

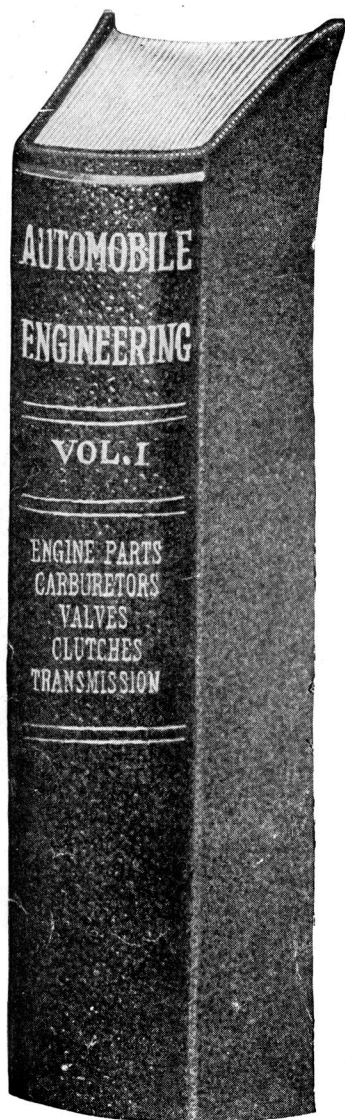
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VOL. LVIII.

DECEMBER 20, 1920.

No. 5

The Island of Thrills

By Francis Lynde

Author of "The Fad Maker's Fortune," "The Perfect Crime," Etc.

Here is a tale full of that Simon-pure "romance" of adventure which you are always looking for and so seldom find—the sort of story you have been hoping to find again ever since your boyhood's days. It's one of those yarns better not told at all, unless superlatively well told. Our giving you this tale is proof of how perfectly we think Mr. Lynde has succeeded. Yes, he tells us of a desert island and two cast-aways—but with a difference!

(A Complete Novel)

O poor Robinson Crusoe,
What for did you do so?
He made him a coat
Of the skin of a goat,
So did poor Robinson Crusoe.
—Old Song.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH WE GO TO SEA.

IF I had kept my mouth shut about "Pinck" Barrett, or if Bob Lauderdale hadn't been so loose-tongued as to repeat what was said at a club luncheon, there would still have been a tragedy, though it would have taken an entirely different slant, and I shouldn't have gotten myself written down so everlastingly in Alison Jeffard's black books. Also, Alison wouldn't have found it necessary to take her aunt Mary on an early-winter voyage for her health across the Pacific; in which case, all that happened subsequently wouldn't have happened at all.

To begin at the beginning, let me say that I hadn't a thing against Barrett on any personal score—not a thing in the world. I'll admit that we weren't chummy in any ordinary sense of the word, but that may have been because Barrett never seemed to have much use for anybody who couldn't contribute something toward his business success. And for a reason which will appear

presently, I rather despised him secretly as a man. But other people found him entirely personable; and the Old Man—we all called Alison's father the Old Man in the Island and Oriental Sugar Company—had early taken a fancy to him, boosting him over the heads of a lot of the other fellows, and finally giving him a year in the islands as local head of the company. So, when Barrett's year in Manila was up and his engagement to Alison was announced, I fancy it was generally admitted that the old sugar king's daughter had picked the brightest of the bunch; the brightest, if not exactly the best. For we were all willing enough to admit Barrett's business ability. Besides, he had money that his father had left him.

Before going any further, perhaps I'd better define myself by saying that I was practically out of sight in the lower register of the business scale; engineers rank a good bit that way in modern corporations, as everybody knows. I had begun as a "trouble shooter" in one of the home refineries; and after the big war I had been given my engineering job again and was sent to the Philippines to superintend the installation of some new cane mills. While there, I saw more or less of Barrett, of course; I couldn't very well help it.

With this bit of explanation disposed of, we may now come to that fatal talk with

Bob Lauderdale over the luncheon table in the Acanthus Club; Bob having climbed to the sales managership of the company while I was away, and I having just returned from Manila.

"Surest thing you know," Bob was saying—he had just given me my first news of the Barrett-Alison engagement. "Wonder it didn't percolate across to you on the other side. The society columns made noise enough about it here, the Lord knows."

I guess I must have gasped. To tell the truth, the news gave me a sort of sickening shock. I had known Alison Jeffard all my life, as you might say; had carried her school books for her in the days before hard-bitted old Adam Jeffard grew so poison rich that his daughter didn't have to go to the public school. Puppy love? Maybe. We may call it that, anyway.

Afterward, it had tapered off—or up—into an honest, straightforward, girl-to-man friendship, and I had always believed that it was Alison's good word that had got me my first job with the Island and Oriental after I came out of college. Man love, this time? No-o, hardly. I wasn't altogether a wooden-headed ninny, and I knew well enough—had the best of reasons for knowing—that Adam Jeffard's millions had put his daughter safely out of reach of a workaday engineer. But—Pinck Barrett!

"Seems to have knocked you all in a heap," said Bob; and then I realized that I had been absently staring at nothing and stirring the glass of ice water with my fork.

"It does," I admitted.

"It's no specially new thing," he went on. "Barrett has had his weather eye on that quarter of the heavens for a good while. Everybody is calling it a love match, pure and simple."

"But Barrett!" I blurted out. "Why, Bob—he can't marry anybody!"

"Why not?" Bob asked coolly. "The Old Man hasn't made a pet of him to no purpose—not by a hatful. Pinck's a 'comer,' in the rapidest sense of the word. He'll die a rich man, sooner or later."

"But, see here!" I gulped; "he—he's married already!"

That was how I spilled the beans. Bob's eyebrows went up a full inch.

"Hold on, Mac," he said; "you don't mean that!"

Come to think, perhaps I didn't mean it. Perhaps, in a strictly legal sense, Barrett

wasn't married. But intrinsically and as a matter of fact he— However, those lifted eyebrows were warning me that I'd have to make good, so I said what I was obliged to.

"Maybe my code of morals is old-fashioned and out of date," was the way I stumbled on. "I can't see things as some of our fellows in the islands seem to: I don't want to see them that way. There is a girl, a Japanese—I've understood that Barrett married her according to the Japanese custom—which may or may not count as a marriage in United States law; probably doesn't. But that doesn't cut any figure with the decency side of it. They've been living together."

"Publicly?" Lauderdale snapped.

"I can't say definitely as to how publicly. They had a bungalow in one of the suburbs. That sort of thing isn't as uncommon in the islands as it ought to be, you know."

Bob was frowning.

"That's bad," he commented; "damned bad, if you ask me. Alison is a mighty good little soldier, and she deserves something less rotten than that for a Christmas gift."

"A Christmas gift?" I queried.

"Yes; they're to be married Christmas."

Christmas was nearly two months off, and I remember thinking that a good many things might happen in two months. But at that moment I hadn't the slightest idea of the vast number of things that were actually scheduled to happen before the Christmas holidays should come along down the pike.

Presently, the subject died a natural death, and Bob began to talk about the fortunes that were going to be made in sugar in the next twelve months or so. I hoped he would forget what I had said about Barrett. There is no use muddying a pool when you haven't any means of clarifying the water afterward, and I was telling myself in the seven different dialects of the Tagalog that I was an ivory-headed fool for having mentioned the Manila bungalow episode.

I say I hoped Bob was forgetting; but he wasn't, and didn't, as the event shortly proved. Three days later I happened to meet Alison Jeffard as she was getting out of her car at our office-building entrance, and—she cut me dead!

I felt pretty miserable about that. Not sentimentally, of course; I wasn't quite ass enough to take that slant. But after you've been schoolboy chummy with a girl all your life, it's a bit tough to get the slap direct. I

didn't blame Alison, you understand. It was her part to be loyal to the man she had promised to marry. And, even if she were admitting the thin edge of the wedge of doubt—well, there may be times when one needs a dose of bad news in one's business; but that is no reason why one should especially love the news bringer.

After that sidewalk meeting with Alison—which, you will agree, was no meeting at all—I left the city and put in a couple of weeks at one of our local plants. Then, one morning, I was called to headquarters by wire. Going up in the elevator of the office building, I bumped into Lauderdale and followed him to his rooms in the sales department.

"About Barrett," I began, when I had him cornered in privacy. "Did you repeat what I told you to anybody else, Bob?"

He looked a bit fussed.

"Yes," he admitted; "I spoke of it to my sister Kate."

"And she carried it straight to Alison, I suppose?"

"I'm rather afraid she did, Mac; though she refuses to tell me anything about it. Just the same, there's been a flare-up of some sort and the Christmas wedding is off—or, at least, postponed. Barrett has gone East on business for the company and won't be back until some time in January."

"Huh!" said I; though I didn't need this confirmation to tell me why, three days after the Acanthus Club luncheon, Alison Jeffard had looked straight through me without appearing to see me.

Bob changed the subject—and seemed rather glad to.

"What are you in town for, this morning?" he asked.

I told him I didn't know, and left him. But within the next fifteen minutes I found out why I had been wired for. A cable had come, and I was to take ship at once for the Philippines to make some extensive changes in one of our Luzon plants. One of the company's ships was clearing for Manila early the next morning, so said our machinery chief, and unless there were some good reason for delay, I'd better get ready and go in that. Since there was no good reason, or any reason at all, I made my arrangements accordingly.

With something less than a day in which to prepare for a journey nearly a third of the way around the world, it was quite late that

night before I showed up at the company's wharf and went aboard the old *Mindoro*. The boat was a freighter, but it had formerly been in service between San Francisco and Hawaii and was fitted with limited passenger accommodations. Captain Lamper, an old-timer in our fleet, met me at the gangway, and there was a queer twinkle in his eye as he helped me aboard with my dunnage.

"Didn't know but you'd got bashful and had backed out, Mr. Mac," he said, adding: "Everybody else has turned in long ago."

"That is what I'm going to do, right now," I flung back; and thereupon he called a member of the anchor watch to carry my luggage, still with the curious twinkle in his eye.

There were only eight staterooms in the *Mindoro*, and mine was the one farthest forward on the port side. The main cabin, with its single hanging lamp turned down and smoking sullenly, was empty as I passed through it; and since I was dog-tired, I postponed the stowing of my dunnage to a new day and turned in at once.

When I awakened the following morning the old *Mindoro* was curtsying to the long Pacific swell, proving that I had been a good enough sailor to sleep right through the racket of getting under way. While I was dressing, a Filipino cabin boy came to tell me that breakfast was ready. Up to that moment it hadn't occurred to me to wonder if there were any other passengers aboard; but before I could ask the boy he was gone.

Under such conditions there was nothing to palliate the shock that was awaiting me when I stepped out into the main cabin. The breakfast table held covers for nine persons, and four of the nine had already taken their places, with Captain Lamper doing the honors. But I had no eyes for the captain, or for the clerkish young supercargo who sat at his left. What I saw, and all I could see, at the moment, were the two women sitting across the table from young Clarkson.

If I made a noise like a choked chicken, it was small wonder. For the two women were Alison Jeffard and her aunt Mary.

CHAPTER II.

A LEAF FROM KIPLING.

Figure it, if you can. For a solid month or more I was doomed to be shut up in a narrow ship with a young woman who could

—and did—look straight through me without perceiving that I was there; to sit at meals with her; to share with her the same limited deck space in good weather, or the more desperately limited between decks in bad. It was enough to make me gasp and wonder if the California coast were, indeed, irretrievably beyond the reach of a strong swimmer. If it hadn't been, I'm not sure that I wouldn't have gone overboard.

Fortunately, at that first breakfast Captain Lamper didn't try to introduce us. He evidently took it for granted that Miss Jeffard—the two Miss Jeffards—were upon speaking terms with the company's supervisor of cane mills and refining machinery; or, if they were not, that it was none of his business. Luckily, too, for me, he and Clarkson kept the conversational ball rolling during the meal, and I was left to say little or nothing—which I did most assiduously.

From the talk which went back and forth across the table, and over my head, I learned a few of the whys and wherefores. On the surface of things it appeared that Alison had persuaded her aunt that a voyage to Manila, just at this particular time, would add years to her life, and they were going in the old *Mindoro* because—well, chiefly because Alison had so elected, was the way I put it up. Of course, they might have had the bridal suite in the Pacific Mail's fastest flyer if they had wanted it, instead of roughing it on a freight carrier, but it seemed they hadn't wanted it.

After I escaped from that paralyzing first breakfast I was better able to put two and two together. Being more or less familiar with the transpacific sailings, I remembered that the next regular Manila boat wouldn't leave San Francisco for a week. The *Mindoro* wasn't particularly a slow boat, and she would probably beat the regular liner into Manila by a day or so, if she had good luck, inasmuch as she would go direct instead of by the roundabout way of Yokohama and Shanghai as the liners did.

What then? It simply meant that Alison was in such a tearing hurry to reach Manila that she was willing to subject herself and her aunt to the discomforts of a freight boat for the sake of getting to the Philippines a little sooner. And why? She was simply eaten up with impatience to see and hear for herself; and, incidentally, to prove me the meanest liar that ever drew breath of scandal.

Of course, there were a thousand and one contacts in those slow-winged, leaden-footed days. They were unavoidable. We were constantly coming face to face, Alison and I, and it couldn't very well be helped. But if I had been as small as I felt, the offended goddess couldn't have had a better excuse for ignoring my presence. Not that I ever thrust myself upon her, you may be sure: on the contrary, I was always dodging to keep out of her way, spending long hours in the crew's quarters forward, and roasting alive for other hours in the hot engine room with Duncan, our old Scotch chief engineer.

As the days loafed into weeks some little measure of self-respect came along to help me out, as it should have. Viewed impartially, I told myself, my punishment didn't fit the crime. While the matter at issue—Barrett's fitness to become the husband of the sugar king's daughter—was a thing in which I had no right to meddle, still I hadn't done anything to make me a moral leper, a hissing, and a reproach. Pinckney Barrett *was* a reprobate, of a sort, and I had merely mentioned that fact to a friend. That was the sum total of my crime.

Coincident with the growth of this belated sense of self-justification came another prompting which, at times, I fought with all the strength I could muster. It came in the way of a natural result. The constant battery of wordless anger and contempt began to have the effect of a prolonged whipping. At first, the whippee may hide his face and let the bare back take its medicine. But after just so long the reaction is bound to come. When it set in, the cold anger in my lady's eyes no longer made me turn away; far from it, I found myself meeting it with a strange quickening of the pulses; a recrudescence of that puppy love mentioned a while back, maybe it was, but, if so, there was mingled with it a grown man's desire to rise up and smash things.

At Honolulu, where we stopped long enough to unload part of the *Mindoro's* outward-bound cargo of machinery, I was no longer ducking and dodging to keep out of sight. At the Marshalls I was able to meet the chilly indignation in Alison's all-too-beautiful eyes with a new daring born of the induration which comes of too much undeserved punishment. And at the Marianas—

I never knew why Captain Lamper laid

the course so as to take the *Mindoro* through the archipelago formerly named the Ladrões instead of to the southward of it. The regular steamship lines all dodge these islands, either to the north or the south. But Lamper knew these seas so well that he could have sailed them with his eyes shut; so I did not question him when I found by consulting the chart that we were passing to the northward of Guam.

The weather, which had been a bit heavy for a few days, was now as nearly perfect as the rawest fresh-water sailor could have desired. The days were picture fine and the nights idyllic. With the spicy breath of the islands in the air, the phosphorescent wavelets lapping along the bilge, and a tropical moon to spread the *Mindoro's* wake fanlike in a broadening path of silver astern, it was easy to figure the stout old ship as sailing an enchanted sea.

Now and again we came in sight of some one of the islands. As everybody knows, the Marianas are partly of volcanic and partly of coralline origin. It was the volcanic islands that we were occasionally sighting; high-pitched, heavily wooded masses on the horizon, in sharp contrast to the level atolls of the coralline groups.

It was on one of these perfect nights when the moon was at its full that I went on deck to smoke a bedtime pipe; to do that and to try yet once again to throttle the growing desire to be transformed into a cave man or something of that nature. California and Adam Jeffard's millions when a long way off; in another world, if you think of it that way; and the one woman—

I thought she had gone to bed. I was certain I had heard her and her aunt come in before I had left my own cubby-hole stateroom. But I was mistaken. As I walked aft I saw her standing alone at the rail. At first I thought she was merely reveling in the beauty of the night. Then I saw that she was holding something up to the moonlight; a thing that glinted and flashed like a tiny point of white fire.

I don't know of any possible reason why I should have jumped to the conclusion that it was Barrett's ring, but it came to me instantly that it was the sparkle of a diamond that I had seen. As I drew back into the shadow of the deck awning she made a quick gesture, as if she were tossing something overboard. Almost unconsciously I took a step forward. The *Mindoro* had a short

turtleback stern extending aft beyond the rail, and on the sloping metal of the sheathing there was a minute point of light glimmering and winking to the shudder of the propeller. Then I saw that I had been mistaken; the quick little gesture had merely meant that she had dropped the thing she was holding up to the moonlight, and it had fallen outside of the rail.

What followed had no sequence, if you understand what I mean; the whole business bunched itself in a tragic climax. The ship's rail at the stern was merely three strands of canvas-covered wire rope supported by iron stanchions. In a flash Alison had passed the slight barrier and was reaching for the thing she had dropped. The next instant she had slipped on the smooth sloping metal of the turtleback and was gone. And, with barely enough presence of mind left to snatch up a life buoy as I sprang to the rail, I went over after her.

CHAPTER III.

THE LONG REACH.

Naturally, I hadn't fairly cleared the *Mindoro's* rail before I realized what an absolutely suicidal thing I was doing by going overboard without first giving, or trying to give, some sort of an alarm. So it was with a half-strangled yell of "Man overboard!"—which probably couldn't have been heard six feet away—that I plunged, losing my hold upon the clumsy ring buoy as I went under.

Coming to the surface, I struck out quickly for the buoy and caught it. The ship, a black bulk to the left, was already beyond calling distance. Raising myself high on the cork float, I scanned the broad pathway of the ship's wake rippling in the moonlight. There was no swimmer's head to be seen, and a heartbreaking conclusion jammed itself home with crushing finality. Alison's slip had taken her nearly straight aft over the edge of the turtleback; hence, she must have fallen directly into the tail race of the propeller, to be drawn under and drowned at once by the suction.

I let myself slip back to sea level, sick and gasping. It had been so horribly sudden. Two little minutes earlier we had both been standing on the *Mindoro's* after deck, alive and well. And now the dear girl's life had been snuffed out like a candle, and my own finish—that of a lone swimmer in a trackless ocean—could be only a matter

of a few hours. To cap my groan of despair a snail voice just behind me said, quite conversationally: "I'm doing pretty well, considering; but could you let me have a bit of that fire buoy?"

Of course, I whirled like a man stabbed in the back and made a frantic grab for her—grabbed and missed.

"No," she objected, still speaking quite calmly, "I don't need to be rescued: just a hand on that buoy, if you please."

I pushed the clumsy cork ring toward her, steadying it so that she could hook her arms over it. She had lost her hat, in the dive from the ship's turtleback, and her hair had come down.

"I wish now I had had it bobbed," she remarked, supporting herself with one hand while she tried to twist the thick ropes of hair to make them stay out of her eyes. Then: "I suppose it isn't any use trying to make them hear on the *Mindoro*?"

"None in the world," I returned, estimating the distance to the vanishing ship, which must, by that time, have grown to a full half mile.

Silence, for a long minute, while she kept on trying to put up the rebellious hair. And at length, much as if she were remarking upon the state of the weather:

"It was silly of you to come over after me. If you had wanted to do anything, you might have stayed on board and stopped the ship. Is it likely that we shall be missed?"

"Not in time to do us any good," I answered, turning both hot and cold under the cool criticism which she might have, and probably would have, applied to the veriest stranger who had done what I had.

Another silence, and then: "Do you happen to know whether or not we are in one of the regular steamship lanes?" If we had been actually meeting for the first time there on opposite sides of a cork buoy in mid-ocean, her tone couldn't have been more calmly impersonal.

"We are not," I assured her. "Captain Lamper changed our course at the Marshalls; just why, I don't know."

I made sure she'd break down at that; any other woman in the world would have—with small blame for it. But if she were anywhere near the edge, she didn't show it.

"There are islands about: we have been sighting them all day. Perhaps we may be able to reach one of them," she suggested.

You would say that we had a handsomely

fat chance to reach anything—unless it might finally be the bottom of the sea. There was nothing in sight in any direction, barring the shadowy wraith of our ship which was now becoming indistinct in the distance. Yet I couldn't find it in my heart to extinguish this last little hope for her.

"We might," I conceded.

"Are the islands inhabited?" she inquired.

"A few of them are, but more are not."

"What islands are they?"

"The Ladrões—the Marianas, as they are called now."

She had contrived at last to twist her hair into a knot that would stay, and was reaching down into the water as if groping for something she had lost. Pretty soon the diving hand came up with a small shoe which she proceeded to tie to the buoy by its string. Then she fished up the other and made it fast beside its mate.

The shoes taken off and secured, she began to get rid of her outer clothing a bit at a time; the skirts which would impede her swimming, and the waist with its loose sleeves to bag and hold back; all this as if it were part of the day's work. Not to be outdone in pure sang-froid by a mere girl, I followed the sensible example, and soon our tiny circular life raft was festooned with the cast-offs. If it should come to a swim for life, we should need to be rid of all the handicaps.

After those questions about the islands she didn't talk any more; giving me to understand, as I took it, that the status quo before the double dive from the after deck of the old *Mindoro* was still to be maintained. I wished she would talk. Her silence gave me too blessed much time to think. Among other things, I remembered, all of a sudden, that these South Seas were alive with man-eating sharks. What if one of them should scent us and give the signal? Too often I'd seen a dozen of them rush for the contents of the garbage barrel emptied overboard from a ship's galley.

If similar thoughts were disturbing my cool-blooded little vis-à-vis across the narrow circle of the life buoy, she made no sign. We had been drifting in the milk-warm sea—and awkwardly—er—clearing the decks for action, as you might put it—for maybe half an hour, in solemn silence, when the slow circling of the buoy once more turned my back toward the glittering moonbeam path. Presently I saw Ali-

son raise herself and shade her eyes with her hand. Then she said, as calmly as if she were passing the time of day, "A landfall, I think: look straight down the path of moonlight."

I twisted myself around and looked. Dimly bulking at the far end of the silvered moonlight highway a dark mass loomed like a shadow. My swift fear that it might be only a cloud was dissipated instantly by a glance at the sky. There was no storm brewing. Yet the land, if it were land, was far enough beyond our puny reach.

Followed another half hour; a keenly anxious interval of suspense. We were not standing still; we were unmistakably drifting some whither; the appearance of the looming shadow, upon a horizon which had so lately been empty, proved it. There were currents and tideways in all these island groups, as I knew. Was one of these drifting us toward the land?

At the end of the period of uncertainty the critical question was answered definitely. As nearly as could be determined, we were being carried slowly down the moonlit path, and the pace was accelerating. Little by little the shadowy bulk to the eastward materialized until it took shape as high land, and before long we could distinguish the distant thunder of the surf. And still our course remained unchanged. We were drifting shoreward as straight as if we were at the end of an invisible tow line.

I could easily prefigure that this hopeful state of affairs wasn't going to continue. Sooner or later the drift current would be deflected by the mass of the island and we should be swept aside. The next slow circling of the life buoy turned this foreboding into a fact accomplished. Our direction was already changing. During the long and silent drifting interval I had firmly made up my mind that I wasn't going to speak again unless I was spoken to, but now this vow had to be broken if we were not to lose our last slender chance of getting ashore.

"We'll have to swim for it," I said. "The current is changing, and it won't carry us to the land."

"That is just what I was going to remark," was the cool reply; and as she spoke she slipped from her support and struck out, with the end of one of the hand lines of the buoy between her teeth.

Then and there was where the battle, the

shrewdest one ever fights, began. Though the grip of the tidal swirl was intangible, it seemed fairly viselike. Hampered by the backward-dragging life buoy—it was laden with all the worldly goods we possessed, and, for aught we knew, ever should possess—we made headway only by inches. Steadily we were swept along parallel to the shore line—which was lucky, perhaps, since the booming of the surf gave notice that a landing through it would be impossible for two tired swimmers. At times I could have sworn that the tide rip was actually carrying us seaward again.

I don't know how long this desperate struggle lasted; for hours, it seemed to me. Straight through it all the sturdy little swimmer on the other side of the handicapping, clothing-freighted buoy fought pluckily: she was swimming with the crawl stroke, and you could have timed a watch by the regular flash of her white arms at the outreach. Not a word out of her, mind you, from first to last. For one thing, she had her teeth clamped upon her towing string; and for another, there was no breath to be wasted.

Along toward the last I turned upon my side to be able to watch her better. I knew, in the nature of things, that the stubborn fight she was putting up couldn't continue forever. Nevertheless, the end of the struggle—and of her splendid endurance—came without warning. I felt rather than saw that we were being swept past what seemed to be the mouth of a small landlocked bay when the swirling tide current lost its hold upon us, leaving us to spin slowly in the life-saving eddy at the bay mouth.

It was at the same instant that I saw my brave little teammate relax and go down like a stone; and in the next breath I had caught her in my arms and brought her again to the surface of things. She was pretty far gone; was barely able to drape her tired arms over the life buoy and let me tow her, and it, to the shallow water of the nearest beach.

When we reached wading depth she tried to walk out; tried it and stumbled and fell; and I had to pick her up and carry her. Putting her down upon the sand above the surf wash, I went back after our buoy raft. I remember now that I hadn't strength enough left to lift the thing when I got it and its soggy lading of shoes and clothes out of the water. So I dragged it up out of

reach of the waves lapping upon the sands, and so left it.

When I got back to where I had left Alison I found her stretched out like a tired child and already sound asleep. Bending over her only long enough to make sure that it was sleep, and not a fainting fit, I staggered off to a respectful distance and dropped upon my face on the warm sand. For by that time I, too, was just about all in.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CRUSOE ISLAND.

When I awoke the sun was peering at me over the shoulder of a wooded mountain, and a huge land crab was speculatively regarding me as if undetermined as to whether or not I might be dead enough to furnish him with a breakfast.

Cautiously approaching, under cover of the wood, the place where I had left Alison asleep I was heartily thankful to find it empty. She was up and gone, somewhere, and once assured of that fact, I made a quick dash for my clothes which, in spite of the animosity she was cherishing against me, she had been good enough to spread out to dry upon the hot sands. With the good old gray tweeds in hand I felt better. It's odd how the conventions have made a few rags of garmenting bridge the entire distance between the ability to face one's world with complacency and an avid desire to run and hide; but the fact remains.

Clothed once more and in my right mind, I began to wonder what had become of my erstwhile swimming mate. Not for long, however, for presently she came marching up the beach with an unhusked coconut under each arm. The adventures and perils of the night seemed to have left no mark upon her. Passing over the necessary affront to her natty traveling suit offered by an all-night soaking in salt water, she was quite as alluringly attractive—and quite as cold-eyed—when she asked me gravely if I had been thoughtful enough to put a knife in my pocket before jumping overboard from the *Mindoro*. Evidently, the old status quo was once more firmly seated in the saddle. For her I was merely a man—any man—who had happened, or chosen, to become a castaway at the same moment with her—nothing more.

I had a knife, and a bunch of keys, for whatever good the latter might be to any

pair in our situation—and with this pocket tool I made shift to strip the nuts of their thick husks. After I had duly bored holes in the shells to get at the milk, I passed the nuts back to her, but she would take only one of them so we each had our breakfast cup. I hadn't learned to be wild about coconut milk, even during my sojourn in the Philippines, but a sudden realization that we were likely to be living upon it for an indefinite while did something toward taming the distaste for the moment.

"I've been looking around a bit," she remarked aloofly, after we had retreated to the shade of the palms to crack the nuts and get at the meats. "I am afraid this is a Crusoe island—in the sense that there are no inhabitants."

"Yes?" I said, determined to try my own hand at the aloofnesses.

"There is a wreck," she added, in the tone she might have used if she had been telling me that the sun was shining.

"Quite so," I agreed. "There is always a wreck on a Crusoe island, isn't there?"

If she had smiled I might have taken heart of grace. But she didn't smile.

"If there isn't, there should be," she returned, quite soberly; "only I think this one isn't going to be of much use. It looks very old and decrepit."

Now I knew in reason that this attitude of speculative nonchalance could be no measure of her real feelings. Cast away on a lost island in mid-ocean, in company with a man she despised, and with little or no probability of a speedy rescue, her condition was just about as forlorn as conditions ever get to be for a petted daughter of millions.

While watching her furtively for some outward manifestation of this confidently prefigured inward tempest, I became conscious of a complete change in my own attitude. The cave-man prompting had completely disappeared with this marvelous and miraculous plunge into conditions so exactly conforming to cave-man desires. As I assume any civilized man would, in similar circumstances, I was already putting myself upon honor as Alison's protector and defender. So much, I told myself, would go without saying, and it would be manfully irrespective of anything she might think of or about me.

The coconut meat wasn't very satisfying, though it had to suffice in the absence of anything better. Still, on that first morn-

ing the bare cupboard necessities were not troubling me overmuch. Though we were cast away, naked, as you might say, in the middle of nowhere, I knew the tropical islands well enough to be confident that we needn't die of hunger. If the wreck Alison had spoken of would only yield us a few tools and the means of making a fire to cook with, we needn't starve.

"That wreck you discovered," I said, still trying to match her air of casual disinterest; "is it worth going to see?"

"It might be," she admitted. "It is not very far away."

Leisurely, because we had all the time there was, we went in search of the discovery, following the beach around to the left. Coming presently into open ground, we could see more of the island topography, which was more or less precipitous. Back from the beach the land rose in a succession of benches, these culminating finally in a respectable mountain peak. And at its summit the mountain terminated in a truncated cone; proof assumptive, at least, that it had once been an active volcano.

Occasional openings in the forest afforded glimpses of high-lying meadows far up the mountainside, and in one of them I saw a number of animals feeding, though whether they were cattle or goats or sheep I could not tell at that distance. But as yet there were no signs of inhabitants.

The doubling of the next sand spit, with its matted jungle screen coming down almost to the water's edge, revealed a complete change of scene. A deep, V-shaped bay opened out before us, thrusting itself into the island like a wedge; and on its opposite shore rugged cliffs of black rock backgrounded a beach of less than a hundred yards in width. Off the mouth of this bay or inlet the Pacific surf was beating upon a reef which made a sheltered and almost landlocked lagoon of the inner body of water; and, perched upon a reef within the barrier reef, was the wreck.

At first sight of it I decided that the vessel was one of the island-to-island trading schooners of which there are countless numbers in the Pacific. The vessel was "down by the head," as a sailor would say, with its stern well out of water, its bow completely submerged, and its deck pitched at a sharp angle to seaward. Only a stump of one of the masts remained, but upon this there were some remnants of the rigging.

It didn't look very promising as a possible repository of things which might be useful to us, but I immediately proposed that we go around to the other side of the bay for a nearer view of it. This we did, following the beach to the head of the inlet—where we found a stream of clear, cool mountain water tumbling into it—and passing thence into the shade of the black-rock cliffs which were, as I had supposed they would be, of volcanic origin.

Doubling back on the cliff beach we soon reached the place which measured the shortest distance to the stranded vessel. From this point it was not over three or four hundred yards out to the wreck, and we could see perfectly all there was to be seen. On the side toward land the hull seemed to be unbroken, though the rudder and some part of the taffrail had been carried away. It was the stump of the mainmast that remained, but the sails and the standing rigging were gone.

"Well?" said my companion, a bit impatiently, I thought.

"A trading schooner," I answered briefly. "She had probably put in here for fresh water, and the gale, typhoon, or whatever it was, caught her while she was anchored in the bay." So much it seemed reasonable to assume, since no wooden hull that was ever built could have come over the outer reef without having been broken into kindling wood.

"It is very old, isn't it?" she said.

I took another look for a guess at the age of the derelict. There was nothing to indicate any very great lapse of time measured by seasons or years. The cordage hanging from the stump of the mainmast was still cordage, and the hull, though blackened and weathered, showed no signs of breaking up.

"Not so very old, as wrecks go," I answered at a venture. Then, still trying to preserve the formalities: "May I ask how much you remember of your Robinson Crusoe?"

She shook her head.

"Not very much. It was a long time ago when I skimmed it"—as if I didn't remember that she had given me my first copy of the dear old book away back in our childhood days and our reading of it together! "It is a boy's book and didn't interest me greatly."

"There was a stranded ship in it," I reminded her, "and if I recall it correctly,

Crusoe got pretty nearly everything he needed out of it. On a raft. What I can't recall is just how he contrived to build the raft."

"That is one of the few things I do recall," she returned. "He swam to the wreck first, and then made the raft out of pieces of the things he found there."

"Of course!" I nodded. "How stupid of me to forget." Then I sat down and began to take my shoes off.

"You are going to swim out?" she asked in a rather small voice.

"Assuredly. That was what the other Crusoe did, wasn't it? We breakfasted on coconuts, but under present conditions, coconuts are the entire bill of fare—unless we can bring ourselves to the point of enlarging it with raw shellfish. Without fire we can neither cook anything nor make a distress signal."

I had my shoes off and was waiting for her to go away. I felt sure she would go; that she wouldn't make me do a three-hundred-yard swim with my clothes on. But still she lingered.

"There may be sharks in the bay: it's quite deep enough," she pointed out.

"Nothing venture, nothing have."

"Yes, but——"

Her reluctance to let me try it was easily explained. With a world of men to choose from she would probably have picked any one but me for a castaway companion, I thought. Still, I was better than nothing. And "nothing" meant that she would have to face the castaway horrors alone.

"I—I don't believe I'd take the risk, if I were in your place," she went on, and it was almost pathetic to see how hard she was trying to maintain that attitude of nonchalant aloofness as she said it.

I argued it out with her calmly. There must certainly be something—possibly many things—that we needed aboard the wreck. As matters stood we were completely bare-handed. If I should succeed only in finding a few necessary tools and the means of making a fire, we should be infinitely better off. And the risk might be discounted. We had been in the sea for hours on end the night before, and the sharks hadn't bitten us.

She gave in at that and moved away up the bay beach; along the narrow margin of sand under the cliffs to disappear finally under the palms at the mouth of the little fresh-water stream. Stripping quickly, I

made a bundle of my clothes, using the belt to buckle the bundle on top of my head. The clear, pellucid waters of the bay were undisturbed save as they rippled in the reflex of the surf breaking here and there over low places in the outer reef, and I plunged in. I soon reached the wreck, and passing around it, climbed out on the side low-canted to seaward.

CHAPTER V.

THE WRECK.

Getting into my clothes as hurriedly as might be—the tropical sun, high risen by now, was promising to blister me promptly if I should give it half a chance—I took a look around at our treasure-trove. The ship was a small one; not over a hundred tons burden, I should say; and there was nothing on the steeply inclined deck to make me change my belief that it had been a trading schooner.

Quite naturally, the deck had been swept clean of everything removable; even the capstan and cable bitts were gone, and the foremast had been snapped off even with the deck. Forward of the stump of the mainmast there were two hatches, both battened down, one amidships, and the other so far forward that the water, owing to the position of the wreck, which, as I have said, was well down by the head, was lapping at the coaming.

