. Ross was a monotonous business, and Smith pined for a more active life, and did not disguise his feelings from Cæsar when he met him the next morning.

"I'm sorry I can't give you a throat to cut every day," said Cæsar sardonically. "You will attend to Mr. Ross."

"Mr. Ross spends most of his time in the Reform Club reading dull English magazines," complained Tray-Bong with some slight exasperation. "I have already got wet through watching those infernal premises."

"Continue," said Cæsar definitely. That evening he telephoned, through, in a state of excitement.

"He's found!"

"Who?"

"Welland—I'm going to see him," it almost sounded as though Cæsar's voice was shaking. "He was picked up in Manchester—he is staying at a poor lodging in the suburbs."

"Oh," said Mr. Smith awkwardly. He did not know what else he could say. "You are seeing him?" But Cæsar had hung up his receiver. He had abrupt habits.

Whatever Mr. Smith thought of this interview is not known. He had troubles of his own next day, as he discovered on returning to his hotel. In twelve months' sojourn in the French capital he had acquired a reputation and a nickname, which is more than some people better placed than he could boast. But he was only human, and had the strongest objection to his trunks and his private writing case being ransacked by amateur hands. Only an amateur would cut off the lock of the new leather portfolio he had bought the day before, and leave its contents to litter his dressing table. Only an amateur would go through his clothes without replacing them upon the hooks where they rightly belonged.

Smith sent for the manager of Bilton's Hotel and showed him the chaos which the visitor had left, and the manager was duly apologetic. He did not remember any strange man or woman coming to the hotel, nor did the chambermaid. The only stranger who had put in an appearance was "the young lady who called on Mr. Ross"—and she, of course, was too young-ladylike to commit this act of vandalism.

At the mention of the young lady, Mr. Smith's mind grew calmer. He had a fear that some misguided, but well-meaning, officer from Scotland Yard had taken it upon himself to substantiate a passing suspicion. The active and intelligent young officers who pass into the criminal investigation department are prone to be zealous, and Smith would have hated to have been compelled to call upon the steely eyed Mr. Hallett with a complaint against his promising boys.

Obviously an amateur's work, thought he, as he again inspected the evidence of the hasty search; for there was a little smear of blood on the blotting pad.

CHAPTER X.

THE LADY WHO MODELED.

Smith drove up to No. 409 Portland Place. Mr. Valentine was out, the pompous footman told him, and would not be back until late that evening. Was the young lady in? Yes, she was. Would he ask her to be kind enough to see him, asked Smith, and gave him a card inscribed "Lord Henry Jones"—one of those comic visiting cards which one uses on the Continent with such effect, the French being wholly ignorant of the fact that nobody could be called "Lord Henry Jones" and live.

He was shown into the drawing-room and she came down, holding a card in her hand, and stopped dead at the door at the sight of the, to her, sinister figure. Smith was, by all records, a hardened man and not unacquainted with beautiful women, but he never saw this girl but his tongue did not cleave to the roof of his mouth, and he was not

reduced from the cool, sane man of affairs, to a stammering fool. It was not her beauty alone, or her spirituality; it was something worshipful in her, to which his heart responded.

"You!" she said.

"Why, yes," Smith stammered like a schoolboy. "I came to see you on a matter of importance." He looked at her hand. One finger was neatly bandaged, and then he laughed, incidentally recovering something of his self-possession.

"My father is out," she said coldly. "I am afraid I cannot be of any assistance to you."

"You can be a lot of assistance to me, Miss Valentine," said the man coolly. "You can give me, for example, a great deal of information."

"About what?" she asked.

"First, about your finger," said he boldly. "Have you hurt it badly?"

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly.

"When you cut open my writing case, this morning," said Smith gently, "I fear the knife or scissors slipped. You left a little of your blue blood behind."

Her face had gone pink, and for one delicious moment she looked ridiculous. There is nothing more wonderful than to see somebody of whom you stand in awe looking a little foolish. She was wise enough not to attempt to reply.

"Won't you ask me to sit down?" asked Smith. She waved her hand to a chair. "What did you expect to find in my writing case?" he rallied her. "Evidence of my excessive criminality?"

"I have that," she said. "You seem to forget that I was on the Quai des Fleurs that night."

She did not say what night, but it was not necessary to ask her for an explanation. What Smith marveled at was her extraordinary coolness. She did not tremble—she who had witnessed what must have been to her a terrible crime. She spoke as coolly of "that night" as though she had been a participant rather than a horrified spectator.

"Yes, I remember," said Smith. "Curiously enough, I always remember things like that."

But sarcasm was wasted on her. "You'll have some tea, now that you're here, Mr. Smith? I take tea very early."

Smith nodded. He was prepared to drink tea, or something more noxious, so that it was delivered to him by her hand—into such a condition had this man fallen. She rang a bell and then came back to her chair, and looked across at him with a little smile in her eyes. "So you think I'm a burglar, Mr. Smith?" she said.

"I—I don't think you're anything of the sort," stammered Smith. "The fact is, I thought—possibly your father had told you to come——" he floundered helplessly.

"We are a queer lot of people, aren't we?" she said unexpectedly. "My father, you, and I."

"And Mr. Ross," added Smith softly, and she looked at him for a moment, startled.

"Of course," she said quickly. "Mr. Ross. Mr. Valentine put you in the next room to him to watch him, didn't he?"

She was a most disconcerting person, and again Tray-Bong Smith was embarrassed. He had long before discovered that the best way to get out of an embarrassing situation is to return the embarrassment. "I don't know that it is necessary for me to watch Mr. Ross on behalf of your father," he drawled, "especially when he can sit at home and watch him."

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly.

"I thought Mr. Ross was a visitor to this house," said Smith innocently.

"A visitor?" Her eyes were fixed on his, and then suddenly he saw a light dawn, and her face went pink. For a second or two she controlled the laughter which was bubbling at her lips, and then she fell back in the chair and laughed long and musically. "How wonderful!" she said. "Mr. Ross here. And did you see him come?"

"I did," said Smith boldly.

"And did you see him go?"

"I didn't see him go," admitted the other.

"Oh, but you should have done," she said with mock seriousness. "You should have seen him home and tucked him into bed. Isn't that what you're paid for?"

Smith winced under the scarcely veiled scorn in the tone. Or was it good-humored malice?

"So you saw Mr. Ross come here," she said after a while, "and did you tell my father? No, of course you didn't."

Smith shook his head. "I told him—nothing," and she looked at him queerly.

At that moment a footman brought in a silver tea tray and set the table, and further conversation was impossible. When the man had gone and the girl had filled the cups,

she sat with her folded hands on her lap, looking down as though she were resolving some problem.

"Mr. Smith," she said, "perhaps you'll think it is dreadful of me, that I speak so lightly of the terrible scene I witnessed on the Quai des Fleurs, but I have a reason."

"I think I know your reason," said Smith quietly.

"I wonder if you do?" she said. "Of course, I ought to shrink away from you and shout for the police when you come near, for you're a horrid criminal, aren't you?"

Smith grinned uncomfortably. She alone of all the people in the world had a trick of making him feel a fool.

"I suppose I am," he said, "although I have——"

"A clean bill in England—I know all about that," said the girl, and he stared at her, wondering who had used that phrase before, and was startled to remember that it was himself.

"I'm rather a queer girl, because I've had rather a queer life," she said. "You see, the earlier days of my life were spent in a little New Jersey town——"

"How eccentric!" murmured Smith as he stirred his tea.

"Don't be sarcastic," said the girl with a smile. "I was very, very happy in America, except that I didn't seem to have any parents around. Father came only occasionally, and he is rather—how shall I put it, forbidding?"

All the time her eyes were fixed on his, and Smith nodded.

"I might have stayed on in New Jersey for a very long time," she went on; "in fact, all my life, because I love the place; only you see"—again she hesitated—"I made rather a terrific discovery."

"How terrific?" asked Smith.

"Well, I won't tell you that," said the girl. "At least, not at present."

He was curious enough now. "Perhaps if you told me," he said quietly, "it might help me a lot, and help you, too."

She looked at him doubtfully and shook her head. "I wonder," she said. "I'll tell you this much, and I'm not going to ask you to keep my secret, because I'm sure you will—I have rather a secret of yours, you know."

"I had a horrible fear you were going to betray me——" began Smith, but she stopped him.

"Don't let us talk about that," she said. "One of these days I'm going to surprise you."

"What was it you discovered in New Jersey?" asked Smith.

"After mother—died," said the girl slowly, "and father went to Europe, he left a lot of things with his lawyer, Judge Cramb. The judge used to pay all my expenses and the cost of the upkeep of the house, and give me an allowance every month when I was old enough to have an allowance; and generally he acted as father's agent. Well, while Mr. Valentine was away in Europe, the old judge died suddenly and his practice passed into the hands of strangers. The first thing the strangers did was to send back a small black box which father had kept in the judge's office for safe-keeping.

"I rather fancy that at the time of his death the judge was not acting for father at all, because my money used to come through the Farmers' Bank, and I suppose that the new lawyer, finding his office cluttered up with old boxes, thought he would make a clean sweep, so father's effects came back to me. I hadn't the slightest idea as to what I should do with it until Mrs. Temple, the lady who was looking after me, suggested that I should send it to him in Europe, by registered post. Of course, I couldn't send a big, heavy box, so I tried to find a key which would fit the lock, and after a while found one. The box was full of papers, all tied neatly into bundles, except for a few loose documents and photographs. I took them out, wrote a big envelope, and addressed it to father, and it was while I was going over the loose papers that I saw something which decided me to come to Europe. Father had often asked me to come, though I don't think he seriously meant me to leave America. But now I made up my mind."

"How long ago was this?" asked Smith quietly.

"Two years ago," replied Stephanie.

"And you came to Europe?"

She nodded.

"Your father knew?"

"Oh, yes," said the girl indifferently. "He agreed. In fact, I think he was pleased."

Smith thought a while.

"That explains a lot," he said, then asked carelessly, "what do you do with your days?"

The answer was the last he expected. "I model in wax," said the girl.

"Model?"

She nodded. "I will show you," she said, and led him out of the drawing-room through the big hall to a little room at the back of the house. The "room" was really a small conservatory which had been furnished with a long deal bench, a few chairs, and a cupboard.