Aft, where the hull was pretty well lifted, there was a raised deck with transom lights and a companion slide, which was closed and apparently fastened on the inside, since it resisted all my efforts to open it. Being able to do little with my bare hands, I began to edge my way along toward the main hatch, hoping that I might be able to gain the interior of the ship by that route.

It was not until after I had begun this crablike progress, handing myself along with my feet in the leeward scuppers, that I thought to take a look shoreward to see if Alison had come back. Pulling myself up to the high-pitched port rail, I saw her coming slowly down the beach, staring out across the bay with a hand over her eyes to shut off the sun glare. As I looked, she came to the place where I had waded in for my swim. She didn't call out; she stood for a long minute with her eyes searching the wreck and the intervening water. Then, as suddenly as if she had been struck down by

an invisible club, she turned and fell upon her face in the sand.

Naturally, this bit of heartbroken pantomime explained itself instantly. She couldn't see me, and the corollary to that was that the sharks had eaten me. Too much ashamed to call out and thus let her know that I had been watching her, I slid back to the stump of the mast and pounded upon the deck with the remains of a block that was hanging in the shreds of rigging. When I looked again she was sitting up, with her face in her hands. She had heard the pounding and the reaction had come. She was crying with relief—not that I wasn't eaten, but that she wasn't left alone.

Chewing that cud a bit bitterly, I made my way to the main hatch. To my surprise the fastenings yielded easily when I hammered upon them with the block fragment. I lifted the hatch, which was an abnormally long one, and slid it off, and when I stooped to stare into the dark cavern below, surprise grew into astoundment. Instead of the cargo of rotting copra, I was expecting to see I found myself staring down upon an up-to-date, breech-loading ship's gun mounted upon a disappearing platform.

Lowering myself cautiously into the evil-smelling depths, I examined the gun curiously. It was of German make, of the size and caliber used on their earlier submarines; and the disappearing platform was built in much the same way. More than this, the hold, or this part of it, was a gun room, and nothing else. There were racks of Mausers on the bulkheads, boxes of ammunition in the open lockers, many shells for the small cannon. And there was nothing more than these.

As you would imagine, an explanation of a sort suggested itself immediately. In some desultory fashion the Great War had extended even to these distant islands of the Pacific, and this armed schooner had doubtless been a commerce destroyer fitted out to prey upon such helpless enemy ships as it might dare to attack—trading schooners and the like.

All of which was small fish, or no fish at all, in our net. We couldn't eat war munitions, or make a fire and cook with them. I handled a few of the racked Mausers; they were mere masses of rust and wholly useless, I decided. With a fire and a hammer I might contrive to beat out a few tools from the metal in them; but that was all.

Climbing out of the hold, I worked my way forward to the other hatch. This, too, was battened down, and the fastenings refused to yield to the blows I rained upon them with the broken pulley block. Not to be denied, I went back to the main hold and got one of the rusty rifles; and using the barrel as a pry got the hatch off. Here, again, there was a disappointment, though it was not wholly a surprise. The forehold was full of water, almost up to the deck level. From the way in which the ship was canted it was easy to figure that the breach in the under planking must be in this part, so the forehold would be open to the sea, most likely with a jagged tooth of the reef sticking up in it somewhere.

While I was considering the chance of finding something useful, if I should strip and dive into the water-filled depths, I saw something that looked like a frond of seaweed waving slowly back and forth in the flood. Suddenly I realized that it wasn't seaweed; that it was something alive—two somethings—three of them. With my face close to the surface of the water, I stared down into the shut-in pool. One look was enough. The wreck's forehold was tenanted by an octopus—a giant squid!

It will doubtless say itself that what diving I did into that forehold could have been measured upon a micrometer scale. The wealth of all the Indies wouldn't have tempted me to stick a leg into that black pool with those deadly tentacles waving in its depths. Jack London, in one of his South Sea stories, tells of a Kanaka who, for mere amusement, would dive into the sea and drag an octopus from its lair and bite it to death with his teeth. Perhaps. But I'm not built that way.

Anyhow, I concluded, there was nothing much lost. Whatever there might be of housekeeping value in that dismal cavern would be water-spoiled and useless. Remained, therefore, nothing but the after cabin into which I had not yet penetrated; and with my gun-barrel pry I climbed back to attack it. Here I am obliged to chronicle a complete failure. With the one poor tool I could command I was wholly unable to break into the locked companionway; and the raised deck, with its small glass side lights all broken out, also resisted my best efforts. Though marine construction had been no part of my education, I was con-

vinced that no trading schooner had ever before been built so strongly, and I marveled at it.

After hammering and prying for a half hour or so, the mounting sun began to warn me that I was nearing the limit. Since we were only a few degrees north of the equator, the December sun lacked little of its July altitude, and already as I toiled I was beginning to see black spots dancing in the heated air. Obeying the warning, I crept back to the main hold and lowered myself into it. Again with the gun barrel for a pry, I freed a number of loose planks that had evidently been used for some purpose in the cannon elevating. With these and the two hatch covers I built a clumsy raft, tying the pieces together with the scraps of rigging salvaged from the mainmast stump.

Just as I was about to go aboard a bright idea struck me, and I dropped once more into the gun hold. Picking out half a dozen of the least rusted rifles, I put them on the raft. To these I added a half-emptied box of cartridges; and with these war munitions for the sole cargo I paddled the raft, the clumsiest ever fabricated, I dare swear, away from the ship's side.

It was while I was working the awkward float around the bow of the wreck—that being the shortest cut to the shore and the longed-for shade of the cliff—that I happened upon a small mystery. Leading down into the depths from the submerged bow of the vessel, I saw what I took to be a taut anchor cable. Now, I could readily understand that the wreck might have been caused by the anchor dragging in a gale; but the position of things, with the taut cable extending in the wrong direction, was puzzling.

Moreover, as I looked down through the transparent water, I saw that the cable, which apparently ran through a hawse hole in the ship's bow, was not a chain, as most anchor cables are; it looked more like a heavy wire rope. And why did it pass inboard instead of up to the capstan, the remains of which could be clearly seen on the sunken foredeck? I might have taken a bit more time to find the answers to these curious questions if the sun hadn't been so fiercely hot. As it was, I postponed them, and in the breathless heat began to work my way shoreward, with a reversed Mauser for a paddle.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LIE COMPASSIONATE.

Alison was down at the water's marge and waiting for me as I shoved the makeshift raft to the beach, and it was plainly evident that a lively curiosity was doing its prettiest to kill off that predetermined attitude of hostile aloofness I have spoken of.

"Well—what did you find?" she demanded.

I told her briefly, adding: "You see, we are not so lucky as old Robinson was. As you may remember, he got a good start toward housekeeping out of his wreck."

"But those old guns," she said, pointing; "what good will they be?"

"I'm not certain that they will be of any use whatever; but we'll see."

She helped me carry the rifles up to the shade of the cliff; after which I sat down to overhaul them one by one, anxious to determine if, by any manner of means, one of them could be induced to fire a cartridge. There was nothing doing; rather less than nothing. All I did was to dull the best blade of my pocketknife scraping rust. The firing mechanism of each of the pieces was welded solid with the salt rust. And there was no oil, and nothing that I knew of that would serve as a substitute.

Midday came while I was still sweating over the guns, and Alison, who had been playing the part of the disinterested onlooker to a letter-perfect finish, went forth and collected more of the fallen coconuts. Though this was only the second meal of it, I was already beginning to be fed up on the tree food. Breaking my vow of silence again, I mentioned the fact.

"There must be other things to eat, if we only knew them and knew where to look for them," she said. And then: "Would you know sweet potatoes, if you should see them?"

Since baked sweet potatoes usually come to the table *au naturel*, I admitted that they might be recognizable.

"I think I found some vines this morning," she went on placidly, "in a little open space on the other side of the bay. We could dig them out with one of the guns, couldn't we?"

"Oh, yes; I suppose so," I agreed. "But the guns won't cook the things, unfortunately."

"Fire," she murmured musingly. "I never

realized before how very necessary it is. Don't the boy scouts make it by rubbing two sticks together, or something like that?"

I replied that I had heard it could be done in that way; that indisputably the savages in all countries had been able to do it. But I had never seen it done and wouldn't know how to go about it. Then I explained that my hopes had been based upon the possibility of persuading one of the rifles to fire a cartridge. I'd seen dry grass fires started by the burning wads from a shotgun.

"But the guns are quite hopeless, aren't they?"

"They are; but we still have the cartridges. Perhaps something can be done with them."

Leaning upon this last resort, I proceeded to try all sorts of fire-making experiments with the ammunition. The priming was still alive in most of the shells, and by pounding the cap ends between two of the lava stones I got explosions galore—and nearly shot myself in the leg with one of them. Alison seemed more interested now, and she helped as she could. But with the utmost cunning we could employ, surrounding the anvil stone with crumbled dry leaves and grass, and all that, we couldn't get a spark of the precious fire to stay alive. All the explosions did was to make a racket and blow the fuel away. Still we persevered, keeping at it until we had fired all the cartridges I had brought ashore from the wreck.

While we were banging the cartridges off one at a time, the sun got around so that we had to move our base of operations to keep in the shade of the cliff. After the last explosion of hope had been extinguished, my silent helper launched a bright little idea of her own.

"Haven't I read somewhere of lost people making a sunglass out of a drop of water on a watch crystal?" she asked.

"Sure you have!" I croaked. "Curious we didn't think of that long ago."

We had the watch crystals—two of them, since we were both wearing wrist watches when we went overboard. And the two timepieces marked the exact moment of our separation from the world of human beings; both having stopped at 10.17 p. m. I pried the crystal from mine, polished it carefully on my shirt sleeve, and applied a drop of clear water.

Though I had little faith in it after I had seen the infinitesimally small point of con-

centration it made, this experiment came nearer being a success than all our fooling with the gun cartridges. Time and again we got the dried leaves hot enough in tiny pin-point spots to smoke; but that was the limit. Having the patience of two persons with all the leisure in the universe, we kept on trying until the sun had gone so far over to the westward that its rays were too indirect; and after that came supper—of more coconuts. I didn't venture to ask my companion how she felt about a third meal of the things, but by this time I was beginning to shudder at the bare sight of the brown-shelled globes.

After supper I suffered another twist of the deprivation screw; one which, fortunately, did not involve Alison. As I have recorded back a piece, I had gone to the *Mindoro's* after deck to smoke, the night before, and the unlighted pipe was between my teeth when the catastrophe climaxed. With the unconscious habit of the smoker, I had stuck the pipe into my pocket as I grabbed for the life buoy; so I still had it, as well as a tin box of tobacco, which I had been careful to dry out during the day in the hot sunshine.

It was from the purest mechanical force of habit that I sat back against the cliff face after our coconut supper and filled the pipe and clamped it between my teeth. And it was not until I found myself groping absently in my pockets for a match that I realized what I was doing. It was then, for the first time since we had been thrown together at the beginning of the voyage, that Alison smiled at me, though it was only the smile that she might have given a chance acquaintance, at that.

"It is no wonder you were so desperately anxious to make a fire," she remarked, half mockingly.

"No," I returned. "Still, I was thinking less of the pipe than I was of possible baked yams and grilled shellfish. If we ever escape from here I shall never want to see a coconut palm again as long as I live."

"I'm feeling rather that way myself," she admitted; and this was the most human thing she had said, thus far.

With the conversational ice thus cracked a trifle, she plunged into an undercurrent that I am sure had been running strongly in the thoughts of both of us all through this long first day.

"The real Crusoe," she said; "wasn't it years before he was rescued? Are we——"

I tried to put the ominous facts before her without coloring, either optimistically or the other way.

"As I said last night, Lamper was steering a course among the Ladrones," I told her. "I know little about these islands, except that there are many of them, mostly small, and that the southernmost one is our own island of Guam. I have been told that the group extends north from Guam some five hundred miles, and that there are a good many volcanic islets, like this one."

"You said last night that most of the small ones were uninhabited, didn't you?"

"That is what I have been told is their present condition; though long ago, in Magellan's time and Captain Cook's, they were all inhabited. If the plants you found this morning are really yams, that is good proof that there were inhabitants here once."

"The islands are not in the regular track of ships?"

"No. The steamship lines to Japan run north of the group, and those to the Philippines to the south. Of course, there are always the trading schooners; but if this island isn't inhabited—and the undisturbed condition of that wreck out there is pretty good proof that it isn't—the schooners wouldn't come here."

"But that one did," she countered, pointing to the wreck.

"Yes; but for what purpose we don't know, unless it was to take on fresh water."

"You think it wasn't blown ashore in a storm?"

"I am confident that it wasn't. It was anchored in the bay when the storm smashed it. In fact, its anchor is still down. You can see the cable running out from the sunken bow."

"It is curious," she commented. "Unless it did come for water, what could an armed ship like that have been doing here?"

I told her briefly what I had surmised; that the nameless schooner—I had been unable to find a name anywhere on the wreck—had been a commerce destroyer fitted out during the Great War; also, I told her that the Ladrones, which were now under a Japanese mandate, had formerly belonged to Germany.

"Somehow, I can't quite believe it was a real warship," she objected. "Mightn't it mightn't it have been a pirate?"

The short tropical twilight was merging into night, so I had leave to smile at this romantic hypothesis.

"This is the twentieth century," I reminded her. "There are no pirates nowadays."

"But there might have been," she insisted; "with the World War turning everything topsy-turvy as it did."

I thought it could do no harm to let her keep the piratical idea if she wanted to. Privateer or buccaneer, it made small difference to us. After a little lapse into thoughtful silence she began again on a new tack, asking me, oddly enough, I thought, what day of the week it was. I told her, and after another pause she said:

"A week from to-morrow will be Christmas Day."

That quiet remark of hers knocked me all in a heap. Eight days later, in the normal run of things—and if I had kept my mouth shut—her wedding day would have dawned. And now, at a time when she should have been busily and happily occupied in trousseau-tryings-on and things of that sort, she was marooned on a tropical islet with the man who had bored the fatal hole in the bottom of her life ship of happiness and scuttled it.

As I said in the beginning, it was a tragedy, all right, and when the full folds of it wrapped themselves around me I thought I would be willing to do anything under the shining sun to make it easier for her. To my utter astoundment she gave me the chance, much as if she had been able to read my thoughts.

"You lied about Pinckney, didn't you?" she said as quietly as if the sudden accusation wasn't going to hit me like a rock falling from the cliff above us.

What could I say? Of course, the truthful reply would have been a stern denial, buttressed by the shameful details, if she insisted upon having them. But, on the other hand—well, it was only one week from the day which should have been her wedding day; and for that week, and probably many more, she would be a captive here, mourning over her lost happiness; mourning even more bitterly over the doubt unresolved—the doubt she had been on her way to Manila to either confirm or dispel. On the instant my resolve was taken. I could lift a part of the burden, temporarily, at least; and I would.

"Tell me one thing first," I said. "Are you really and truly in love with Pinckney Barrett?"

"I was going to be married to him," she retorted, as if that settled it.

"Well, then—call it a lie. I—I've always hated Barrett, more or less."

I heard her draw a long breath. We were sitting perhaps a couple of yards apart, and I thought she would make the distance greater. But she did not move or speak; and when the silence was finally broken, it was I who had to break it.

"We should have made some preparation for the night while it was still light enough to see things," I said, banishing the impossible topic as best I could. "As it is——"

"It makes little difference," she protested in a voice that was as blank as an unwritten page of white paper. "The beach sand will do—as it did last night."

We got up to walk a little way around the cliff face, my notion being to get as far as might be away from the jungle forest with its possible threat of night beasts or reptiles. As we left the shadow of the cliff, the cone-shaped summit of the mountain outlined itself against the sky; a dark mass reaching—for us—halfway to the zenith. As I glanced up at it I saw a thing to make me stop suddenly and look again.

"What is it?" she asked, half fearfully, I thought.

"Nothing but a freak of the imagination, I guess," was my answer. "For a moment I fancied I saw a faint pink glow over the top of the mountain."

She stood a little apart, staring upward.

"You *did* see one!" she exclaimed. "There it is again!—it comes and goes. Can it be—no, it can't be the afterglow of the sunset; it is too late for that!"

"It looks more like the ghost of a reflection from a fire," I qualified; and then the explanation jumped at me out of the night: "It is a fire! Didn't you notice the shape of the mountain, in the daytime when you could see the top of it distinctly? It is, or has been, a volcano, and there is fire in it yet. To-morrow we shall climb up and do the Prometheus act—only it was heavenly fire that he brought, wasn't it? Never mind; it will serve to cook our sweet potatoes, if there are any."

She made no reply to this little sally as we passed on around the cliff. Perhaps the thought of sleeping under the shadow of a

more or less active volcano was disturbing to her, but, if so, she was too proud to let me know of it.

At a point a little beyond the landing place of the raft we found what I had been hoping we might find; a shallow cave like a hermit's cell, hollowed out in the foot of the lava cliff. There was a bed of white beach sand in its dish-shaped bottom, and it was as dry as a bone.

"There is your sleeping berth," I told her; and after I had seen her safely hidden in the rock hollow, I did as I had done the night before; removed myself and made my bed in the warm, loose sand of the beach.

CHAPTER VII.

HELL FIRE.

I was astir at the first peep of dawn the next morning, the beach sand being something less wooing than a spring mattress, and, taking advantage of the cock-crow hour, I searched out a cove pool conveniently private, stripped, and had a refreshing plunge. Dressing after it, I heard a great splashing around on the far side of the cliff promontory; an advertisement that Alison was also up and taking her morning bath.

Since she had dutifully foraged all three of our meals the day before, it seemed no more than fair that I should take my turn. So I went exploring in the wood, keeping an eye out for something, anything, that might fortify us for a climb to the top of our mountain; that is to say, anything but coconuts, of which there were enough lying on the ground to feed all the wild pigs in creation.

Before I had gone very far I was made to realize that, while an engineering education may be a capital thing in its place, its botanical features are conspicuous chiefly by their absence; a lack which even my recent sojourn in the Philippines hadn't corrected. From reading Stevenson and Jack London I knew that there were plenty of edible things all around me, if I could only recognize them. Kalo, or taro, I knew, from having seen it growing in Hawaii, and there were numerous bread-fruit trees growing among the palms. But neither the roots of the one nor the fruit of the other was edible without cooking. Bananas, of which a number of varieties grow in all the islands, was the one fruit I hoped to be able to find; but, though I saw many plants that looked like

bananas, there was no fruit on them. So it was with a faltering appetite that I finally picked up a couple of the despised coconuts and went back to the cliff beach.

Alison didn't say "Good morning" when she met me. What she said was, "Oh, dear me! More coconuts?"

I acquiesced sorrowfully.

"I'm tremendously sick of them myself, but until we can find something else that can be eaten raw——"

"I know," she cut in, adding: "I don't believe I care for any breakfast; I'm not hungry any more. Shall we climb the mountain and see if last night's pinkiness really meant anything? If we're going, it will be better to go before the sun gets too hot."

I was quite as willing as she was to forgo the only breakfast there was in sight, so we set out, taking the little stream which came down into the bay head for a pathfinder. It was stiff going for a while. Huge ferns and clambering vines made a tangled jungle of the forest, and we had nothing to use as a clearing tool.

Finally, however, by dint of perseverance, we won through the worst of it and began to ascend the slopes of the mountain. Here the forest was more open and the going much easier. In the course of time we came to one of those high-lying, meadowlike spaces I have spoken of. As we entered it from the downhill side, a flock of goats—unmistakable, ordinary goats—took fright and dashed away into the wood at the left. Here was meat, any quantity of it, needing only catching and cooking, and I ventured to say as much to my silent tramping companion.

"Yes," she returned, half absently; "Robinson Crusoe had goats on his island, too. How did he contrive to catch them?"

"He was lucky enough to find some usable guns on his wreck," I replied. "Never mind; we, too, shall eat goat mutton—if we ever acquire the means of cooking it. Given a pot and a fire under it, it will go hard with us, if we can't find some way of herding the meat into it."

Keeping on across the little meadow we came to more jungle, though it was much easier to navigate than that lower down. As we ascended, the jungle thinned more and more, and at last, at an altitude of perhaps a thousand feet above the sea, the vegetation stopped entirely and we came out upon a bare, broken lava slope with the crater summit lying only a little way above us.

From this elevated stand we could look down upon practically all of our island kingdom. As I had anticipated, it was triflingly small; possibly two miles in the longer dimension by half of that distance in the other. From all of the beaches, which were indented by numerous coves and bays, the land rose toward the common center of the mountain, and with the exception of a few bare spots like the one in which we had found the goats feeding, it was a dense mass of tropical greenery.

As for the wider horizons there was nothing hopeful in sight. In all directions sea met sky without a break. I own this was a keen disappointment to me. At our height above sea level we were commanding a circle with a radius of many miles, and I had confidently expected to find other islands of the group in sight, if nothing more. But the horizons were vacant. Though for the greater part of the time Alison appeared to ignore me studiously, she doubtless saw my countenance fall.

"What is it?" she asked, not too unsympathetically.

"I was hoping to find that we were not quite so completely isolated. With other islands near there would be a better chance of our being found and taken off."

"Yes," she agreed. And then: "Yet we ought not to forget to be thankful. If the current hadn't brought us here night before last—to the only bit of land in all this wide world of water——"

"Quite so," I admitted, and then we climbed the final hundred yards of the ascent and the crater of our volcano lay at our feet.

It was a true crater, accurately fitting the geography descriptions, and if the volcano wasn't at the moment an active one, it certainly looked as if it might become so upon short notice. What we found ourselves looking down into was a circular depression possibly half a mile across and a couple of hundred feet deep, bare of vegetation, and hemmed in on all sides by precipitous black cliffs. Its bottom appeared to be, and doubtless was, a sea of congealed lava, dark and forbidding; and from various cracks and fissures in it numberless little jets of steam were issuing, to be licked up and dissipated almost instantly in the pouring heat of the sun.

On the side farthest from us we saw what at first appeared to be a group of boiling springs of muddy water, rising and subsiding

with the regularity of clockwork. It was not until one of these boiling springs showed dully red in one of its ebullitions that we realized that what we had taken to be muddy water was molten lava.

"There is the mother of our cooking fire," I announced; but where another woman might have shuddered and clung to me, my companion merely shuddered.

"We could never get down there alive!" she protested; "never in this world!"

"One of us is going to try it, anyway," I asserted, and began to look around for some means of getting down to the fire level.

There was a way, though we had to skirt the lip of the crater to the opposite side to come at it; a jagged gully zigzagging down through the cliff and leading almost directly to one of the fire holes. Before attempting to go down I made a trip to the nearest fringe of the mountain jungle and cut a number of thick, elephant-ear leaves from a plant which looked as if it might be the grandfather of our familiar home-grown giant begonia. Out of the mammoth leaves, with twigs for pins, I contrived a rude sort of basket, lining the bottom of it with bits of the broken lava to make it at least temporarily fireproof.

For tinder fuel I found a fallen tree and kicked out a chunk of its rotting heart. This was placed carefully in the carrier basket and partly covered with earth. Then, with a dead tree branch for a torch, I was ready to make the attempt.

Alison had merely looked on while I was building the basket, but now she crisply declared her intention of going down with me. Of course, I objected strenuously. There wasn't the slightest need of both of us venturing into the threatening fire bowl, and I said so emphatically. But I might as well have saved my breath.

"No," she maintained stubbornly, "I shall not go through again what I did yesterday when I thought the sharks had killed you. I'd much rather die at once than be left alive here by myself."

She said it so calmly that I had no reason to make any personal application of her motive; it was simply the instinct of self-preservation reaching out for any sort of a hand hold. Indeed, she went on to put it that way in so many words.

"I should go mad if I were left here alone," she added; "and so would you or any one. I'm going down there with you!"

After that I said no more, and the rather difficult descent was begun. I hadn't been discounting the dangers very much, but as we approached the lava surface they began to be manifest in a way to make me wish from the bottom of my heart that she had let me come alone.

At the nearer view the lava lake, at this end of it, looked like a caldron only partly cooled, and it was not altogether quiescent; it was heaving gently in spots like a sea of stiff molasses, cracking and bursting here and there to set free numberless little jets and puffings of steam and a thick yellowish vapor. In consequence, the air of these lower depths, besides being furnace hot, was strongly shot through with the sulphurous fumes, and we straightway fell to coughing and choking.

When it got so bad that a good breath was no longer to be had, I tried once more to drive Alison back, telling her that it was a sheer brutality for her to make me responsible for her as well as for myself; but she merely shook her head and came on.

You've probably noticed the word that I put at the top of this chapter. That is precisely what we found when we finally slid down, gasping and strangling, to the surface of the lava lake. Everything we touched was fiery hot, and the heaving of the lava underfoot gave the sickening, terrifying sensation you experience in an earthquake. It couldn't have been more than a dozen yards from our alighting spot to the nearest of the bubbling fire holes, but it was like walking over hot plowshares to cross the little interval. And the fumes were not only breath-cutting; they were blinding, as well.

I have a mighty indistinct recollection of just how the thing was done at the last, but in some way it was done; in some fashion I crept close enough to that nearest hell mouth to thrust my dry stick into it and to pull it out a blazing torch. After that, I think the fumes must have befuddled me completely; at any rate, I remember nothing more until I found myself at the foot of the crater cliff, with Alison trying to fan the breath of life back into me with a piece of a big leaf broken from our fire basket.

"Did I—did I get it?" I choked.

She nodded, but didn't speak. Dimly I understood that she was holding her breath and trying to urge me into the upward path. Blinded and breathless, we began to climb out of the Gehenna pit with the basket of

stolen fire between us. Coming down I had been able to help, as a man should, but now the case was reversed, and once I slipped and should have rolled back to certain death if Alison hadn't caught and held me until I could secure a fresh hold.

Looking back upon it calmly, after it was all over, I suppose we weren't in that stifling, burning gas pit more than a few minutes, all told; but at the escaping moment, after we had dragged ourselves and our costly booty up to the pure air of the crater lip, I felt as if hours wouldn't have measured the tortures we had undergone. Just the same, we had the fire. The piece of punk wood was still smoking, holding within its dull-red heart a cheerful promise of some of the things we had been so sorely missing.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DESERTED VILLAGE.

Did we take any chance of losing that costly spark of fire fished so hazardously from the Gehenna pit? Believe me, we did not. Carrying the leaf basket as gingerly as if it held a king's ransom, each of us with a spread hand under it to keep it from bursting and spilling its precious contents, we crept down the crater slope to the wood and to the rotting tree trunk from which I had obtained the punk wood.

Here we shifted the kindling to a bed of dry leaves, fanned it ablaze, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing a respectable column of smoke rising upon the still morning air of the mountaintop. At that, with the fire safely assured, we took time to sum up the casualties.

Luckily, these were neither many nor very serious. Alison, good little sport, had a couple of burns—which she insisted amounted to nothing—upon one rounded arm; and I had a few in spots where I had come into collision with the volcanic hotnesses. But these were trifles, now that the prize was fairly won.

The next move in the game was to get the fire down to the beach. To accomplish this I made another and stronger leaf basket, lined it more carefully with little stones and damp earth, and wattled together a sort of hand barrow litter to carry it on, using green fern stalks that could be cut with my knife. When the rig was built I was given due meed of praise.

"That is perfectly fine! Really, you ought to be an inventor," was Alison's comment. "But then, you were always——" She pulled herself up short on the verge of an acknowledgment that we hadn't always been strangers. "I mean it is—er—awfully ingenious. We shall do it nicely, that way. Which end of it am I to carry?"

I told her I'd take the lead and break trail, and after a bigger piece of the punk wood had been lighted and packed in the carrier, we took up the litter and started down the mountain.

Not to dwell needlessly upon a detail, the descent was made without mishap, and in a short while we had a fine, large cooking fire burning in a ringed circle of stones at the foot of our lava cliff. I had dug up a half dozen fat yams from the patch Alison had found the day before, and we were ready to try experiments with a breadfruit which, knowing nothing about the way it should be prepared, we undertook to bake by burying it with hot stones in a hole in the sand.

While the yams were roasting merrily in their own juice before the fire, I made a wading excursion out to some partly submerged rocks in the bay and gathered the leaf basket half full of shellfish; bivalves that looked like small oysters—and most likely were not; these we roasted in their own shells and ate as an entrée, skipping lightly over the possibility that they might not be fit food for humans. Salt we lacked, as well as all the other garnishings; also, when we came to cut it open, the breadfruit was little more than half cooked. Nevertheless, I venture to say that no two castaways ever made a more grateful feast on a changed diet than we had in that belated breakfast of baked yams and uncatalogued shellfish.

With the famine assuaged, and the primal necessities of fire and food thus assured, I was ready to do what I had not yet taken time to do; namely, to look our situation squarely in the face in the light of the mountaintop discovery of our islet's complete isolation. Again, as upon a previous occasion, Alison seemed to divine my thoughts.

"You needn't be afraid to say it to me," she challenged, with a firm set of the pretty lips. "It won't make it any worse to talk about it."

"I wish there were something encouraging to say," I returned. "I don't care to spend the remainder of my natural life on

this island, Edenlike as it is, and I'm assuming that you don't."

"Is it likely to be as bad as that?" she questioned; and if her voice trembled a bit she quickly controlled it.

"Can you brace to the cold facts?" I asked.

"We've both got to brace to them, haven't we?"

"Well, then; you saw what I saw from the mountaintop a little while ago. Our islet is a mere dot in an archipelago half as big as the State of California. It may easily be a hundred miles and more from any inhabited land. As I have pointed out before, the *Mindoro* wasn't following any of the regular steamship lanes; so, though we'll hope for the best, it may be a long time before another ship passes this way. To make the loss total for us, the *Mindoro* people have certainly given us up long before this time. They know we must have gone overboard; and there isn't a chance for them to suspect that we weren't drowned."

"I know," she admitted. "My aunt and I had separate staterooms: I doubt if they missed us at all until yesterday morning. They'd find that our beds hadn't been slept in; which would mean that we had disappeared early in the night. We can cross the *Mindoro*—and the regular steamships—off the list. What else is there?"

"Remains the bare possibility of a trading schooner touching here for water—perhaps. Or the equally slim chance of our being able to sight one and signal it in passing. I don't know how good or how slender this chance may be. We may lie in the track of one of these trade routes, or we may not. The copra traders touch only at the inhabited islands, naturally. The nut meats have to be gathered and dried before they are fit for shipment."

Silence for a bit and then she repeated something she had said at the crater's edge.

"Still we ought to be thankful that we are alive. It is hardly less than a miracle that we should have been carried here—to the only bit of land in all this world of waters." Then she added, very sensibly: "I suppose we must just hope for the best and prepare for the worst. That is what poor old Robinson did. His story wasn't all imaginary, was it?"

I told her what I could recall of the origin of Defoe's immortal tale based, or so his contemporaries believed, on the marooning

by Captain Thomas Spradling of his quarrelsome sailor, Alexander Selkirk, on the island of Juan Fernandez. How many of the shifts of the real Robinson Crusoe Defoe lifted out of the true tale and planted in the imaginary, I did not know, but this cut little figure with us. There was plenty of room for improvement in our condition, if we were to remain on our island for any length of time.

"It will be better for us on all accounts if we try to keep busy," I wound up. "There are a lot of things we ought to do while the good weather holds; though if the climate here is like that of the Philippines, we've hit the best time of the year. They always count upon good weather for Christmas in Manila."

The moment it was done I could have bitten my foolish tongue for this wholly thoughtless reference to Christmas and Manila. It looked like an intentional twist of the torture screw for her, and from the way in which she took her lip between her teeth and sat staring fixedly out to sea, I knew she must be taking it that way. Of course, there was no use trying to patch it up. It was simply a bad break, and any attempt to explain would only have made matters worse. So I did the next best thing; got up and dusted the sand from my clothes and said that since the day was yet young we might as well stir around and see what we could do for ourselves.

She joined me with a sort of lack-luster interest, helping me cover the fire so that it would keep, and acquiescing silently when I proposed the lighting of a smoke beacon on top of our cliff. When this was done, I thought me that a signal on one side of the islet could be seen from one horizon only, and proposed that we plant another on some southward promontory. Again she acquiesced, and we went around the westward end of the island, where the scanty beach afforded a narrow walkway under the high cliffs, to a point nearly opposite the bay of the wreck, carrying a bunch of lighted brands to kindle a second signal.

With the new fire lighted under the lee of a big log that promised to smolder indefinitely, it was Alison's own proposal that we go on around the island on a voyage of discovery. So we set out along the beach to the eastward, heading the little bights and coves as we came to them, and taking it slowly in deference to the mounting sun.

For the entire distance along this southern shore the discoveries were negligible. Unlike the western end of the island, which was abrupt and rocky, with offshore reefs, this part was more nearly level, with the palms growing almost to the water's edge. Nowhere were there any signs of former inhabitants, or any indications that the island had ever been visited by man, though, as nearly as could be judged, there was good anchorage ground in a number of the inlets.

It was after we had doubled the eastern tip of the island and were on our way back along the northern shore toward the bay of the wreck that we came upon a discovery that was hopeful in one way and depressing in another. We were skirting the beach of a semicircular bay—it was the one in which we had come ashore on the night of drownings—when we descried, at a little distance back under the palms, the ruins of a hut.

Turning aside to investigate, we were amply rewarded. At some time in the past—a remote past, from the look of things—our island had been inhabited. The remains of a native village were dotted among the palms; grass-thatched huts in all stages of dilapidation, kitchen middens, shell mounds, and in one place, a little apart, a few sheets of rusty roofing iron to mark the site of a former copra shed, or possibly a trader's store.

With our housekeeping necessities keen upon us we began an eager search in the ruins—and found nothing; not a pot or a pan or a tool of any sort. So the luck of the discovery promised to be no luck at all, unless the few sheets of rusty iron could be turned to some account.

"They might have left us a single cooking pot, at least!" I lamented at the end of the fruitless search; but my companion's thoughts were running in other and more speculative channels.

"Who were they, and why did they go away?" she asked.

I made two guesses and let her take her choice.

"The native races in many of the Pacific islands are dying out, as the Hawaiians are to-day," I offered for one of the guesses. "Maybe this was only a remnant here. Or perhaps our volcano showed signs of becoming obstreperous, and they went while the going was good. The only encouraging thing for us is the fact that white men have been here."

"How do you know that?"

I pointed to the rusty iron.

"That came in a trading schooner, and it may have roofed a trading station. I'm going to drag a piece of it around to our bay so that we may have salt to our potatoes."

"Salt?" she echoed.

"Sure thing. I can make an evaporating pan out of that iron, and we can boil sea water in it."

"I'm awfully glad," she said soberly. "I wasn't going to say a word about it, but I did miss the salt horribly this morning."

Since it was drawing on toward noon and the time for another cooking spasm, I set to work getting out the most promising of the rusted sheets. As I was dragging it out of the thick growth of ground ferns in which it was half buried, I stumbled over something that made me quickly drop the iron and grope for the new treasure. It was what I thought it was when I stepped on it—the head of an ax, red with blisters and flakings of rust, but, nevertheless, an ax head.

I don't think I should have been happier over the discovery of a complete modern kitchen outfit with all of the accessories. A single pocketknife is a niggardly small tool to be marooned with, when you come to think of it, and I had felt as helpless as a man with his hands tied. But the possession of an ax opened out new vistas of Crusoe accomplishment. I could chop down trees and build a hut—build two huts, for that matter; and with it I could disintegrate our wreck a little at a time and make firewood of it, if we couldn't find any better use for the lumber.

Alison smiled gravely at my transports.

"You are like a boy with a new toy," she said. "Does a rusty old ax mean that much to you?"

"It means a house and lot in the suburbs—two of them," I chortled gleefully. "It is the one tool in the entire aggregation that we were needing most. But there may be others as well."

Together we pulled out all of the iron sheets and searched the ground beneath microscopically; but all to no purpose. Our luck had exhausted itself. There were no more tools; nothing but a few shadowy nails which had been used for fastenings in the iron roof. But even these I saved carefully.

Intrusting the priceless ax head to Alison to carry, I made a back load of one of the

iron sheets, and so laden we doubled by the beach route the long point separating the village bay from our own. At home again, Allison made up the fire to roast more of the yams while I busied myself with the salt pan. By careful hammering with the ax head the edges of the iron sheet were turned up and it was made so it would hold water. Mounted upon chunks of the lava rock it became a capital evaporating pan, and I soon had water in it and a fire going underneath. By the time the yams were cooked, the water had boiled away and there was a thin layer of salt on the iron; and so we added another of the civilized necessities.

After dinner I devoted myself exclusively to the ax, polishing it upon a stone and contriving, with infinite labor, to rub a cutting edge on it. Next I whittled a handle out of a little tree that it took me a full hour to cut down with the jackknife; a wood, dark-like rosewood, and about fourteen times as hard. The handle wasn't a very workman-like job when I got it done, but it promised to serve the purpose.

While I was putting in the afternoon toiling over the ax, Alison did the lookout stunt, climbing to the top of our cliff and watching for that remote possibility of a sail on the horizon. Later, she went afield in the direction of the deserted village, coming back after an hour or so handsomely laden with little red bananas and oranges. By the merest chance she had stumbled upon the village plantation, which lay upon the far side of the hilly point separating the two bays. There were orange trees, she said, and bananas growing wild. Also there was a taro patch. We were no longer in danger of starving upon coconuts.

With the approach of evening I decided to go back to the site of the village for another sheet or two of the iron, meaning to make of it a screen for Alison's sleeping niche under the cliff. When I spoke of this, Alison offered to go along, and I couldn't quite make out whether she did it to keep me company, or because she didn't want to be left alone. No matter; we went together, and, having by this time learned a little more of the lay of the island, we took a straight course through the wood and over the neck of land instead of following the beach detour.

It was in the very heart of the wood that we came upon a thing of almost awesome

mystery. In a deep dell, in which, oddly enough, no trees were growing, stood two rows of massive stone pillars with heavy round capitals; single monoliths they were as much as five feet through at the base and twelve or fourteen feet high. Buried in the shadows of the surrounding forest, the great dark, upright stones, reaching back, as they must have, to a time when the earth was young, had a graveyard solemnity all their own; the monuments of a race lost and forgotten centuries, it might be, before the Pharaohs built their pyramids.

CHAPTER IX.

A HIEROGLYPH AND SOMEWHAT ELSE.

"What are they?" asked Alison.

"You can search me," I replied. Then, in one of those curious backward flips of memory that come in odd moments, I recalled a day in my junior year in college when I had been digging in an encyclopedia for some mechanical formula and had gone adrift in the article on "Cromlechs."

Most of the article, as I remember it, had been devoted to the Druidical stones on Salisbury Plain in England, but there had been mention of similar remains in some of the South Sea islands.

I rehearsed what I could recall of the encyclopedia stuff for Alison's benefit, telling her that the stones probably antedated all history; that they were certainly older than any of the island races we knew of in our day. I didn't think she would be greatly interested in the prehistoric guesses, but she was, and we spent some little time examining the gray, weatherworn old monuments.

It was just as we were about to leave them and go on that Alison found the hieroglyph. It was a rude drawing, at about the height of a man's head, of a ship; a schooner, by the rig, though the two great sails were of the lateen shape still used on Malay craft. This picture was roughly carved on the side of one of the great pillars; "chiseled" would be the better word, though the blunt tool used had made little more than a straggling outline of the vessel. Like the surface of the stone upon which they were etched, the lines were much weatherworn and half obliterated.

"Why should anybody take the trouble to do that?" Alison queried, after I had scraped the moss and lichens from the stone for a better sight of the etching.

"Heaven knows," I replied; "there is no accounting for the vagaries of the human insect. But see here! What's this?"

I had gone on scraping, and just below the picture of the lateen-sailed ship there was an inscription, or rather, another picture, this time of an awkwardly drawn triangle. At one of the points of the triangle there was a miniature reproduction of the ship picture; at another something that looked like a wheel with a hub and spokes but no felloe, and the words, "Muriddian, Dec. 25," and at the third corner, "SSE ship's corse 11 fadoms." The sudden twilight of the latitudes was beginning to fall, and we could barely make out the scratchings in the fading light.

"What can it mean?" Alison's voice was small and a bit awe-stricken.

Again I told her she might search me, and then I called attention to the passing daylight and our need to be moving on. "We can come back and study it out some other time," I suggested. "Anyway, it is probably nothing but some idle sailorman's joke; some fellow on shore leave back in the time when the copra schooners used to come here."

With this dismissal of the relic pillars and their pictured inscription, we went on to the head of the round bay and got two more pieces of the sheet iron. Returning, we took the beach route, since I couldn't very well drag the big pieces of iron through the wood. By reason of this roundabout return the moon, now two days past its full, was rising out of the waste of waters when we won back to our camping place beneath the cliff; and since it was so late, we made our supper on bananas and oranges and didn't try to cook anything.

After supper, working by moonlight, I did the best I could for Alison's sleeping niche in the cliff's foot, carpeting it with a thick padding of pandanu leaves and setting up the iron sheets for a screen. Finishing this job while it was still something short of bedtime, I went back to the stone fire circle where Alison was sitting; made myself comfortable on a heaped-up sand seat, and filled my pipe—filled and lighted it.

For a while neither of us spoke. I don't know what the dear girl was thinking about; perhaps it was that date scratched upon the prehistoric stone in the wood—the fatal Christmas date that we couldn't seem to escape, try as we might. As for my own

thoughts, they were still struggling to orient themselves to the startling changes that had thrust themselves upon us two.

Could it be possible that a brief forty-eight hours earlier we had both been passengers on the old *Mindoro*, steaming westward with only a few days more of the long transpacific voyage in prospect; each of us with plans for the future, the wildest of which didn't include the possibility of a Robinson Crusoe residence upon an uninhabited islet in mid-ocean?

Frankly, it didn't seem at all possible. The two days and nights seemed to measure a space almost immeasurable. Why, I was already forgetting how the interior of my *Mindoro* stateroom looked; and the meals I had eaten in the steamer's cabin—those chilling meals, when Alison, sitting opposite, had borne herself as if she were totally unaware of my existence, were fading into a dim and scarcely reconstructable past.

That phase of things—Alison's cold indifference—was a bit more bearable now. Though, with the single exception of that one question touching Pinckney Barrett, she was still holding me at the distance of a mere chance acquaintance, there was companionship of a sort, and I had to bring myself up with a round turn when I realized how infinitely precious even this strictly formal contact was growing.

There are many sarcastic things said and written about the adolescent passions, and they are mostly justified, I guess. But now and again some simpleton—it is the boy simpleton, usually—fails to outgrow the puppy attack. It came over me like a submerging wave, as I sat there stealing a glance now and then at my brave, silken-strong little shipmate sitting by the embers of the fire, that I had once given her up only because I had sense enough to understand that she was out of my reach—a number of million-dollar miles out of it. But here and now, for the time being, at least, we were equals; merely a man and a woman as God made us.

"Are you enjoying your pipe?" she asked, after the meditative silence had drawn itself out to a full quarter of an hour.

"I am; and I am resolutely refusing to remember that in a few days my tobacco will be all gone."

"At supper you spoke of going out to the wreck again. Maybe you will find some more there."

"I mean to go; but I am hoping to find something more useful than tobacco."

"Have you smoked long?"

That simple question stood our relations on the "stranger" pedestal more firmly than anything else she could have said. As a little girl, in the period when she was wearing her hair in a thick braid down her back, she had been with me on a day when we sneaked away from a school picnic and I smoked my first cigarette; nay, she had even taken a whiff of it herself, choking and strangling over a mouthful of swallowed smoke, and fighting me like an angry little cat when I, boylike, tried to make her do it again. I knew she hadn't forgotten that day.

"I began rather early," I said, trying to match her cool disinterest; "though I didn't fairly acquire the habit until after I went to college."

"College," she said musingly; "I went to college, too. What course did you take?"

"Mechanical engineering." It is simply impossible to describe the effect of this talk upon me; her utter detachment—when she knew all these things as well or better than I did.

"Were you intending to stay long in the Philippines?" was her next question.

I accepted her attitude; I was obliged to. With some little detail—but with no mention of the name of my employer—I told her I had been going out to install some new machinery; and that in the ordinary course of things my stay wouldn't have been very long.

"And you would have been glad to get through and go home?"

"One is always glad to be going home."

"Still, there might be special reasons," she suggested.

I couldn't for the life of me imagine what she was driving at, in this indirect way, and it showed how the "casual-acquaintance" attitude and the necessity for indirection were embarrassing her. In her own proper character she was open-handed frankness personified. To give her a chance to go on, I said, "Special reasons? Like what?"

"Oh, I don't know: one might be going to be married."

"Not this one," I denied.

If she didn't give a little start, then my eyes deceived me. Then came the thunder-bolt.

"Didn't Captain Lamper tell us that you

were engaged to a girl in France, and that she was coming over to be married to you when you returned from the Philippines?"

Holy smoke! Lamper didn't tell her anything of the sort, I made sure; first, because it wasn't true, and secondly, because he knew nothing whatever about my private affairs—less than nothing. Yet somebody must have told her this lie cut out of whole cloth.

"Captain Lamper was very much misinformed," I said mildly. "I was in France with the army, to be sure; but I left no expectant bride behind me—not that I am aware of."

"Oh, I'm sure you must have," she insisted. "Perhaps you have merely forgotten."

"No; I couldn't have done anything like that, because it was impossible."

"How, impossible?"

I smiled grimly. "Because—if you must know—the only woman I ever wanted to marry had been left behind in America, and—I had lost her."

"That sounds interesting," she remarked with just the proper shade of invitatory encouragement. "Would it be presuming too much upon a short acquaintance to ask how it happened?"

I laughed.

"The horse you invite me to curry is as short as our acquaintance. I hadn't any better sense than to fall in love with somebody out of my reach."

"You mean she didn't love you?"

"Not exactly that; though, as it turned out, I found that she didn't—at least, not in the marrying way. I thought, once, she was going to, but the anchor didn't hold."

"Was it while you were in college?"

"No; it was before that."

"But before that you couldn't have been really——"

"I wasn't," I filled in for her. "I was nothing but a callow boy."

"And she wouldn't wait for you to grow up?"

"I didn't ask her to. Before I was grown she was well out of my reach, as I have said."

"But I don't understand," she persisted. "How could she be out of your reach?"

"The distance can be measured in one short word—money."

"Oh; you mean she had money?"

"Lashings of it."

"And you had none?"

"You've said it. I still have none."

"But that needn't have put her out of your reach."

"You think not? Perhaps you are looking at it from the wrong side of the fence. Ah—er—Captain Lamper is a talkative soul, as you doubtless discovered; he told me who you are—the daughter of Mr. Adam Jeffard, the sugar king."

"Never mind me," she put in, rather impatiently, I thought. "What enrages me is your calm assumption that just because a girl happens to have money she is disqualified."

"Disqualified from being a poor man's wife, is what I meant," I hastened to say. "I was merely laying down the broad principle that a moneyless man with any self-respect would shy away from money on the other side of the house."

"Irrespective of how the girl might feel about it?" she came back.

"Irrespective of everything but the stubborn fact. Such a man would be called a fortune hunter—as he is, in most cases. I can't conceive of anything more humiliating, for the man."

She was silent for a little while, and, although the moonlight was silver bright, I couldn't see her face well enough to read its expression. Finally she said:

"I can't help being a bit sorry for the poor rich girl." Then, in a sudden dart aside: "I wonder how Captain Lamper came to tell us that story about the young woman in France?"

I wondered, too, knowing full well, as I thought, that he hadn't done anything of the sort. But the wonder presently took a decidedly different turn; somebody had certainly told her that lie about me: what was the real name of the talebearer who was figuring in her talk as the captain of the *Mindoro*?

"I can't imagine how Lamper came to do it," I said, in answer to her implied question. "And it is the more singular since I didn't know that he knew anything at all about me."

"He certainly spoke of it," she asserted, so calmly and definitely that now I had to believe she was telling the simple truth.

Through another little silent interval I puzzled over this new involvement. If Lamper had said anything like that about me, he was simply repeating what somebody else had told him. Who was the somebody?

When you are a thousand, or five thousand, miles removed from every source of distraction, panoramic recollections of former events unroll themselves with singular facility. Lamper—and the *Mindoro*—had been twice in port at Manila during the time I had spent in the Philippines. Once that I knew of, Barrett had made him a guest at the Overseas Club, where I, too, put up now and again. Like two parts of a fitted mechanism the answer to the "who" question clicked into place. Of course! it was Pinckney Barrett who was the source of that gossiping lie about the French girl.

But why had he told the lie? The answer to that query was much less obvious. He hadn't had the slightest cause to fear that I might come between him and Alison. Naturally, he knew that we had been schoolmates; had, in a manner, grown up together. But he had no reason to think that I was in any sense his rival. It was beyond me.

For some little time neither of us spoke, and when the silence was broken Alison asked what, besides a visit to the wreck, were my plans for the following day.

"House building," I answered. "Now that we have an ax there is no need for us to continue to live as cave dwellers and beach combers."

"Can you really build a house?"

"You shall see. Am I not an educated person?"

She did not respond at once, and, when she did, her reply; made as she was preparing to retreat to her sleeping burrow, was a bit cryptic.

"I might say that I don't know what you are—or are not; only this—you are a man. And, as before, I'm sorry for the poor rich girl. Good night."

And with that she left me.

CHAPTER X.

THE MYSTERY SHIP.

Turning out early, the following morning, I fell to work chopping down trees, and by the time Alison made her appearance and began to prepare breakfast I had a good start made on a hut. Also, I had doubled the number of my tools by hacking, out of one of the oak hatch-cover planks, a rude semblance of a spade which I used in digging the holes for the corner posts.

After breakfast Alison offered to help, and when I told her there was nothing she could

do, she said she might as well go over to the other bay and get some more of the fruit and yams, asking if she might take my makeshift spade for the digging of the roots. I demurred a bit at this and told her she didn't have to turn herself into a potato digger; but she only laughed and quoted that old saying about, "When Adam delved and Eve span," adding that the modern Eve wasn't above digging her own dinner. After she had got the spade and the leaf basket, she came by where I was at work to ask me how much a fathom was. I grinned down at her from the raised floor platform which was already erected.

"I'm a fathom long," I said.

"Two of these spade lengths?" she asked, holding up the clumsy implement I had chopped out of the hatch plank.

I took the spade and measured my height with it.

"Two spades, lacking half an inch," I announced. "What's the idea?"

"I just wanted to know," she returned; and with that she left me, taking the short cut through the wood to dodge the long walk around the beach.

House building in the tropics is no very serious matter. A raised platform for a floor, basket work of palm branches for the walls, and a thatch for a roof, and you have it. By working briskly I had the hut nearly completed by noon; and it was not until I was putting the last of the thatch on that I realized that Alison had been gone a long time. Just as I was getting ready to go in search of her she came in sight on the beach path, lugging the basketful of fruit and potatoes and dragging the wooden spade.

When I went to meet her and scolded her a bit for making a pack horse of herself, she gave me the basket to carry, and laughed in my face. At once I saw that there was a marvelous change in her. Her eyes were fairly starry, and she had an air of suppressed excitement which she seemed to be doing her best to conceal.

"What's up?" I demanded. "Have you seen a sail?"

"No," she denied, with her lips tightly shut; and not another word could I get out of her.

Circling the bay head—our bay head—we made up the fire and cooked our dinner. All through the preparations for the meal the curious change that had come over my

companion puzzled me. She wouldn't talk; I couldn't make her talk. It wasn't sullenness or anything of that sort; it was more as if she were trying to bottle something up and were afraid she'd let it out. Finally I got her started by shamelessly fishing for compliments on my house-building accomplishments. She went into raptures over my rude hut, but every time I tried to turn the talk upon her potato-digging expedition and what she had seen or found that she wouldn't tell me about, she dodged.

I gave it up after a while and let her keep her secret, whatever it was, telling myself that the change in her attitude toward me—a change that took me back to the kiddie days when we used to tease each other to the limit—was cheaply bought in the coin of unsatisfied curiosity. It was worth a million dollars to have her spar with me in the old-time way, and to mark that the starry look in her pretty eyes still held good.

After dinner I was minded to make that promised trip out to the wrecked schooner. As a preparation I chopped down a few more of the corklike trees and built a better raft, binding the logs together with a tough vine. While I was pinch barring the new craft down to the water, Alison remarked that she'd like to go along if she wouldn't be too much in the way; and I told her she might, if she would make herself a hat of leaves as a protection from the midday sun.

As skillful with her fingers as any trained milliner, she had two leaf hats twig-pinned into shape by the time I got the raft into the bay, and when I put mine on she laughed; the first real laugh I had heard out of her since our casting away. It did me more than a little good to hear her turn loose that way, believe me.

"You haven't anything on me for looks," I grinned back at her from under the green-leaf sombrero thing she had made for me. "If you could see yourself as others see you just now——"

"Clothes!" she gurgled. "In a little while we'll be wearing goat skins—if we can catch the goats. I'm in ruins already. I hope you can sew as well as you can build houses. Are we ready?"

I pushed the raft off and we were afloat. By following a sand spit out toward the reef we were able to get within short paddling distance of the wreck, and in a few minutes I was helping Alison aboard on the

canted deck and making our craft fast with a bit of rope dangling from the broken mast. It was while I was doing this that I noticed, what I hadn't noticed on the previous visit, that the mast had not broken of its own accord; it had been chopped part way through and weakened so it would fall.

"There is another of the little mysteries," I said, pointing out the ax gashes. "Why did they stop in the storm or hurricane, or whatever it was, to chop their masts down?"

Alison shook her head. "Don't ask me," she demurred. "My acquaintance with pirates hasn't been extensive enough to count for much."

I smiled at the way she was clinging to the pirate notion, and we made our way forward to take a peep into the main hold where, of course, the cannon, and everything else, were just as I had found and left them. Next we crept over to the forward hatch, and here, in the pea-green depths, had a glimpse of granddaddy octopus waving his tentacles. At sight of the hideous squid Alison shrank back with a little cry, and this time she forgot and grabbed me.

"Don't be alarmed," I laughed; "we're not going to meddle with that chap; I just wanted to see if the brute had moved out since day before yesterday. He hasn't, so we'll leave him in possession."

Curiosity as to two-thirds of the vessel being thus satisfied, we worked our way crabwise to the after-deck transom and the entrance to the cabin. A few blows of the ax broke the fastening of the companion slide, and we were free to descend. Since the slide had been fastened on the inside, I thought there might possibly be some pretty gruesome sights in the cabin below, so I told Alison she'd better let me go down first.

"Dead men?" she queried.

"Maybe," I admitted.

"Well, they won't hurt me any more than they will you, will they?"

"All right," I said; so we went down together.

There were no dead men in the little box of a main cabin, which was lighted by the small-paned transom overhead, but there was every evidence of violence and a sudden and destructive catastrophe. The brass cabin lamp was smashed and hanging awry; table, chairs, lockers, everything movable, had gone hurtling to starboard in the crash on the reef, and the furnishings, which were of a much better quality than one would expect

to find in an ordinary trader, were badly broken up. Still, I thought, looking at them with the eye of a Crusoe, they were not past mending.

Off the main cabin were four smaller cabins or staterooms, two on either side. These, after we had broken the doors, proved to be nothing more than boxlike sleeping cubicles with built-in bunks, two in each. There was bedding in the bunks, but, of course, it was all badly mildewed. Under one of the mattresses we found a couple of German Luger pistols with cartridge belts; and under the pillow in another a cheap watch. But there was no clew to the identity of the ship; no luggage and no clothing, save that in a locker under one of the berths we found two suits of workman's overalls.

"A find!" said Alison, with a twisty little smile. "We'd better take them along." And so we did.

At the end of the search I was completely mystified.

"I don't understand it at all," I repeated. "Whatever it was that happened to these people, there is every indication that it came suddenly. Yet they apparently escaped with all their belongings. It's a mystery."

"And didn't you say that whoever was down here when the wreck came must have been locked in?" Alison queried.

"It would seem so. The companion slide was certainly fastened on the inside."

After another ransacking of the bunk cubicles we began a systematic search for some means of egress that the imprisoned occupants of the cabin might have used in the emergency. There was apparently none. Beside the companion steps a slide door opened into the run of the vessel aft; a dark hole half filled with spare sails and rigging, all seemingly so badly rotted as to be useless. A glance proved that the cabin prisoners couldn't have escaped that way. But how had they, or, at least, the one person who must have been below at the time of the smash, gotten out?

In the end it was Alison who found a partial answer to the puzzle, and, though they say women can't reason logically, she found the clew by pure Sherlock deduction.

"That chopped-off mast," she said; "when we looked down into the place where the cannon is, I didn't see it. Did you?"

Now I had a perfectly good mental picture of the interior of the main hold, having explored it thoroughly on the occasion of my

former visit. The hatch opening was well forward of the mainmast, and I was certain that the mast did not extend down through the armament space.

"Well," Alison pointed out, "it doesn't go down through this cabin, either."

This meant that there must still be an unexplored space between the forward bulkhead of the cabin and the after bulkhead of the main hold; a space in which the butt of the mast went on down to its step in the keelson. Foot by foot we examined the paneling of the cabin bulkhead, but if there was a secret door or slide we failed to find it. Impatient of the new mystery, I swung the ax and fell upon the paneling. The wood splintered under the blow easily enough, but the ax didn't go through. Instead, there was a clash of steel against steel and I got a jar that numbed my arms to the elbows.

"Gosh!" I said, and dropped the ax. Then we investigated. The wood of the paneling was underlaid or backed up with a steel plating, riveted and caulked as if it had been made to hold water. Breaking the wood away in other places, we found that the steel was everywhere behind it; a complete bulkhead of it, air-tight and water-tight. And there was no loose panel or door or opening of any kind, that we could discover.

Eager curiosity having the call, now, we went on deck and I dropped into the armament space and attacked the after bulkhead—with precisely the same result. Everywhere the wood was backed up by the resounding steel wall; armor plate it seemed to be, and of considerable thickness; quite heavy enough to stop a rifle bullet, at least.

Piqued a bit on my professional side at being thus confronted with a mechanical mystery that I couldn't solve, I climbed back to the deck and began chopping at the schooner's planking on the high-lifted port side. Here, again, after a period of laborious hacking the steel underskin came to light; and exactly the same thing happened after I had chopped through the deck planking just abaft of the mainmast stump.

"It's a complete steel box," was all I could say as I wiped the sweat from the brow of labor. "It probably has the key to all the mysteries inside of it—where it's likely to stay unless we can find some better tool than an ax."

"Haven't you any guesses?" queried Alison, who had been a keenly interested onlooker at the chopping processes.

"Nothing even slightly resembling a guess," I was forced to admit. "It's not an ammunition magazine, because in that case there'd be some way of getting into it from the gun hold. And what else it can be is beyond me."

"Can't you think of some way of breaking into it?"

"Not without tools or dynamite. There are plenty of explosives in the main hold—in the gun shells; but if we should try to blow the thing up, the schooner would probably sink out here in deep water and that would be the end of it. I'll have to take a day off and try to think up some burglar dodge. We're going to see what's inside of that box, sooner or later, or I'll never write M. E. after my name again."

"What is 'M. E.?' " she asked—just as if she didn't know.

"Mutt engineer," I answered with a grin.

Failing in all these efforts to break into the ship's strong room, we went back to the cabin and I took another shot at the dark space in the run where the rotting sails and rigging were stored. Half buried in the cotton and hempen ruins, I came upon an object which defined itself under my hands as a round iron tank similar to the drums in which gasoline is shipped. The opening to this tank was through a plugged bung in its upper side, and while, of course, I couldn't remove the plug without a wrench of some sort, my nose told me that the tank contained gasoline, or had contained it. Thereupon a fresh puzzle rose up to claw for an answer. What was a gasoline supply doing aboard of a sailing vessel?

As I told Alison, after I had crawled out of the evil-smelling run, our interest in the various mysteries was reaching such a pitch that we were forgetting our own necessities and what we came for. In that field we were apparently going to profit but meagerly. Some of the bedding might be washed and dried and saved, so I got it up and loaded it upon the raft. Also, I tied the broken table and chairs in a kite's tail—since there wasn't room on the raft for them—and dropped them overboard in readiness to be towed ashore.

Beyond these few salvages, and the Luger pistols—which were not rusted quite so badly as the guns I had foraged two days earlier—we found little that was worth carrying away; no dishes or cooking utensils or anything of that nature—these things doubt-

less being drowned in the cook's galley forward.

I remarked upon this as I shoved the raft off and began to paddle it around under the stern of the wreck, adding: "And it is all safe to stay there while that big squid stands guard over it."

"I should say so!" Alison shuddered; then suddenly: "Promise me you won't take any risks with that horrible, horrible thing! You mustn't, you know."

You can't imagine what a thrill it sent through me to have her say that. Quite possibly her interest in my safety was still taking the selfish slant, but I was slowly coming to doubt this a bit. There was something in her tones—in all the tones she'd been letting me hear since we had set out on this raft voyage together— Oh, well, it was the old-time passion boiling up in me again, and I had imagined that I had flung it down and throttled it.

It was when we were fully halfway across the bay, and getting, as I thought, to a depth at which I might begin to use the pole instead of the clumsy paddle, that the real adventure of the afternoon butted in. As I was about to lay the paddle aside and reach for the pole, a triangular fish fin of enormous proportions cut the glassy surface of the water almost within prodding distance of our crazy float. The next instant there was a violent commotion in the depths and a heavy body struck the raft an upheaving blow from beneath; a bump so shrewd that the frail lashings with which the logs were bound snapped like pack threads.

As if a submarine mine had exploded under it, the raft dissolved under us and began to go to pieces. At the disintegrating climax I had a terrifying glimpse of a great white fish belly upturned and saw the flirt of a powerful tail that made the water boil like a caldron. "A shark!" I yelled—"jump—swim for the shallows!" and I contrived to keep my footing on the bobbing logs long enough to give Alison a mighty push shoreward. Then I fell, as it seemed to me, squarely into the open maw of the man-eater.

You hear a lot said, now and again, about presence of mind in an emergency, but I've always wondered if there is really any such thing. I know that in the few times I've been called upon to make good in a hurry, every move has been purely and strictly mechanical; you act first and think afterward.

My gripping, as I sank, of the heavy paddle I had been about to lay aside was altogether instinctive, and it is certain that the prompting to ram the clumsy blade with all the madman strength I could put behind the thrust into the shark's yawning mouth wasn't the result of any well-considered plan. The whole business was as mechanical as the frantic efforts I made to get out of the danger zone immediately afterward, slashing through the water hand over hand in Alison's wake and taking ground in the beach shallows not three seconds behind her.

It was in the similitude of drowned rats that we waded ashore and turned to look back upon the scene of our late near tragedy. The shark was still there, thrashing about in the wreckage, but even as we looked he turned tail and we saw the black fin cutting its way swiftly toward the seaward opening in the outer reef.

The enemy was routed, but so were we. The raft, with its tow of broken furniture, was mere flotsam and jetsam; and the ax, the one precious tool that had lifted us above the level of the beasts that perish, was at the bottom of the bay.

CHAPTER XI.

IN DAVY JONES' LOCKER.

I'll admit that I felt hugely depressed over the loss of the ax. I had been intending to build another hut against the coming of bad weather; a single storm would mess up the Garden-of-Eden idyl mighty uncomfortably, as I well knew, having had some experience of tropical storms in Luzon. But when I looked aside at Alison she was wringing some of the superfluous water from her clothes and laughing.

"I'll confess I've lost my sense of humor," I stuck in, rather grumpily. "Where is the joke?"

"Forgive me," she pleaded, instantly apologetic. "I was laughing because I didn't want to cry. But it *was* funny—the way you looked when you shouted at me and pushed me overboard."

"Huh!" I grunted. "Maybe what you saw was only a reflection of what I saw. I was looking straight down into that shark's gizzard when I yelled at you."

"Considering how badly we're needing them now, don't you think I had lots of presence of mind to bring these ashore?" she asked, pointing to the soaked blue denim roll

at her feet—the two suits of overalls we had found in the otherwise empty locker under one of the schooner's bunks. "They fell into the water with me, and I thought I might as well bring them along. If you'll excuse me——" and she untied the bundle, and, taking one of the suits, ran dripping up the beach to vanish in the new hut.

In a few minutes, and while I was still trying to squeeze some of the loose water out of my own clothes, she came tripping down to the bay front again, a young woman transmogrified. She had gotten rid of her wet clothes and her trim little figure was lost in the suit of baggy overwear, which, of course, was also wet. And she was barefooted.

"You'd better go and do the same," she told me, grimacing, as she came down to the water's edge. "Your clothes will be hours drying unless you take them off and hang them up in the sun. You may have my house for a dressing room."

It was sensible advice, and I took it, appearing on the beach a bit later as a second plumber's apprentice. Having now something that might, by a wild stretch of the imagination, be called a bathing suit, I announced my intention of swimming out to salvage what I could of our raft and its some time cargo.

Heavens! I wasn't half prepared for the almost tearful storm of protest this simple announcement evoked. No, no, no, and again no! I mustn't think of such a thing; it would be suicide, pure and simple! No, the shark *hadn't* gone away; or, if it had, it might come back. Did I want to break her heart a second time? Besides, everything that was floating out there in the bay would come ashore, sooner or later, so what was the use?

If I hadn't been trying so hard to convince her that I should run no great risk, I might have stopped to wonder what she meant by breaking her heart a second time. But I didn't, then.

"That drifting business is all right," I acceded; "but there is the ax. The water can't be very deep, and I'll cheerfully chance another shark or two for the sake of getting our chopping tool back. We need it; you don't realize how badly we need it." --

I won her reluctant consent at last; but when I sat down in the sand to roll up the trousers legs of my plumber's uniform, she did the same.

"If anything happens while you are out there, I'm coming, too," she declared firmly; and thereupon we fell into another wrangle. I showed her I'd have to dive for the ax, and told her she mustn't lose her head and come bulging in when there was no need of it. We compromised it after a while. She was to stand on one of the half-submerged lava boulders and keep a watch on the offing for me. If she saw a black fin coming in from seaward she was to shriek at me.

While she was climbing to her outlook perch I swam out and began to gather up the flotsam. Everything there was, except the ax, was floating nobly; even the German pistols and the cartridge belts which I had buckled around some of the bedding. Rounding the stuff up, I soon had the wreckage towed ashore and was ready to do the diving act. The first time I went down I misjudged the place. As I have said before, the water of the inlet bay was transparently clear, and I could see quite well at the bottom depth, which, at that place, might have been three fathoms or a little less.

In this particular place there were a number of the lava stones half buried in the white sand of the bottom, and it was while I was groping among these that I came upon a most gruesome find. Wedged between two of the black stones and partly silted over with sand was the wreck of a ship's long boat; wreck, I said, but the boat was not a wreck; so far as I could determine in the few breath-holding seconds at my disposal it was entirely whole, preserved in its original shape; blackened and covered with sea growths, but apparently sound and unbroken.

So much for the boat; but it was its contents that gave the gruesome touch to the discovery. The boat's lading was bones; discolored, ghastly, human bones. As I held myself down by a grip on the gunwale, bare skulls grinned up at me from their sand bed in the boat's bottom; dozens of them; it appeared to me, in that brief, horrified glance.

When I shot to the surface for air, Alison was standing on her rocky perch and waving her arms excitedly. But since she didn't shriek the agreed-upon warning, I filled my lungs and went down again. This time I took things a bit more methodically. The boat was a sizable one, much too large to have belonged to the wrecked schooner lying out upon the reef. And, though I was no expert in marine architecture, I knew

enough about ship's boats to be well aware that it belonged to a period long past; to a time when ships really carried "long boats." And I hadn't been mistaken about the plenitude of its grisly contents. There were fourteen of the grinning skulls—no less!

It was just as I completed the ghastly count that I found our ax standing upright on the little half deck at the boat's stern, just as if it had been carefully placed there, and, recovering it, I swam to the surface. The instant I got my ears out of water they were saluted by a piercing scream. Alison, a weird witchlike little figure in her baggy uniform, was dancing up and down on her lookout rock, making frantic gestures seaward and fairly waking the echoes with her shrieks.

Without stopping to look behind me, I struck out for shore, swimming for dear life and finding myself considerably handicapped by the ax. As I reached wading depth, Alison flung herself into the sea and grabbed me in a wild frenzy of terror, with the result that we both fell down and were well strangled when we finally dragged ourselves out upon the beach.

It was not until I sat up, coughing and choking, that I took a look seaward and saw what Alison had seen. Instead of a single black fin shearing the ground swell which came lazily rolling in through the gap in the reef there were a full dozen of them. And they didn't shear; they dipped and came up again, bobbing and dodging as if the fish to which they were attached were playing some sort of a game. I shouted aloud.

"Sea pigs!—porpoises!" I cried, laughing at her. "Do you admit that you have lived on the California coast and don't know porpoises when you see them?"

She looked up at me, and I could have sworn that there were tears in the violet-blue eyes.

"I—I was scared stiff," she stammered. "All I could see was the black fins—and you were down so long: I thought you'd never come up!" Then, in the sudden reaction, I suppose, she laughed a bit hysterically, ending up with, "What must you think of me!"

With the vision of those suspiciously bright eyes to make me generous, I hastened to say, "Nothing that you wouldn't like to have me think," and then I picked myself up and began to fish the raft lading out

of the water, looking the broken furniture over to see how much of it could be made useful for my lady's chamber, and spreading the salvaged bedding out on the hot sands to dry.

We sat out in the sun in our bathing suits until our clothes were dry, and for some reason, or perhaps no good reason, I did not tell Alison of my discovery at the bottom of the bay. But after supper that evening; after the fire had been covered for the night and I had lighted the one daily pipeful of tobacco to which I had limited myself; I did tell her. She heard me through without comment, and without shudderings. Even as a child, as I well remembered, she had always been singularly free from the terrors which tales of dead folk inspire in most women and children—and in some men.

"You think they couldn't have belonged to that schooner out on the rocks?" she asked, when the tale was told.

"Not a chance. As I have said, the boat is much too large to have been carried on the schooner; too large and too old-fashioned. Besides, it has evidently been in the water a very long time. Those men were skeletons long before that schooner came here."