He looked at the beautiful little figures, finished and unfinished, that decorated the bench, and was genuinely astonished.

"You're an artist, Miss Stephanie—Miss Valentine," he corrected himself.

"Miss Stephanie would do," she said with a little smile. "I'm an artist, am I?"

"Of course, I don't know much about art," began Smith.

"But you know just what you like?" she said dryly. "Now, you've disappointed me, Mr. Smith. I thought a man with your artistic temperament would really have said something original."

They were exquisite little models; a shepherdess in the French style was as perfect a thing as Smith had seen.

"And do you color them yourself?"

She nodded. She glanced round, and Smith saw a look of anxiety in her face and followed the direction of her eyes. It was at a cupboard against the wall that she was looking, and almost before he discovered the cause of her anxiety she had darted across the room, shut the cupboard door, and locked it, and, thrusting the key into her pocket, turned a very red face to him.

"Family skeleton?" said Smith.

She looked at him suspiciously. "The family skeleton," she replied steadily. "Now come back and finish your tea."

She was perturbed, and Smith wondered what there was in that mysterious cupboard, which she was so anxious to hide. And what had amused her so when he had told her that he had been shadowing Mr. Ross? She was a strange girl. He did not understand her, and what he did not understand worried him.

"The family skeleton," she said unexpectedly after a long silence. "There are a lot of skeletons in this family, Mr. Smith."

"There are in most families," said Smith lamely.

"But we"—she lingered on the word—"we—Borgias—have more than our share, Mr. Smith."

"Borgias?" said Smith softly. "What do you mean by Borgias?"

"Didn't you know? Of course you knew!" she said derisively. She had recovered something of her spirits, and her old flippancy. "Have you never heard of the illustrious house of the Borgias—can you understand why father did not call me Lucrezia?"

"I think I can," said Smith. "Oh, yes, I think I can," and he nodded wisely.

"What is your explanation?" she asked.

"My explanation is the mysterious box that you discovered in your little New Jersey town," said Smith. "The box and the contents thereof."

She got up from her seat and held out her hand.

"I hope you've enjoyed your tea," she said. "I think you ought to get back." And Smith was in the street before he realized that he had been summarily dismissed.

CHAPTER XI.

JOHN WELLAND.

On the morning of this interview, a warder opened the cell door in Strangeways Gaol, and woke John Welland from a troublous sleep. He was not known to the officials of Strangeways Gaol as John Welland, but the name he had assumed is unimportant.

"Six o'clock," said the warder briefly, and went out.

John Welland rose, and dressed himself. Gaol delivery at Strangeways is at nine o'clock in the morning, but the big prison clock was booming the midday hour before the discharged men were released to their waiting friends. It was half past twelve when John Welland came through the little black wicket door and walked down the street, in the direction of the cars.

A prisoner who had been released that morning, and who had been detained outside the gaol by his numerous friends, jerked his head in the direction of the retreating figure and said something which diverted the attention of his friends from their hero and to the man. Welland boarded a street car and drove to the far end of the city, where he changed into a car which brought him back again, but by another route. He alighted and walked for a mile and a half, taking such short cuts as would suggest that he feared being watched and followed.

Presently he came to a quiet street, and turned in at a little house at one end. There was nobody to greet him, but a tiny fire burned in the kitchen, and somebody had

laid a plate and a cup and saucer. He put the kettle on and climbed a steep little flight of stairs which led to a neat bedroom, changing his clothes for others, which he took from a hanging cupboard.

The face that looked into the mirror was gray and lined, the face of a prematurely old man. For fully five minutes he stood looking at himself, as though communing with the reflection; then with a sigh he descended the stairs, made and poured his tea, and sat down before the fire, his elbows on his knees, his chin in his palm.

He heard the door unlocked, and looked round as a motherly looking woman came in with a loaded market basket.

"Good morning, mister," she said in a broad Lancashire dialect. "I knew you'd be back this morning, but I didn't think you'd be here so early. Have you made your tea?"

She made no reference to his absence; probably she was used to it. As she disposed of the contents of the basket she chattered incessantly—so incessantly that he rose presently and went into the little parlor and closed the door behind him. The woman went about her work until from the parlor came the faint strains of a violin, and then she sat to listen. It was a sad refrain he was playing—something Andalusian, with a sob at its end—and the good woman shook her head.

Presently Welland came out again.

"Aye," said his housekeeper, "I wish you'd play something cheerful, Mr. Welland. Those tunes get on my nerves."

"They soothe mine," said Welland, with a faint smile.

"You're a champion player," agreed the busy lady. "And I like a tune on the fiddle. Did you ever play in public, Mr. Welland?"

Welland nodded as he took down a pipe from the mantelshelf, stuffed it from an old pouch, and lit it.

"I thought you did," said Mrs. Beck triumphantly. "I was telling my husband this morning——"

"I hope you didn't tell your husband much about me, Mrs. Beck?" said the man quietly.

"Oh, not too much. I'm proper careful. I told a young man who came here yesterday——"

Welland took his pipe out of his mouth and looked around, his gray eyebrows lowered in a frown.

"What young man came here yesterday?"

"He came to inquire if you were at home."

"If I was at home," said Welland. "Did he mention my name?"

"He did an' all," said the woman. "That's what struck me as funny. He's the first person that's ever been to this house and asked for you by name."

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him you might be home to-morrow and you might be home next week, but I don't know for certain, Mr. Welland, you're not very regular. I told him you're away for months at a time——"

Welland pressed his lips together. He knew it was useless to reproach the woman. After all, it might be some tax collector or somebody canvassing for charity, for these poor streets yield a rich harvest to the charity-monger; or, perhaps, it was the vicar renewing his attempts to become acquainted—an effort on the vicar's part which had been so uncompromisingly repulsed that he never called again in person.

"It's all right, Mrs. Beck," said Welland. "Only I don't like my business spoken of, if you don't mind."

"I never speak of your business, Mr. Welland," said the woman, aggrieved. "Anyway, I don't know it," she added huffily. "It's nowt to me what you do with your time. For owt I know you might be a burglar or a policeman, you're away from home so often."

Welland made no reply. That afternoon, when the woman had finished her labors, had laid the tea and gone back to her own home, his mind went back to this young man visitor, and he put the chain on the door, determined not to answer the knock of any caller.

None came until nightfall. He was sitting in his parlor with drawn blinds, reading, by the light of an oil lamp, when he heard a tap-tap on his door. He put down the book and listened. Presently it came again—tap-tap. In this tiny house the front door was within half a dozen feet of where he sat, and he walked out into the narrow passage. Again came the knock. It sounded as though somebody was tapping on the door with the head of a stick.

"Who is that?" asked Welland.

"Let me in," said a muffled voice. "I want to see you, Welland."

"Who are you?"

"Let me in," was the reply, and John Wel-

land recognized the voice and his face went as white as death. For a moment his head swam, and he had to hold on to the wall for support. Then after a while he steadied his nerves, but his hands were trembling when he flung back the catch of the chain, and threw the door open wide. The night was dark, for the moon had not risen, and he could only see the tall figure standing on the flagged path outside as an indistinct mass.

"Come in," he said. He had secured control of his voice.

"Do you know me?" asked the visitor.

"I know you," said John Welland, and every word was an effort. "You are Cæsar Valentine."

He led the way into the parlor and Cæsar followed, and so they stood for a breathing space, one on each side of a little circular table on which the oil lamp burned, the tall man towering above his enemy, Welland watching him with eyes that were hot.

"I want to see you on an important matter," said Cæsar coolly.

"Where is my wife?" asked Welland, breathing heavily.

Cæsar shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Your wife is dead," he said, "you know that."

"Where is my child?" asked Welland.

Again Cæsar shrugged. "Why do you raise a subject which is as painful to me as it is to you?" he asked in a tone of complaint, as though he were the injured person. Then, without invitation, he sat down. "Welland," he said, "you must be reasonable. The past is dead. Why nurse your hatred?"

"The hatred harbors me," said the other grimly. "It is the link which binds me to life, Valentine, and will keep me living until with these hands"—he stretched them forth and they were trembling—"until with these hands I kill you!"

Cæsar laughed.

"Melodrama!" he scoffed. "You will kill me? Well, here I am. Kill, my friend. Have you no gun or knife? Are you afraid? You who threatened to kill, and who have held this threat over my head all this time, now is your opportunity."

He slipped from his pocket something which glittered, and laid it on the table before the man.

"Take this," he said. It was a silver-plated revolver. "Shoot! I guarantee that the bullet is heavy enough to kill."

Welland looked from the pistol to the man and shook his head. "Not that way," he said. "You shall die in good time, and you shall suffer even more than I have suffered."

A silence fell again, and Welland, speaking half to himself, went on: "I am glad I have seen you. You have not changed. You are as you were—look at me." He flung out his arms. "You should be happy, Valentine, for all your life you have taken that which you wanted, and I have lost—oh, my God! What have I lost?" He covered his face with his hands, and Cæsar watched him curiously. Then the big man picked up the revolver and put it back in his pocket.

"I shall die in good time, eh!" he sneered. "Well, here's to that good time! You had your chance. I asked you to divorce her."

"Divorce!" groaned the other.

"She could have married again and been happy. Now, Welland, are you going to be sensible?"

"Have you said all you wanted to say?" asked Welland steadily. "Because, if you have, you can go. I say I am glad I have seen you. It has revived whatever hopes and ambitions were fading from my heart. I have gone through hell for you, Cæsar Valentine. I have suffered beyond your understanding in order that one day—one day ——" he nodded, and, despite his calm and self-possession, Cæsar felt a cold chill creeping down his spine. He was angry at the thought that any man should bring that thrill of fear to his heart.

"You've had your chance, Welland," he said. "And if you've missed it, that is your fault. Now I have come to put the matter plainly to you. I believe you're in some government service. I have reason to believe that you have been employed to spy on me, and I tell you here and now, that the man is not born who will net Cæsar Valentine."

He brought his fist down on the table and the lamp jumped. "Like a fool I left you alone, and never once did it occur to me that I had the whole game in my hands if I acted instead of waiting for you to make your wife a free woman."