"You say there were fourteen of them?"

I nodded.

"There ought to be one more," she commented soberly.

"Why so?"

"To make it fit the old buccaneering song:

"Fifteen men on a dead man's chest:
Yo, ho, ho, and a bottle of rum!"

She chanted the old anchor ditty softly, winding up with, "We're not, by any chance, marooned on Stevenson's Treasure Island, are we?"

"No such luck," I laughed. But the mention of the old chantey opened a new and curious vista of speculation. How had it come about that fourteen men had gone to their death in an apparently sound boat in the middle of a sheltered bay? What terrific fate had overtaken them so suddenly that not one of them had even had time to get out of the boat? Violence seemed to be the only reasonable answer to that query. But why the violence?—and by whom was it offered?

Alison, sitting with her back to the cliff and her fingers locked over her knees, turned to me.

"Have you guessed who they were?" she asked.

"Never in this world."

"I *know*," she asseverated.

"Who were they?"

"Pirates."

"If we had been longer acquainted I might say that you seem to have pirates on the brain," I grinned.

"They *were* pirates; and that is a drawing of their ship that we found scratched upon the old stone pillar in the woods," she insisted gravely.

"How are you going to prove it?"

"I don't know—yet. But I shall prove it, if we are not rescued too soon; I'm sure I shall."

I smiled at this persistent conceit of hers, that our island had once been a refuge for sea rovers. But I had nothing to offer in rebuttal. Not that it made any difference to us whether she were right or wrong. If old Blackbeard himself had once owned the island, it wouldn't have made our chances of escape from it one whit the brighter.

Being thus set to thinking about those same chances, I proposed that we walk around on the beach to see if our southern beacon was still burning. She agreed, and we made the long circuit together, not in sober silence, as we had made it the first time, but talking over the adventures of the day and their grotesque irreligion to things that might be expected to happen in the twentieth century.

"It all seems like a dream to me," Alison confided. "It isn't reasonable, you know. There are no mystery ships nowadays—or pirates—or dead men's bones filling a sunken boat. All these things belong to the age of romance, and we've outlived that, haven't we?"

"I should have said we had."

Silence while we were covering another hundred yards of the hard, white beach walk. Then: "There is one thing very real and undreamlike about it—for me. My family—my father and mother: they've been cabled or wirelessly long before this. It's heart-breaking; when I'm here alive and well and they're mourning me as dead. If it wasn't for that——"

She stopped and I thought to help her along.

"Well, if it wasn't for that?" I prompted.

"It's silly, I suppose," she went on; "but

if I didn't have to think of the people at home, I believe I could—well, almost enjoy this. All my life I've wished that something could happen to me—out of the ordinary, you know. Modern life is terribly humdrum, don't you think? The same things over and over again, every day. And this is at least different."

"Rather," I laughed; "different and dreamish, as you have suggested—with a bit of nightmare thrown in now and then for good measure. Never mind. You remember the old saying: This world, and another, and then come the fireworks. And there are our fireworks up on the point—and they're still burning."

Climbing the southern promontory to add fresh fuel to our beacon, we retraced our steps and renewed the signal fire on top of our own cliff. It was after we had regained our camping spot at the foot of the cliff, and I had relighted my pipe, which I had purposely allowed to go out so that I might have two smokes out of the one filling, that Alison bade me good night and started across to the hut I had built for her under the palms. But before she had taken a dozen steps she came back to stand before me.

"I wouldn't have you go to bed thinking that I don't know that once more you have saved my life at the risk of your own," she said, as one discharging a necessary duty.

"Nothing of the sort," I denied.

"Yes, but you did. Another man might have thought of himself first. When you pushed me from the raft I was falling the other way—toward the shark. And because you pushed me, you fell that way yourself. I—I'm not ungrateful."

"Well, what else am I here for?" I growled. I had to be gruff with her if I meant to keep hold of myself.

"I j-just wanted you to know," she stammered; and with that he turned and almost ran to vanish in the tree-shadowed hut.

For some little time after she disappeared I sat with my back to the cliff, coaxing the final whiff out of the relighted pipe dottle. It was then that that half-tearful question of hers, "Do you want to break my heart a second time?" came back to get itself properly docketed and filed. What had she meant by "a second time?" Had there been another and preceding time of mortal stress? Or was the phrase only a natural exuberance of excited protest? I accepted the latter explanation because I had to. To admit the

other was to take the first step in the way that led to madness.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STORM.

The next day, four days before Christmas, dawned portentous. In place of the bright sunshine and light breezes we had been having, the sky was overcast and leaden, and there was a suffocating dead heat in the air to make the drawing of every breath an effort.

I had slept in the rock niche which had been Alison's cubicle, and it was the sullen pounding of the surf on the outer reef that awakened me. There was a new note in the thunder and crash of the waves, and when I looked out across the little bay I could fancy that the hulk of the mysterious schooner was heaving to the increased swell, though, of course, it wasn't.

Hastening around to the other face of the cliff, I found Alison already up and out and busying herself in housewifely fashion getting breakfast. This was a simple matter. We still had some of the fruit gathered from the abandoned plantation, and this, with a few yams baked in the hot ashes, made the morning meal.

"I hope you rested well," said Alison, and for a moment I feared she was going to relapse again into the formal distances.

"Don't!" I begged.

"Don't what?"

"Don't make me feel as if we were back in civilization and I had called upon you at the wrong time of day. It's much too hot for the conventions."

"The idea!" she said; and then: "What is the weather trying to do to us this morning?"

I shook my head. "I'm afraid we are in for a bad day. While it isn't the season for hard storms in this latitude, as I understand it, we seem to be due to have an exception handed us. If we had a barometer I fancy it would be telling us all sorts of incendiary things just now."

"Is there anything we can do to get ready for it?" she asked.

"I had hoped to get another hut built," I told her. "There may be time, yet."

"I'll help," she offered, as comradely as you please, and we set to work at once, though every move made in that stifling, windless air was like trying to do flip-flaps

in the stagnant breath of a furnace. It was along about nine o'clock, after I had chopped down a number of trees and had the floor of the new hut nearly completed, that the wind came; first in hot puffs and later in gusty squalls that sent the scud from the outer reef halfway across the bay. Overhead the leaden sky was changing to dull brass, and the clash and rattle of the palms in the wind was like a Gargantuan gnashing of teeth.

In a very short time it became evident that the hut-building operations would have to be postponed. The uprights we were trying to place for the walls and roof supports were blown down as fast as we stood them up. It was just as well to stop, anyway, for we couldn't have put the grass thatch on in any such weather. As for that, the roof of the hut first built was showing signs of distress, and it seemed doubtful if we could anchor it down well enough to make it stay in place.

While we were working at this, tying poles across the thatch and weighting them with chunks of lava, Alison screamed up to me; screamed because she couldn't otherwise make herself heard above the rattling of the palms: "The fire!—if it rains we'll lose it!"

Like a pair suddenly gone daft we began a frantic search for some hiding place for the vital spark. This, which promised to be the curtain raiser for our greatest calamity, turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Some niche or crevice in the cliff deep enough to escape a downpour of rain was what we needed; and at the very last, when the thunder was crashing and the precursor rain squall was already sweeping down upon us out of the westward blacknesses, we found it; a globular cavern almost at beach level, and within a stone's throw of our house-building clearing in the wood. A great tree fern—which I propped aside to admit us—had masked the entrance so that we had not discovered it in our many passages to and fro; but as for that, the discovery could not have come at a more opportune moment.

Hurry was the word, after that. In frenzied haste we transferred the brands and embers of our cooking fire to the shelter of the cave, racing out afterward to gather up chips and choppings to keep it going. Next we rescued the provisions, what few we had of them; and lastly I made three or four breathless dashes in the rain to strip Alison's hut, which was already showing signs of disintegration, of everything movable.

It was while we were completing these last-moment preparations that the storm broke in all its wrath. I thought I had seen the tropical elements do their worst in the Philippines, but the great typhoon which had brought an immense tidal wave high into the upper reaches of Manila Bay had nothing on the tumult of wind and rain and wave that crashed upon our dot of an island out of a sky that was now invisible in the reek and murk.

When it got fairly in action the rain fell in sheets and torrents, and the wind rose to hurricane velocity. While we looked on from our cave mouth the little fresh-water stream that tumbled into the bay from its mountain ravine took on cloud-burst proportions, roaring and thundering like a miniature Niagara. Fortunately for us, our retreat was under the lee of the cliff, so we got only the eddyings of the blasts, but even so, the sights and sounds were unnerving enough.

It was in this pandemonium of nature let loose that the distance which Alison had tried so stubbornly to maintain finally dissolved; melted and vanished, so to speak. I've made a mess of it if I haven't drawn the dear girl as one courageous to the verge of rashness; a modern, clear-thinking, young woman, with few or none of the mid-Victorian effeminacies. But there be limits, even for the most courageous; and the scene we were looking out upon from our providentially provided shelter was enough to make any woman cling, if there were anything at hand to cling to.

Our hastily built hut was flying away, bit by bit, the thatch anchors we had put on merely serving to delay the ruin and make it piecemeal. Great palms, ship-mast high, were bowing to the earth, and now and again one of them would give way and break with a crash like that of an explosion. Out on the reef huge green billows were rearing themselves mountainlike, the aftermath blotting out and burying the wrecked schooner and hurling itself in flattened surges across the bay and far up on the sands. And the thunder and lightning, crash upon flash, were enough to daze anybody.

"How perfectly awful!" shivered a tremulous little voice at my shoulder. "Is it the end of the world?"

"Oh, no; nothing like that," I comforted. "We'll pull through all right. We won't even get wet unless the wind changes. You mustn't be frightened."

"I'm not ordinarily; you know I'm not. But this is something terrible—it crushes one! O-o-oh!"

A zigzagging flash blinded us for an instant, and there was a deafening clamor and a curious odor, like that of scorched flesh, in the air. For a single horrified heartbeat I was afraid to look around. But we were both unscathed. The bolt had struck a towering palm less than a hundred feet from the cave mouth and the great tree lay in splinters. I thought this might well prove the final straw for Alison's nerve. But from the moment of that narrow escape she began to regain something of her usual poise.

"I'm properly ashamed of myself," she said, after the rain had poured steadily for some minutes beyond the lightning stroke. "I've been letting you furnish all the courage, and that isn't fair. I won't do it any more. How long do you suppose this is likely to last?"

"Heaven knows," I returned. "Measured by its fury it can't hold out very long. We'll hope for the best."

As the event proved, we had to take it out in hoping. For hours on end the gale belled and the rain poured. I spoke of heaven a few lines back, and it certainly seemed as if the windows thereof were propped open to stay that way permanently. By the middle of the afternoon the wind velocity was abating somewhat, but the rain was still falling in torrents that shut out even a sight of the near-by bay.

With the stubborn continuance of the storm I began to worry about our commissary. We had our fire, and the storm couldn't well destroy the yams in the ground. Also, there would probably be some of the breadfruit left after the elements had done their worst. But the deserted plantation where we had been getting the oranges and bananas would doubtless be a total loss.

"Never mind; we could even live on coconuts for a while, if we had to," was Alison's comment, when I spoke of our probable loss. I turned to look at her. Her cheerful fortitude was something wonderful, and it carried me swiftly back to those childhood days of ours when nothing was big enough or bad enough to daunt her.

"What do you see?" she asked, meeting my gaze fairly.

"You remind me of a little girl I once knew. She was always cheerful, and she wasn't afraid of anything on earth."

"But I am," she corrected. "I was horribly scared when the storm first came, and when that tree was struck. But never mind me. What was the name of the little girl who wasn't afraid?"

Again I shook my head.

"Please don't ask me. I have been years trying to forget it."

A silence fell, if you could call it silence when the rain was roaring in mimic thunder—playing an obligato to the jarring crashes of the seas upon the reef. Then:

"Did you succeed?"

"Not wholly. She has done better."

"You mean she has forgotten you?"

"Yes."

Another silence, and then a firm little hand came across the distances—the real interval as well as the figurative—and laid itself in mine.

"I—I can't keep it up any longer, Hugh," she said; and now it was my turn to brace.

"But you must keep it up!" I exclaimed, having a most unnerving flash-light picture of what this admission of hers might mean to both of us. "It's a lot better that way, you know. Sooner or later we shall both be rescued, and then things will have to go on as they were before."

"They can never be the same as they were before," she denied. "You might say we have died and come to life again. And for all we know we may be here for years. Can't we go back to the time when I was the little girl unafraid?"

I doubted it; doubted it like fury; but it was not for me to build barriers when she was trying to pull them down. So we talked, of the old times when we were kiddies together: "Do you remember this?" and "Do you remember that other time?" and so on; you know what I mean. And it was heart-warming; the more so because we both ignored, as by tacit consent, any reference to the late past; I mean to the Pinckney Barrett affair.

After a time she made me tell her of my war-time experiences in France—which were humdrum enough, the Lord knows—and even joshed me a bit about the French-girl story, affecting to believe that there must have been some foundation of fact for it, and laughing at me when I insisted that it was the purest invention on the part of whoever told it.

"You needn't deny it as if it were a crime," she said, still laughing. And then:

"I didn't want to believe it, you know. It didn't seem quite in character. As a boy, when you really wanted anything you reached out and took it; you wouldn't wait a single minute. I couldn't quite visualize you as being in love with a girl over there and coming off to leave her behind."

"You've said it," I grinned. "I'm a poor waiter."

She nodded. "I think I've always liked you the better for that, Hugh," A pause, and then: "It's all right between us, now?"

"Quite right."

"And you won't hold it against me because I acted like a pig?"

I might have told her that her attitude toward me had been entirely justifiable; that I had had no manner of right to butt in on her love affair with my heedless gossip to Lauderdale. But since she had thus far kept studiously away from the Pinckney Barrett involvement, I did the same, merely laughing her plea aside and saying that I was not familiar enough with pigs to know how they acted. From that she fell to joking me about the "poor rich girl," asking me if she were anybody she knew.

"No," said I; "I don't think you've ever met her."

"Has she—did she marry somebody else?"

"No, not yet."

"But she is going to?"

"I think so."

Her next question set me dodging crazily among the evasions.

"Is he worthy of her?"

"How should I know?" I blurted out. Then: "No man is really worthy of the love of a good woman. In the nature of things he can't be."

She looked out of the cave mouth at the pouring rain and her eyes grew thoughtful.

"I wonder if you mean that," she said.

"I do, most assuredly. A man always demands more than he can give, and there are reasons. Though he may not admit it even to himself, his one determining motive lies in the fact that the woman he will marry will become the mother of his children."

"Ah!" she said. "And has the father no responsibilities?"

"Surely; but some men are a bit blind on that side."

"Women are blind, too," she returned gravely. "They are taught to be from their cradles. And it isn't right."

"Of course it isn't," I agreed. "But what

would you? You can't change human nature."

"Man human nature, you mean?"

"Well—yes; if you want to put it that way."

"Still, there are the children," she murmured. "If the father remembers them, subconsciously or otherwise, how much should the mother forget?"

"Do you mean how much should she condone in the man she is to marry?"

"Something like that—yes."

Of course, her object was perfectly plain to me. She was trying to determine how much she ought to be able to forgive Pinckney Barrett. And I was the last man on earth to be able to tell her that.

"That depends upon the woman's own standards," was the way I slipped aside. "There are all kinds of women."

"But a—*a* reasonably good woman," she persisted; "how much ought she to condone? Surely the line must be drawn somewhere—for the father of her children."

To tell the blank truth, I was just about ready to find some excuse for ducking out into the rain. The next thing I knew she'd be asking me to repeat what I had told Bob Lauderdale, and that I had firmly resolved never to do. Happily, great nature butted in with a diversion. As suddenly as it had begun, the rain stopped and the gale blew itself out. Even as we looked, the setting sun was breaking through the clouds to show us what had happened in the all-day battle of the elements.

What we saw when we stepped abroad was disheartening enough, Heaven knows! The island wood looked as if it had been beaten with a giant's club, and the head of the little bay was half filled with debris that had been washed down by the mountain stream. Worse than that, our hut was not only torn to pieces and demolished; even the ruins of it were buried under the stream wash.

But the greatest surprise was in the bay. Though the wind had gone down the seas hadn't. They were still breaking thunderously over the outer reef to surge in scarcely diminished fury all across to our beach. But what made us gape and stare was the sight of the wrecked schooner now lying high and dry, as you might say, in the shallows, within a few fathoms of the spot where we had been kindling our stone-ringed cooking fire on the beach. Some huge breaker, the father of them all, had lifted it clear of its

resting place on the inner reef and hurled it ashore.

And even that wasn't all. Outside of the main reef, and apparently heading for the deserted-village bay, was a storm-torn ship; a schooner with its topmasts both gone, its head sails in tatters, and its foremast, which carried a single close-reefed strip of canvas, badly sprung. Yet it was a ship with men on it. The Robinson Crusoe idyl was ended.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ILL WIND.

I drew a long breath.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," I quoted; not too jubilantly, because I knew that a fellow named Hugh MacLaren was due to suffer loss at a moment when his stock had begun to look up a bit. "Shall we chase over to the other bay and be ready to meet them when they send a boat ashore?"

Naturally, you'd say she would have been frantically eager to do that very thing—any poor castaway would. But, oddly enough, she didn't seem at all eager.

"Why—yes; if that is what you think we ought to do," she yielded half reluctantly. "But—but wouldn't it be better to try to find out who and what they are first?"

"It will be a trading schooner, most likely, blown out of its course by the storm," I said. "They're probably putting in here to repair damages. We shan't find any *Mindoro* accommodations on her, but beggars mustn't be choosers."

Still she hung back.

"It makes me feel all sort of shivery-shuddery, Hugh," she confided; "just the sight of that broken-winged ship. It's childish, I know; but I can't help it."

"But think," I urged. "No matter who they are, if we miss this chance the Lord only knows when we'll get another!"

"Yes, I know. But still we might keep out of their way until we see."

"All right," I agreed; "we'll go across to the other bay and keep out of sight while we give them the once over. We can make it before dark if we hurry."

Accordingly, we set out, taking the short cut both to save time and to keep out of sight. As you'd imagine, we got beautifully bedraggled. What with dodging the storm wrack and climbing over and under fallen trees it was coming on to dusk when we approached the site of the ruined village. Out

a hundred yards or so from the beach the disabled schooner had anchored. On the bay beach a whaleboat was drawn up out of the slash of the swell, and a little way from it a number of men were gathered around a small fire. I wondered how they had found anything dry enough to burn after the day of torrentings.

With a single exception the men were small and half naked; Orientals—either Chinese or Malays. Two of them were cooking at the fire over which an iron pot was hanging from a rude gallows frame. Others were smoking; and the one white man, on whom the firelight fell like the glow from a hand-shielded candle, was sitting on the sand with a paper of some kind spread upon his knees. While I looked, Alison's hand crept within my arm and there was shrinking aversion in her clutch.

"That awful face!" she breathed; "look at it!"

I knew she meant the face of the sitting white man. It wasn't a pretty face; on the contrary, it might have been called a mighty villainous one. It was seamed and scarred, with the lower half of it covered with a growth of reddish beard that was merely the beard of neglect; a month-old unshaved stubble. To go with the beard there were small, piglike eyes, also reddish, though that may have been only the reflection of the firelight.

The man's body and limbs bore out the promise of the hard-bitted face; though he was sitting it was apparent that he was a giant in size; his arms were long and his hands were as hairy as a gorilla's paws. Taking him as a whole, there was something almost awesomely simian about him. One good look at him made the Darwinian theory seem easily credible. Clamped between his teeth he held a sailor's black cutty pipe, and he was smoking furiously as he studied the paper or parchment, or whatever it was, that lay on his hunched-up knees; studying it and scowling at it.

It was a reasonable assumption that this scowling pipe smoker was the master of the strange schooner; and the guess was confirmed when he looked up and ripped out something at the two cooks. We couldn't distinguish the words, but from the way in which the two men cringed it was easy to surmise that he was cursing them. One of them caught hastily at the stew pot to lift it from its hook and, in so doing, he stum-

bled over the sitting man's foot; stumbled and fell, and in falling splashed some of the hot-pot contents upon the curser.

What followed was simply horrifying in its suddenness and crass brutality. With a yell the scalded giant leaped to his feet, and in his attempt to kick the fallen stumbler the spread paper fluttered toward the fire. Half a dozen yellow hands grabbed for it to save it, but they were not quick enough. Before it could be snatched up there was a momentary burst of flame, and it was gone.

At that, as deliberately as if he were reaching for his tobacco pouch, the red-bearded ruffian pulled a pistol from his belt. The poor, half-stripped devil, whose unlucky stumble had started the trouble, was trying to get up; was already upon his knees. Calmly, almost dispassionately, as it seemed to us, the big man clapped the pistol to the kneeling one's head and fired.

I suppose it may say itself that with the crash of the brutal murderer's pistol we fled, racing back through the wood and neither of us speaking until we had gained the summit of the land ridge separating the two bays.

"Heavens and earth, Allie!" I gasped, as we paused to take breath, "I shall never doubt one of your hunches again! I thought I saw some horrible things in France, but there was nothing to equal that fiend!"

"I knew it!—I just felt it!" she fluttered. Then: "Where shall we go?—what shall we do?"

I was already trying to answer that question for myself. Naturally, all thoughts of escape from the island by means of this bloody skipper's vessel had vanished at the flash and crash of the pistol. As I saw it, our safety lay in keeping so well out of sight that these newcomers wouldn't know we were on the island, and I told Alison so as we toiled on in the darkness through the storm-wrecked wood.

"But surely they'll find out!" she exclaimed. "Those freshly cut down trees will betray us, if nothing else does!"

I had thought of that, too. The cut trees—the storm had washed away all other traces—would prove that there had been recent inhabitants, to be sure; but if the inhabitants themselves didn't appear, the inference would be that they had found some means of getting off the island.

"Couldn't we hide in the cave?" Alison queried.

"We can for to-night, at least," I answered, and we went on.

Reaching our bay head and the cave at last, we blew up the fire and ate a little, though neither of us had much appetite. Presently we fell to talking in hushed whispers, as if the red-bearded murderer, a mile away, might overhear us if we spoke aloud, about this new lapping of mystery upon our island shores. What sort of trading captain could he be who would shoot down one of his crew for an accident for which the outsprawled foot was as much to blame as the poor wretch's clumsiness? And the paper that had burned—what could that have been?

"You think they are Chinese?" Alison asked, meaning the crew.

"I couldn't be certain. They may be Malays. Many of the island-to-island schooners are manned that way—with Orientals. They are cheaper than white men."

"But the paper," she said, going back to the second act in the grim tragedy: "it was the burning of the paper that made the brute so furious. I can't imagine what it could have been, can you?"

"Not I," I returned; "and most likely we'll never know." Then: "It's horrible to have your hopes of escape snashed this way, Allie., I can think of only one thing to do. I'll take one of these Lugers, trot over yonder and shoot that brute, and captain the schooner myself. I fancy those chinks or Malays, or whatever they are, wouldn't object much to a change of masters."

"Horrors! As if I'd let you do any such cold-blooded thing as that!" she shuddered. "No, indeed, Hugh; not if we should have to stay here for the remainder of our lives."

There was that way to madness opening up before me again. A voice was whispering in my ear, "She doesn't care; she doesn't love Pinckney Barrett; she'd be willing to stay here with you. You fool—can't you see that is what she means?" Once more I had to throttle the rising passion.

"You are to go to bed and try to get some sleep," I said shortly. "We've talked too long as it is."

"But you," she put in; "what are you going to do?"

"I'm going outside to keep watch; to stand guard and to think. We've got to know exactly what we are going to do before daylight comes again. I'll call you if anything happens. Good night!"

It was with the best intentions in the world that I sat down under the tree fern at the cave's mouth and tried to sketch out some plan of concealment that would be less childish than staying in the cave while the schooner's people remained on the island. The saving suggestion wouldn't come, but something else did. The diminished plashing of our fresh-water stream and the rhythmic pounding of the surf on the reef drummed soothingly upon my ears. In some confused fashion I realized that I had had a pretty strenuous day; and after that I didn't realize anything until I awoke with a start to find the morning star blazing in the east; sure precursor of a rapidly approaching dawn.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN DEAD MEN'S BAY.

With the need for quick action jabbing me like the prick of a bayonet point I sprang up and tried to collect my sleep-scattered wits. What should we do? Should we hide in the cave and take a chance of being trapped there? Or ought we to run for it while the running was good?

You'll say there was no biting compulsion either way; that if the schooner people did happen to run across us, there was no reason to suppose that we'd be taken off the island against our will. That might have been the case if we had been two men instead of a man and a woman. But you can bet your last simoleon I wasn't going to give that gorilla-handed brute of a skipper a sight of Alison if I could help it.

Scrapping around for some suggestion of a better hiding place, the wrecked mystery ship, a dim shape lying out in the shallows where the storm had driven it, offered itself as a possible refuge. Coming upon the chopped trees as evidence of the recent occupation of the islet, Redbeard might make a search for us. But would it occur to him to extend the search to a dismantled and weather-beaten wreck grounded a couple of hundred yards or so from the beach?

A moment later I had called Alison and told her my notion.

"You think they won't go out to the wreck?" she asked somewhat dubiously.

"I'd say the chances are against it. Anyway, they'd have to bring their boat around from the other bay to do it, and that would give us time enough to get ashore again."

"All right; then let us do it quickly," she urged. "It will be daylight almost before we know it."

The make-ready for the short flight took but little time. Banking the fire in the cave, in the hope that it might keep against our return, I hastily reconstructed our raft. Next I sunk the salt evaporator and the other two sheets of iron in the shallow water of the bay and dug sand over them. Lastly, after we had put our small stock of provisions on the raft and were embarked, I splashed water over our footprints in the sand until they were completely obliterated.

The sun was not more than a couple of diameters above the horizon when I poled the raft around to the seaward side of the wreck where it would be out of sight from any possible viewpoint on shore, climbed over the broken rail of the mystery ship—which now stood upon nearly an even keel—and helped Alison aboard. From the height of the deck we could see the masts and hull of the vessel in the other bay, but the intervening point hid the landing place at the head of the bay.

On the mystery ship the storm had wrought some changes, as it was bound to. The armament hold had been breached and was awash, and the knocking about had dismounted the cannon, which was now lying half submerged in the bottom of the hold. Up forward the crew's quarters had been partly drained and Daddy-long-arms was gone. Peering down through the fore hatch we could look into the cook's galley. There were provisions there; canned stuff scattered about in the shallow water; and in the racks cooking utensils.

"If, or, rather, when, we get back on the Crusoe job, the housekeeping part of it is going to be a lot easier," I remarked, pointing into the dim recesses of the galley. But all Alison said was "Oh, goodness, Hugh! If that horrible ship would only go away!"

In the cabin we found ourselves in luck. The floor in this part of the ship stood high in the hull, and though, of course, everything had been freshly drenched and the hold beneath must have been full of water, we didn't have to wade. I wondered if there were any water in the steel strong-room amidships, and then and there made a renewed resolve to find some way of entering it—if we shouldn't have to dodge and run again before I could get around to it.

After I had looked carefully to the moor-

ings of the raft I handed up the cold baked yams and fruit and we carried them to the cabin and made our frugal breakfast. That done, we sat on the companion steps, where we could see without being seen, to wait for developments. There was nothing stirring on the distant vessel, so far as we could determine, but smoke rising above the trees on the point of land told us that the party from the schooner was still on the island.

An hour passed and nothing happened. By this time the calmer second thought was beginning to elbow its way to the front to point out the unlikelihood that our presence on the island would be discovered. The disabled vessel had doubtless put in only to refit—or so we concluded—in which case there was no reason why her people should go wandering all over the place.

Anyway, calling it a waste of time for two pairs of eyes to be doing what one pair might do equally well, I told Alison that my curiosity about the strong box was digging me again, saying that if she'd stay at the lookout post, I'd go and have another try at solving the mystery. She gave me leave, and I went below to make another examination of the blind bulkhead.

As before, the closest scrutiny gave no hint of an entrance from the cabin. The wrenching and twisting of the storm had apparently made no impression upon this part of the hull, the steel shell strengthening it so that it had withstood the buffetings. So the bulkhead remained as we had left it on the occasion of our former visit; hacked and scarred as to its woodwork by my choppings with the ax, but otherwise unchanged.

I never will know how I came to think of pushing the search to the little cubicle sleeping berths on either side—or why I didn't think of it before. Two of them had for their forward partitions this same cabin bulkhead. Confident that I was at last about to fathom the mystery of how the man or men who had fastened the companion slide on the inside had made their escape from the wreck, I dived into the little room on the port side. Here there was only a blank wall, and I crossed quickly to the other, the one in which we had found the two pistols and the overalls.

Instantly I wondered how we could have been so blind. At the back of the forward berth there was a square door flush with the bulkheading; a door with a lock on it. As I was reaching for the ax to break the

fastening, I heard Alison calling and ran to answer.

"They are coming!" she exclaimed, pointing to four figures rounding the promontory on the beach path; and, crouching side by side in our hiding place, we watched them.

As the four drew nearer we were able to sort them out. The biggest of them was the stubbie-bearded murderer, and the three tailing along behind were coolie sailors; unmistakable Chinamen, now that we saw them in daylight. The white man carried a gun on his shoulder; but until they came closer we could not identify the weapons carried by the three others. As the distance shortened, however, we saw that the coolies' shoulder loads were implements instead of weapons; one of the sailors was carrying a pick and his two companions had spades.

This was bewildering enough, but there was more to follow. When the little procession reached the head of our bay the white man halted it, stood his gun against a tree, and took from a ditty bag slung over his shoulder an instrument of some sort; a thing that looked as if it might be a ship's sextant for determining the altitude of the sun. With this he presently seemed to be taking bearings; of the cliff, of the distant point around which he had just come, of the opening in the outer reef.

Satisfied at length, he returned the instrument to its bag and turned to face landward. At this, he seemed to notice, for the first time, our chopped-down trees and their stumps. These evidently gave him pause. After a careful examination of the stumps, as if to determine how recently the trees had been cut, he gave his men an order that made them drop their tools and scatter along the beach and in the edges of the wood. They were looking for us; or, at least, for some further traces of us.

I'll own up frankly that I was mighty nervous. True, the storm of the previous day messed things up so that nobody could tell just what the chopped logs half buried in the flood wash from the stream had been intended for; but there were other things to worry about. In the haste of leaving, had I been careful enough to efface all of our tracks in the sand? A single footprint would betray us, in as much as a child would reason that it must have been made since the storm.

Then, too, there was the shallow cave. If they should discover that, they would in-

evitably find the banked fire inside of it; and finding the fire they would know that somebody had covered it within a few hours at the furthest.

"Now is the time to pray hard that they won't discover our cave!" I whispered to Alison. "The fire which we hadn't the courage to put out will be a dead give-away. I hadn't thought of that."

"See!" she whispered back. "That awful man is standing right in front of it now! If he should smell the smoke——"

It was perfectly plain that he *was* smelling it. He had thrown up his head as one sniffing the air. Then he called to one of his slaves and the Chinaman dropped upon all fours and crept nosing around under the ferns and pandanu plants. But he didn't stick his head into the one fern that would have betrayed us.

They gave it up at last and the skipper called his men in. When they came he pointed to the wreck, and all four of them stood staring out at us, or, rather, I should say, at our hiding place, for we were well hidden in the companionway and using the cracks in the boxing for peepholes. It was the crucial moment, and we both felt it to be so.

"He is trying to decide whether or not it is worth while to go back and get his boat," Alison breathed in my ear; and when the slave-driving skipper finally cuffed his men into line and started back around the beach we knew what the decision had been.

"That settles it," I announced. "Just the same, we're twice lucky: he isn't leaving anybody to watch us; and after he gets back to his camp it's going to take some little time to pull that whaleboat around the point and the outer reef and into our bay. And now for *my* news—I've found the way into the strong box—found it just as you called me."

"Did you go in?" she asked.

"No, I hadn't time. There is a door in one of the cubby-hole staterooms—back of the berth where we found the pistols. Let's go and have a look while we can; we don't need to run away until we see the boat leaving the other bay."

On tenterhooks of excitement, because we knew our time was strictly limited, we ducked below. With the ax I smashed the fastening of the little door. What we saw at first beyond the opening was merely a black cavern with the shadowy column of

the mainmast butt apparently supporting its roof. But after we had crept in and our eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, what we saw added another layer to the thick blanketing of mystery.

The interior of the armored box was fitted up as a room, and, as nearly as we could judge, regardless of expense. The walls were wood paneled and there were thick-piled rugs on the floor. Built to encircle the mast column was a table, with its serving pivot chair bolted to the floor; and on the table was mounted a smashed instrument of some kind—I couldn't tell what it was in the dark. Groping further, my hands came in contact with a familiar object hanging by a strap from a hook on the mast butt. It was a field glass in its moldy leather case, and I lost no time in appropriating it.

Knowing that there must be some means of egress from the luxurious little den on the main-hold side, I began to search for it. It was easily found from the inside; another square door opening inward, and also locked. Again the ax came in play, and with the breaking of the lock a flood of light came in from the open main hatch above. Then we saw all the things we couldn't see before.

"What is it?" Alison asked, pointing to the smashed mechanism on the table.

I examined it curiously. My hobby, as a schoolboy and in college, had been telegraphy of the various sorts, and like many other American boys, I had owned an amateur wireless set. But the wrecked instrument was not a wireless installation. It was a siphon recorder or receiving set, such as is used in submarine telegraphy. And it wasn't the knocking about of the vessel that had smashed it. It had been deliberately destroyed as by a blow from a hammer. And the hammer that had been used was lying underfoot on the floor.

I told Alison what the instrument was, and now the ill-fitting parts of the mystery began to come together, hypothetically, at least; the German cannon, Mausers, and pistols; the wreck on the inner reef which had been so carefully and artistically made to look like the real thing so that no passing ship would be likely to turn aside to investigate it; the casing of the operating room in steel so that the knocking about wouldn't affect it; the taut, black, under-water rope thing which I had mistaken for an anchor cable, and which was really the submarine wire cut-in.

"War-time wire tappers," I said. "This whole contrivance was a spying plant. Some important cable line must run near this island, and they picked it up and tapped it so that they could 'listen in.'"

"But what good would it do them when they were marooned away out here?" Alison demanded.

"You may be sure they had some way of passing on the information they might pick up," I assured her. "Perhaps they had a motor launch to ply between this and some other island of the group. That's the idea! That's what that tank of gasoline in the ship's run was for; a fuel supply in case the launch should run short at this end of things!"

Pursuing the search a bit farther, we found where the cable came into the iron room, through a pipe conduit running forward along the inner skin of the ship. Also, we found out why we hadn't discovered the egress door in our former search; it opened in the armament hold in one of the gun lockers with a false back. Likewise, we found a curious and most ingenious contrivance for ventilating the iron-clad box when both doors were closed.

It was easy to understand why all these elaborate precautions had been taken. If some Yankee-minded ship captain, more curious than the rest, had taken the trouble to send a boat into the bay to examine the wreck perched upon the reef, the wire tapper concealed in the armored room stood at least an even chance of going undiscovered. Possibly he had been discovered, at the end of the ends—which was the reason why he had smashed his instrument.

I think it occurred to both of us at the same instant that we had been using up a lot of time fitting the mystery blocks together into a comprehensible whole. For that matter, I guess we had both lost sight, for the time being, of the menace that might be threatening us from the bay beyond the point of land. "Horrors! We're forgetting that wretched murderer!" Alison gasped; and thereupon we made a hurried bolt for the cabin and the companion steps.

One glance to the eastward was all that was needed. The disabled schooner's whaleboat, well manned, was already far out toward the tip of the point of land separating the two bays, and in a few minutes more it would be rounding it.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MOUNTAIN SHUDDERS.

With a boatload of yellow heathens, captained by a white man who had shown himself worse than a heathen, on its way to the entrance to our bay, it was up to us to disappear, and to be mighty swift about it. Dropping over the schooner's rail, I handed the raft around to the port side so that the stranded hulk might hide it from seaward, and hastily got Alison aboard.

Paddling and poling like mad we were soon in the shallows; but, when I would have jumped ashore, it came to me with a jolt like a fist blow, that the raft and our footprints on the beach would betray us if the intruders should come ashore from the wreck. With no moment to spare, I began to urge the clumsy float along in a course parallel to the beach, hoping to be able to round the westward cliff point before the whaleboat should come in sight beyond the reef.

Seeing quickly that the poling process was going to be too slow, I went overboard to wade and push the raft, telling Alison to fend off with the paddle so we shouldn't go aground; and so pushing and fending we got the telltale thing around the cliff point and out of sight from the bay entrance just about half a heartbeat before the flash of oars to seaward told us that the whaleboat was heading in for the passage through the reef.

Even so, we were not yet safe. In some way the raft had to be disposed of. With more time I might have knocked it to pieces and scattered the logs to make them appear to be storm drift. But in that case the freshly cut ends would have fitted themselves too accurately to the stumps at the bay head. So I kept on wading and pushing farther and farther around toward the southern side of the islet; until at last, finding a place where an eddy from a tide rip promised to carry the thing out to sea, I got Alison off and gave it a shove; and was much relieved when it kept on going and bade fair to disappear.

Hampered only with the ax, the salvaged binoculars, and the eatables, which had now unwinded to a few of the baked yams which I could carry in my pockets, we struck inland, covering our tracks where we crossed the beach. At this end of the island the ascent of the mountain was pretty steep, so

we bore off to the left, working our way in a series of climbing zigzags toward the top of the beacon cliff overlooking the bay, intent upon keeping the search party under observation, if we could manage it in any way.

After a rather breathless scramble we reached our spying place; a point on the cliff whence we could look down upon the bay. The whaleboat had come in and was hooked up to the stranded wreck, and its crew were swarming over the vessel, peering into the open hatchways and dodging up and down the companion steps.

Focusing the stolen field glass upon the swarmers, I tried to figure out the probabilities—our probabilities. As nearly as could be judged from the activities of the newcomers, they were just about as badly puzzled as we had been. Of course they were finding plenty of evidences that the wreck had been lately visited; the fresh ax choppings proved that much. But the one thing we were hoping they wouldn't find out was that we had just left the schooner.

After a hasty look I handed the glass to Alison. In a moment or two she said excitedly, "They're robbing us, Hughie; taking the boxes and things out of the hold—and some of the guns. Now they're going down into that other place—the kitchen place—oh, dear me! they're taking our cooking things—and the canned provisions! Isn't that the meanest, *meanest* thing that ever was?"

Mean or otherwise, it was the lamentable fact; and a bit later, when the invaders tumbled into their boat and pulled away for the opening through the reef, their craft was heavy with loot. I chuckled when I remembered how utterly useless the rusty Mausers would be. And, unless they happened to have guns of the same caliber, the boxes of ammunition wouldn't do them any good.

We stayed hidden on the cliff summit until we had seen the loaded whaleboat make its slow roundabout from one bay to the other, following its course with the excellent glass. It paused at the side of the strange schooner; after a transfer of the loot had been effected, the boat, with four men in it, pulled to the landing place at the site of the deserted village.

At the disembarking of the four we lost sight of them, the wood hiding them.

"Have they given us up, do you think?" Alison asked.

"It looks that way," I hazarded, but the hope was father to the thought. Then: "I don't see any good reason why they should be overcurious about us. They know there have been castaways on the island within a comparatively recent time, but that is all they do know. Since they haven't been able to find anybody, the obvious conclusion would be that the castaways found some means of escape."

"You're not forgetting that that awful man might have smelled the smoke of our fire?" she put in.

"He may have thought he did; but he didn't find the fire."

"N-no," she admitted; then her nimble mind skipped to a matter that I had completely forgotten. "What was he doing with that thing he took from the bag and was sighting with?"

"By Jove!—that's so!" I exclaimed. "You'd say he was taking the bearings of our bay. I wonder what for?"

For quite some little time she was silent. Then she said: "I'm trying to piece things together, Hugh. I shan't tell you what the things are, because you'd laugh at me. But I do wish we could know what that dreadful man is doing and is going to do."

I was just about to say that I thought we were now safe to go back to the cave, but that wish of hers, about keeping cases on the man-killing skipper, started me off in another direction.

"We might climb to the top of the mountain," I suggested. "From there we can see all over the island. And now that we have the binoculars——"

"Let's do it!" she agreed quickly; so we set out for the climb.

A half hour's stiff work through the storm-torn forest and up the steep slopes brought us to the barren lava cone, and a short scramble up the final acclivity took us to the lip of the crater bowl. It was with a shock of awed astonishment that we noted the remarkable changes that had taken place in the great circular pit since the time when we had made the fire-stealing expedition. The surface of the lava lake had risen many feet, the vapor-blowing fissures which had then been confined to a comparatively small area on one side had now opened in many places, and in some of them boiling springs of molten lava were bubbling.

Two or three times, in the ascent of the mountain. I had experienced queer little

attacks of vertigo, which I had attributed to the increasing altitude. But now, while we were looking down into the changed crater, the solid cliff upon which we were standing shuddered under our feet.

"Heavens!" I gasped, grabbing Alison to draw her away from the brink of the chasm.

"Goodness me! Wh-what was it?" she stammered.

"Being California-born you ought to recognize it, even this far from home," I told her. "It was a miniature earthquake. I wonder if our volcano is getting ready to give us a surprise?"

She turned a bit pale under that healthy sunburn the Crusoe life was giving her. Since she had lived most of her life in California, little earth shakes had no special terrors for her. But volcanic eruptions were something else.

"It's no use, Hughie," she quavered, making one more brave attempt to give the Robinson Crusoe adventure a humorous twist, "we didn't time our casting away right. Too many things are happening all at once. I can't keep up with them."

Turning our backs upon the threatening crater we descended to a place upon the eastern slope which commanded a view of the greater part of the island, and sat down. I had scarcely gotten the glass focused before I made out four figures once more coming along the beach from the round bay to our bay—Dead Men's Bay, as we had named it. The glass enabled me to identify the beach tramps as three smallish men and one big one, and the inference was plain that the strange vessel's skipper was on his way to finish whatever it was he had begun when the sight of our chopped-down trees had turned him aside.

Using the glass in turn, we saw the four reach the bay head. There, as nearly as we could make out, some sort of an instrument was set up on a tripod, and for an hour or longer the big man busied himself with taking sights in various directions.

If he had been troubled earlier in the day about the possible presence of other people on the island, he was no longer letting such extraneous matters divert him. In the surveying job he was keeping first one and then another of his half-naked helpers chasing to different points on the bay shore with the sighting staff; and once he made one of them swim out to the reef to hold the staff on the outer barrier—an errand which

at first seemed likely to cost the man his life, inasmuch as the suri knocked him down half a dozen times before he could gain a footing on the rocks.

Over in the round bay we could see the schooner, the refitting of which was now going on briskly. With the glass we could pick out the men straightening the sprung mast and bending new canvas. But the broken fore-topmast had not been replaced, probably because they had no spare spars on board.

"Are you making any more guesses?" Alison inquired naïvely, after we had passed the field glass back and forth a number of times.

Once more the mountain was shuddering under us, but I managed to ignore the seismic interruption.

"My one best guess is that we're dreaming again. Can you better it?"

"Not without being 'romantic,' as you call it."

"Turn it loose," I bantered. "I'm ripe for anything, now."

"Well, supposing this *was* once a pirates' island——"

I grinned.

"Are you working around to that again? All right; we'll suppose it, if you like."

"And suppose there should be a buried treasure somewhere on it."

"That is the customary supposition. Go on!"

"And suppose that dreadful man has got trace of it somehow or other, or thinks he has, and has come to try to find it."

Naturally, I had to laugh at this highly imaginary hypothesis. But the little girl stuck to her guns and would not let me laugh her down.

"Why is it so ridiculous? Haven't there *been* buried treasures? And haven't they been hunted for, time and again, by all sorts of people? Listen: when we first saw that terrible man, last evening, he was studying a paper: then the paper fell into the fire and was burned up. Next, we see him come to our bay with men and shovels, as if he were going to dig for something."

Still, manlike, I refused to be convinced.

"We're not living in the age of miracles—or of romance," I insisted. "For some purpose of his own, which does not yet appear, this barbarian is making a survey of our bay. I've no more idea than the man in the moon what he's doing it for, but it's a hundred-to-

one shot that he isn't hunting for buried treasure. This is the twentieth century—not the eighteenth."

"Yes; surveying the bay," she said, and again her eyes were shining the way they had two days before on her return from that prolonged food-gathering excursion. "And isn't it Dead Men's Bay?"

"Pshaw, Allie!" I said, joshing her a bit. "You can't tie that boatload of old bones up to your romance."

"I don't know why I can't, if I want to," she flashed back; "the bones, and the picture on the old stone pillar in the wood."

"Oh, that!" I grunted.

"Yes, my lord; even that. Have you forgotten the inscription on the stone?"

I had—quite forgotten it; and I admitted as much.

"But you remember it now, don't you? There is a thing that looks like a wheel without any rim to it. Don't you remember that?"

"Now that you recall it, I do. What of it?"

"That, my dear Hughie with the impenetrable brain, is meant to represent the sun; I should think anybody would know that. Then there is the date; I'm sure you recollect that?"

I wasn't going to be the first to remention that Christmas date which should have meant so much to her—and which now wouldn't mean anything but one more day's waiting for a rescue that might never come. So I dodged and said that I hadn't paid much attention to the sailor scrawlings.

"The date," she went on, like a teacher trying to drill something into a stupid pupil, "is December twenty-fifth—Christmas Day; the day after to-morrow. And then there is the word 'meridian,' only it is spelled wrong. And the line on that side of the triangle points to the picture of the sun."

"All right," I agreed, humoring her; "the sun at the meridian on Christmas Day: what then?"

"Then eleven fathoms on the ship's course," she announced solemnly. "That would be sixty-six feet, wouldn't it?"

"A professor of mathematics couldn't make the distance any longer or shorter," I granted.

"Well?—what more could you ask?"

"Nothing more. If you're satisfied, I'm sure I am."

She looked aside at me and the shining

radiance in the violet eyes was changing to a sort of accusing impatience.

"Don't you *want* to find a buried treasure?" she demanded.

"I don't want to get all wrought up and excited over something that doesn't exist." Then, to pry her away from this thing that was getting her all fussed up: "What's that fellow down yonder doing now? Put the glass on him again."

It was rather hard to guess what the skipper was doing. He had set up two stakes on the beach and seemed to be sighting over them with his instrument. After a bit he made one of the Chinamen shoulder the transit, or whatever it was, and the four of them plunged into the wood on a course that promised to take them over the hill on the short cut to the head of the other bay.

Naturally, we lost them when they entered the forest, and I amused myself by lining up the two stakes on the beach with the glass and trying to figure out where the indicated course would take the explorers of our domain. Projected in a south-southeasterly direction, the line would run pretty straight over the route we had taken when we discovered the ancient stone monuments.

After an interval, in which we kept the glass busy trying to pick up the surveying party again, we heard a distant gunshot, and the next minute a flock of the wild goats dashed madly across the open space where the monuments stood—which was in plain view from our observation lookout on the mountain. In a few minutes the surveying party came in sight, with two of the men carrying a dead goat suspended from a pole between them. The gun-toting skipper had seen a chance to secure a supply of fresh meat and had improved it.

From our high-lying lookout, to the glade of the weatherworn stones, was something upward of half a mile, I judged, and without the glass we shouldn't have been able to see much. But with it we could mark every movement of the four men. At first there was little doing. The white man seemed to be examining the different monuments, while the coolies sat on the ground and waited. After a time the white man set up the three-legged surveying instrument, and we could see that its telescope was pointed upward. We had no means of telling the exact time of day, but it couldn't have been far from noon.

"He is going to take the sun's altitude with the transit," I guessed aloud; and Alison nodded, saying, "Of course that is what he would do." And then: "Are you still unconvinced?"

I was and I wasn't. The brute captain's actions certainly did point toward a treasure-seeking enterprise of some sort; there was no denying it. But it still seemed too ridiculous for belief.

While the little drama enacting itself in the monument glade paused—presumably waiting for the sun to reach the meridian—the big man wandered about from one stone to another. Finally he found what we had found—the chiseled hieroglyph; we could tell perfectly by his actions. Suddenly he began waving his arms, and we could imagine him yelling at his coolies, for all three of them jumped up and ran to him. Alison had the glass at the moment and she told me what was doing.

"He has taken something out of his shoulder bag—I can't see what it is. Now one of the Chinamen is stooping at the foot of the stone and the white man is walking away. Oh, of course! He is measuring and the coolie is holding the end of the tape measure. Now he is looking at the surveying instrument and holding something in his hand—his watch, I suppose. Isn't it perfectly maddening?"

"What is maddening?"

"To think that that horrible villain is going to dig up the treasure—*our* treasure!"

I laughed.

"I'm sure he is welcome to my share of it. I shan't say a word, if he'll only take it and go away and leave us in peace. Besides, the rainbow pot of gold—if there should happen to be one—isn't ours any more than it's his."

"It *is* ours!" she burst out excitedly. "Didn't I——" She stopped, choked a bit, and then went on: "Didn't we discover this island—or, at least, rediscover it? I should say we did!"

"Oh, if you put it that way," I yielded, knowing from long experience how useless it was to argue with her when she had set her heart upon having a thing a certain way.

When Skipper Bloody Bones, as we were calling him, gave the signal, things began to happen in a hurry in the open glade. As one man the three coolies flung themselves upon a designated spot and began to dig furiously; one with a pick and two with

shovels. This went on for maybe half an hour, and during all that time either one or the other of us was holding the glass on the diggers.

In a very short while they had dug themselves into a hole big enough and deep enough for a grave. But as yet nothing but earth had come out of the hole, so far as we could determine. After a time we guessed that Bloody Bones had given a fresh order, for the three diggers attacked one side of the excavation and began to widen it to the eastward. Again a half hour passed, and that particular part of the glade was beginning to look like one of the Old World battle fields during the trench-fighting period.

Half a dozen times the slave-driving white man changed his orders, sending the toiling diggers first in one direction and then in another. Then he took one man off the job and sent him away toward the round bay; and in a little while the relieved man—or we supposed it was he—came back with three others. Thereupon the six of them took turns making the dirt fly, and the excavation enlarged itself until it looked, from our distant point of view, as if it were big enough to serve as a cellar for a country house.

At the finish, which didn't come until the sun was well down in the western sky, Bloody Bones apparently gave it up for a bad job. We could see him sitting upon one of the dirt piles with his chin in his hand, and he seemed to be glowering down into the great hole his men had dug. By and by he got up and waved his arms; and then the coolies gathered up their tools and the surveying instrument and the slain goat, and the seven of them, the white man bringing up the rear, tailed off down the slope toward the landing place at the head of the round bay.

"Well," said I to Alison, in the tone of the I-told-you-so insect, "do you still cling to your pet romance?"

Some way or other she seemed strangely elated; and what he said wasn't altogether intelligible.

"I should never have been able to forgive myself if he had found anything," was the unintelligible part of her reply; but the rest of it was perfectly human: "Hughie, dear, I'm clinging to the remnant of my fortitude. Do you realize that we've had only seven baked potatoes between us all day? I'm so hungry that I'm faint!"

That was something else again. We might now venture to go back to our cave, and by good luck might find a spark of the fire surviving; but the potato patch lay too near to the Bloody Bones landing place to make it safe to raid it. Still, there were the ever-present coconuts; and we might get a breadfruit and roast it. Alison was game when I proposed the shift to the beach and the cave, so we made our way down the mountain, with a little earth shiver to go with every hundred yards or so, reaching the bay head just at dark.

Happily, the fire in the cave hadn't quite gone out; and when we got it going, with a breadfruit baking in the ashes, I announced my intention of wading and swimming out to the wreck to see if the invaders might not have overlooked a can or so of the foodstuff we had seen lying on the floor of the partly submerged galley. Alison protested, of course; said we could do very well with the breadfruit, and, besides, I couldn't find anything in the dark; but finally she let me go—with many cautions about being careful of myself.

The small adventure was quite unexciting. Stripping on the beach, I swam out and climbed aboard of the mystery ship. Groping in the pitch-dark forehold and the cook's galley, I found nothing but emptiness. But after I had given it up and was about to climb out through the hatchway, I stepped upon something that rolled under my foot. It was one of the cans, which the looters had probably dropped in their haste. Nabbing the prize, I swam ashore with it, dressed hastily, and ran up the beach to the cave.

"What is it?" Alison asked, eying the can from which the label had long since disappeared in its water soaking.

"One guess is as good as another," I grinned. "I'm calling it peaches."

She shook her head speculatively. "Tomatoes," was her guess; and when I opened the can with my knife it proved to be the right one. So, some while later, we dined royally upon baked breadfruit and canned tomatoes, and were thankful.

Planning ahead just a little, we agreed that it wouldn't be well to risk staying in the neighborhood of the cave overnight; so, after we had eaten, we once more buried the fire, and then, laden with some of the bedding salvaged from the wreck, made our way toilsomely in the darkness to the top of the beacon cliff.

There I made Alison as comfortable as I could in a cranny of the lava rock, and then made my own bed near the cliff brink where the rising sun would be certain to wake me betimes. It was our sixth night of the Cru-soeing, and as I composed myself for sleep I wondered if any six days of time, since time began, had ever been fuller of grotesque happenings and adventures for two poor cast-aways on the Great Deep.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN WHICH GREAT NATURE TAKES A HAND.

Without waking enough to realize what was the matter, I passed a most restless night, shot through with grisly dream horrors. Once I dreamed that the fire in the cave had communicated itself to the black lava and was slowly eating the cliff away. Next I fancied we were shut tight in the cave and the smoke was gradually stifling us. Suddenly the dream changed, and I had a sickening recurrence of the deadly nausea which had assailed me the first time I went up in an observation balloon on the fighting line in France.

When I awoke finally and sat up it was with the feeling that the solid cliff was rocking to its foundations. Overhead the sky was as black as midnight; but all around the horizon the stars were shining with an effect that was weird and ghastly to an unnerving degree. Bestirring myself to make sure that I was not still asleep and dreaming, I found that Alison had left her niche and was sitting beside me.

"Oh, Hughie!" she gasped, "I'm so glad you're awake at last! Isn't it terrible!"

"What is it?" I demanded, trying to shake off the lethargy that clung to me like the after effects of a drug.

"The mountain—don't you see the black smoke cloud? And there have been literally hundreds of earthquakes! Th—there's another!" and as she spoke I knew why I had been dreaming that the cliff was tumbling down.

The dizzying shock banished the lethargy like a bucketing of cold water. The volcano was in eruption, as the signs and portents we had seen the day before in the crater had given warning that it might. The crater hadn't boiled over as yet; there were only the earth shudderings and the black cloud that was spreading to extinguish the heavens. But at any moment the lava burst might

come. In a flash I had a reproachful mental picture of the dear girl sitting there beside me in an agony of fright, waiting for me to wake up.

"Why on earth didn't you shake me alive?" I burst out, scrambling to my feet and helping her up.

"I wanted to—you don't know how badly I wanted to! But you needed your rest, and—and——"

"We've got to get out of this and do it quick!" I broke in: "If that crater gets full enough to slop over, we'll get it first, right here on this cliff top!"

With another earth shake to hurry us, and in darkness that was now thick enough to be cut with an ax, we fled, hands clasped and literally feeling our way down to the beach level. Having no object but to get to the other extremity of the island and as far as possible away from the threatening mountain, and being barred from taking the beach path along the northern shore by the presence of the treasure seekers at the head of the round bay, we ran in the opposite direction, passing all the way around the western end of the island and racing on breathlessly until I judged we must be fully halfway down the southern shore.

Here we took time to catch our breath and look back. From the narrow zone of sky still visible in the east the stars were fading to tell us that the dawn was at hand, and in a few minutes more the scene lightened enough to reveal the dark bulk of the volcano. From its summit a vast column of inky smoke was rising lazily to mushroom at the height of maybe a thousand feet in air, from which elevation it spread like a huge umbrella of blackness.

Turning our backs upon this menacing spectacle we fled again, keeping to the beach until we reached the extreme easternmost tip of the island. A little way inland from this there was a small hill with a bare, rocky crown; and toward this hill we made our way through the wood, climbing to the bare summit before throwing ourselves down to pant and gasp and hope that we had gained distance enough to give us a chance for our lives when the threatened explosion should come.

By this time the day had fully dawned and the sun, an orange-colored disk that scarcely cast a shadow through the smoky air, appeared above the horizon for a few minutes before the mushrooming cloud

blotted it out entirely. In those few minutes of lightened obscurity we saw the schooner in the round bay. It was alive with frenzied activity. Men working as if in terror of their lives were getting the anchor up and hoisting the sails, which flapped idly in the dead air. Halfway from the beach to the vessel we saw the whaleboat making for the schooner at top speed, the oarsmen splashing and tangling their oars in their mad haste. I turned to Alison crouching beside me.

"They are not going to wait until the mountain blows up; they'll be getting under way with the first puff of wind that comes." Then: "It's our last chance, Allie—shall I run down to the beach and signal them?"

She looked at me reproachfully.

"As if you could ask me such a thing as that, Hugh!"

"I know," I agreed hurriedly; "it would be a horrible risk—with such a man. But think a moment: if that volcano really turns loose, we may not have many hours to live; and, if we should pull through without being stifled or cremated, it may be years before another vessel touches here."

She laid a detaining hand upon my arm as if to hold me back.

"Then let it be hours—or years," she said softly. "We'll face what comes—together. Anyway, we can die but once."

It was with a strangely exultant thrill, stirred up by that word "together," that I focused the field glass upon the vessel in the near-by bay. She was shipshape again, all but the broken fore-topmast, and was ready to put to sea. As the anchor came apeak the whaleboat slashed up under the schooner's counter and its crew swarmed aboard. A moment later the first stirring of a gentle offshore breeze began to belly the two great sails.

"See," said Alison; "you couldn't have reached the beach in time if you had tried."

The words were scarcely out of her mouth before we had another of the earthquakes far more violent than any that had preceded it. For a full minute it seemed as if the racking vibrations must uproot every tree on the island. What followed beggars any powers of description that I have or ever shall have. "The schooner!—look at the schooner!" Alison shrielled; and then I saw that the crew of the slowly moving vessel were straining every nerve to make their ship claw its way out of the bay. At the same instant the reason for their frantic pull-

ing and hauling became frightfully apparent. Out of a sea as calm as a duck pond a huge wave, masthead high, as it seemed to us, had arisen, and it was sweeping toward the island with the speed of the wind.

I don't know, and never shall know, how those panic-stricken treasure hunters ever made their offing and got outside of the reef before the tidal wave caught them; but they did it in some fashion, and in the very teeth of a howling squall that came with the wave; a blast that made us quickly flatten ourselves on the bare hilltop and cling to each other to keep from being blown bodily away. In the gripping moment we had one last glimpse of the schooner rolling to blast and wave, until her lee rail was buried in the smother, and then righting herself to flick around the eastern point of the island and disappear. And as she tore away into the murk the wave struck us.

We couldn't see the full effect of the enormous breaker from our flat hilltop, but we saw enough of it to make us shrink and cling again. Up and up the water billowed in the round bay until it seemed as if it must surely sweep all the way across the island. Then, as suddenly as it had come, it retreated with a sucking roar, taking sand, earth, uprooted trees, and the last remains of the deserted village with it. Havoc it brought, and chaotic havoc it left behind.

For some time neither of us spoke. Though we could not see what the great wave had done in our own bay, we knew that the devastation could not be less there than elsewhere. While we waited the wonder came. As if the violent earthquake shock and the accompanying flood had been the easing of all strains, the earth shuddering ceased and the mountain was no longer vomiting such a dense column of blackness. A clean wind, pouring as steadily as the trades, set in from the northwest, and in a short while the heavy pall of smoke was blown aside and the sun came out.

For all her splendid nerve and courage, Alison was still shaken when I helped her down from the hilltop.

"Is there any other dreadful thing that could possibly happen to us, Hugh?" she asked, and there was something like tragedy in her voice.

I tried to laugh it off, and made a rather sorry go of it, I guess.

"I'll admit that the jinx has been crowding us a bit. But let us hope that the luck

is turning. Unless that smoking mountain takes a fresh start—but it won't. The main disturbance is somewhere else; probably many miles away. What we've been having was only sympathetic, as you might say—a sort of reflex. Tough on the nerves, I'll grant; but it served to rid us of Captain Bloody Bones and his savages."

"Yes, but we're stripped again. We haven't anything left but the glass."

She was right. In the hurried flight I had brought away only the field glass, and that only because I had slept with the strap over my shoulder. The ax and the pistols had been left on the cliff top where we had camped overnight. High as the wave had been, I was sure it hadn't topped the cliff, however, so I told Alison that we would have our ax and our arsenal when we got back home.

"The ax, yes," she said. "But the fire is gone."

By Jove! I hadn't thought of the fire. The cave in the cliff was a good bit higher than the beach, to be sure, but if the wave had risen half as high at the western end of the island as it had in the round bay, the cave—and the fire—must certainly have been drowned.

Tired as we were by the early morning flight two-thirds of the way around the island, and breakfastless as yet, we started to retrace our steps toward our own end of things. The northern beach being impassable by reason of the strewing of forest wreckage left by the retreating flood, we went through the wood, skirting the highest limit of the wave advance. On the dividing ridge between the two bays we passed through the overgrown and neglected village plantation and there found a few oranges and bananas that had been spared by the storm. With a broken stick for a spade I dug a handful of yams and stuck them into my pockets, hoping, but not with any degree of assurance, that we might later find some way of cooking them.

Crossing the ridge and coming in sight of our own bay, we were faced by a complete metamorphosis. All traces of our house-building activities had been either swept away or buried many feet deep under flood wash and débris. The tree fern that had concealed the cave's mouth was torn and bedraggled, as were many others along the cliff's foot. But the most convincing proof of the momentum of the brute wave was on

the beach. Splintered and broken up so as to be hardly recognizable as the remains of a ship lay the bones of the mystery schooner, high and dry, heaved so far ashore that much of the wreckage lay under the trees of the wood.

Upon reaching the bay head and crossing the stream our first care was to go and look for the fire. Of course it was out. The roof of the cave was still dripping dismally from its recent drenching, and sea water was still standing in the hollows in the floor. Depressed beyond measure, we crept out to look over the *dissecta membra* of the nameless schooner. There were smashed timbers enough to have built us a house or to have kept us in firewood for a year; but, besides these, and the steel strong room, which was tipped up at a drunken angle and half full of water, we saw no useful thing.

It was Alison now who turned comforter.

"You mustn't lose your grip, Hughie, boy," she said. "As long as we are still alive and have each other, there's a lot to be thankful for."

"Yes," I gloomed, "but what a Christmas we're facing! No shelter, no fire—and without the fire no chance of making signals. Why didn't I have wit enough to carry a few coals to the top of the cliff, when we went up last night?"

"Merely because you don't happen to be a prophet or the son of a prophet," she answered lightly. "Nobody less gifted could have foreseen what we've gone through this blessed morning." Then, perhaps in an effort to drag me down out of the gloom cloud: "What is that round thing lying up there under the palms?"

I looked and recognized the gasoline tank which had been hurled out of the schooner's run in the smash. Going up to it, I shook it and found that it was partly full. Rolling it over so that the bung would be up, I loosened the cap with a few taps with a stone and unscrewed it. A twig thrust into the tank showed a generous depth of the liquid, and the smell identified it.

"Is it gasoline?" Alison asked.

"It is," I assented; "and it is just about as useful to us as a grand piano would be."

Without having any special object in view we straggled back toward the cave, picking our way over the scattered wreckage. While I was poking among the soaked ashes of the cave fire in the hopeless hope of finding a live ember in them, Alison wan-

climbed a little way along the newly bared cliff's foot. In half a minute she came running back, wide-eyed and breathless.

"Come with me!" she panted; "I—I've found something!"

CHAPTER XVII.

WIRELESS.

What Alison had found in her short exploration was another blow hole in the cliff somewhat similar to our cave, only instead of ending abruptly against a solid wall of stone it went on through to somewhere, with daylight showing at its farther extremity. The mouth of this tunnel cave, which was high enough and broad enough to have admitted a team and road drag, had been so completely concealed by the luxuriant jungle growing at the cliff's foot that, though we had passed it a hundred times a day, we had never suspected its existence. And it might have gone undiscovered for all time if the great wave had not torn away a good part of its leafy screen.

"Another cave?" I said, as we stood before the mouth of the tunnel cavern.

"A cave—yes," she said; "but look up there."

What she was pointing at was an ordinary green-glass telegraph-wire insulator bracketed on an iron spike driven into a crevice of the lava. But that wasn't all. When we stepped under the arch to get a nearer view of the insulator I found a semicircular channel neatly grooved in the side wall of the cave just beneath it. The groove was half of a drill hole. At some time in the past the tunnelloike passage through the cliff had been widened by blasting.

Like a match to a train of powder the sight of this bit of up-to-date road making started a new line of speculation. I hadn't been fully satisfied with the explanation I had given Alison—about the wire tappers in the carefully wrecked schooner having passed their gleanings on to some other island by means of a launch. Even while I was offering it it seemed lame. The launch expedient would be far too clumsy and time wasting to fit in with the elaborate scheme of wire spying.

"If you're not too tired, we'll find out where this tunnel road leads to," I said. "Are you good for a climb?"

"I'm not tired any more," she asserted cheerfully. "But the path looks as if it

might take us up the mountain. Is it safe to go any nearer to the crater just yet?"

We had now gone an hour and more without any of the earth tremblings, and the crater smoke had decreased to a gray haze rising slowly to be blown aside by the freshening breeze.

"It seems safe enough now," I ventured; so we struck out together to explore the curious, half-natural roadway.

Before we had gone a hundred feet the tunnel ended in a deep, crevice-like defile open to the sky and ascending steeply. All the way along the crevice had been widened by blasting, and at regular intervals the glass insulators were bracketed along the sides, most of them so low as to be within arm's reach. I couldn't for the life of me imagine why a mountain-climbing path like this had been made wagon-road width on a grade far too steep for any wagon haul, but the fact remained, it was a road, and it had been constructed at no little cost and effort.

The explanation, when we found it, came with all the unexpectedness of a thunderclap out of a clear sky. At the end of its various windings up the steep ascent the road led to a high, rocky labyrinth on the western mountain shoulder; a sort of battleground of the gods in which the dense tropical vegetation fought for standing room among great boulders scattered in chaotic confusion. And in the very heart of this labyrinth, well hidden save for the tips of its tall steel masts carrying the aërials, was a wireless installation!

"Good Lord!" I gulped in a sudden overwhelming rush of thankfulness, and the words half choked me. Then I recalled the smashed siphon recorder in the steel-clad operating room of the schooner and the grateful hope died gasping. Of course, the wireless outfit would be wrecked and useless.

Nevertheless, we pressed forward to investigate it. At the foot of one of the three masts there was a small sheet-iron hut with the door on the latch. Entering, we found the little house half filled with a sturdy little caterpillar tractor of the kind used in the war for dragging guns to the front. Here was the reason for the costly widening of the crevice road. They had used the tractor for hauling the wireless outfit to its high hiding place.

Coupled by a second transmission to the

engine of the tractor was an electric generator set of the inclosed type designed for use under wet or damp conditions. Like all oxidizable metal uncared for for any length of time in a damp climate, both tractor and dynamo were red with rust; none the less, they seemed intact and serviceable. Here was the power they had used for generating the sending current.

At first, so sure was I that the installation would prove to be crippled in some way, I thought only of contriving some way to re-instate our lost cooking fire.

"If I can get this engine to turn over a few times, we shall at least have our fire back again," I told Alison, giving the motor the once over.

"But how?" she queried.

"In either one of two ways; from the electric spark, if it will make one; if not, then from the engine exhaust—the burning gases." Then that wild hope that had been killed came suddenly to life again. "But that isn't all. If they haven't smashed the sending instruments beyond repair, we can send out a yell for help."

"But—but can you use it?" she faltered.

"Sure I can, if it's usable. Why else did I waste half of my nights when I was a kid, experimenting with the wireless game? Let's take a look at the set."

The instruments, sending and receiving, were on a table shelf in one corner of the boxlike iron hut. They were inclosed in a water-tight case, which was locked, and I had to get the hammer from the tractor tool box to break in. With the case removed the set appeared to be in perfect working order so far as I could tell by looking it over. It was fitted with all the late appliances; variable condensers, vacuum rectifiers, amplifiers, a full rack of tuning coils, two telephone head sets, a rotary spark gap for the sending.

Of course, there was every reason to fear that the battery of the receiving set would be run down and exhausted by natural leakage and the lapse of time. To test it, I quickly inserted an audion bulb and cut the battery in. To my immense relief the tiny light, no bigger than that of a firefly, appeared in the lamp; weak, but still alive. Pulling up the operator's stool for Alison, I gave her one of the head phones and showed her how to put it on. Then I clamped the other over my own ears.

For a time the phones were as silent as the grave; not a whisper came through them for all of my adjusting and readjusting of the various tuning coils. Just as I was about to give up and switch out to save the dying battery, Alison held up a warning finger.

"What are we listening for?" she asked.

"A buzzing—like that of a bee about a thousand miles away," I told her.

"I'm hearing it now!" she burst out excitedly; "little buzzes mixed in with longer ones! Don't you hear them?"

I guess her ears were sharper than mine, but with a bit more of the careful tuning I got the signals, though they were so broken that I could catch only a word here and there. Some distant ship was asking the world at large for the correct time; her chronometer had stopped. It was enough. The receiving half of the apparatus, at least, was in good working condition.

"Glory be!" I gasped, cutting the battery off to save the precious energy which we could have no possible means of renewing. "Now for the other half of it—the talking half!"

Not to get the cart before the horse, I began at the beginning with the sending machinery, giving the tractor motor and the dynamo a thorough overhauling. Fortunately, the tractor tool box was well supplied, and the repair kit was as complete as if the small plant had been specially provided against all the contingencies of desert-island operation.

The overhauling, with Alison standing by to hand me the various gadgets as I asked for them, was, as you would imagine, right in my line as a B. S. in M. E.; and after an hour or so of loosening up and oiling and adjusting I got the motor so that it would turn over and give a gasping cough or two. But it couldn't do more than that for the excellent reason that its gasoline tank was practically empty.