He had stepped round the table until he was side by side with the man he had wronged. Then suddenly, without warning, his two hands shot out and gripped Welland by the throat. Welland was strong, but Cæsar was superhuman in his strength. He swung the man backward over a chair and

crashed him to the floor, his hands never releasing their grip. Welland struggled desperately, but his struggles were in vain. Cæsar's knees were upon his arms, those vice-like hands of his were pressing steadily at his throat.

"To-morrow," whispered Cæsar, "they will find you hanging——"

There was a knock at the door and he looked round. Again the knock came, and the voice of a woman.

"Are you up, Mr. Welland? I can see your light. It's only Mrs. Beck."

Cæsar released his grip and crept out of the room as Welland struggled to a chair, voiceless, half senseless, and incapable of further movement. The big man stepped back into the room and blew out the lamp; then he came back and opened the door.

"All in the dark?" said the woman's voice. "Aye, but I could have sworn I saw a light!"

He let her pass, then leaped through the door, slamming it behind him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MYSTERIOUS MR. ROSS.

"You look as if you've had a bad night, my friend," said Mr. Tray-Bong Smith.

"A bad night?" said Cæsar absently. "Er —oh, yes, I didn't get back to town until late."

"Did you see your Mr. Welland?"

Cæsar did not reply.

"I gather you did," said Smith, "and that the interview was one you don't care to think about."

Cæsar nodded. "I am wondering just what Welland will do," he said, after a while. "With any kind of luck I should have known, but I was interrupted."

Smith looked at him sharply. "That sounds like an interesting story spoiled by overmodesty," said he. "Will you be kind enough to tell me just what happened when you met this interesting Mr. Welland?"

"I ought to have sent you," said Cæsar moodily. "There's something weak about us Borgias, a cursed desire for the theatrical. I can imagine that you would have made no mistake," and then he told his companion the story.

Smith was grave. "At any moment you, the artist in slaughter, are liable to be arrested for a very vulgar, common assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm, if I may employ the stilted phraseology of an indictment."

Cæsar shook his head. "He will not take action. I tell you the man is fanatical. He is satisfied in his mind that some day he will kill me, and nothing less than killing me will please him."

"Better you than me," said Smith. "You would be well advised to go careful, Mr. Cæsar Valentine. You can't play those monkey tricks in England and get away with 'em. If Welland is Number Six, then you're going to have the devil's own trouble before you're rid of his attentions."

"Welland *is* Number Six," said Cæsar. "My agent made inquiries. He spends his time running about up and down the country. He's away for long periods. Moreover —and this is important—he has been visiting the gaols."

"As a boarder?" asked Smith flippantly, but Cæsar was in no mood for jests.

"I told you that I was pretty well informed as to what happened at Scotland Yard. As a matter of fact, when Hallett, the chief of the criminal intelligence bureau, gave his instructions to the mysterious Number Six, there was a man of mine planted in the library, which was the next room. He had bored a hole through the wall, which was covered by the bookshelf in the chief's office and one of the bookshelves in the library. By taking out one book and pushing away another, he could hear practically all that went on."

Smith nodded. "So that is how it was done, eh?" he said. "You must have had a pretty good man. Well, what about the prisons?"

"That was Hallett's instructions," said Cæsar. "He told this man, or this woman, that he or she had the entree to all the prisons. He was under the impression that I had friends or confederates who might be undergoing terms of imprisonment."

"Rather a stupid idea," said Smith. "You're not likely to have gaolbirds as your accomplices."

"I have you," answered Cæsar, a little tactlessly, Smith thought. But the man from Chi So's laughed.

"I have never been in prison—yet," he said. "So you think that Welland is Number Six?" he asked. "Because you have traced him to a few of his majesty's gaols?"

"Isn't he the kind of man who'd take this job on? Didn't Hallett say that his

agent was an amateur? All the evidence points to Welland."

He paced up and down his library, his hands behind him, a considerably ruffled man.

Smith had come to Portland Place before breakfast that morning rather in the hope of seeing the girl than of interviewing Cæsar.

"Where is Welland now?" asked Smith.

"In Lancashire, I suppose——" Cæsar began, and then stopped dead and looked down at his blotting pad. "I didn't see that before."

"What?" asked Smith.

Cæsar took the envelope from his writing table. It was sealed and addressed as was the letter he had found at his feet in Green Park. He tore it open, and read the typewritten message aloud:

Cæsar, you are but mortal. Remember! Number Six!

He stared at the paper stupidly, then sank down heavily into his chair.

"I think," said Smith to himself, "our Cæsar is afraid."

Cæsar's prediction was fulfilled. Welland took no action, though for days Mr. Smith was in such a state of apprehension that he twice mislaid the millionaire to watch whose comings and goings was his duty. In that period two things occurred which worried him. The first was the absence from town of Stephanie. Cæsar mentioned casually that she had gone up to Scotland for a couple of days, and seemed on the whole relieved by her absence. And then Mr. Ross confined himself to his room and refused to come out and be watched. That did not worry Smith greatly, except that he thought it was extraordinary.

On the evening of the second day the mystery of Mr. Ross deepened. Smith had been unaccountably sleepy through his dinner, and went upstairs to his room to lie down. He was lying on his bed, half asleep, when he heard the handle of his door turned, and presently somebody came in, and after a moment's hesitation switched on the light. In the second of time between the switching on of the light and its extinguishment, he caught a glimpse of old Ross in a dressing gown, just a momentary glimpse, and then the light was snapped out. There was a patter of feet, and the old man's door closed with a slam, and Smith heard the key turned in the lock.

That in itself was remarkable. That the man he had been set to watch should be watching him, and, taking advantage of his absence, as he evidently had thought, should have entered the room, was astounding. Smith was quite awake now, and walked down the corridor, inspecting the door, wondering in his mind what excuse he could find for knocking and interviewing his neighbor. He thought better of it, and went downstairs into the hall; and there he found waiting for him the shock of his life, for, standing near the reception desk was Mr. Ross, wearing a heavy ulster and a cloth cap, which gave his queer old face an odd appearance.

Smith stared as the old man shuffled across to the elevator and was whisked up to his floor. "Where did Mr. Ross come from?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir," said the clerk, shaking his head, "I thought he was in his room. He hasn't been out of his room all day, and I certainly didn't see him go through the vestibule."

"H'm!" said Smith.

He was waiting in the hall, undecided as to what he should do, when piquancy was added to the situation by the arrival of a small page boy who requested him to go to Mr. Ross' room. Tray-Bong Smith followed the diminutive messenger, and was ushered into the bedroom, where Mr. Ross was waiting in the identical dressing gown he had worn when he had stepped into Smith's room.

"I owe you an apology, Mr. Smith," growled the old man. "Won't you sit down?"

Smith obeyed.

"I am afraid I have been wandering rather restlessly about the hotel of late, and I made a mistake and stepped into your room about half an hour ago."

"Yes," said Smith, "and then you made a mistake and stepped into the hall, dressing yourself en route."

The old man's grim face relaxed in a smile. "You're very observant, Mr. Smith," he said. "What a wonderful detective you would have made!"

Was he being sarcastic? Smith rather thought he was. He wondered at first why the old man had sent for him, but the soft sound of footsteps on the carpet outside the door reached his ears and he wondered no longer. Of course, the old man had

brought him to the bedroom while his double was escaping from the sitting room.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE.

It is related of great criminals, and no biographer would miss recording this aspect of their lives, that there come to them moments of remorse and memory, when the shades of their victims crowd in upon them and bring them to the borders of madness.

The full extent of Cæsar Valentine's wrongdoing has never been, and probably never will be known; but it is certain that, were he given to sentimental reminiscences, and did he allow his mind to dwell upon the past, there would be memories enough and to spare to trouble his nights.

But the truth about him is that he had no regrets, and to those who knew him best, showed no sign of remorse. Tray-Bong Smith, calling at Portland Place, discovered that Cæsar, too, had his hobby. When Smith was shown into the library he found Cæsar sitting at his table polishing something vigorously. There were two little marble molds before him, and in one of these was a circular brown object, to which from time to time Cæsar applied a coat of amber-colored varnish.

"What on earth is that?" asked Smith.

"What does it look like?" said Cæsar without looking up.

"It looks for all the world like a button."

"And that's just what it is," said Cæsar Valentine cheerfully. "You never suspected me of being a button maker?"

Smith looked closer, and found that the other had spoken the truth. It was a button, a very commonplace, bone-looking button, and when Cæsar had pried it out of the mold and turned it over and over on his hand admiringly, he placed it on a sheet of paper and put the paper on the mantelshelf.

"A new process," said Cæsar carelessly. "There might be a lot of money in this."

"You're a weird devil," said Smith. "I hardly know what to make of you."

Cæsar smiled as he collected the molds and the other implements he had been employing, and put them in a drawer of his desk. "I know somebody who doesn't know what to make of you," he said. "Who's that?" asked Smith quickly.

"A hard-faced gentleman named Steele. I believe he is a detective sergeant at Scotland Yard. He has been watching you—I suppose you know that?"

"I was not aware of it," said Smith, and Cæsar laughed at his discomfiture.

"If you walk into the drawing-room and look through the window, you will see him standing on the opposite side of the road," he said.

Smith went out of the room and returned presently. "You're right," said he. "I suppose that's Steele. I don't know the gentleman."

"Make yourself comfortable, Smith," said Cæsar, dismissing the detective with a characteristic gesture. "I'm going to put a proposal up to you."

"That's interesting. Is there money in it?"

Cæsar nodded. "A great deal of money in it," he said, "for you and for me. I want you to marry Stephanie."

Smith half rose from his chair in astonishment. "Marry Stephanie?" he cried incredulously. "Your daughter?"

Cæsar nodded again. "I want you to marry Stephanie," he said. "That is why I attached you to my entourage. You don't suppose I wanted to hire an assassin to settle my feuds, do you?"

Smith was silent.

"I watched you for a long time in Paris," said Cæsar. "You were the kind of man that I'd been looking for for a year. You're educated, you were once a gentleman, you have a manner, and to my surprise I found Stephanie speaking quite approvingly of you."

"As a possible husband?" asked Smith dryly.

The other shook his head. "I didn't discuss you in that aspect," he said.

Smith's heart was beating rapidly. He had to exercise all his powers to keep his face expressionless. Stephanie! It was incredible and in some respects terrible.

"I suppose you're not married already?" asked Cæsar, and Smith shook his head.

"That, of course, would have complicated matters," nodded Cæsar. "As things stand now, the matter is easy."

He pulled open a drawer and took out a paper, handing it to the other.

"This is an agreement, you will observe, as between you and me, that in the event of your wife inheriting a fortune, you will deliver to me one-half of your share."

It required all Smith's self-control to keep his voice steady.

"Suppose my—wife does not agree?" he asked.

"That will be settled before your marriage," said Cæsar. "She will sign a document undertaking to place three-quarters of her inheritance in your hands."

Smith laughed, an irritating laugh.

"You're taking a lot for granted," he said.

"Stephanie will agree," replied Cæsar, and pushed a bell on his table. A servant came in. "Ask Miss Valentine to come to the library," he said.

"What are you going to do?" demanded the agitated Smith when the man had left. "You're not going to ask her now?"

"Wait," said Cæsar.

"But——"

"Wait!" said Cæsar sharply.

The girl came in and nodded to Tray-Bong Smith, and looked inquiringly at her father.

"Stephanie, I have just designed your future," said Valentine.

She did not reply, but her eyes never left his face.

"I have decided," said Cæsar, leaning back in his chair and putting his finger tips together, "that you shall marry my friend Mr. Smith."

The girl's mouth opened in an "oh!" of astonishment as she looked from Cæsar to the awkward young man who stood, crumpling his soft hat in his hand. Smith expected an outburst and a refusal; he might have expected tears; he certainly did not anticipate the course of the conversation which followed. The girl had gone white. She was surprised but not horrified.

"Yes, father," she said meekly.

"I wish the wedding to take place next week," Cæsar went on. "I can give you a generous allowance, and at my death you will inherit a considerable amount of property."

"Yes, father," she said again.

"I shall require of you that you will sign an agreement with your future—husband" —Smith stood on one foot in his embarrassment—"that three-quarters of the money which you may inherit from me or from anybody else will be assigned to him."

The girl looked at Smith, a long, scrutinizing glance, which he could not meet. "Is Mr. Smith willing?" she asked quietly.

"Quite willing," replied her father. "You understand, Stephanie?"

"Is that all?" she asked.

"That is all," said Cæsar, and with a gracious smile dismissed her.

Smith sat there spellbound, incapable of speech, and Cæsar looked at him curiously with a cynical little smile on his handsome face. "Well, Smith," he said, "you seem to be somewhat overcome."

Smith licked his dry lips. "Do you know what you have done?" he asked.

"I think so," said Cæsar coolly. "I have given you a very charming wife."

"You have engaged your daughter to a man—like me."

There was something in his tone which led Cæsar to scrutinize him more keenly.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "Are you suffering from a conscience?"

"My conscience has never troubled me very much," replied Smith, shaking his head, "and to ease your mind I can tell you that I do not intend turning over a new leaf. No, what puzzles me is your condition of mind."

"I assure you it is normal," replied Cæsar. There was a faint click and he looked round. Near the fireplace was a small, polished wooden box with two apertures. Behind one of these a little red disk had fallen.

"What is that?" asked Smith.

"That is my detector," smiled Cæsar. "There are three telephone extensions in this house, and I had that fixed so that I might know if any of my conversations were being overheard. That shows that one of the telephones is in use and that the receiver is off." He pulled his own instrument toward him and gently released the hook, covering the transmitter with his hand.

"It is sometimes useful to know what one's servants are talking about," he said, and put the receiver to his ear. Smith, watching him, saw his face harden. He did not utter a sound, but sat motionless until the little red disk disappeared. Then he restored his receiver to the hook and stood up. What he had heard must have been more than ordinarily unnerving. For the second time Smith saw his employer really troubled.

"Come with me," he said suddenly, and walked from the room, Smith at his heels. He passed up the stairs to the second floor, and, pausing before a door, he beckoned Smith with a gesture and walked in. It was

evidently Stephanie's own room. Smith recognized this by the furnishing and decoration, long before he saw the girl, who had risen at Cæsar's entrance as though she had some premonition of its import.

Cæsar's face was set and ugly.

"Do you want me, father?" said the girl.

"To whom were you telephoning?" he asked harshly.

"Telephoning?" The other man surprised a look of alarm. "To a friend—to a girl friend."

"That's a lie," said Cæsar harshly. "You were telephoning to Ross. When did you meet Ross?"

The girl was silent.

"You were telling him of my plan to make you marry Smith, and you were arranging to meet him this afternoon."

The girl said nothing.

"When did you meet Ross? Under what circumstances? Answer me." He strode across the room and caught her by her shoulders, and Smith followed him. "Answer me!" shouted Cæsar, and shook her. Then Smith caught his arm and pulled him gently backward.

"Damn you! Don't interfere!" snapped Cæsar. "I am going to get the truth out of this girl. What have you told Ross? By Heaven! I'll kill you if you don't answer me!"

The girl's pleading eyes looked past her father to Tray-Bong Smith, and that unworthy man tightened his grip on Cæsar's arm. "You're not going to do any good by bullying her," he said.

"Let me go!" cried Cæsar savagely, but the grip on his arm was surprisingly firm, and he released the girl. But he was not done with her. "Come this way," he said. "Upstairs!"

She obeyed, and the two men followed. On the top floor was a room looking out from the back of the house, and into this the big man thrust the girl. "You'll stay there until you learn to speak," he said, and he slammed the door upon her, and, turning the key in the lock, put it into his pocket.

"Smith, you'll wait here until I come back. I'm going to settle with this young lady."

"I'm no warder," said Smith sulkily, and the other stormed at him.

"You fool! You madman! Don't you realize that you're placing your life in this girl's hands? If she is in communication with Ross, if she has told him things such as she might have told him—if she knows—my God! I wonder if she knows!"

He stood biting his fingers and scowling at the closed door. "Wait here on the landing," he said. "I will be back in half an hour."

He was gone less than that time, and came back white with rage, coming up the stairs of the house two at a time. Smith was waiting on the landing, a lank cigarette drooping from his mouth, his hands thrust into his pockets.

"I told you so. This girl has betrayed me to Ross. She knows—damn her! She knows!" said Cæsar breathlessly.

"Knows what?" asked Smith.

"She knows that she is Welland's daughter. You fool, didn't you guess that all along?"

Smith said nothing.

"Welland's daughter! The heiress to Ross' millions. It isn't essential that this girl should live—not essential to me, you understand, Smith? If the little fool had kept her mouth shut! How she discovered the fact that she was Welland's daughter is a mystery to me—we could have been rich men, and we may be rich men still. You're in the swim as deeply as I am. It's our lives that are at stake."

The two men exchanged glances. "Well?" said Smith with a return to his drawl. "What is the commission? Do I cut her throat? Because if you tell me to do that, I reply 'Nothing doing.'"

Cæsar swallowed his rage. "You need do nothing," he said in a quieter tone, "but you've got to help me—after." He took a key from his pocket and pushed it in the lock, then took a little silver box from his waistcoat pocket. "Wait here," he said.

"What are you going to do?" asked Smith, and a slow smile dawned on Cæsar's face. He opened the door and stepped in, and there was a momentary silence. Then a curse came from the room.

"She's gone!"

"Gone?" said Smith in a tone of amazement. "Gone?" He walked into the room, but it was empty. The windows were closed; there was no other door, but the girl had vanished.

"Look, look, look!"

Smith could have sworn he heard Cæsar's teeth chatter as he pointed with shaking fingers to one of the walls. There was an

envelope suspended by its gummed edge. In pencil were the five words: "Cæsar, you are but mortal," and in the corner, the cipher "Six."

The next day Cæsar had disappeared from London, leaving a hurried note for his confederate. It contained peremptory instructions for Smith that he should take up his quarters in Portland Place pending Cæsar's return; and this was an invitation which Mr. Smith accepted without hesitation; for his consuming vice was curiosity. So to Portland Place he came, occupying Cæsar's own room.

It somewhat interfered with his comfort that, before leaving, Cæsar had summarily dismissed the modest staff of servants that ran the house. Mr. Smith sympathized with an indignant butler, and left a protesting footman with the impression that in Smith he had a friend for life.

"It was only the young lady that kept me in this job," said the butler. "Mr. Valentine is not the kind of gentleman that I like to be in service with. He's here to-day and gone to-morrow, so to speak, and for months there's nobody in this house except all sorts of queer people—begging your pardon——"

"Go ahead," said Smith, "I admit I'm queer."

"The young lady was a perfect hangel," said the butler solemnly. "A real lady if ever there was one. And a wonderful maker of himages."

"Oh, yes," nodded Smith.

"She worked in wax. She made a model of me, sir, that was so lifelike that my wife said she wouldn't know me and the statue apart," said the butler impressively. "She had only to look at a person once or twice, and she could make a sort of statue of him—what do you call it, head and shoulders——"

"Bust?" suggested Smith.

"That's the word. I never knew whether it was bust or burst—bust seems a bit vulgar to me."

Smith got rid of the loquacious old gentleman, for he was impatient to explore the conservatory workroom and, particularly, to examine the contents of the mystery cupboard. He had formed his own ideas as to what he would discover; and when, with his skeleton key, he turned the lock and flung back the door, he sat down and admired the artistry of this girl.

Facing him was a most lifelike Mr. Ross. It was not Mr. Ross really, but a hard wax mask that hung on a peg; and next to Mr. Ross was Cæsar himself—unmistakably Cæsar, with the fine nose, the full lips, and the womanly chin. Next to these exhibits—and Smith went red and hot—was a life-size mask of Smith himself. He took it down, fixed it to his face, and looked at himself in a small round mirror that hung on the wall. The eye spaces had been so cut and thinned that it was almost impossible to detect where the real man and the counterfeit began and ended.

The mask did not fit him well. It was made for a smaller face—the face of Miss Stephanie Welland. He passed his delicate fingers over the interior with a loving touch, and laid the thing upon the bench. Then he sat down to consider the situation.

It was Stephanie who had impersonated old Mr. Ross at the hotel, Stephanie who had come in to search his room, believing he was away and Stephanie who had made her escape by the kitchen entrance of the hotel. He had guessed all that, but he had not believed it possible that her disguise could be so perfect.