I stepped to the door of the hut and looked up at the sun, our only timepiece, since neither Alison's watch nor mine had turned a wheel since the night of the plunge from the *Mindoro's* after deck.

"It's past noon," I said. "We'd better quit now and go down to the dining room in the Restaurant de Forest, and eat a coconut *au sauvage*. Then we'll hustle back here quick with some gas and raise the loud yell for help."

Oddly enough, as I thought, she didn't

seem half as excited as I supposed she would.

"Are you afraid your work in the Philippines is suffering?" she asked mildly; and then: "I want to wash my hands. Just look at them!"

"I guess you'll have to wait and wear it off," I told her. "And about my job; I wasn't thinking of that, specially. What I was thinking of was that any minute a ship with wireless may be passing within our reach. And it might be days or weeks before another would pass. You don't want to stay here on this island, where something different happens every hour in the day, any longer than you have to, do you?"

She gave me a quaint little smile that I couldn't understand any more than I could read Sanskrit, and said: "If we had our fire again and could cook things, it wouldn't be so bad, Hughie—you know it wouldn't."

I may as well say it as think it. Her talking that way gave me a deeper look into the heart of a really good, pure woman than I'd ever had before. 'Though God knows there hadn't been, and wouldn't be, any reason for it; in fact, I knew well enough that spiteful tongues would wag when we should get back to civilization. And Pinckney Barrett—would he try to renew the broken engagement after he had heard the Crusoe Christmas story? Right there and then I knew what it was up to me to do, and the thought of it made me pretty silent. For the mere proposal of it might be taken as an insult, if she wanted to look at it in that light.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VOICE FROM THE VOID.

Before starting down the mountain we skirmished around in the hut looking for something in which we could carry gasoline. An empty five-gallon oil can was found. In a corner behind an empty barrel we turned up something else that I thought might come in handy, sooner or later. It was a case of ship's signal rockets, with the rockets and fuses carefully wrapped in paraffined paper to keep them dry. Evidently the wire tappers had overlooked nothing in providing for contingencies.

Taking the empty oil can, we returned to the beach to hunt for something to eat. Back in the early morning, when things were at their discouraging worst, I had told Alison that our luck would turn, and we had

our Christmas gift, a bit ahead of time, when we got back to where the bones of the wrecked schooner were scattered all over the landscape. Away up under the palms, looking as if a playful giant had kicked it there, we stumbled upon a whole case of the canned stuff which had probably been hurled out of some hidden locker in the schooner's inwards.

The box was broken to kindling and a good many of the cans were dented and battered, with some few of them crushed and the contents ruined. But there was enough left to keep us going for a long time; peaches, apricots, tinned beef, canned salmon, a lot of tomatoes, canned sardines, coffee, and—joy of joys for the breadless!—a couple of square, tightly soldered tins of ship's biscuits so well baked and so well put up that they were as good as new. The wire tappers had apparently lived exceedingly well in their day and generation.

Perhaps you think that we stopped the wheels right there and then and sat down and made a feast. If you do, you have another guess coming. Perhaps that is what I should have done, being hungry enough to chew bricks. But Alison had a notion of her own.

"Let's not," she said. "To-morrow will be Christmas, and we must save the best of everything for our Christmas dinner. Don't you think that would be nicer?" and she said this last just as she used to say it when she was a little girl with bare knees.

"I think anything you think," I returned; so we opened one can of the sardines and made our dinner on it and some of the ship's biscuits.

Immediately after the hurried meal we went back to the wireless plant, carrying a can of gasoline. After a little more tinkering I got the motor to going at speed and the dynamo humming merrily. Then I tried the spark gap. It worked perfectly, and I sat down to send out our S O S.

For a long time, hours it seemed to me, there was no answer. Because I knew positively that the battery of the receiving set must be on its last legs from old age, I didn't dare to cut the phones in for very long at a time, and I was keenly conscious of the fact that there might have been an answer to my call at moments when we were not listening in. Still, there was nothing to do but to keep on trying while the battery held out. There must be a ship somewhere within

the wide radius we were reaching; I refused to believe it could be otherwise.

All the same, the belief wasn't justified until late in the afternoon, after the sun had already dropped below the leafy barrier surrounding and shutting in the rock-strewn labyrinth. For the hundredth time I had cut in the receiver, and had noted with alarm that the tiny lamp in the vacuum tube was growing dimmer. Then, as distinctly as if the sender had been only a mile away, a medley of dots and dashes came buzzing into the phones: "B-u-z-z, b-u-z-z, b-u-z-z, b-u-z-z, buzz," pause, "b-u-z-z, b-u-z-z, buzz, buzz, buzz." It was a number, and when I got it I nearly fell off the stool. For it was the *Mindoro's* number in the continental code!

"Good Lord!" I choked, and then fell upon the sending key like a madman. "S O S—MacLaren sending. Miss Jeffard and self marooned on unknown island Marianas. Can't give latitude or longitude. Cruise till you find us."

Back came the answer, sizzling.

"Been hunting for you for a week—under wireless orders from San Fran. Thought you were drowned. Can't you give better address?"

Our battery was dying and I knew I should hear little more.

"Look for small islet with mountain at west end. Mountain, volcano, smoking a bit just now. Place it from ship's log and time we went overboard; ten-seventeen, night sixteenth."

"Got you. Can't make it under twenty-four hours at quickest. How are you fixed for —"

That ended it. The dying battery was dead and we should hear no more. But I could still keep on sending, and I took a shot at answering the unfinished question.

"Plenty to eat and we are both well. Am using war wireless installed by Germans. Sending set is all right, but receiver battery gone and can't hear you any more. Look for you to-morrow or next day. Merry Christmas."

During all this long-distance battling back and forth, Alison had sat with the extra phone set clamped over her ears, understanding nothing at all, and waiting as patiently as an angel until she could be told. I repeated, word for word, what I had heard and what I had said.

"Of course, it would be the *Mindoro*," she said, as calmly as if I had been reading

her an item out of a newspaper. "I knew daddy would keep them looking for us until all hope was gone." Then with that quaint little grimace that I was coming to look for and to love: "Oh, dear! we had to go and spoil it all. Poor Robinson didn't have any handy wireless to help him out. Never mind; we've got a whole day yet in which to be Crusoes. And we'll have our Christmas dinner, too."

You can't imagine what a difference it made—at least to me—to know that some time within the next twenty-four hours we'd be taken off and the island idyl would be ended. Almost at once I felt myself drifting over toward the conventionalities, in spite of all I could do. In a few hours Alison would take her proper place in the world again, and I'd take mine; and the two places were a million-dollar miles apart. I mustn't forget that. And then there was that other thing that I had determined must be done: that, too, must be remembered.

Alison, bless her sweet heart! seemed to be doing her level best to make me forget. After we had returned to the beach, carrying fire in a bunch of oily waste lighted at the tractor exhaust, she chattered like a magpie, bustling around to help me get supper, and to build a fire in the cave to dry it out so that it could be slept in.

And after supper, when we had made up a fire out of broken pieces of the wreck to snap and crackle and look a bit Christmasy—though goodness knows we didn't need it for warmth—and I had crammed the last bit of tobacco I had left in the good old jimmie pipe and lighted it, she kept on bubbling over and wouldn't give me a chance to get a word in edgewise.

But my turn came at last: I made it come.

"Allie," I broke in, at a moment when she had stopped to take breath, "do you know what people are going to say when we get back to the world?"

"What should they say?" she retorted quickly.

"What they should say, and what they will say, are as far apart as heaven and hell. We have been here alone together for over a week. At least a fair half of your world and mine won't give us the credit of—er——" Well, I couldn't say it right out, after all; not to a perfectly clean-minded girl like Alison Jeffard.

She sat still, looking into the fire so stead-

ily and so long that I thought she was hurt past mending. But when she looked up and spoke, it was not as a child; it was as a woman grown.

"You are like all men—good men—Hughie," she said soberly. "You put the woman upon a pedestal. I know well enough what some people will say, or if they don't say it in words, they'll say it in other ways. It's vile, but it can't be helped."

"Yes," I put in; "there is one way it can be helped. Listen, Allie: you've known me for a long time, and you know I'd keep faith with you, if it killed me. We can have Captain Lamper take us to Guam, and there we can have the navy chaplain marry us. That will stop the lying tongues before they can begin. And after it's done and over with, I'll vanish and stay vanished until you've gotten your freedom again."

Again she turned to face the fire. After a while she said, "Hughie, would you really do that—for me?"

"You know I would; that, and much more, if the chance offered. And it isn't so crazy as it may look. It is known to everybody long before this that we went off together in the *Mindoro*; and nobody knows that the 'together' part of it was purely accidental. And the same people know that there was a break of some sort between you and Pinckney Barrett. They'll say that we were together a month on shipboard, and that I probably caught you in the rebound; but that doesn't matter. The only thing that matters is the scandal, and that will be nipped in the bud."

"And beyond that?"

"Beyond that is your life happiness, Allie. I'm taking it for granted that your quarrel with Barrett isn't mortal. And you may be sure he won't give you up so easily. In time——"

But now she was shaking her head in crisp decision.

"No," she said in low, firm tones, "there won't be any 'in time' for Pinckney Barrett." Then she looked me squarely in the eyes. "You did lie about Pinckney, Hugh; but it was to me when you said you had lied. What you told Bob Lauderdale was true."

"You are only guessing at that," I evaded.

"I am not!" she flashed out. "I wasn't given even the poor privilege of remaining in doubt. When I told Pinckney what he

was accused of, he admitted it—admitted it and—*laughed!*"

"Good God!" I exclaimed, and the ejaculation was fairly jarred out of me.

"It's so," she went on insistently; "and he was even base enough to try to justify himself. He said all men did such things when they were marooned away off in foreign countries; that, for that matter, you were as deep in the mud as he was in the mire. *And he tried to tell me it would be different after we were married!*"

I sure had to set my teeth hard to keep from cursing that lying scoundrel out of a full heart. "Did you believe that of me, Allie?" I demanded.

She looked down and her voice broke a little.

"I was sore-hearted, Hugh; I thought I could never believe in anybody any more. Then a mean little demon came and whispered that you had told that story to Bob Lauderdale out of pure malice. I believed—we all believed—that you were going to marry a French girl, and——"

"I know," I said, anxious now only to make things easier for her. "I had no business to say what I did to Bob."

"You did," she cut in quickly; "you had a perfect right. And I—— Hughie, I was sore and mad and silly foolish—but I've paid!"

A silence, long-continued, came and sat between us, and the cheerful blaze died down and the embers began to put on white coatings of ash. Now and then a bit of the brine-soaked wood blazed up with a blue flame, and the ghostly light it gave out jibed evenly with the measured, tolling boom of the seas upon the outer reef.

I got up at last and put my pipe aside.

"I'm going to the top of the cliff to get the bedding we carried up last night," I said. "While I'm gone I wish you'd think over what I have offered to do. I'm afraid it's the only way out of the tangle."

When I came back with the armful of blankets she was still sitting before the dying fire. I made a palm-branch broom and brushed the shallow cave out as well as I could; did that and arranged her bed. When I climbed out of the hole in the rock, she was standing before the fire circle with her hands tightly clasped.

"The last night of the Blessed Adventure," she said softly. And then: "Where will you sleep?"

"I'll roll up in a blanket on the sand. The beach is dry enough by now." Then: "Have you been thinking over what I said?"

"I am still thinking," she answered quietly. And so the Christmas Eve ended.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT THE END OF THE RAINBOW.

In sharp contradistinction to her mood of the night before, Alison turned out on the Christmas morning as bright and chipper as if she'd never had a sorrow in the world. Because it had seemed probable that it would be the last time we'd have to do it, I had made such a poor job of covering the cooking fire that it had gone out, so there had to be another jaunt up the mountain and a restarting of the tractor motor before we could cook breakfast.*

Alison insisted upon going along when I went after the light, and she teased me all the way up the hill about being so absent-minded as to lose the fire. After we had reached the operator's hut and I had started the motor, she made me go to the key and broadcast a Christmas greeting into the ether addressed to "All Whom it May Concern," and when that was done she dictated a touching little message to her father and mother in San Francisco, saying that she was well and happy; did this after I had told her that there was a chance that some distant ship might pick such a message up and relay it to America.

"Are you?" I asked, after we had once more taken fire from the motor exhaust and were on our way back to the beach.

"Am I what?"

"Happy. You put it in your message home, you know."

"Why shouldn't I be happy?" she laughed. "Haven't I had the adventure of my life? One fond dream of childhood made real to the very last shiver and shudder? You must think I'm hard to please."

"Thrills!" I chuckled; "there have certainly been plenty of them."

She glanced up at the mountain peak where the eruption haze aftermath was still hanging in the air. "Smoke, good old boy!" she commanded; "smoke up, so the *Mindoro* people will be sure to see you!"

"Then you do want to be rescued," I threw out. "You wouldn't care to stay here indefinitely? Think of what you may be missing in the shape of thrills!"

Her smile was a challenge.

"The thrills don't all live on the Island of Thrills, Hughie, dear. Don't fancy for a moment that we shall have exhausted them the moment we step aboard the *Mindoro*. Let's hurry. I'm half famished."

The breakfast, eked out by black coffee made in an empty tomato can, was a jolly meal, and we dallied over it like two hoboes who had all the time in the world before them. After breakfast nothing would do but we must climb the mountain for a final look into the Gehenna pit that had come so near to making an end of us in the fire-stealing adventure.

"I want to see it, and I want to take a last all-over look at our kingdom, before we leave it," Alison said; so I cut a couple of sticks for alpenstocks and we set out for the long climb.

Being so richly endowed with leisure on this day when we didn't have to work or plan for an indefinite Crusoe future, we spent two good hours on the roundabout ascent; talking chiefly about old times and the childhood pranks we had played together—a mighty fruitful topic when you've really had a childhood intimacy with anybody. And for all I could see, my companion had put away all thoughts of the things we had talked about the night before; or if she were thinking of them they never once came to the surface.

Reaching the mountaintop in due time, we saw that we had overestimated the volcanic quiescences. What had looked like a thin, blue haze from the beach level proved to be a heavy sulphurous outpouring completely filling and obscuring the depths of the crater, and making all but the windward side of the summit unbreathable for anything with lungs. During the night the wind had shifted to a point somewhat east of north, so the place from which we had looked down upon Captain Bloody Bones' mining operations two days earlier was free from the sulphur fumes. Here we sat down to rest, and I swept the horizon with the glass for signs of a coming rescue.

There were no signs as yet, but we did not expect them. The *Mindoro* operator had said twenty-four hours, and it was not yet noon. When I lowered the glass and said, "Nothing doing," Alison said, "Of course there wouldn't be—so soon as this." Then: "Does it seem at all like Christmas to you, Hughie?"

I had to admit that it didn't. The concomitants were missing; yule log, joyous family gathering, church bells ringing, kiddies wild with excitement over their gifts, and all that. In place of these there was only the equatorial sun beating down upon a lost islet set like a green jewel in the midst of a dimpling ocean unbroken to the farthest horizon.

"No," I said; "it doesn't seem much like the traditional Christmas."

She was quiet for a moment. Then: "It doesn't seem possible that in a few hours longer all this will be only a fading memory. How long have we been here, Hugh? Is it years; or only months?"

I laughed. "Measured by the crowded happenings you might call it a century."

She held up her hands and looked at them. She had scrubbed them with sand, but they still bore the marks of honest toil; toil with a gas engine. Soap was one of the things we did not find in the smashed provision locker on the beach.

"Aren't they a perfect sight!" she said. "And my clothes: look at that sleeve—and this skirt!"

The strenuous life had certainly told upon us outwardly, if not otherwise. Alison's smart tailored things were in rags, and I was even less presentable from a sartorial point of view.

"Beach combers, both of us," I grinned. "Never mind: it will be all over in a few hours, as you say. Our luggage is probably still safely reposing in the *Mindoro's* state-rooms."

For a while she seemed to be trying to visualize the return to civilization. But when she spoke again it was to say: "I've been thinking about what you said—last night, you know, Hughie, it won't do—it would be wicked."

"Why wicked?"

"Because it would be making a mockery of what ought to be the most sacred thing in life."

"I am thinking chiefly of the scandal-mongers," I said.

"Let them do their worst. Better that than for you to stand up before God's minister and blacken your soul with a lie."

"I should tell no lie," I quibbled. "Haven't I loved you ever since you were a little girl? I can easily promise to keep on doing it."

"But how about the poor rich girl you

say you can't marry because you haven't money enough? Or, was that only a pleasant little fiction?"

"It was no fiction," I muttered.

"Yet you say you'll never ask her."

"I can't. To do that would be to ask her to make sacrifices that no man has a right to ask of the woman he loves."

"Money!" she said, with the scorn that the possessor of money can always put into the word. "But if you had the money, Hughie?"

"I shall never have it; not in any equalizing measure. Show me a rich engineer and I'll show you a thousand poor ones."

"Maybe she doesn't look at it in the same light you do."

"I think she does; but in any case her father does."

"How do you know?"

"Because I've asked him. It was just before I left for the war. There was the ordinary chance that I might not live to come back. So I pocketed my pride and said what I had to say."

"And what did her father say?"

"He laughed in my face."

She got up and took a step aside.

"That was cruel. But you ought to have gone to the girl. It was her happiness that was involved; not her father's. And it wasn't her money; it was just your pride. I hate your pride, Hughie! And I love it! Let's go on and finish the tour of our kingdom; it'll be for the last time."

We descended the mountain and were silent for the most part. My heart was sore. I had been sure she would guess who the "poor rich girl" was. But it seemed that she hadn't.

In the course of time our wanderings brought us to the glade of the old monuments and we stood looking down into the Captain Bloody Bones excavation. It was bigger than we had thought it was. With little or no method in the trenching, the ground looked as if it had been rooted up at random by some antediluvian hog monster.

"Why do you suppose they didn't find the treasure?" Alison questioned.

"For the best reason in the world," I retorted. "There wasn't any treasure to find."

"That wasn't the reason," she countered, quite soberly. "Day before yesterday was only the twenty-third, and the date on the stone is the twenty-fifth. They didn't dig on the right day."

Her perfectly serious manner was beginning to shake my convictions a bit. Some way she gave me the impression that she knew exactly what she was talking about. And yet—

"The angle of the sun's inclination wouldn't change much in two days," I objected.

"No; but if the difference should be multiplied by sixty feet—"

"It wouldn't be much, even at that. Here is Bloody Bones' line that he laid off day before yesterday. Since it was then two days past the winter solstice on the twenty-first, the sun would be gaining instead of losing. At the farthest, this island can't be more than twenty degrees north of the equator, so the variation would be very slight. Let's see; in a distance of sixty feet"—I picked up a sharp pebble and scratched the computation on the surface of one of the moss-grown monuments—"in sixty feet he couldn't be more than three or four feet out of the way."

"In which direction?" she asked; "to the right, or to the left?"

I had to stop and think a minute. "To the right."

"Yes," she said. "But, you see, he has dug to the *left*."

It was true; just the same, I couldn't help smiling at the persistence with which she clung to the piratical romance.

"I believe you'd like to have me dig another hole to go with this Bloody Bones collection," I chuckled. "If I had anything to dig with, I'd do it—just to satisfy you."

She walked over to one of the dirt piles and poked at it with the walking stick I had cut for her. What she uncovered was a pick handle. The pick had evidently been thrown out of the hole and accidentally buried in the hurry job of two days before.

"I dare you," she said, with a swift return to the old schoolday playfulness, and she pointed to the pick.

At that, of course, I had to make my bluff good; but she didn't go with me as I paced off the sixty-foot distance and then measured what I judged would be about the variation from the line the schooner skipper had laid off. The double measurement landed me in a spot well covered with vegetable rubbish that looked as if it might have been lodged there by the storm.

Clawing away the rubbish with the pick I saw something that made me stare a bit.

The ground underneath looked as if it had been recently disturbed. At the first swing the pick went in up to the handle, and at the next it struck something that felt like a bed of pebbles. At that I went down on my knees to scratch the earth out of the hole with my hands.

What came to light after a few seconds of scratching was a brass-bound chest of rotting wood—rotten wood, I should say, for it crumbled to damp dust under my touch. And under the brown dust— I had to rub my eyes and look again; under the dust there was the dull glitter of gold.

Merely digging away enough of the rotten wood and corroded brass to convince myself that the hidden hoard was apparently a box of gold coin, I sprang up to call to Alison. But she had disappeared and was nowhere to be seen. Before I could go in search of her she came flying down from the low ridge which shut in the glade at its eastern extremity.

"The schooner!" she cried—"the one that was here before! It's—it's coming back!"

I darted past her to the top of the little ridge, from which there was a limited view of the ocean to the southeast. Less than a mile off shore a schooner was beating up to round the eastern horn of the island. That it was the Bloody Bones craft was plainly evident from the broken fore-topmast. The treasure-hunting skipper had evidently taken a second thought upon his calculations and measurements and was coming back.

My first impulse when I ran down from the lookout ridge was purely ostrichlike; it was to refill the hole I had dug and try to conceal it. But Alison had more sense.

"Mercy!" she exclaimed; "that would be just handing it to that awful man! We must carry it away and hide it!"

"Carry it?" I snorted. "Where to, and how?"

"I'll show you!" she flashed out. "Come on!"

The next moment we were racing through the wood toward our bay head which, by the short cut, was little more than a quarter of a mile. As we ran I remembered the food tins we had emptied, and those which we might still empty if we should be given time. That was the thought in Alison's mind, too, for, when we reached the bay head she began gathering up the empty cans and bade me cut open and empty more of them.

I did it—with the ax—reckless of the waste of food. With our arms full of the empty tins we raced back to the glade, and while Alison was looting the treasure pit and filling the cans I tore up to the top of the lookout ridge. The schooner had gone on the starboard tack and was apparently standing out to sea. They had been unable to weather the eastern point as they stood and were forced to make another leg.

"We've still got time!" I bellowed as I ran back to help Alison. "They've had to go about and make another tack!"

In feverish haste we filled the food-sticky tin cans. At first there was nothing but gold coins loosely piled as if they had been shoveled into the chest. We didn't stop to examine them; all we noticed was that they were old and of mintages that neither of us recognized. Under the coins, or, rather, buried in them, were treasures of greater worth; a pair of gold candlesticks, an altar cross heavy with gems, rings, brooches, gold chains with pendants of precious stones; and, at the very bottom, a small copper casket, richly inlaid, holding a fair handful of unset stones, diamonds, rubies, emeralds—a king's ransom!

We couldn't carry it all in one trip, with the clumsy containers we had; nor even in two. Three times we doubled the stumbling race between the glade and our beach, and as we were crossing the point of land, on the final homeward dash, we saw the schooner's broken fore-topmast coming in sight over the eastern headland of the round bay.

Our time limit had expired.

CHAPTER XX.

"FOR RICHER, FOR POORER——"

Of course we both realized instantly that in transferring the looted treasure to our bay head we had only postponed the inevitable for a few minutes, as you might say. Skipper Bloody Bones would land, would go to the monument glade, would find that he had been anticipated. Our fresh tracks in the excavated earth would tell him all that he needed to know; that no more than two people had very recently done the anticipating, and that one of the two was a woman.

I'll confess freely that I was so badly rattled that I hardly knew which way to turn next. It was only the middle of the after-

noon, and it was altogether unlikely that the *Mindoro*, if she found us at all, would be able to better the running time given us by her wireless operator; wouldn't come until after dark. How were we to hold out for the three or four hours intervening?

As before, at the treasure pit, it was Alison's quick wit that came to the rescue.

"The wireless station!" she burst out; "we must carry the treasure up there!"

In a flash I saw the advantage this might give us for a temporary holdout. The rocky labyrinth on the rugged mountain shoulder was approachable, or at least easily approachable, only by way of the climbing trail; a passage that even a single resolute defender might make shift to hold for a time against an attack by numbers.

"Up we go, then!" I cried; and with arms full of the canned treasure we made for the crevice path. It was a stiff carrying climb, but the distance was comparatively short; and after chasing up and down four or five times we got all the stuff up the hill, and were once more safe—for the moment.

The first thing I did, after I had knocked the head out of the oil cask and had dumped the loot therein, was to start the motor and send out a hurry call for help. With the battery dead we could get no reply, as a matter of course; but the *Mindoro* could get our sending, if she were anywhere within reach. Over and over again I repeated the squeal: "*Mindoro*: Come quick. We are besieged by Chinese pirates. Look for island with smoking mountain and schooner anchored in northern bay. Have rockets and will signal, if we hold out till dark."

While I was doing this, Alison climbed to a craggy point from which she could look down upon the beach; and there, after I had shut off the power, I joined her.

"Nobody in sight yet," she reported, as I came toiling up to her lookout, "and no sign of the *Mindoro*, either. It's getting quite late: maybe that terrible man won't try to look for us until morning."

"No such luck, I'm afraid," I rejoined. "Most likely he is down there among the monuments right now. And, if he is, it won't take him long to put two and two together."

"What will you do if he comes, Hughie?"

"We have the two pistols and plenty of ammunition. It is going to cost them something when they try to rush us."

For a long time the strained suspense kept

us both silent. There was nothing to do but to watch, and with the glass we alternately swept the horizon in the hope of picking up the smoke of the *Mindoro*, and the two bays to try to ascertain what the enemy was about. Slowly the Christmas sun swung down toward the western ocean. In another half hour it would be down and night would be upon us. At the long last Alison put the glass down with a deep-drawn sigh.

"I can't see any more," she said, and I saw that her eyes were swimming.

"Too much telescoping?" I said; "rest a bit." And I took up the glass to spell her.

"No, Hughie," shaking her head; "it isn't eyestrain: it's just that I'm broken-hearted. We shall never get away from here alive. The *Mindoro* won't come soon enough."

"Nothing like that!" I cut in, trying to rally her. "We'll never say die till we're dead. And we won't then."

"It isn't the dying I mind so much," she went on; "it's the—the miserable disappointment!"

"The disappointment? How?"

"I'm almost ashamed to tell you; but I will—if you'll tell me first if we really have a right to take the treasure."

"Nobody has a better right," I declared unhesitatingly. "Your romance has come true. It is pirate loot, unquestionably, and from the look of it may easily be centuries old. It's ours, or rather yours, for I should never have looked for it, if you hadn't fairly bluffed me into doing it."

"No," she objected hastily, "it's yours, Hughie. I wasn't even with you when you found it. It's *got* to be yours!"

"It isn't anybody's—yet," I said grimly. "But why the compulsion about its ownership?—always providing we live to get away with it."

"Because, if we do escape, you'll need it, and I shan't. That was the way it was meant to be."

"Meant to be? I don't understand," I expostulated, more and more bewildered as she went on.

"I—I didn't mean to tell you until we were safely on board of some ship—because you laughed at me so much about my imaginary romance. I found the treasure the day I borrowed the wooden spade to dig the yams and was gone so long. It was just the sheerest, crudest accident, of course; I just happened to dig in the right place. I saw the gold and covered it up and left it,

and meant to have you find it afterward; by yourself. Now you know why I nearly went wild day before yesterday when we were watching Captain Bloody Bones digging for it. I was sure he'd find it and take it away!"

"Still I don't understand," I floundered. "Why should you want me to rediscover it?"

"Silly!" she said; but there was a stifled sob to go with the epithet. "Hadh't you told me over and over again that you'd m-marry the poor rich girl if you had money enough?"

I shook my head.

"By your own confession, Allie, the treasure isn't mine, since you found it first. But it doesn't matter."

"Why doesn't it matter, I'd like to know? D-don't you l-love the girl any more?"

I'd had all I could hold, and more. With darkness settling down upon the Isle of Thrills, and the threat of the Lord only knew what lurking just beyond the wooded point dividing the two bays, I turned and took the dear girl in my arms.

"You are 'the poor rich girl,' Alison," I told her; and the coming darkness and the piratical treasure seekers became as naught to me.

"As if I hadn't known it all along!" she murmured into my ragged coat; and then she put up her lips to be kissed.

I shall always be thankful to Captain Bloody Bones—to this good day I know no other name for him, nor from what port he had cleared, nor how he came to know of the buried treasure—for leaving us unmolested for those few moments so precious to lovers the world around. The deep peace of the Christmas evening brooded over the enchanted isle; the sea was like a mirror and the very air was hushed.

After a time Alison said, "You'll take the treasure now, won't you, Hughie—when it means so much to both of us?"

As I saw it, we were quite some little distance from being able to say what we should do or shouldn't do with the pirate hoard, but I had no intention of quenching the precious fire so lately kindled.

"It shall be yours and mine together, sweetheart: 'For richer, for poorer, until death——'"

I didn't finish the quotation for a most excellent reason. At that precise moment, materializing as if they had sprung up out of the ground, a horde of half-stripped Mon-

golians, headed by a single white man, swarmed on the beach below to beat back and forth like a pack of hounds hotly searching for a lost scent. The enemy was at the door—and the *Mindoro* was still somewhere beyond the far-reaching, fast-fading horizon.

What few preparations we could make had to be made swiftly. I knew it could be only a few minutes, at best, before the searchers below would find the entrance to the climbing roadway. At first, my intention was to post myself at a turn in the crevice path with the pistols salvaged from the wreck, keyed up to emulate Horatius at the bridge; an expedient less foolish than it may seem, since the approach was so steep and narrow as to give a tremendous advantage to a determined defender of it.

But when we had scrambled down to the wireless plant the sight of a spare coil of copper wire gave me a better notion. As I have related, the war cable tappers had some sort of wire communication—telephone or telegraph—between the wreck on the reef and the station on the mountain shoulder: the insulators for this wire, stuck in crevices of the rock, were still in place all the way up the climbing trail.

Grabbing up the spare coil of wire, I ran down the road, flinging the loopings of the coil up to the insulators as I went and letting them hang down to form loose bends and entanglements across the crevice. With the time so critically short, and the darkness shutting down in the narrow passageway like the lid on a coffeepot, I couldn't make a very workmanlike job of it, but I hoped it might serve.

With the trap thus set, I raced back to the power plant, connected the wire to the dynamo terminals, and started the tractor motor. The effect, of course, was to make a "live wire" out of the entanglement; a conductor leaking, doubtless, at a good many places in the hurried installation, but still retaining energy enough, I hoped, to jolt an intruder who might pick it up or walk into it.

As was to be expected, the rapid-fire, popping exhausts of the motor speedily told the marauders where to look for us, and presently we heard them coming. I took a rocket from the case in the hut and placed it ready for firing. That done, I loaded the two pistols and gave one of them to Alison. Also, I gave her the casket of unset gems,

telling her to empty it and to hide the stones about her person.

"If it comes to the worst and you fall into the hands of that murdering devil, maybe you can bargain with him," I said; but she stopped me quickly.

"If they kill you, dear, I shan't be alive to bargain with them," she asserted quietly; and after that we crouched at the road head and waited.

They didn't keep us in suspense very long. Almost at once we saw the light from a torch wavering in the gulch below us, and then the motley crew came in sight toiling up the steep ascent. I don't know what one of the bare-bodied beagle hounds came first in contact with the charged wire, but one of them did. There was a spitting flash, a scream, and a backward rush which knocked the torch bearer down and extinguished his light.

In the darkness we could hear curses and blows, and then the crash of a pistol shot. Evidently the brute skipper was trying to drive his slave crew back into the death trap. Between death ahead and death behind they came on again. There was no torch this time, but in the starlight we could see a wriggling mass of figures struggling up the path. Once more there was a crackling flash, followed quickly by a second and a third, and then a shrill clamor of shrieks and yells, punctuated sharply by more pistol shots.

It was in the very heart of this pandemonium that a hoarse, deep-toned roar began to swell upon our ears, dominating and drowning the human cries in the pass of death; the bell-like siren blast with which we had both grown familiar on the long voyage across the Pacific.

"Thank God!—the *Mindoro*!" I gasped; and running quickly to the racing motor in the iron hut, I opened the cut-out, lighted a bit of oily waste in the flaming gases, and held it under the fuse of the placed signal rocket.

What happened after the rocket soared aloft to burst into a shower of red, yellow, and green stars was, as you might say, a mere matter of ship's discipline and routine. In a jiffy a boat came ashore from the halted *Mindoro*, landing at the head of Dead Men's Bay. When the boat's crew, led by Captain Lamper himself, found the road to our refuge, the crevice path was empty. The marauders had disappeared, taking their dead with them.

We met our rescuers halfway, and Lamper, hard-bitted old sea rover as he was, choked up and swore in his beard when he saw, by the light of the ship's lantern he was carrying, that we were alive and well. A few words sufficed to put him in possession of the incredible facts, and he got action promptly. Four men were told to row us out to the *Mindoro*, and the others were to stay with him and carry the treasure down to the beach against the return of the boat. As he ordered, so he was obeyed; but at our embarking moment he thrust in his word about the Bloody Bones crew.

"Just wink your eye once, Hughie, lad, and we'll go over yonder and sink that pirate right where she lies," he grated; but we both said, "No;" the marauders had got what was coming to them and the score was even.

Two hours later, fed, clothed, and in our right minds, Alison and I sat out on the after deck of the old *Mindoro* as she went wallowing on her way southward toward Guam; drawn thither together to get a final glimpse of our island as it sank, a dark blot among the Christmas-night horizon stars in the sternward distances.

"Good-by, little island!" Alison called softly. "There may be others as full of thrills as you are, but I doubt it. When we visit you again——"

"Dear heart!" said I; "will you ever want to go back there?"

She laughed happily.

"Some day, Hughie; some Christmas, if I may choose the time. You'll be along, of course, and I shall want the boat to go away and leave us for a while." A little pause, and then: "Did you really speak to daddy before you went to France?"

"I did, indeed."

"And he laughed at you?"

"He did that, and informed me that I couldn't earn enough to keep you in pin money."

"But now you don't have to earn it; you can sell one of the pirate diamonds—or emeralds."

"I'd much rather see you wear them."

"Do you love me that much, Hughie?"

"More."

"Well, singular as it may seem, I love you, too; I've been doing it ever since I was a little girl and wore my hair in two pig-tails down my back."

"Yet you once said 'yes' to Pickney Barrett."

"Jealous old Robinson! But what would you have, Hughie? You didn't care, or seem to care; and as the years went by you acted as though you cared still less."

"That was because you were getting farther and farther away from me—in million-dollar miles," I said.

"Then there came that story about the girl in France; it was in everybody's mouth, and as I've said before, I believed it."

"That was only another of Barrett's frilly lies," I put in.

"Probably. But no matter. Please let's forget it, Hughie; I'm too happy to-night to think of such things. But we mustn't hate Pinckney too hard. It was his ring that brought us together, you know. I had tried to make him take it back, but he wouldn't; and that night, when I slipped and fell overboard, I was trying to throw it away—into the sea. Light your old black pipe if you want to, Hughie, dear. I'd like to see you smoke a whole pipeful once more, without having to wonder where the next one was coming from."

I filled the brier, and while I was about it she softly chanted the old childish ditty—with variations of her own:

"O poor Robinson Crusoe,
Whatever made you do so?
You found you a Jill
On an island of thrill:
Loving old Robinson Crusoe!"