So old Mr. Ross knew that she was his granddaughter, and had gone away—where? He had been absent two days while Stephanie was impersonating him in his rooms—Smith remembered that Cæsar had told him that she had gone to Scotland. There would be little difficulty in imposing upon the servants of the hotel. Mr. Ross was a tetchy man and the servants never went to his rooms unless they were sent for. That was one part of the mystery cleared up, at any rate.

The box which Stephanie had received from the American lawyers, and which she had opened, had obviously contained particulars of her own birth. When Cæsar said that Mrs. Welland's girl had died, he had lied as surely as when he had spoken of the unfortunate wife of John Welland as being dead; for that she was the woman of the manacles, the tragic figure that crossed the midnight lawn at Maisons Lafitte, Smith was certain.

He sat for an hour regarding these examples of Stephanie Welland's artistic training, then he gathered the masks together, wrapped them in paper, and carried them to his rooms. Somehow he knew instinctively that the days of Cæsar Valentine were num-

bered, and incidentally the days of Tray-Bong Smith. He shrugged his shoulders at the thought.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST COUP.

There is a little hotel overlooking the beauties of Babbacombe Bay, in Devonshire. Its lawn stretches to the edge of the cliff; its gardens are secluded from public view by high hedges of rambler roses. Under a big garden umbrella sat an old man and a girl. A table was spread for breakfast, and Mr. Ross was reading the morning newspapers, while Stephanie was looking out over the sea.

"My dear," he said, putting down the paper and looking over his glasses with a puzzled frown, "this is the third day, and we have heard no news from Monsieur Lecomte."

"I don't think we're likely to get news for a little while," she said. "I'm sure Monsieur Lecomte is doing his best. He searched Cæsar's château from end to end, and he is perfectly confident that my mother is alive."

"But she was not there," persisted the old man, shaking his head. "That is bad. This man Cæsar is a devil, I tell you——"

"She had been there a few days before," said the girl. "This woman—what is her name, Madonna Beatrice?—admitted it when they arrested her."

"Has Cæsar heard of her arrest?" asked the other quickly.

The girl made a little grimace. "We can't really worry as to whether Cæsar has heard or not. I am confident that he brought mother to England."

The old man muttered something uncomplimentary to the French police. "If they'd only searched the château when I was in Paris," he said, "but there were all sorts of formalities to be overcome. Apparently Cæsar is regarded as an American subject, and they had to consult the consulate; and then the infernal consulate had to consult somebody else to discover whether he was American or English. Who was this madonna person?"

"An old servant of the Valentines, I believe," said the girl.

"We shall have him yet," muttered the old man and took up his paper again.

It was at that moment that Tray-Bong Smith made his appearance, a passable figure in gray flannels, who strolled nonchalantly across the lawn toward the group. At sight of him the girl rose.

"Why—why——" she stammered.

"Who is this?" demanded Mr. Ross sharply, "Mr. Smith?"

"I'm awfully sorry," said Tray-Bong Smith. "I have not the slightest intention of joining your party, but I have very specific instructions from my worthy friend Mr. Valentine to present myself here at nine o'clock, and here I am."

The old man scowled up at him. "And you can go as quickly as you came," he said gruffly. "We want no people of your caliber here, my friend."

A car had stopped on the public road, opposite the entrance to the hotel garden. The girl heard it and Smith heard it, but neither attached any significance to so commonplace an event. Perhaps, had they seen the man and woman who alighted, or been witnesses of the menacing gesture of the man and the shrinking submission of the woman, even the venom in the old man's tone would have been unheeded.

"You can go back to your employer," he snapped, "and tell him that I am afraid neither of him nor of his hired cutthroats. Such men as you, enjoying all the advantages of education and birth, who descend to the level you have reached, are more contemptible in the eyes of decent men and women than the poor, wretched creatures who fill our gaols."

Smith smiled a little crookedly. "Your views upon my character," he drawled, "are particularly interesting. Your granddaughter will probably tell you——" and here came the grand interruption.

Smith alone of the three understood just what it meant and drew a long, sighing breath as a faded woman walked haltingly toward them. "My God!" he whispered.

The girl was watching the intruder wonderingly. The old man still held to his scowl. The newcomer was a frail lady with an old colorless face and the hands she put before her as she groped like a blind woman across the lawn were blue-veined and almost transparent. Then the girl screamed and flew toward her, and at her approach the woman halted and shrank back.

"Mother—mother, don't you know me?" sobbed Stephanie, and caught the faded creature in her arms.

A waiter staggering under a laden tray

came down a narrow path that led from the kitchen through the rosary into the lawn. He was surprised to see a tall man sitting on one of the garden seats that abound in these shady walks—more surprised when the stranger beckoned to him.

"Waiter," he said, "could you get me a glass of water?"

"Certainly, sir," said the waiter. "I am just taking coffee down to a gentleman on the lawn——"

"It won't take you a minute," said the man faintly and took out a handful of silver. "I have heart trouble. My life may depend upon your help."

The waiter put down the tray and hurried back to the kitchen and returned in something under a minute. The stranger took the glass with a shaking hand. "Thank you," he said, "I feel better now."

The waiter picked up the tray, pocketed the liberal tip and carried the tray to this strangely assorted group on the lawn. When he returned the stranger had gone.

The fourth member of that group, Smith, felt awkward and out of place. Yet he must hold on, for Cæsar would not have telegraphed to him insisting upon his arrival at the Bellevue at an exact hour, unless there was more of the game to be played out. He had drawn aside from the three, and heard little of what was said. He recognized the woman immediately as the apparition he had looked upon from his bedroom window, at Maisons Lafitte.

It was old Ross who beckoned him forward, and if his tone was not friendly, it had lost some of its antagonism.

"Mr. Smith," he said solemnly, "did you know of this?"

Smith shook his head. "I knew nothing," he said, "except that I suspect this lady was kept a prisoner at Cæsar's house at Maisons Lafitte."

"Do you know why he has released her, why he brought her here this morning?"

Again Smith shook his head.

"I know nothing except that I had instructions from my employer to be here at a certain hour."

It was an awkward moment and a situation which required the most delicate handling. After a little while he was withdrawing when the woman beckoned him back. She was sitting looking listlessly from her daughter to the old man. A dazed, gray woman, incapable, it seemed, of understanding what was going on around her, but at the man's movements she roused herself.

"You are Smith?" she said. She spoke slowly as one who was not accustomed to speaking. "He told me you were to wait."

"Where is he?" asked Smith quickly.

"He was here—in the car." She pointed to the way she had come. "But I think he has gone now. He did not wish to wait and see father," she said simply. "But you were here. He said that. We must always do what Cæsar says."

Smith came back to the little group and at a nod from the old man seated himself.

"I signed the paper he asked me to sign," said the woman, "on the boat yesterday, and one of the sailors—a steward, I think—signed it, too."

"A paper?" said the girl quickly. "What kind of paper, mother?"

The woman's brows contracted. "Mother?" she repeated. "That's a peculiar word." She looked strangely at the girl. "I had a little child once," she said, and her eyes filled with tears.

Stephanie drew the woman's head down upon her shoulder and comforted her.

"Let us hear the story, my dear," said Ross gently. "I am sure Mr. Smith will not mind staying. Stephanie, my child, pour out the coffee, and a cup for Mr. Smith."

"It was a week ago, I think," said the woman more calmly. "Cæsar came to the house and told me he was taking me back to England to my father, and, of course, I was glad. It has been very—very dull at the château, you know. And everything has been so mysterious, and sometimes Cæsar has been quite cruel. They were afraid of my running away; that's why they only used to allow me to come out at night with horrible things on my hands and ankles, so that I couldn't run. I tried to run away once," she said.

Smith was watching her over the brim of his cup as he sipped his coffee. Stephanie had lifted her cup and it was at her lips when Smith struck it from her hand. The hot coffee spilled over her dainty dress and she sprang up in alarm and indignation.

"Sorry!" said Smith most coolly. "Sorry to interrupt the story and the light repast; but there's a taste about this coffee which I don't like."

"What do you mean?" demanded Ross.

"I only mean," said Mr. Smith, "that it seems to me rather likely that friend Cæsar

is removing the just and the unjust at one fell swoop; and, speaking for myself, I should prefer to live a little while longer." He smelled the coffee, then beckoned the waiter who was visible at the far end of the lawn.

"Coffee tastes funny, sir?" said the waiter in surprise. "I don't know why that should be."

He was lifting the cup when Smith stopped him.

"Unless you want to be a very dead waiter," he said, "I should recommend you not to taste it. Just tell me. Did you bring this coffee straight from the kitchen?"

"Yes, sir," said the man, mystified.

"Did you meet anybody on the way?"

"No, sir—yes, I did," corrected the man. "There was a gentleman who was ill, and asked me to get him a glass of water."

"Which you did," said Smith, "leaving the coffee behind. I see." He nodded. "All right, that will do."

"Shall I take the coffee back?"

"No, thank you," said Smith grimly. "Leave the coffee here. I want to make absolutely certain that Cæsar Valentine has double-crossed me, but I'd rather like to make the experiment on something less than human. Bring me a bottle—a whisky bottle will do—to put this coffee in."

There was a dead silence when the waiter had gone.

"You don't mean to suggest that he would be as diabolical as that?"

"I'm not concerned with the morality of his actions or the purity of his intentions," said Smith, "but I am pretty certain that our friend contemplated a vulgar and wholesale murder which would remove in one swoop every person with a knowledge of his infamy."

CHAPTER XV.

THE END.

Cæsar Valentine received the note written from Bilton's Hotel, and was considerably annoyed to discover that the signature was T. B. Smith. It was a note at once peremptory and reassuring, for Smith had made no reference to the deplorable happenings at Babbacombe on the previous day.

Cæsar came to Bilton's Hotel and went straight up to Smith's room. Remarkably enough it was Ross' old room, but Cæsar did not seem to notice this. Smith was sprawling in an armchair, smoking a pipe.

"Hullo! You back?" greeted Cæsar. "I expected you at Portland Place."

"Shut the door and sit down," said Smith, "I am not returning to Portland Place. I think this little caravansary is safer."

"What do you mean?" demanded Cæsar with a smile.

"I mean, Valentine, that you've tried to double cross me, and it's the last time you'll do it. I'm talking to you as man to man, and get all that I say into your mind and memory. I came in with you on the understanding that we were going to play fair all round, that there were to be no mysteries and no secrets. Now, you know my record and I pretty well know yours, and I want the whole facts of certain circumstances and certain relationships of yours in the past, before I go any further."

"Suppose I refuse to offer you my confidence?" asked Cæsar. "Are you going to the police or something?"

"I am not going to the police, and I'm not particularly afraid of the police coming to me," said Smith. "You have nothing against me."

"Except a murder in Paris," suggested Cæsar.

"Oh, that!" Smith shrugged his shoulders. "Paris is Paris, and London is London. Cæsar, you tried yesterday morning to put me out of action. Don't lie about it; I know just the strength of that affair, and I've had the coffee analyzed."

"Coffee analyzed?" said Cæsar with a puzzled air.

"Come off it!" said Smith crudely. "Let's get down to facts. There's a pretty big combination against you, and probably against me. I think it's stronger against you than me. Now you know just how much you have to fear, and I think if you let your mind wander round, you'll guess the identity of your weird enemy."

"You mean Number Six?" said Cæsar sharply. "It must either be Welland or —or——"

"Or?" said Smith.

"Or the Gale boy."

"Let us hear all about the Gale boy," said Smith, "because this is something I have not heard before from you."

Cæsar thought for a moment.

"Well, you might as well know," he said. "George Gale, the bank manager, had a son. I believe after the tragedy he went to the Argentine, and I am under the impression

that he is still there. In fact, I seem to remember your telling me as much."

Smith nodded.

"Why should you fear Gale's son?" he asked, and Cæsar did not reply. "What is the truth about that Gale case, Cæsar? I can't go on much longer unless I know just what difficulties I have to face."

"Gale died," said Cæsar sullenly.

"His death was providential, I gather," said Smith.

"In a way it was," said Cæsar. "I owed him a lot of money; in fact, I had put him in wrong. If he had opened his mouth I should have been arrested for fraud, and on the day of his death he had practically decided to make a statement to the police. I knew of his practice of taking a nerve tonic at midday, and managed to get hold of one of his empty bottles and substituted it for the one in his study."

"And that empty bottle contained something particularly noxious in the way of acids, I presume?" said Smith steadily.

"Hydrocyanic," replied Cæsar. "Now you know the whole truth of it. I'm not going to explain to you the nature of the fraud, but it was a pretty bad one, and the old man was, of course, not in it."

Smith did not reply. He sat hunched up in his chair, looking at the carpet.

And Cæsar went back to Portland Place cursing himself that he had been so communicative. As for Smith, he was interviewing Detective Steele, who had occupied the next room and had taken a shorthand note of the conversation.

It is history now that Cæsar Valentine was arrested as he was entering his house and taken to Marlborough Street police station, and charged with murder and attempted murder. He was relieved to discover a handcuffed Smith waiting in the charge room to share his ignominy. They were rushed before the magistrate, charged and remanded, and for seven days these two men occupied adjoining cells in Brixton Gaol, and enjoyed the extraordinary privilege of meeting together in the exercise ground. Then one morning Smith disappeared, and Cæsar did not see him again until he stepped on to the witness stand at the Old Bailey and began his evidence thus:

"My name is John Gale. I am an officer of the Criminal Investigation Bureau, and I am known in the official records as Number Six——"

A week after the trial and its inevitable ending, John Gale, alias Smith, alias Number Six, met a pretty girl in the tea room of the Piccadilly Hotel.

"I suppose you're awfully glad it's over?" said the girl, and Gale nodded.

"There's one thing I wanted to know from you," he said, "I've never understood your attitude to me, Stephanie."

"Haven't you?" she said demurely. "I thought I'd been rather nice."

"I don't mean that. I mean, when you were watching Cæsar Valentine in Paris, you were the witness of what was apparently a terrible crime on the Quai des Fleurs." She nodded. "Yet you never showed the horror and the loathing which one would have expected a properly constituted girl would have expressed for a man who had been guilty of such a vile deed."

The girl laughed. "When I looked over the parapet," she said, "I really did think a murder had been committed. But when I saw the two boats with the French police picking up the murdered man, and heard him using terrible language about the necessity for jumping in the Seine at midnight, I knew the whole scene had been carefully staged in order to bring you into close contact with Cæsar Valentine. If I had any doubt at all," she said, "that doubt was dissipated when you let me out of the room in Portland Place, and I saw you scribbling your message on an envelope."

"It was the only possible way I could get into close touch with Cæsar, as soon as I found he had taken an interest in me, as I knew he would, after the stories I had carefully circulated through Chi So's about my depravity. I had those boats and that 'murdered man' waiting on the Quai des Fleurs night after night until a favorable opportunity occurred. You see, I'm only an amateur detective, but I have wonderful ideas."

"What I admire about you," she smiled, "is your extreme modesty." Then, more seriously: "Have you discovered my father?"

"I found him weeks ago," he said.

"But don't you think you've been rather cruel in keeping him away from mother and me?" she asked. "Surely there is no reason why we cannot see him at once?"

"There is a very great reason," he said quietly. "In three weeks' time I will bring

you to your father, who is wholly ignorant of the fact that you and his wife are alive."

"But why in three weeks?" she persisted.

"That is my secret and his," said John Gale quietly and the girl did not pursue the subject.

Cæsar Valentine was destined to meet his enemy first. On a certain morning they aroused him from a deep sleep, and he woke to find that the convict clothes he had been wearing the day before had been taken away, and that the suit he had worn at his trial had been substituted.

He rose and dressed, and refused the ministrations of the chaplain, and ate a hearty breakfast. At a quarter to eight came the governor, and behind him John Gale.

"Hullo, Gale!" Cæsar greeted him. "This is the end of the road. It has been a most amusing experience. Take my advice," he said. "Have a hobby; it keeps you out of mischief. Even if it's only button-making, eh?"

Gale made no response, and the governor signaled to somebody at the door, and a man walked in with the straps of his office in his hand.

"Excuse me," said Cæsar, and to everybody's surprise he fell on his knees by the side of his box and buried his face in his hands.

Then he rose, turned, and faced—Welland.

"My God!" he breathed, and he seemed to have a difficulty in talking. "You—the hangman!"

"I have waited for this day," Welland said, and deftly strapped Cæsar's hands behind him.

"You have waited in vain," said Cæsar loudly. "Look there, my clever fellow. How many buttons are there on my coat?"

Welland looked and saw that a thread was hanging where a button had been.

"Cyanide of potassium and a little gum make an excellent button," mumbled Cæsar, and collapsed in the arms of the warders.

They laid him down on the bed, but he was dead.

ON BEING BORED

AN old Chinese proverb says: "A man seldom affects to despise the world unless the world is regardless of him." Which is another way of explaining that, when you are bored, you're a weakling; you're unable to get out of the world the entertainment and pleasure to which you are entitled. To say that you are bored is to confess that you cannot think keenly enough or feel vividly enough to appreciate what is going on around you.

Men like Thomas A. Edison and Charles M. Schwab are never bored. Village loafers and lazy clerks frequently are. There are also types of "high society" and disappointed young men who make a show of their boredom. Nothing is worth their attention. Nothing ever happens. Everybody else is so infernally stupid, don't you know! This town was buried ten years ago and doesn't know it!

The real trouble with fellows of that sort is that they are too lazy to work for the good things of life. They refuse to take the trouble to know the people by whom they are surrounded, or to attain that proficiency and skill in games and recreations essential to enjoyment. Taking the selfish view that the world owes them a laugh every hour, they're blind to the fact that everything in this life is bought at a price—usually at the price of exertion.

If you don't believe this, the next time you are bored, dissatisfied, or discontented, set yourself to work on the people you meet. Compel yourself to look for the interesting things in their conversation. There is no individual so commonplace or so dull that you cannot discover in his experiences and opinions something highly diverting or intensely interesting. That goes also for recreations, the theater, books, music, and sports. In all these things, as in every other relation of life, the world gives you exactly what you expect to find in the world.

A Chat With You

NEARLY two years ago we started getting together a Christmas number of THE POPULAR, expecting to have it in your hands about December 20, 1919. We did our part, but other things intervened—a printers' strike, the scarcity of paper, the difficulties in transportation, so that the magazine did not get out on the news stands till some time in January, 1920. We were disappointed—but not discouraged. There was always another Christmas coming, and we set to work laying the lines for a new Christmas number. It is ready now. It will reach you in time, if nothing unforeseen happens. It looked for a time as if we might not be able to get paper enough to bring the magazine back to its full size—but we succeeded. It cost a lot—newsprint is a valuable commodity now—but it was worth it. Also, we have the right sort of stuff to print on the paper. Altogether an even better number than the last. Look for it on the stands in two weeks. It might be safer to order it now.

WE have heard it said that Dickens invented the old-fashioned English Christmas. At any rate, he invented a type of story that he wrote so supremely well and his imitators so poorly, that Christmas stories rather went out of fashion for a while. Nearly every writer tries his hand once at imitating Dickens. It is good fun as a literary exercise, but it does not make good reading. You can't imitate Dickens successfully. He was a man of genius. The spots in his stories where the genius shines out are inimitable. He was human, and as a writer had a great many faults. The faults are very easy to imitate. His frequently long-winded style, his peculiar semilegal phraseology, his false sentiment at times, would be intolerable in any one but a writer of the very highest rank. His novels would not be as successful now as they were when they were written. With the prestige of his great name behind them, people will always read them and will be well repaid, but if they were put out for the first time, to-day, as the work of an unknown man, it is doubtful whether readers would take the time to get into them. He was not a conscious literary artist in the sense that Stevenson, or even Thackeray, was. He wrote naturally without taking thought. A proof is the fact that "Pickwick Papers," his first long effort, is one of the three or four of his best.

ALL this is by the way and simply as introduction to the announcement that we are not planning to give you secondhand Dickens, but first-hand American stories—the best that living American authors can write. That means very good, indeed. With all due respect to our friends across the pond, we want a literature of our own—even a Christmas literature of our own. The traditional English Christmas is a wonder, but we want a traditional American

Christmas that goes it just a little better. Can we get it? Certainly. We are hammering out new traditions all the time. We'll have all the jolly heartiness of the old times with something more besides. We'll have motor cars and steam heat and airplanes, as well as open fires and horses and dogs. We won't have so much to drink, but then, we won't have so many headaches. We'll have all the kind feeling, hospitality, and generosity that the old-timers had—and a little bit more added to that. We'll have our own Christmas spirit, and it will be the best ever. No matter what Dickens says about roast goose, we have eaten better dinners than Dickens ever saw. Any unprejudiced traveler will tell you that American chow, at its best, beats the world.