The Cabochon Emeralds

A CHRISTMAS COMEDY OF NEW YORK

By Charles Agnew MacLean

Author of "The Mainspring," "Here's To The Day!" Etc.

If we had been those emeralds, we would have wondered ourselves whom we really did belong to. Incidentally, they looked as though they would be the last Christmas present Chesterfield would buy this side of the poorhouse. Still, we think you will agree that that little dinner he had with Patricia would have made it a pretty merry yuletide for him, anyway

IT was one of those New York days when the wind seems to be blowing from every direction at once—a spiteful wind, a teasing wind, a cruel, brutal wind blowing up and down Fifth Avenue and across the side streets, whirling little wisps of dry snow into tiny sandstorms, building up little drifts across doorways. It had tried to be a real snowstorm and failed. Now it was just a bleak, mean gale.

But one pair of footprints marked the little drift across the doorway of Charles Duval. The shop lay just a little off Fifth Avenue, but even in the holidays it was never crowded. As a dealer in objects of art, museum pieces with a history behind them, odd and bizarre jewels with romance and mystery winking at you out of their depths, Mr. Duval is distinguished. If you buy a present for a girl at Duval's you will certainly have to pay a great deal for it, but you will also have the assurance that there is nothing else like it in town—or anywhere else for the matter of that.

The regular clients of Mr. Duval are entertained upstairs. The ordinary public, the passers-by who drift into the quietly elegant little shop, are received below by a young man as quiet and elegant as the shop itself.

On this afternoon the young man was idle. There was nothing for him to do but polish his finger nails, rearrange his cravat, and smooth his glossy hair. Upstairs, Mr. Duval himself was doing the business for the establishment.

The room in which he and his customer sat was finely paneled in oak. Over an open wood fire was a Grinling Gibbons mantelpiece. Two more or less authentic Gainsboroughs and a Romney broke the mellow

amber of the walls. A carved screen masked the safe. An ancient and beautiful refectory table, half covered with a scarf of red, Genoese velvet, served as a counter on which Mr. Duval might display his treasures.

The only false note in the harmony of this dim-lit room was an early edition of an evening paper whose glaring, black headlines screamed at one from the armchair where it had been carelessly thrown. Its presence there annoyed Mr. Duval; indeed, it seemed to alarm him, for as soon as his eyes fell on it, he grasped it with a muttered exclamation of alarm and thrust it hurriedly beneath a pile of cushions.

Mr. Duval, like one of his own jewels, was suitably set. He matched the room. His spats were of the same soft fawn as his waistcoat, his morning coat fitted him beautifully. His eyes were the eyes of an art connoisseur and his complexion that of an English butler of the highest rank and properly seasoned. His nose was slightly predatory, but the silk handkerchief with which he dusted his hands was the very refinement of gentility.

"Horrid things, these sensational papers," he said with a polite shudder. "You don't ever read them, do you, Mr. Chesterfield?"

There was almost a tremor in Duval's voice, and young Mr. Chesterfield, whose eyes had been fixed on a jeweled clasp on the table, glanced up at him in mild surprise. He was a tall, well-built young man, with an intelligent, good-humored face, and an agreeable and friendly air of carelessness. He might have been thirty, but the only lines in his face were those left there by the practice of athletic sports in the open air and the habit of easy and kindly laughter,

friendly little wrinkles at the corners of the eyes and deeper lines about the mouth. His dress, his voice, the unconscious ease of his attitude all proclaimed him as one whom Fortune has made a pet of, protecting him from worry and annoyance, from unseemly eagerness of passion or struggle, showing him the world through her rosiest of spectacles.

"I hardly ever read them," he said, "except the sporting pages and some of the funny stuff—and some of it isn't very funny. But about these emeralds—you are sure this thing is an original?"

Mr. Duval tenderly raised the Russia leather case in his hands. He became impressive.

"I give you," he said, "the written guarantee of Charles Duval & Brothers, of London, Paris, and New York, that this belt buckle, consisting of cabochon emeralds set in gold, was originally the property of a Russian grand duke who, two generations ago, presented it to a member of a distinguished American family. A representative of the family offers it for sale, but wishes, for personal reasons, that his name remain a secret. The gentleman from Tiffany's who called at your request pronounced it a genuine antique."

"I know," said Chesterfield, "but I'd like to have the pedigree with it. If it has a story, I'd like it now."

"The story will be in your possession within a few days." Mr. Duval laid the case back on the table and dusted off his hands once more.

The young man rose and bent over the table, looking down at the pale-gold setting and gleaming, provocative stones. As the fire crackled, sullen, green flames stirred in their depths. He knew he was extravagant, and yet he could afford it. It is pleasant to be gracious and princely and to bestow happiness.

In a fashion peculiarly elegant, Mr. Duval cleared his throat.

"You will not, I hope, think it an impertinence," he said, "if I suggest that perhaps you intend making this present to the young lady whom you hope to marry."

"Not at all," said Chesterfield with a sort of absent-minded formality, "not at all."

"In that case it might interest you to know that the young lady has seen the buckle."

"Oh, Pauline saw it, did she?" Chesterfield looked up with a flicker of interest.

"Miss Dupuy and her mother, Mrs. Dupuy, called the other day. They were looking for some little trinkets for Christmas presents. I was fortunate enough to please them with one or two trifles. I took the liberty of showing them this."

"Yes?" Chesterfield was still looking down at the stones.

"They are so fond of beautiful things, so appreciative. Miss Dupuy was enchanted with it. They both were. Miss Dupuy's taste is infallible—so sure, so discriminating." She said that this was exquisite. She had never seen anything like it before. She recognized its charm and value at once, instantaneously. She even went so far as to say that she might purchase it herself, if she had the means. It is a pity that people of their wonderful social position and taste have not the means of giving expression to it in the fullest possible way."

"All right," said Chesterfield. "I'll take it."

"You understand that the condition of sale at this price is immediate payment."

"If you have a blank check and a pen," said Chesterfield.

Mr. Duval had a book of blank checks, an antique-looking bottle of ink and several quill pens, also a box of sand. There was nothing so crude and modern as blotting paper in his place. Like a benevolent Beau Brummel he bowed and rubbed his hands while the name Preston Chesterfield was affixed to a check calling for payment of a sum of money that would have seemed a king's, if not an emperor's, ransom to the monks who once had dined at the narrow table.

Mr. Duval hastened to clasp the hand that had signed the check.

"I must congratulate you on having made a wise purchase," he said. "You have shown excellent judgment. Only the pressing necessities of the family would have induced them to part with it at this price."

"I would like Miss Dupuy to get it tomorrow morning. She generally arises about eleven."

"She shall have it upon awakening. A beautiful Christmas gift! And now, if you will excuse me for a moment. Before you go I want to have my expert examine the settings. I want to assure you of everything before you leave."

Duval's exit from the room was reverential and impressive. He held the Russia leather case as if it were some sacred chalice.

Once out of sight of Mr. Chesterfield, his manner changed into something much more agile and less gentlemanly. He skipped down the stairs in a sort of stealthy race and addressed his assistant in whispered and incisive speech.

"Go to the bank as fast as God will let you," he hissed into the elegant young man's ear. "Get this check certified and have it deposited to my account. Then if everything is all right come upstairs and say that the settings are in good order. Got that straight?"

The assistant seemed quite used to this hurried Mr. Duval whom the customers never saw. He was struggling with his overcoat before Duval had reached the foot of the stairs. His hand was on the doorknob before the instructions were completed.

"Hurry," said Duval. "He doesn't know what has happened on the Street. Why did you leave that paper lying there? I thought he had seen it at first."

Uttering these and other remarks in a hoarse whisper, he pushed his man through the door and shut it after him. Being not quite as young as he sometimes felt, Mr. Duval waited a moment for his breathing to become more regular before he attempted the stairs. He was his genteel and imposing self again when he confronted Mr. Chesterfield with an invitation to join him in a glass of Napoleon brandy as befitting the day and the occasion. An authentic bottle was discovered among the Etruscan vases, Tanagra figurines, and other treasures in the big safe. Antique, crystal liqueur glasses accompanied the long-necked bottle.

The odors of Pedro Murias and the attar of autumn vineyards had faintly scented the room when the assistant returned with his report. The settings had been carefully examined and found perfect. Everything was in order.

A second congratulation of Mr. Chesterfield on his felicitous purchase was an imposing ceremony. The business of helping him into his coat, in which the young man from downstairs assisted, seemed almost in the nature of a solemn and sacramental investiture. Chesterfield found himself out on the wind-blown street, permeated with a vague consciousness of well doing and a very distinct sensation of physical glow and well-being.

In spite of the weather he would walk up the Avenue and call on his intended before

dinner. What if the wind did slap you in the face, it was a sturdy, bracing wind. The stores with their dark-green window wreaths looked awfully jolly. It was nice to think that it was Christmas with everybody happy.

Two or three blocks north he bumped into Tommy Breck, southbound and in a hurry. Inasmuch as two short hours ago he had been playing squash with this young man and fully expected to see him again that evening, the natural thing would have been to pass him by with a casual nod. Mr. Breck was of a different mind. He seized Chesterfield's arm and hand with affection. His face took on an expression of gravest concern.

"I'm awfully sorry, old man," he said, "awfully sorry. But I can't wait now. You must call me up after the holidays."

He was off before Chesterfield could ask him what it was he was sorry for or why he should call him up. The curiosity he left behind him carried with it a vague impression of uneasiness. Two or three chance acquaintances greeted him farther on, and it seemed as if their manner were out of keeping with the Christmas spirit. Passing the Metropolitan Club, he noticed old Mr. van Buskirk in the window. There was nothing unusual in that. What was strange was that Mr. van Buskirk seemed to be pointing him out sadly to another aged financier.

Some fifteen years ago Chesterfield had been summoned from the football field at Exeter to hear the news of his father's death. That fall day had returned somehow. The harsh air, the gray sky, the grave and commiserating faces were back again. The sensation of physical comfort, the easy self-satisfaction were fading and something dark and heavy loomed up beneath them. So, it could not be said that he was entirely unprepared when he was ushered into the drawing-room of the Dupuy home.

Miss Dupuy and her mother were there, having the air of expecting him, also Melville Cram, a lawyer, who though young, gave evidence in his manner that he was headed for the bench. The room ordinarily so pleasant in a formal way, gave a first impression of extreme disorder. A second glance showed that this disorder was due entirely to a litter of evening papers which were scattered everywhere, on chairs, on tables, and even on the floor. Miss Dupuy held in her right hand a lace handkerchief with which she dabbed at her eyes. Her

left was occupied with a lip stick and vanity case. Her dress had a general air of elegant disorder and her eyes were pathetic and reproachful. Mrs. Dupuy was as correctly turned out as ever, but her face had the expression usually seen at funerals. Mr. Cram, who, although little older than Chesterfield, was already growing bald in front, looked a little balder and more judicial than usual. He was unbelievably stern and sorrowful.

They all stood facing Chesterfield, searching him with reproachful eyes, a trio such as one might see in the third act of a fashionable play. Cram was the first to speak.

"I'm sorry for this, Preston, my boy," he said, "very sorry."

In a dazed fashion, Chesterfield shook hands and bowed to the ladies.

"Sorry for what?" he said. "What is it?"

"Oh, Preston, how *could* you do it?" said Miss Dupuy. She was a beautiful girl in a cold, blond, statuesque way, and she looked now like a great emotional actress in one of her most pathetic moments.

"Do what?" said Chesterfield.

"And why did you not tell us what you were doing?" said Mrs. Dupuy. She sank into an armchair as she spoke.

"Tell you what?" said Chesterfield. "What was I doing?"

"Pull yourself together, my boy, and don't talk like a parrot," said Cram. "There's no use trying to make a secret of it. It's all in the papers."

"What's all in the papers?"

"Is it possible you have not seen it? Here!" Cram held out one of the journals with which the room was littered.

Chesterfield stared at it stupidly. The headline was simple enough. Whatever tragedy lay behind it was hidden in a cipher. In letters an inch high, running across the smudgy page, he read:

AMALGAMATED MOTORS HITS SIX HUNDRED.

For a moment the room spun about him so fast that the printed letters refused to cohere into words. He was trying to read the news of a Wall Street sensation in which now, for the first time, he realized that he was acutely concerned. He had played the part of the proud prince, careless, generous, and trusting. Business he had left to others.

The letters began to steady themselves and arrange themselves into words. The words

were marshaled into phrases, sentences, paragraphs. Other headings came out of the blur: "Bryan Determined to Squeeze the Shorts." "Bryan Defies Stock Exchange Governors." "Sharpe, Martin & Co. Heavily Involved." "Stock Exchange Closed."

Sharpe, Martin & Co. was Chesterfield's firm. His money was behind them. He remembered something Tommy Martin had said to him about a raid on Amalgamated Motors only a week ago. Since then he had been playing squash and going to dances. On the same day he had won the squash championship at the club and lost a fortune. To say what he was thinking is impossible; he was thinking so many things at once. Mrs. Dupuy handed him another paper. Across its front, in even larger letters, ran the legend

CHESTERFIELD MILLIONS INVOLVED.

He could hear Mrs. Dupuy's voice coming as from a great distance.

"This has been a terrible shock to me," it said. "I would not have understood what it all meant, had not Mr. Cram been so kind as to explain it all. You have been gambling, Preston, and this is what has come of it."

Chesterfield carefully folded the papers and handed them to Cram. He knew exactly what had happened, for with all his carelessness he was no fool at business or anything else. It was not so spectacular as an earthquake, but quite as effective. To read of such things happening to others conveys a pleasant excitement and adds an interest to life. To have it happen to oneself is taking part in the last days of Pompeii or going over Niagara in a barrel.

A momentary silence was broken only by an occasional sniff from Miss Dupuy. Chesterfield's first feeling that the earth had collapsed beneath him gave place to an assurance of personal guilt. The three faces all accused him. Other feelings began to rise up through the welter in his breast. Pauline's sniffs and sobs annoyed him. He was a little angry at the attitude of his three friends.

"Well," he said. "I'm badly burned, that's all."

"All!" said Miss Dupuy through her handkerchief. "Mother, I can't stand this."

"All!" said Mrs. Dupuy. "Preston, do you realize what you have done to my girl?"

At present Chesterfield was a little too

busy realizing what he had done to himself to think of others. He remembered the size of the check he had just signed for Pauline's Christmas gift. A faint smile touched the corners of his good-natured mouth and brought a new expression into his kindly eyes. Cram, who as a lawyer was good at reading faces, noticed it.

"This is no time for levity," he said.

Cram's heavy, judicial air was largely assumed and Chesterfield knew it. Also, he knew that Cram was a social climber as well as a rising young lawyer. He had noticed his attentions to Pauline with amused tolerance. Good-natured and well-mannered people often see much more than they appear to. Anyway, his marriage to Pauline was a settled family matter, a wooing and betrothal as passionless, as formal, as decorous and ceremonial as though they had been members of the old régime in France.

At present, however, the airs Cram was giving himself were irritating. Chesterfield turned upon him as if he had been stung.

"What have you got to do with this?" he asked.

"I am a friend of Mrs. Dupuy and her daughter—Pauline," said Cram with slight embarrassment.

Chesterfield looked at him and Cram read in his face a chronicle of the true regard in which he had been held all these years. It was humiliating. Apparently Chesterfield liked nothing about him. His hair, his clothes, his shoes, his eyes, his soul were all in evident contempt. It is only the naturally polite man who can be thoroughly offensive when he chokes. Cram moved uneasily and tried to assert himself.

"Preston," he said, "I don't like the attitude you take."

"What have you to do with my attitude?"

"As a friend of Pauline's."

"That gives you no right to lecture me just because I have made a miscue."

"A miscue!" said Mrs. Dupuy. "That is what he calls it."

Cram was a little encouraged by Mrs. Dupuy's support. She was a formidable personality.

"Your attitude is flippant," said Cram, "and your carelessness is criminal."

"I shall be glad to talk to Mrs. Dupuy and Miss Dupuy about my misfortune; but as far as I'm concerned, you don't exist."

"Preston," said Miss Dupuy, looking up

from her little mirror, "please try and remember that you are a gentleman."

"Pauline," said Chesterfield, "please try to persuade your friend that I don't want to talk to him."

Chesterfield at that moment, without knowing it, talked and looked like his grandfather. Underneath the good-natured personality there was something both polite and truculent that none of them had ever seen before. Pauline felt as though she had been doused with ice water. She was not used to it. It took her breath away. She appealed gaspingly to Cram.

"Please take me out, Melville. I can't stand this," she said.

The use of Cram's Christian name, the appeal that her expressive eyes made to the lawyer, had a correspondingly chilly effect on Chesterfield. He watched them out of the room in silence, Pauline clinging to the lawyer's arm and looking like the Muse of Tragedy.

"Now, Preston," said Mrs. Dupuy, "please sit down and try to calm yourself. I want to have a serious talk with you."

"I am at your service."

There was something in his tone that disturbed her. She could not say that it was rude. She could not have put her feeling into words. What was really the matter was that Chesterfield was no longer in awe of her. It was a new and unpleasant experience. She had been accustomed to have people in awe of her for so long, especially Chesterfield, whom she had hoped to hand over to her daughter in a proper state of submission. She could make him uncomfortable by talking to him seriously and slowly. She could make him still more uncomfortable by saying nothing at all, while he in a good-humored fashion strove to please and placate. She had enjoyed the exercise of both these powers—but now her pleasure was gone. She knew that nothing she could say would make Chesterfield uncomfortable, and were she as silent as the sphinx, it would make no difference. We all hate to have power pass away from us.

"Oh, Preston," she said, "I feel so upset!"

"I am sorry," said Chesterfield.

"It is not the loss of the money," said Mrs. Dupuy after a long pause which she saw had no effect on the aspect of the young man before her. "That is a mere trifle." She waved her hand in a gesture suggesting something like a puff of eiderdown.

"Of course" said Chesterfield. She glanced at him to see if his meaning was sarcastic, but his face told nothing, which was worse. She determined to play her last card at once.

"The question is whether you are the sort of man to whom I can trust the happiness of my daughter," she said. "Pauline is so sensitive."

"You know me," said Chesterfield. "You should know."

"I am in serious doubt," she said.

"Perhaps Pauline knows." Chesterfield seemed to view the matter as a disinterested outsider.

"Pauline is such a dear girl! She tries to keep it from me, but I know she has been unhappy lately."

"If you wish to break the engagement, and Pauline wishes it, all I can say is that I am sorry."

"You grew up together as children and your marriage was an understood thing. But this recklessness and carelessness of yours is too much. My girl's life happiness is at stake. The question is—can you make her happy?"

"I used to think so, but just at present I have serious doubts."

"Mr. Cram was just saying before you came in—"

"Please spare me any reference to Mr. Cram," said Chesterfield, rising. "I think I understand you. The engagement is broken. I have only to wish you and your daughter a happy holiday season."

Pique, disappointment, resentment—a dozen unaccustomed and bitter emotions were warring within the young man. The result was a totally different person from his normal self. Mrs. Dupuy was stunned. Before she had marshaled her thoughts for her next speech she was looking out on the street where the snow had started to fall again.

She could see Chesterfield as he dashed down the steps. Her eyes followed his tall figure as he strode off through the gathering dusk. Never before had he walked with that aggressive swing to his shoulders and with his hands thrust down into the pockets of his overcoat in that fashion. His very back looked hard and unfamiliar. Perhaps he was not a gentleman, after all. She had liked him a little, as much as she could like any one outside of the incomparable Pauline. What she had looked forward to as a

painful interview for Chesterfield, and a not altogether unpleasant one for herself, had ended almost before it had commenced.

She wondered now if she had been wise in breaking the engagement. Yes, on the whole she thought she was. The Chesterfield fortune might be entirely swept away.

And then there was Melville Cram. She knew that Pauline liked him better than she did Chesterfield, although nine people out of ten would have considered Chesterfield the much more attractive man. There was something about Melville's energy, ambition, and subtlety that made an appeal to Pauline.

Miss Dupuy was the most dignified and circumspect girl in town. For years mothers had pointed her out to their daughters as the model for the fashionable, yet properly brought up, young lady. Her mother, however, had always understood her.

II.

The restaurant of Leon Fleuret is situated pleasantly on a side street. It is one of those admirable establishments which, starting modestly as confectionery and tea shops, become restaurants at once quiet and fashionable, through the sheer merit of cookery and service. It is an excellent place to take a girl. It is not the place for parties.

Without, a large brassbound commissionaire stands ready to open the door. Within, is a beautifully proportioned room in white and gray with plenty of mirrors after the French fashion. Leon is always there in person, and he knows the majority of his guests by name.

It was here that Chesterfield found himself at about a quarter past seven. He wanted to meet no one he knew and Fleuret's would be comparatively deserted on Christmas Eve. He had broken his dinner engagement and spent a useless half hour trying to get his brokers on the phone. It was too late to do anything. Everything was closed. He was quite helpless, and his case hopeless.

Unlike the traditional young man who is ruined in fortune and bereft in love, he made no effort to become dissipated. A single Scotch and soda while dressing for dinner was his modest concession to the conventions of his circumstances. He had summoned the small, closed car that he drove himself and was about to leave for Fleuret's when

he remembered the cabochon emeralds. He knew Duval well enough not to expect his money back. At the same time it did not seem quite the thing under present conditions to send them to Pauline. By good luck he caught Duval on the telephone at seven. That gentleman sometimes stayed late with his treasures of art and his Napoleon brandy. Chesterfield ordered the emeralds sent to his own home and agreed to have some one there to receive them and receipt for them.

And so, his affairs for the day being concluded, he sat at a table in Fleuret's, engaged in the problem of what his dinner was to be. There were few others there that evening, only one or two couples scattered about the large room. The waiter had just handed him the card when some echo of commotion or conversation at the door caused him to look in that direction.

A girl, unattended, had just stepped into the room and was glancing about her in some confusion. Her graceful air of indecision, her dress, which was smart and simple at the same time, her bright eyes and glowing cheeks, made her an engaging figure to look at. Her blue eyes swept the room and came to rest on Chesterfield. She moved straight in his direction. At first he thought she had recognized some one behind him and dropped his eyes to his menu card. But no—she stopped at his table.

"Please pretend that you know me," she said in a low and agreeable voice. "*Please—it's important—please!*"

The voice and the intonation struck some reflex in Chesterfield that saved him the trouble of thought. He was on his feet at once, extending a courteous hand. A waiter drew out a chair for the young lady who was already unbuttoning her coat. She handed over her furs, and a moment later they were seated face to face.

"If you were ever in a hole in your life," she said, "think of it now. Pretend you know me. I'm Miss O'Brien. Pretend we've been here for some time. Look out now! Here he comes! Pretend you're talking to me."

The "he" referred to by Miss O'Brien was a tall man who had just entered. He was large without appearing so, with a beautiful pair of shoulders and a keen, hawk face. He moved slowly down one side of the room, scanning all the couples.

"Don't look up," said Miss O'Brien.

"Talk! Say something! If ever you were in trouble, think of it now and help me out."

"I am thinking of it," said Chesterfield. "I read somewhere that a good meal was a great help when you were blue. Let's order."

He ordered a clear soup, a filet of sole, a mousse of chicken, and Virginia ham, a salad and an ice.

"They don't often keep us waiting this way here," he said.

The large man had paused at the table. Beside him was Leon himself.

"I tell you the man you are looking for is not here," he said. "I cannot have my guests annoyed like this."

"I'm not looking for a man," said the newcomer. "It's a woman. Now, this lady here—"

"Is a friend of Mr. Chesterfield's. Surely you have heard of Mr. Chesterfield."

Chesterfield looked up, apparently noticing the tall man for the first time. His companion was arranging her gloves in a preoccupied and negligent fashion.

"This man is a detective," said Leon. "He is looking for some one."

"I see," said Chesterfield. He drew from the side pocket of his dinner coat an identification card case and presented it to the detective. One glance at the police card with the commissioner's signature at the bottom was enough.

"This lady came here with me," said Chesterfield.

"I'm sorry," said the detective. "She must have gone in somewhere else."

Miss O'Brien raised her head and looked him in the eye.

"I hope she gets away," she said. "Poor, hunted thing!"

The detective laughed.

"The ladies are always in favor of the under dog," he said. "Good night, miss."

"Now," said Chesterfield, when the door had closed on him, "what have you been doing?"

"It's a long story," said Miss O'Brien. "I've had the most terrible evening of my life. It won't be over till the day after tomorrow."

"What won't be over?"

"I'll tell you some day. In the meantime, I'm hungry. I recognized you the minute I came in the room. I'll pay for this party. You see I've seen you often, at the football games and here and there. Just let me stay

here for three-quarters of an hour and then I'll go home. And I'll be grateful to you for the rest of my life."

Chesterfield needed no assurance from her that she was not the ordinary fugitive from justice. No man of his wealth and prominence could live long in New York without learning something about the different sorts of women in town and their wives.

This was clearly an outdoor girl. In the matter of her personality she was almost too good to be true. She was so definitely well bred that there was no doubting her. She almost made him forget Pauline and Amalgamated Motors, which is saying a great deal. She was the sort of girl who laughed readily, at the right time, and never maliciously. She waved his cigarette case aside.

"I never learned to smoke," she said. "Anyway, this mousse is too good to spoil."

"I'm a perfectly respectable person," she went on after a moment. "Though we haven't lived in the city in years. Of course I recognized you, Mr. Chesterfield. I knew from your face that you were clever enough to—"

"Thanks!"

"And easy-going enough to be taken in and imposed upon by any one who came along and asked a favor of you."

"And I'm being imposed upon now?"

"You are just being nice and helpful to some one who is in danger this Christmas Eve."

"Serious danger?"

"As serious as you could imagine, and then some more! But it's only for the present. It will be all right in a day or so. It will all be undone again—at least, I hope it can—after to-morrow's over."

"You won't mind my saying that you make me curious."

"Well, then, I'll try and get your mind on something else. Do you know what the orchestra is playing?"

Chesterfield shook his head. He was aware of the music only as a pleasant accompaniment to an interesting experience.

"Now that is called 'Noel.' 'Noel,' you understand, being the French name for Christmas. It is my favorite Christmas carol. Now, this next one they are drifting into is the 'Cantique de Noel,' by Adam. It is a wonderful solo for a bass. They sing it, Christmas Eve, at the Madeleine. You should have heard Plançon sing it."

"I have. I remember it."

"You should have heard my father sing it. He had a wonderful voice. Now, this one they are coming to is the English one, 'God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen.' And after that they'll play 'Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem.' Do you see? Wasn't I right?"

"Perhaps you play or sing yourself?"

"Oh, just a little for amusement. Do you know I was fortunate in finding you here? It is an odd thing to find a gentleman like yourself dining alone on Christmas Eve."

"Is it?"

"Of course. Weren't you lonely?"

"Maybe so. I wasn't thinking whether I was lonely or not."

"That isn't a nice way to spend Christmas Eve."

"Don't you think that the Christmas good cheer becomes a bit of a farce sometimes?"

"No." Miss O'Brien looked up from her salad and lent emphasis to her remarks with her eyes. "You might as well say that Christmas was a farce altogether. Just trying to be different from other people and not like the things other people do, doesn't appeal to me at all. I'm not cynical."

"Perhaps some people have things happen to them to make them cynical."

"Nothing that happens would make a man with any sense cynical."

"I don't lay claim to having any sense. But supposing you had a couple of very unpleasant Christmas gifts handed to you at once, wouldn't it dim your enthusiasm just a little?"

Miss O'Brien laid down her fork and eyed him disapprovingly.

"Mr. Chesterfield," she said, "that isn't fair. You are making me curious."

"Isn't fair! And you are making me more curious than I've ever been in my life."

"Why, I'm trying to keep you from being curious. Anyway, what does a man know about curiosity?"

"What do you know about men?"

"I have a brother."

Chesterfield leaned back in his chair and glanced around the room. The marvel of it all was that he felt perfectly at ease. The dinner was delicious. The music was not too loud. There was a genial warmth, not only in the air, but in some spirit that presided over the little table with its shaded candles and Santa Claus ices. Miss O'Brien had that strange faculty, given to many women, of making any place seem like home.

"A dollar," said Miss O'Brien, who had

been figuring with a gold pencil on the edge of her menu card, "a dollar will be enough."

"Enough for what?"

"Enough for a tip for the waiter. Or, perhaps, as it is Christmas Eve, I might make it a dollar and a half."

"You might make it a dollar and a half!"

"Yes, this is my party, you know."

"I don't know. You are having dinner with me."

"Of course it will look better if you call the waiter and pay the bill. But after we get outside, I'll give this money to you. Or, here, take it now." She slid a neat little pile of silver and bills across the table. "Take it now while nobody's looking."

"I can't take it. I never heard of such a thing in my life."

"Oh, you are going to be stubborn! Please don't be stubborn." Miss O'Brien's face indicated that among her other accomplishments she numbered the ability to cry at will. A waiter appearing, Chesterfield settled the bill from his own pocketbook, holding the young lady's money in his other hand.

Miss O'Brien buttoned up her coat, pulled on her gloves, and resumed her furs.

"I must be going now," she said, "and thank you a thousand times! I will write you some day and explain the whole thing."

"I'm going to take you home," said Chesterfield, following her. "Besides, I can't allow you to leave this with me. It has been a great pleasure. You have helped to save the worst evening of my life."

"The worst evening of your life!" she shot a startled glance at him. "You don't know what bad evenings are. Wait till you hear what I have been through."

Outside, the wind had died away somewhat and it was snowing harder. She glanced up and down the white, deserted street.

"I expected some one back here in three-quarters of an hour," she said. "Something may have happened to him. Anything might happen to him!"

"I have absolutely nothing to do to-night," said Chesterfield. "Here is my motor car. Let me take you home."

"Oh, I wouldn't think of it."

"You wouldn't trust yourself with me?"

"Nonsense! I mean that I don't want you to go to all that trouble. I've taken enough of your time already. I live in Westchester County, away up near Rye. It

would be too far and you would not know the way."

"I know my way about Westchester after dark. Do step in."

The brass-bound commissionaire was holding the door open, and the little car looked unusually luxurious and comfortable. Miss O'Brien hesitated and was lost.

The engine purred like a sleepy cat, the car slid off as if it were on skates. Inside was a tempered warmth, soft cushions, the gleam of a small light on a dial, the chaste protection of plate-glass windows. Outside was a tunnel of light, boring into the snow-flakes ahead, the soft crunch of snow beneath the cord tires, houses and lamp-posts and street crossings, all slipping behind them noiselessly and steadily.

As every one knows, there is something cozy and intimate about a closed car, especially in winter and in the evening; an atmosphere, too, of the old romance of coaching days, a feeling of having the whole, dark world shut out.

The spell of it was an anodyne for the hurt of a catastrophic day. Still more delightful was the presence of Chesterfield's companion. Unlike Pauline's, her attraction was not of the stunning, obvious sort, but a gently persuasive quality. Her voice brought back the cadences of dear, half-forgotten tunes, and yet her eyes held, mingled with their soft radiance, some quality of dizzy thrills.

As Pauline's fiancée, Chesterfield had been irreproachable in thought as well as action. It was a shock, but still rather pleasant, to discover that his present elation of spirits came from a new-born sense of freedom! Now he could talk to any girl as long as he liked and nobody cared. It was thrilling. Of course, he had been heartbroken, in a way, but then—

"I'm a nuisance," said Miss O'Brien, "making you all this trouble."

"You'll never be a nuisance to anybody."

"You are very kind, sir."

"I'm just telling the truth."

"Is that all?"

"Don't you suppose I like this?"

"Do you?"

"Certainly, don't you?"

"Perhaps—a wee bit." Miss O'Brien gave herself a little ecstatic hug. "It's nice, gliding along like this. I ought to be perfectly miserable, but I don't think I am—not perfectly."

"I should be plunged in the depths of despair, but I'm happy."

"Why?"

"Why am I happy? Can't you imagine why, if you try hard?"

"I don't mean that—and you know it. I mean why should you be plunged in the depths of despair?"

"You tell me about yourself first."

"I can't tell you—not yet. In fact, I've talked a lot, as it is."

"What are you like when you are trying to keep a secret?"

"I've told you my name—and you are taking me home, and we've had dinner together. Isn't that traveling fast enough for people who have never been introduced?"

"Not half fast enough for me."

"Are you often in this mood?"

"This is positively the first time."

"And the last?"

"Oh, no. I hope to feel this way often."

"What is it like?"

"Oh, it's a sense of freedom—a feeling as if things were starting for the first time, a beautiful morning with a wonderful day ahead. I feel as if springtime and Christmas were all rolled into one. Can't you understand?"

"I'm not quite sure."

"Have you never felt that way, yourself?"

"Perhaps, sometimes."

"Now?"

"Maybe so."

Her voice was soft and had a faint tremor. He could see the rise and fall of her breast and the delicate outline of her profile. They were silent for a while.

The deserted uptown streets, the straggling houses and ghostly factories had dropped behind them. Virginal and white, the old Boston Post Road stretched before them. They had run through Larchmont when the girl laid her hand upon his arm and spoke again.

"The next turn to the right," she said, "then to the left over the hill. Then you'll see a break in the hedge. That's the driveway."

Wet snow fell on the hood from the high rose hedge as they swung off the road into an untracked driveway. A brick house, admirably designed and of considerable size, but dimly lit, opened out before them. Somewhere a dog barked and a second and a third joined the chorus. A door swung open and

a vestibule light glowed suddenly, illuminating snow-covered stone steps and a porch with high, white pillars. An old and rather shabby butler opened the door of the machine.

"Has Mike come back yet?" said Miss O'Brien, springing out.

"No, ma'am."

"Nor Mr. Larry?"

"Not him, neither."

"Help this gentleman off with his things then. I want to go in a moment, first."

She flew up the steps and disappeared down a wide hall. Moving at a more sedate pace, the butler led Chesterfield into a sort of smoking room and helped him off with his coat. The house was old, rather fine, very comfortable, and just a little shabby. Presently Miss O'Brien's voice could be heard down the hall.

"Show Mr. Chesterfield in here," she said, "and then bring us some tea."

Chesterfield found Miss O'Brien awaiting him in a spacious apartment. On three sides were bookshelves and on the other an open fire. The furniture, evidently accumulated bit by bit, was of all periods. There were dozens of paintings of all sorts and sizes and several glazed cabinets. Miss O'Brien was bent over the fire arranging the logs.

Curiosity had for the moment blotted out every other emotion from Chesterfield's consciousness. The adventure was more and more strange. He had never seen a house like this. It was not the work of a decorator. It had been lived in expansively and it had grown. There were so many curious things to look at. It had something of the quality of a museum. Everything had atmosphere.

One big, glass-covered cabinet drew him like a magnet. He studied its contents while Miss O'Brien busied herself with the logs.

In it were miniatures, snuff boxes, old watches, vases, bits of jewelry. It reminded him somehow of Duval's collection. The thing, however, that made him draw a long breath, that held him speechless and motionless, was set forth alone on an upper shelf of the cabinet, the light from the old chandelier falling full upon it.

It nestled in a carefully opened Russia leather case. It was startling and inimitable. There was nothing like it in the world. Its emerald eyes winked at him in a message so surprising and incomprehensible as to defy description.