JUST putting a holly wreath and a girl's head on the cover of a magazine won't make a Christmas number out of it. It's the stuff inside. Christmas stories can't be written to order in a hurry. We have a theory that a good Christmas story is more likely to be written in January than in August. That's why we start on a number so far in advance. The good stories are not manufactured, they grow. The Christmas stories in the next issue are all the real thing. They didn't get in there just because they happened to have a Christmas setting. They had to be the best sort of contemporary fiction first. They had to be natural, spontaneous, and unforced.

AS usual, there is a regular two-dollar complete novel—and worth the two dollars—as an opening to the magazine. It is called "The Island of Thrills," and is the work of Francis Lynde. The scene is not the conventional one for a Christmas story. It is a deserted island in the South Seas. It is not the tale of a shipwreck, but, all the same, two people, a man and a girl, get ashore on the island and run into real adventures. We don't want to spoil the story by saying too much about it. Anyway, it is Lynde at his best.

YOU remember, of course, Theodore Seixas Solomons, who wrote "The Implacable Friend," "Garments of Failure," and "The Young Barbarian." He has a Christmas story in the next number. You know something of his quality as a writer, his charm, his humanity, his insight into human character, good and bad. His new Christmas story shows him at his best. It is called "Who Am I? Can't You See?" No, we won't explain the title. You must read the story. There is a fancy literary word used by highbrow writers, already somewhat threadbare. "Intriguing," used as an adjective with a special meaning, is the word. If it fits anything it fits this title and story. Then there is another Christmas story, or, rather, novelette, by Albert Payson Terhune, "Najib's Yowltide." The scene is laid in Syria, not far from the memorable place where Christmas originated. There is another Christmas novelette, "The Cabochon Emeralds," with a New York setting. Some of the others who have helped to make this unusual magazine are Knibbs, Bower, Ferguson, Norton, and Coolidge.

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THOUSANDS of women's hearts will be gladdened Xmas morning by the gift of gifts—a BEE-VAC *Electric Cleaner.* If you want to see real happiness on "friend wife's" face, get her a BEE-VAC.
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Try it personally—note how light it is—a child can carry it anywhere, and use it, too. The BEE-VAC develops more suction than the average electric vacuum cleaner—its gear-driven, reverse-revolving brush loosens imbedded dirt and picks up hairs, threads, ravelings, paper scraps, etc.
The BEE-VAC is sold at an extraordinarily low price by responsible dealers everywhere.
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She Played to Lose!

This woman—so soft—so lovely—so exquisite in every detail—so out of place in that wild gambling hell—this woman played to lose. Across the gleaming tables her long white hands pushed the crackling bills. One after another the yellow backed hundred-dollar bills passed from her golden bag to the dealer. And yet she smiled serene.

How she got there—why she was there—how she got away—it all makes a thrilling story—a tale with not one mystery, but three—and it has been told by to-day's master of detective mystery—

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He is the detective genius of our age. He has taken science—science that stands for this age—and allied it to the mystery and romance of detective fiction. Even to the smallest detail, every bit of the plot is worked out scientifically. For nearly ten years, America has been watching his Craig Kennedy—marveling at the strange, new, startling things that detective hero would unfold. Such plots—such suspense—with real, vivid people moving through the maelstrom of life! Frenchmen have mastered the art of terror stories. English writers have thrilled whole nations by their artful heroes. Russian ingenuity has fashioned wild tales of mystery. But all these seem old-fashioned—out of date beside the infinite variety—the weird excitement of ARTHUR B. REEVE'S tales.

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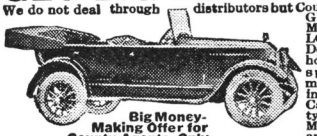

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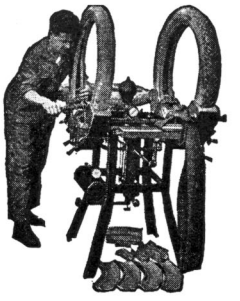

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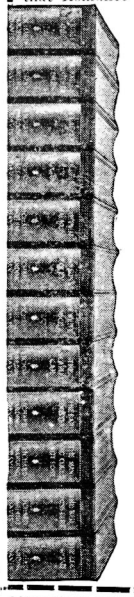

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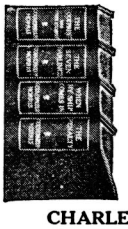

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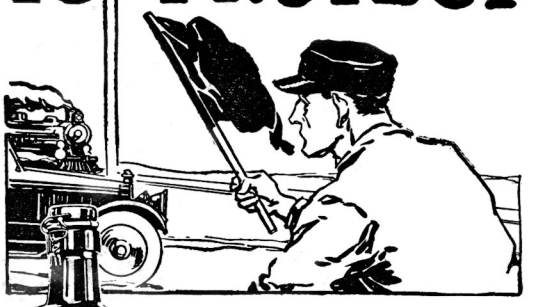

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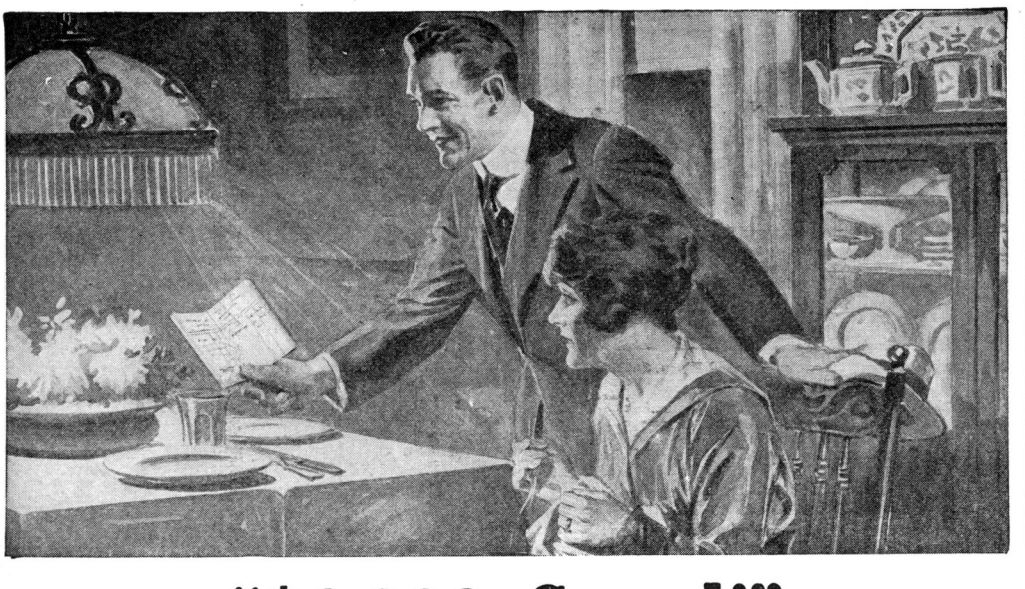

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Soap and Ointment to clear dandruff and itching, 25c. each. Samples free of Cuticura, Dept. D, Malden, Mass.

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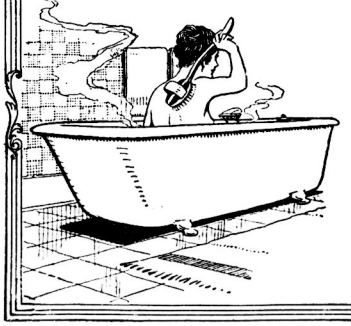

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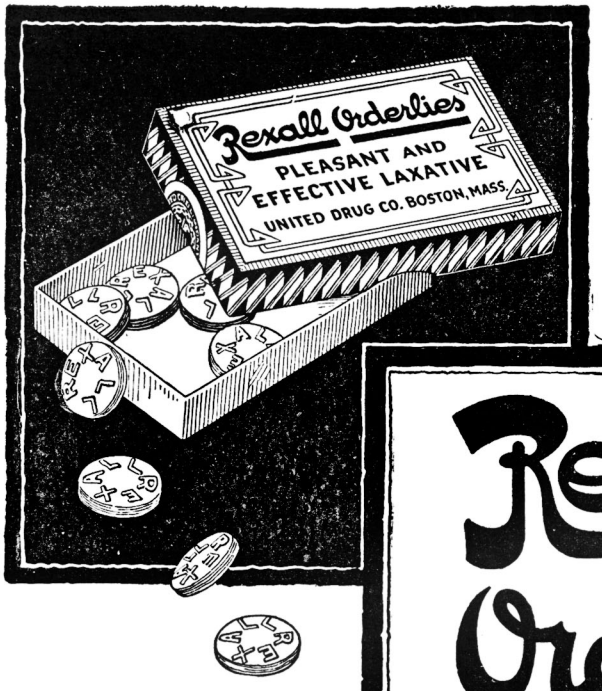

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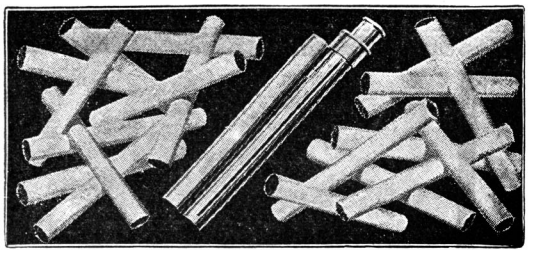

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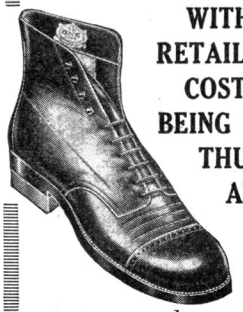

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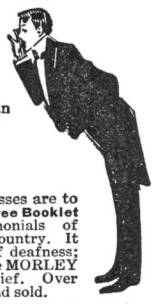

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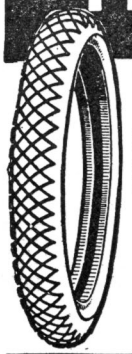

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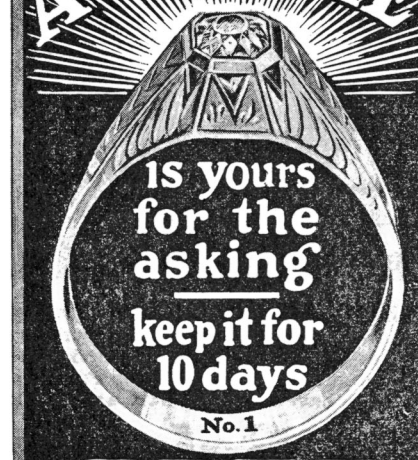

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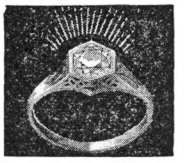

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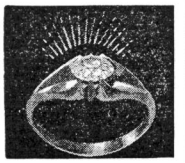

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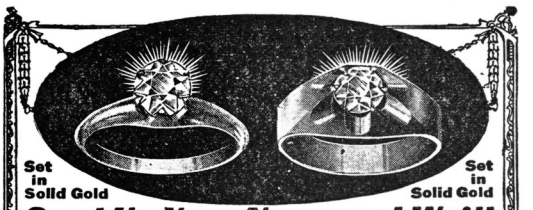

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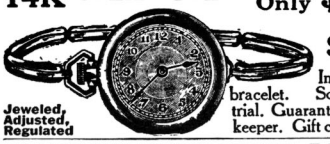

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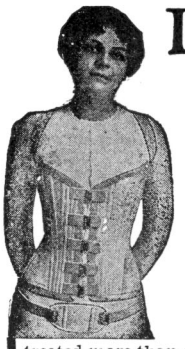

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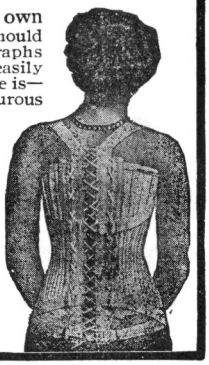

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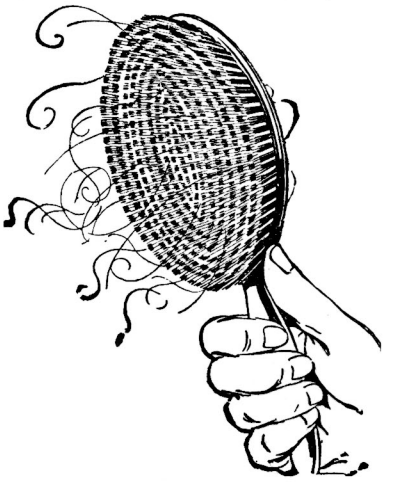

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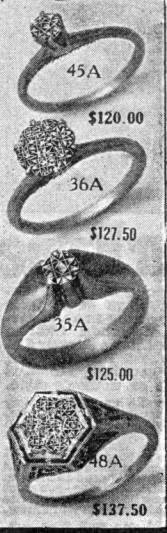

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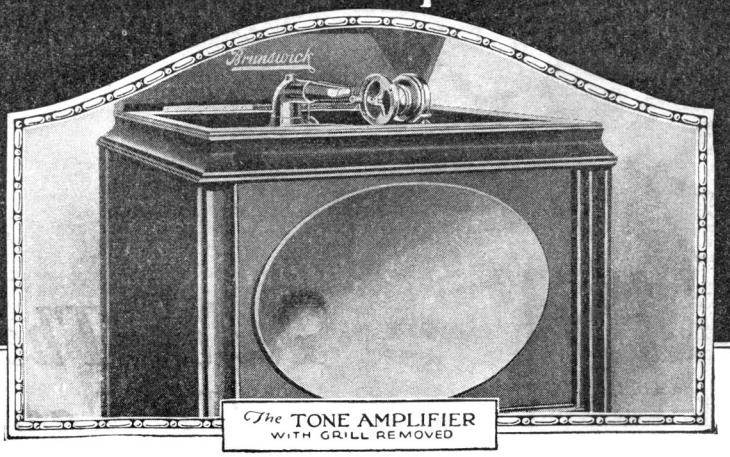
Hires contains juices of 16 roots, barks, herbs and berries

The Brunswick Method of Reproduction



The TONE AMPLIFIER
WITH GRILL REMOVED

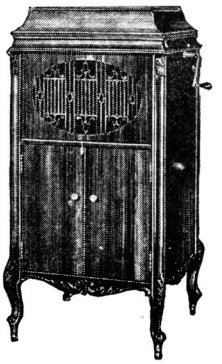
The Importance of the Tone Amplifier

NO matter how perfect a reproducing apparatus might be, much of the beauty of the tone produced would be lost unless the tone chamber amplified the tone in just the proper way.

Sound waves spread in a circle according to basic laws of acoustics, and if any of these laws are violated a confusion and blurring of tones result.

The Brunswick Tone Amplifier conforms to very definite principles of acoustics which were not fully understood in old-time methods of reproduction.

It is built entirely of wood, moulded in a peculiar shape, the process being exclusive with The Brunswick.



By reason of the Ultona, a counterbalanced reproducer which plays *all makes of records* without any adjustment, except a turn of the wrist, the whole world of recorded music is yours when you own a Brunswick.

Hear The Brunswick— then judge for yourself

Visit a Brunswick shop before you make your phonograph decision.

Hear also Brunswick Records — fitting companions of the Brunswick Phonograph. They can be played on any phonograph with steel or fibre needles.

THE BRUNSWICK-BALKE-COLLENDER COMPANY
General Offices: 623-633 S. Wabash Ave., Chicago

Branch Houses in Principal Cities of United States, Mexico and Canada

Canadian Distributors: Musical Merchandise Sales Co., 79 Wellington St., West, Toronto

Brunswick
PHONOGRAPHS AND RECORDS

"Take it from Father!"

A Durham-Duplex Razor! Handsomely finished—durable—useful! No gift from a father to a son could be more sensible.

Father is thoroughly familiar with the wonderful shaving qualities of the oil-tempered, hollow-ground, double-edged Durham-Duplex blades.

"Take it from him" that when he gives you a Durham-Duplex, he gives you not only a nifty Christmas present but a lifelong guarantee of shaving comfort.

Standard Set One Dollar Complete. Razor with attractive American ivory handle, safety guard and package of three Durham-Duplex blades (6 shaving edges) all in handsome American ivory case.

Christmas Model Two Dollars. Same as above but with gold plated blade holder and safety guard.

Other Sets up to $12.

Additional Blades 50c for a package of 5

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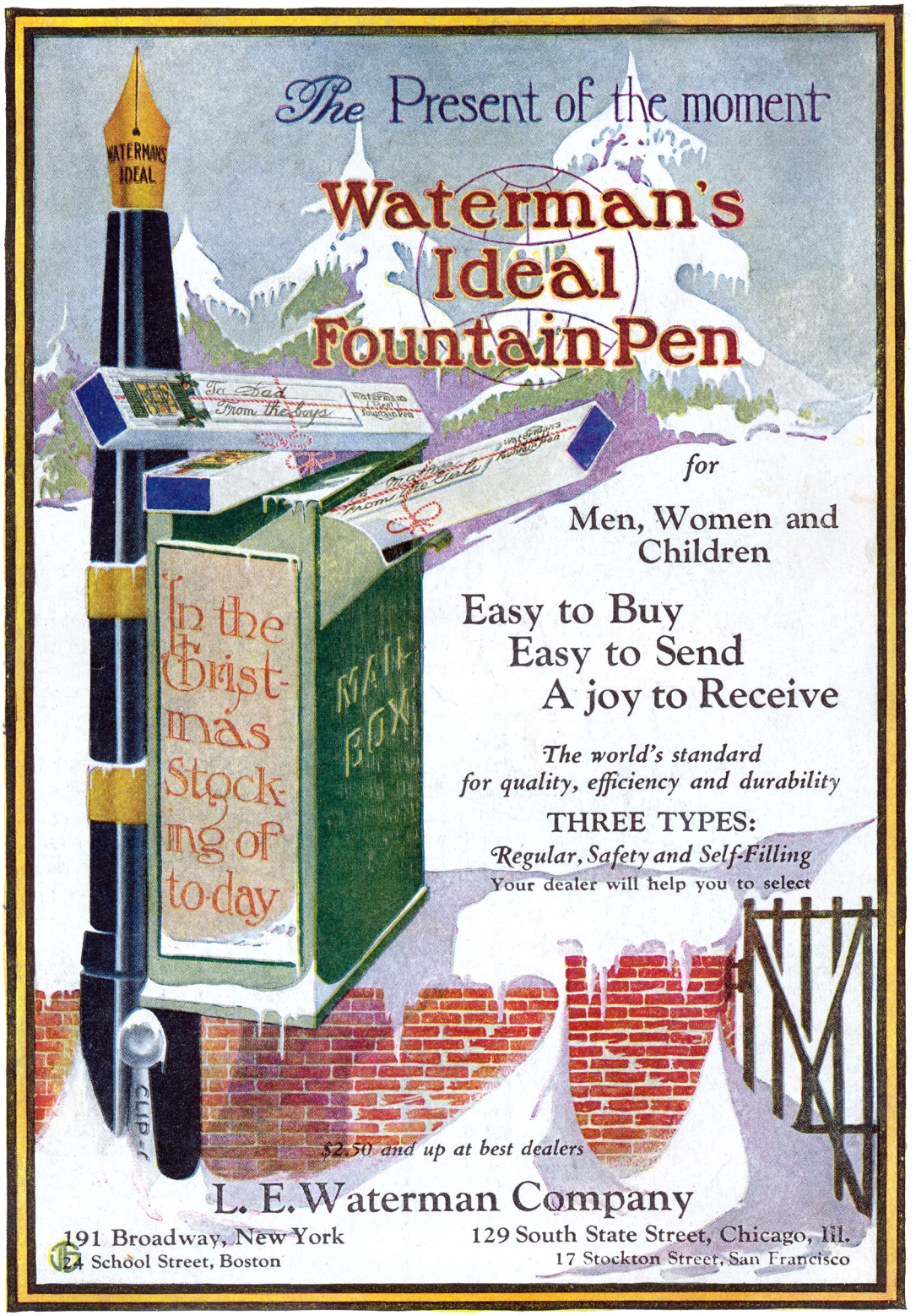
DURHAM-DUPLEX

A Real Razor-made Safe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