The design was the same, the setting was

the same, the tracings and odd scratches, the irregularly shaped stones were the same. Even the signs of wear on the leather case were marks of identification. It was the cabochon emerald buckle he had purchased that afternoon from Duval.

III.

Amazement becomes an overpowering passion when it brings with it the element of inexplicability, when reason seems an utterly futile thing, when the imagination is stunned and paralyzed. There was a ringing in Chesterfield's ears. He could hear the emerald buckle speaking as plainly as though it addressed his ears and not his eyes.

"Behold me!" it said. "I am a miracle. There can be no other buckle so marvelously like me as this. Behold these stones! You have seen them often at Duval's. You know there can be no other gems so identically alike. Note my old, pale gold, the quaint idiosyncracies of my workmanship. Surely it is I! And yet it cannot be I! I am at your house. I went there only an hour or so ago. I could not have arrived here. Yet here I am."

"Mr. Chesterfield," said Miss O'Brien, turning from her operations at the fire and seeing the young man's countenance, "what is the matter? You are so pale. Are you sick?"

"I am surprised."

"At what? What is the matter?" She was plainly concerned for him.

"I am surprised. There is something I cannot understand."

"Do sit down," said Miss O'Brien. She had left off her outer things and looked very girlish and friendly in a filmy blouse and dark skirt. Her hair was brown and wavy, shot with gleams of gold. She seemed as beautiful, as appealing, as inexplicable as the cabochon emeralds. They went together.

"You have not been very frank with me," said Chesterfield, "but I can't help telling you what is bothering me. That emerald buckle in the cabinet there."

Miss O'Brien's hands went to her throat. The delicate flush ebbed from her face, leaving it transparently white with a few faint freckles showing. She swayed, thrust out a hand toward the chair beside her, sank into it. Chesterfield could hear the slow ticking of the clock in the corner and the crackle of the wood fire.

"Please forgive me," said Chesterfield at length. "I did not mean to startle you."

"The buckle!" said Miss O'Brien. "What about it?"

"This afternoon I bought an emerald belt buckle at Duval's. Either I am insane or it is there in that cabinet now."

A sort of blithe and valiant integrity that had made up part of her charm still shone in her eyes, although her face was a white mask. There was something inexpressibly touching about her distress. He took the tea things from the butler and poured her a cup. She drank it with a nod of thanks and laid the cup on the table.

"Do you mean to say that you bought that buckle this afternoon?" she said faintly.

"Either I did, or I am dreaming."

"Then that poor young man was going to you with it! And he may be hurt." She was biting her lower lip and her hands were clasped so that the knuckles showed white. He could see the fluttering rise and fall of her chest beneath the filmy blouse and a quick pulse throbbing in her throat.

"I don't know whom you mean," he said. "And, of course, I can't understand it all. But you mustn't distress yourself this way."

Some kindly instinct prompted him to rise, turn his back to her, and walk over to the fireplace. When he faced her again she had regained a certain measure of self-control.

"Sit down, please, Mr. Chesterfield," she said. "I must tell you the whole story."

Chesterfield waited patiently while she smoothed out her skirt and composed herself generally. In the cross lights of fire and chandelier she was prettier than ever.

"My father," she said, "was an Irishman—Lawrence O'Brien. He was once in the Senate, but he is dead these many years. My mother was a Peabody—a New England Peabody."

"I have heard of the family."

"My brother and I live here alone. Our nearest living relative is Uncle Horace Peabody."

"If he lives at Tuxedo, I know him."

"He does. He motors over here every Christmas morning to pay us a visit. He has been doing it all our lives. He'll be here to-morrow. I don't know what I'm going to do."

"Don't you like him?"

"I love him. He is the dearest man in the world. That belt buckle belonged to his

family. He gave it to us. It is the first thing he looks at when he comes into the house. And if he comes here to-morrow and finds it gone——" Miss O'Brien completed the sentence with a gesture of despair.

"But he won't find it gone," said Chesterfield cheerfully. "There it is."

Miss O'Brien sprang to the cabinet and opened it. She took out the fateful emeralds and extended them to Chesterfield. He had risen to his feet and was reaching out in a gesture of protest when footsteps sounded in the hall and the door shot open. Into the room stepped the tall detective who had invaded Fleuret's an hour or so ago. There was a look of angry determination in his eye, and he pushed aside the protesting butler with an angry gesture and stood surveying Chesterfield and the young lady who was in the evident act of handing over the buckle.

"Just give that to me," he said at length, "and get on your hat and coat."

Miss O'Brien retreated from him, holding the emeralds behind her back. The detective took a step after her and reached out as if to touch her. She looked like a frightened child confronting a giant.

"Look here," said Chesterfield, "there is a mistake here." He stepped between the two. "That buckle belongs to me."

The detective made the additional mistake of trying to brush him aside as he had the butler.

"Keep out of this," he said. "I'll put the bracelets on her—and you, too."

In extenuation of Chesterfield's conduct, it must be pleaded that he had spent a rather trying day. The present situation would have exasperated a pet rabbit. The touch of the officer's hand was the final circumstance, the spark that set off the gunpowder. It changed Chesterfield from a courteous and good-natured young man to a raging super-madman. He had a brain storm. It is a psychological fact that an even-tempered person, once thoroughly aroused, has less control over himself than one who loses his temper more or less habitually and knows how to handle it with practice. An Indian on his first debauch with liquor is much more dangerous than an habitual toper.

His first blow brought the central-office man down with a crash that shook the room.

Miss O'Brien and the butler were speechless—hypnotized by the spectacle before

them. It was an altercation that would have interested Theodore Roosevelt or Jack London or Tarzan of the Apes. In fact, it would have interested any one. It was not brutal. It was too fast to be brutal. Like falling downstairs, it was absolutely engrossing while it lasted.

As an embodiment of whole-souled rage and fury, the fashionable Mr. Chesterfield was a heartening and edifying sight. His surrender to a stark and primitive emotion was so complete as to be magnificent. No one could have had the heart to interfere with a spectacle such as he presented.

The tall detective played almost as worthy a part in the drama. He was hampered a little by his light overcoat, but, on the whole, it could not be said that he allowed it to cramp his style.

He arose with alacrity only to meet several punches, each of which elicited a heavy grunt. In apparent despair, he threw his long arms around the young man's neck and dragged him to his bosom. The room was silent save for a series of heavy thuds. Then, for a moment, the onlookers were rewarded by the sight of a young gentleman of the first fashion and an officer of the law, each engaged in a palpably sincere effort to throttle the other. This arresting tableau lasted but a fraction of a second. The clinch broke and, for an infinitely minute period of time, no longer than a lightning flash, the tall man appeared to be engaged in an effort to push his face against Mr. Chesterfield's right fist and Mr. Chesterfield himself seemed to be doing his earnest best to aid and abet him in this enterprise. The scenes changed like those on a film run at triple speed.

A chair fell apart, and the detective was discovered in its ruins. He was up again, squaring off at Chesterfield in a sort of paralytic attitude. He was down on one knee. He was on his feet again, charging at his opponent like a wild boar. The only sounds were stamping feet, grunts and thuds, and the occasional crackle of some smashing article of furniture. Finally Chesterfield stood alone in the center of the room, with flushed face and rumpled hair, his collar torn open at the neck, and a long rip in the sleeve of his dinner coat. He was painfully breathless. At a little distance from him the large man was slowly rising to his feet. Something in his right hand gleamed in the firelight. It was a police revolver.

"I've got you covered," he said, "and if you make one more funny move, I'll drill a hole in you as sure as God made little apples! I hate to pull a gun, but I've had enough of this!"

"If you are a central-office man you can lay that gun down and call up Commissioner Blair. He knows me," said Chesterfield.

"Commissioner Blair is on his way up here. The whole department is stirred up over this robbery. It's the rawest thing has happened in years. I've got you two, and I've got the emeralds, and you won't get away this time. Hand over the buckle."

"That buckle belongs to me," said Chesterfield, dignified though still panting.

"Of course," said the detective with evident sarcasm, "and that's why I'm going to arrest you."

"I mean what I say," said Chesterfield. "I tell you it is my buckle. Try and get that through your head."

The young man's tone was so confident and masterful as to shake the composure of the other.

"It belongs to you, does it?" he said. "Where did you get it?"

"I bought it," said Chesterfield, breathing on the knuckles of his right hand and speaking with considerable irritation. "Where do you think I got it?"

The detective's eyes brightened with a new comprehension. His manner took on the soothing tone of one who humors a madman.

"Oh, you bought it?" he said. "I suppose you wanted to give it to some lady for a present."

"Exactly," said Chesterfield. "I can see why they put *you* on the detective force. You're a good guesser."

"I can guess well enough to tell you that you'll have to explain this at headquarters—and I've got a charge of assault."

"If Commissioner Blair is on his way here, as you say, we can wait till he comes. Keep your gun on me if you want. I won't start anything. As for the assault, I'm sorry I lost my temper—but you started it. I hope you're not hurt. What's your name, officer?"

"Slade," said the detective. He turned to the girl. "Hand over that buckle," he said.

"Miss O'Brien," said Chesterfield, "please put the buckle in the cabinet where it belongs."

Slade, his weapon still pointed at Chesterfield, watched her as she silently obeyed. This was the strangest pair of thieves he had ever seen. Chesterfield's assured manner and confident air was beginning to have a little weight with him. The young man had every manifestation of being palpably genuine, and the girl looked too much like a lady for the detective's peace of mind. He knew the difference.

At any rate, there was the buckle, and there were the two who had brought it here, before him in the room. Whether or not the young man was insane, who the girl was—these were questions for the commissioner. They could not get away from him and he could afford to wait.

After the late tumult of conflict, the room was strangely silent. The butler moved quietly about, rearranging furniture and picking up pieces of the broken chair. The detective felt tenderly an abrasion on the bridge of his nose. In spite of the violent nature of the recent struggle, his hard face did not look much the worse for wear. The hand that held the revolver was steady. Mr. Chesterfield buttoned his collar, retied his black cravat, and looked quite respectable again. Miss O'Brien seemed on the verge of hysterical laughter. Finally she turned to the detective and broke the silence.

"Won't you sit down and have a cup of tea?" she said chokingly. "You look tired."

"You might as well sit down," said Chesterfield. "Even with that gun you can't run me out of here. And you are not going to arrest Miss O'Brien without shooting me first."

Slade studied him, his hard, intelligent face a picture of earnest cogitation.

"Who are you, anyway?" he said.

"You saw my card down at Fleuret's."

"Do you mean to say that you are the real Preston Chesterfield?"

"Certainly. And this young lady is Miss O'Brien, daughter of the late Senator Lawrence O'Brien."

The big man sat down and laid his weapon on the table.

"I don't believe you," he said. "But no crook could ever scrap the way you do."

"Do have a cup of tea," said Miss O'Brien.

"I never drink tea," said Mr. Slade. "One cup would get me nervous and keep me awake all right."

"It's whisky the officer wants," put in the butler.

"Whisky!" Mr. Slade turned a withering glance in his direction. "Do you think I'd ruin my condition with that stuff? Do you know who I am?"

"Yes," said the butler. "You're Tom Slade, the champion heavyweight of the force, and you are going to be tried out against a professional next week. I know you."

"Well, then, don't offer me whisky. If I had my way, there wouldn't be a drop of that poison in the world."

"It's lucky for you that Mr. Chesterfield isn't in the profession," said the butler silyly.

"That's all right," said Mr. Slade, who was recovering his composure and rearranging his attire. "I shouldn't have started anything rough. You run along and get me a glass of hot water."

Chesterfield leaned forward studying the police officer, the beautiful swing and slope of his shoulders, the muscular column of his neck, the well-set head, the long arms and the refinement of the lines of the torso, visible even beneath the overcoat, sloping in from broad shoulders to narrow hips. But a few moments ago this Hercules had fallen thrice before him. He felt the hair prickling up along the back of his neck. What pallid things were squash championships compared to this!

"Do I understand," he inquired, "that you are the Tom Slade who is to fight at the International Sporting Club in two weeks?"

Mr. Slade had seized the silver hot-water pitcher the butler had brought and was pouring himself a bumper of this invigorating beverage. He drank almost a pint before he answered.

"I'm the man," he said finally, a faint beading of perspiration showing on his forehead. "I've got an eight-hour detail on Wall Street, and I've been training at night. But it's hard to get right. This helps. No tea or coffee for mine. I need my sleep. You seem to be pretty fit yourself. I'll say that you've got a pretty fair right."

"It was an accident," said Chesterfield politely.

"I'll say that an accident that happens three times running like that, gets to be a habit. I'd like to ask a favor of you."

"Anything reasonable."

"If you're not under arrest, box with me a couple of times before the fight."

"I don't know how to box."

"I'll say that you know how to fight. What I want to find out is how you slip that right over. I don't want that to happen in the ring."

"Aren't you sorry you didn't listen to Mr. Chesterfield in the first place?" This from Miss O'Brien, who was quietly sipping tea.

Mr. Slade scratched his head. The atmosphere of the charming old room, with its dark paintings, its rugs, with the log fire and the dull mahogany, above all, the invisible but no less potent aura of unconscious good breeding that Miss O'Brien carried with her, was acting upon him like some pleasant hypnotic gas. Without knowing how it happened, he was falling into a friendly conversation with two people he had expected to arrest.

"If you are the people you say you are," he said, "I am in a big hole, and I owe you an apology. I'm out of my depth here. My work is down on Wall Street. I passed Duval's just as the robbery occurred and got as good a description of the woman as I could. I thought I was making the biggest pinch of the year. But now it appears I made a fool of myself."

His thoughts were in the way of adjusting themselves to this new viewpoint, the air was clearing a little for him, when Miss O'Brien tossed him a mental hand grenade which sputtered for a moment, then went off in a shattering explosion that blew his new scheme of things into dust.

"You didn't make such a big mistake, after all," she said. "It was too bad you fought with Mr. Chesterfield, although it was most interesting. I am so glad that you are neither of you hurt. But I might as well tell you now as later that those are the emeralds which were stolen from Mr. Duval's assistant, and that I brought them up here."

"What!" Mr. Slade almost spilled the glass of hot water he was raising to his lips. "What do you mean?"

"I mean just what I say."

"Then you're under arrest."

"Wait a minute," said Chesterfield. "Those emeralds belong to me. I have Duval's receipted bill for them in my pocket-book. Here it is. I paid a hundred and fifty thousand for them this afternoon. You can't arrest her for having them. I'm lending them to her."

Mr. Slade's jaw dropped as he studied the receipt.

"Who are you, anyway?" he said, turning to Miss O'Brien.

"My name is Patricia O'Brien. If you are down on the Street, perhaps you have heard of my brother Lawrence."

"Not Lawrence O'Brien, of W. F. Bryan & Co.?"

"Yes. And what I'm anxious about is what became of Mike."

"Who is Mike?"

"He's our chauffeur."

"Oh, the old fellow who was driving the limousine. They got him at the Twenty-third Street ferry. As I say, I only happened to be passing. There's a dozen men on this job, but I thought I was going to make the arrest. I went back to Fleuret's later and got a description of your car. I got another car and followed you up. When I was dead sure I had you right in this house, I telephoned down to headquarters. Commissioner Blair is coming up with Duval to get the jewels."

"I don't want to be inquisitive," said Chesterfield, "but you must remember that I don't even know how the buckle came here."

"You don't know how it came here!" said Slade. His face was beginning to show the influence that held Chesterfield, that nightmareish atmosphere of absolute impossibility and unreality that seemed to go with the room and the belt buckle. His eyes opened a little wider, his heavy hand slipped from the table and dropped to his side. Curiosity had reached the point where it was speechless. Words were no use. He stared at Chesterfield and shook his head feebly.

Miss O'Brien was rather pleased with the obvious helplessness of these two strong men. She enjoyed their bewilderment, but the mute appeal in Chesterfield's eye touched her heart. Hers was the strange, deliberate way of a woman telling a story. No brief gasp that gives the clew to the whole thing in a sentence or two, but a slow, ordered unfolding.

"I told you, I think," she said, setting aside her teacup and addressing Chesterfield, "that Uncle Horace Peabody visits us every Christmas morning."

Chesterfield nodded. He did not dare to speak. He was afraid of interrupting her.

"No matter what the weather was, he always motored over. And if he were to come here and not find the buckle in the old place in the cabinet, he would be heart-

broken. It is always the first thing he looks at. I wouldn't have him know about this for anything."

"But the buckle was——" began Slade. Chesterfield silenced him with a peremptory gesture.

"My brother is connected with a Wall Street concern," continued Miss O'Brien. "I am terribly worried about him. He was doing so nicely. And Uncle Horace told me that Mr. Bryan had spoken so kindly about him. And now we are ruined!"

"What has this got to do with it?" said Slade in a faint voice.

"About two weeks ago, Larry became interested in some Wall Street scheme. He didn't tell me any details, but he said it was a chance to make millions, and that it was absolutely safe and sure. He put all the money he had in it. He put in all I gave him. But he wasn't satisfied with that. He acted as if he had gone crazy. Finally, without my knowledge or consent, he tried to raise money on the buckle. He couldn't borrow any more, so he sold it to Mr. Duval for seventy-five thousand dollars."

She paused at this climax like the true artist she was. There was a sobbing gasp from Mr. Chesterfield. Seventy-five thousand dollars! He had paid Duval one hundred and fifty.

"I protested against it," she went on, "but he just laughed and said that everything would be all right. He was going to make so much money that nothing mattered. The killing, as he called it, was to be made two or three days before Christmas. There would be time to buy it back, and we would be so rich that price would not matter."

She turned suddenly to Chesterfield, her eyes bright with a naïve innocence.

"Oh, Mr. Chesterfield," she said, "could you—could you lend it to me for to-morrow! Just one day!"

"Of course," said Chesterfield.

"But, of course, you bought it to give to some girl. You can't lend it to me. She must have it on Christmas."

"I know of no girl to whom to give it," said Chesterfield. "All I care about now is to know how it got here."

"I'm just telling you. Larry's scheme must have failed. He hasn't been home in two days. It seems impossible to get any one down there on the telephone. But I trusted him up to the last moment. I was simply crazy, and along toward evening I

decided to drive down to see Mr. Duval and try to borrow it from him. It was awfully late, about seven when we got there, but Mr. Duval was still there.

"He wasn't a bit nice. He wouldn't lend it to me, and he was almost rude. He said that it was just going out of the place on its way to a purchaser. Mike—he is the chauffeur—is like all old, family servants. He takes liberties, though he means well. He came upstairs with me and heard the whole thing, and, of course, he only wanted to help me out. We saw the young man starting off with the package, and we knew that was the last of the buckle."

She drew a long, shuddering breath. Mr. Slade heaved a great sigh and stirred uneasily. Miss O'Brien, glancing timidly at her auditors, continued:

"Our motor stood a little way down the street and it was quite dark. The young man with the package was going in that direction, and we had to walk right behind him. Just as we reached our car, Mike hit the young man and knocked him down. I had no idea what was happening. The first thing I knew he had given me the package and told me to go off somewhere and meet him there again in an hour. Then he jumped in the car, stepped on it, and was off before I could say a word. The young man was sitting up on the sidewalk and shouting that he had been robbed. People were beginning to run after the car. There was an awful commotion. I turned around and walked over toward Fifth Avenue. I felt that some one was following me, just as I reached Fleuret's, and so I stepped inside. And then I found you there, Mr. Chesterfield."

"And we dined together and you gave me the money to pay for the check." Chesterfield drew the little wad of small bills from his pocket.

"And all the time I sat there I had your buckle inside my blouse, although I had no idea it was yours. The first thing I did when I got to the house was to rush in and put it back where it belonged. I was just crazy to get it back there. It seemed safer. And then you saw it—and I thought I was going to faint, or something."

The narrative came to an impressive pause. Like the sultan who hearkened to Scheherazade, Mr. Slade was enchanted and bemused. Things happened so surprisingly on this New York night.

"Then you didn't steal it after all," he said at length.

"But there it is," said Miss O'Brien, who loved the truth.

"It was the chauffeur. He gave it to you. You didn't know what was in it."

"Didn't I?"

"You couldn't have sworn to it. And you didn't put him up to do it."

"Certainly not."

"Then you have committed no crime."

"Of course not."

"And I'll say they can't arrest you."

"I know it," said Miss O'Brien.

The idea was too much for Mr. Slade. The whole world slid down to one side and tried to turn upside down. Here he sat, there was the emerald buckle, and he was pleading the case of the person he had meant to arrest. The contradiction of ideas was intolerable. He could see the other two regarding him calmly and wondered why they did not notice that his head was coming apart. He licked his dry lips and tried to speak, but could not. He had said too much already.

The butler came to his rescue, opening the door and confronting the company with the air of one who has a solemn announcement to make.

"Mr. Larry has arrived," he said.

The men rose suddenly. Miss O'Brien darted to the door.

Both men were looking for something in the nature of a ruined prodigal, some one showing the signs of dissipation, a wild, crushed, unworthy creature, remorseful and despairing; the sort of home-coming one would rather not watch.

Instead, the young man who stood in the doorway embracing his sister was the very figure of high spirits and triumphant good fortune. The aura of success that surrounded his strong and vigorous personality was undeniable. Like his sister, he was a radiant, sound, wholesome being, but with a sort of lean hardness and mastery in his face. They were plainly devoted to each other. He acknowledged the introductions his sister made, masking his curiosity with an offhand courtesy.

"Pat," he said, "I hope these gentlemen, whom I am sure I am delighted to see, will pardon me. But I simply must tell you that everything is all right."

"Then we're not ruined?"

"Ruined!" His laugh told a different tale.

"And you haven't lost all your money?"

"Pat, I've made a fortune. Go and buy a couple of horses and another automobile."

Patricia clasped his arm with her hands. There was something touching in their frank affection and happiness.

"We'll give Uncle Horace the best Christmas he ever had," he went on. "I can buy that buckle back from Duval. I have the money now. I tried to get it from the old screw on the way up. That's one thing that kept me a little late. But he was gone. I felt like breaking in and stealing it."

"Oh, *you* felt that way, too," said Slade.

O'Brien favored him with a stare, but before he could speak, his sister, in a perfect hurricane of high spirits, dragged him to the cabinet and pointed in triumph to the cabochon emeralds. They winked up at him with their usual effect.

"In the name of all the saints!" he said. "How did they get here?"

"Mike stole them and I brought them here. And this is the detective to arrest us. And this is Mr. Chesterfield, who owns the emeralds."

Mr. O'Brien's bearing was not that of a man easily put at a loss. Now, however, he opened his mouth but seemed unable to speak. The other three broke forth into a perfect babble of exclamation. Slade had lost his headquarters air and was carried away by the interest of the story and plainly captivated by Miss O'Brien. His bass formed a running accompaniment to her musical treble, while Chesterfield furnished a baritone. Three persons all talking vigorously at once can give the effect of a small crowd. It was a little like the sextet from "Lucia."

Earnest attention, the dawn of understanding, a final complete appreciation of the comedy, each in turn dominated the expression of Mr. O'Brien's face. He held up his hands.

"To-morrow or next day I shall be able to believe this," he said. "It's too much all at once. Who made up this story, anyway?"

"Nobody," said Slade.

"Fate," said Chesterfield.

"The cabochon emeralds did it," said Miss O'Brien. "They are enchanted. They have fairies in them."

"It has been a long day for me," said her brother, "the biggest day of a lifetime, of several lifetimes."

"Tell me about it," said Miss O'Brien.

"What happened? You say you made a lot of money. Was it perfectly fair and honest?"

"Certainly. The people who lost knew what they were facing. The public didn't lose anything. I'm in a daze yet. It hung fire for a day or two. We had to get control of certain blocks of stock before we could start it up. Mr. Bryan himself has been tremendously kind to me. Of course it was on father's account. He told me ten days ago what he was going to do. He let me in on the ground floor."

Chesterfield had been listening to this with a new surge of emotion and interest. Stripped of its usual careless air, his face was a picture of intensity. He had never been so thoroughly awake. Even the fight with Slade in retrospect seemed a dreamy thing in comparison with the shrill enormity of the present moment.

"O'Brien," he said, in a voice that surprised every one, himself included, "were you speaking of the Bryan corner in Amalgamated Motors?"

They confronted each other. O'Brien's mouth assumed the shape of one about to say "oh!" But no sound proceeded. He was realizing that this tall, strange man was the Chesterfield you read about in the society columns, the famous Preston Chesterfield, the gilded youth whose money was in Sharpe, Martin & Co. Their two faces told an interesting story.

"Mr. Chesterfield," said Miss O'Brien, "has Larry ruined you? You lost a lot of money to-day. I know it. That's why you were sitting all by yourself on Christmas Eve in Fleuret's. Tell the truth now!"

"I was rather hard hit," said Chesterfield.

"Mr. Chesterfield," said O'Brien, "it's not as bad for you as it looks in the papers. Mr. Bryan has nothing against Sharpe, Martin & Co."

"It isn't as *bad* for him!" cried his sister in a sort of ecstasy of excitement. "As *bad* for him! We stole his emerald buckle, and he saved me from being locked up, and he lent it to me so that Uncle Horace could see it to-morrow. And then he fought with Mr. Slade when he was going to arrest me. You never saw such a fight. It was terrible. You had no right to ruin him. We stole his emeralds, and the money you got for the emeralds was the money you put up against his. You'll have to give it all back." She was on her toes, her voice shaking.

"But the emeralds are ours," said O'Brien. "But he bought them. Can't you understand?"

"In a minute or two. Give me time."

"Please don't excite yourself," said Chesterfield to Miss O'Brien. "It was my own carelessness."

"It isn't bad at all," said O'Brien, with a laugh. "I don't blame people for thinking you might have lost half your fortune. It certainly looked that way in the papers. You don't know the inside story. This was a strictly personal matter with Bryan. He's a fine man, but he has the disposition of an Indian and he goes after his enemies hard. He was after a certain group. They had tried to ruin his pet concern. Sharpe, Martin is not in that group. They were just pulled into the general smash. He's going to make different terms with different shorts. That's why he is getting out of the Stock Exchange. He likes me pretty well, and he knows Uncle Horace, and when they hear the story of this emerald buckle and how you interfered to save Pat from being locked up—why, you'll be the favored individual. You'll be the envy of the Street!"

Mr. Chesterfield, sitting down, rested his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands. It was a moment of relaxation. It seemed almost an anticlimax that his fortune was to be restored to him. When he looked up he met the eyes of Miss O'Brien bent on him with an expression so full of gratitude and approbation as to set him tingling again in a bewilderingly agreeable way.

The butler had been listening behind the door. No creature of flesh and blood could have done otherwise. He opened it.

"There's a big car full of people coming up the drive," he said.

"Show them all in here," said O'Brien. "This has been a great day for Ireland and we're going to have a party."

In the hall arose a babble of voices, feminine as well as masculine, and the sound of numerous footsteps. Duval's assistant, looking less dapper than usual, led the procession. Duval followed, ushering in two ladies.

To the immeasurable and final astonishment of Chesterfield, he found himself gazing on the dignified face of Mrs. Dupuy and the beautiful one of her daughter. Mrs. Dupuy was, as she said herself, "always the same." He had last seen Pauline in

tears. Now there seemed a suppressed elation in her manner. She had never looked better. They took his appearance there as a matter of course. It was evident that they thought he had arrived there with the police officer in pursuit of the stolen buckle.

"My poor boy," said Mrs. Dupuy, going directly to him and laying her hand on his sleeve. "Mr. Duval called us up and told us of the loss of the emeralds and that you had planned them as a gift for my girl. It was beautiful of you."

Chesterfield was embarrassed. It looked as if his broken engagement were in a fair way to be mended without any action of his. He cast a glance at Pauline but could make nothing of her expression. Her evident elation was unaccountable.

"There is the woman," said Duval, pointing to Miss O'Brien. "Where is the buckle?"

"I identify her," said the assistant. "She took it from the man who hit me."

The deputy commissioner entered the room last of all. He nodded in recognition to Chesterfield and turned inquiringly to Slade.

"Arrest the woman," said Duval.

"Let her alone," called Chesterfield from his position beside Mrs. Dupuy. "She didn't steal the thing. I lent it to her."

"You lent it to her!" said Duval. His face was purple and his eyes were bulging.

"Slade," said Chesterfield, "I'm talking to a lady. Can't you explain this thing? You know the whole story. I accept delivery of the buckle from Mr. Duval and will receipt for it any time. I have positively no charges to make. Now you explain the whole thing."

"Preston," said Mrs. Dupuy, drawing him a little farther away from the clamoring group and speaking with a show of affection, "I am so glad that we came up here. Knowing that the buckle was intended for Pauline, we wanted to be with Mr. Duval when it was found. He kindly offered the use of his car."

"Very nice of him, indeed," said Chesterfield.

"I was so glad to see you here. You must have had a terrible day. I am sorry for what happened this afternoon. We were both a little hasty. When Pauline heard that you had gone, she was inconsolable. The dear girl is so affectionate. And later on, when Mr. Duval, in his excitement, called up our house thinking you might be there, for you

were not at home, and she learned of your beautiful thought in making her such a wonderful gift, she was absolutely heartbroken. She wants to talk to you now."

Chesterfield was unable to express the definite feeling of protest he felt rising within him. He did not want to talk to Pauline. He glanced around the room. Duval was engaged in an animated conversation with Mr. O'Brien and the two police officials. He appeared on the verge of apoplexy. It looked as if the heavy personalities opposed to him were wearing him down.

On the other side of the room stood Pauline and Miss O'Brien, each beautiful in her own way, their arms about one another's shoulders. The fact that they were apparently friends of old standing seemed a very commonplace in this unearthly scheme of things. Mrs. Dupuy gave him a little push on the arm.

"Do go and talk to Pauline," she said. "She needs you. It is time you two got together and made things up."

Seeing there was no mistake, Chesterfield moved off. Pauline greeted him with a low, gurgling laugh and a graceful gesture of the arm.

"I am so glad you know Patricia," she said. "We were schoolmates together at Miss Spence's, and the most wonderful friends! She has just been telling me about you. What a comedy of errors this has been! Don't you think Patricia is perfectly wonderful?"

In the face of two pretty girls, two pairs of blue eyes, each sending a message of mingled mockery and affection, Chesterfield was almost tongue-tied.

"Your mother said we ought to have a talk together," he said.

"I'm ready," said Pauline.

The girls untwined themselves and Chesterfield followed Pauline down the hall and through the open door. It had stopped snowing some time ago, and the last ragged clouds had swept away. The shine from the snow and from innumerable stars made it easy to see. Pauline was a graceful and charming figure in her long coat and tricorné hat.

In spite of the undeniable beauty of the young lady, Chesterfield felt his heart turning to lead within him. Freedom, even with ruin attached to it, had been so sweet. Losing fortunes, fighting pugilists, beginning

to experience the allurements of a new and different girl—that was the life.

If a man is jilted, let him stay jilted. Once life has started all over again, he does not want to be dragged back to the sphere he has left. It is the sweet beginnings of things, the rosy dawn of romance and affection that pull the hardest at the heartstrings.

Pauline looked him in the eye and read him. She smiled her slow smile. Her cheeks were faintly flushed, her eyes were bright, there was a tender animation in her manner.

He wondered gloomily if any other man had ever known such a springtime in his affairs on Christmas Eve. Pauline, he thought, was about to put an end to it all.

"Preston," she said, confronting him, "you are afraid of me! Don't deny it! What did mother say to you?"

"She said you wanted to talk to me."

"So I do, Preston. I'm in love."

"In love!"

"Not with you, you dear stupid! We've been engaged to please the families for ever so many years, but we just couldn't manage to fall in love, could we?"

"I don't know."

"Yes, you do know. I'm engaged now to Melville Cram!"

"Cram! Why, Pauline!"

"Yes, you needn't shout at me. I know you didn't like him, to-day. But you used to like him, and you will some day again. He's different from you. We understand each other. Anyway, I'm engaged to him, and I'm in love with him—and he's my man."

"When did this happen?"

"This afternoon, after you left. He was trying to console me, and I guess we found out that we both had been trying not to care for ever so long. And so we stopped trying. And I'm awfully happy. I never knew what living was before. This is the real thing."

"But your mother?"

"She doesn't know about this. She's been trying to make me marry you. She really likes you. I know we'd never get on."

"I suppose I haven't 'pep' enough for a girl like you."

"You have everything, Preston. But you've never been really wakened up in your life before. Don't say anything to mother. If she won't give her consent, we'll

elope. But I'm not going to spoil my Christmas for her."

"How about my Christmas?"

"You are going to have the best Christmas you ever had. You know you feel lots happier not being engaged to me."

"Pauline, I——"

"Don't try to tell me the truth, for you can't. Your manners are too good. Patricia O'Brien's in love with you now, and you are falling in love so fast I can see it in your face. Have a good time, you little dears!"

"Don't be silly."

"I'm not silly; but I'm so happy, I'm going to be." She glanced about her to see that no one was in sight and caught the lapels of his coat.

"It's too bad you didn't wake up before," she said. "But I'm not your kind. But, after all, I like you, dear."

For the first time the real Pauline shone out from her eyes; human, good, and somehow faultful as well, beneath a cold and passionless exterior. She swayed toward him and kissed him warmly on the lips. The perfume of her presence enveloped him. It was as if he had been embraced by a fragrant rosebush.

The door opened and a number of people emerged, Mrs. Dupuy in the lead.

"Come, children," she said in her modulated voice, "you have been billing and cooing out there long enough. I don't want my big girl to catch cold."

She pretended not to see Pauline disengaging herself from Chesterfield, but nothing escaped her eye.

"Don't give me away," whispered Pauline, as they went toward the door. "Mother heard at dinner that you hadn't lost so much, after all. And she really likes you in her own way—more than any one except me, I guess. I want her to have a pleasant Christmas. I'll break the news about Melville later on. Don't give me away, will you? Patricia knows."

"I won't say anything."

"You're a dear." With a final pat on his arm she left him to join her mother.

"You are a good girl," said Mrs. Dupuy complacently. She was pleased and satisfied with her evening's work. Duval had given her the cards to play. Again, Pauline was Preston's fiancée. For once in her life, Pauline had succeeded in deceiving her mother.

Inside, the atmosphere had taken on a

holiday tang and glow. The fire was roaring up the chimney, the place had the air of a Christmas party. Assisted by a maid, Mr. O'Brien was hanging up mistletoe and holly wreaths. Another maid was passing around sandwiches. The butler was engaged in the evidently congenial task of opening bottles of champagne. Mr. Slade and the uniformed policeman were lending able assistance in the disposition of the evergreens. Mr. Duval was shaking hands with Patricia in his very best manner. His assistant was folding up a bill which Chesterfield had given him. Even his Christmas was to be a happy one. He had consented to a dismissal of the charge against the chauffeur. It was worth the money. The commissioner was just hanging up the receiver of the telephone. He had sent word for the liberation of the chauffeur whose impulsive act had started the ball rolling. Everybody was laughing and talking at once. It was a real Christmas party.

"Now," said the energetic Mr. O'Brien, leaping to the ground from the table where he had been standing, "we are all set and everybody's happy. Mr. Chesterfield is going to stay all night. We have to talk things over. The rest are going to drink a toast. Pass the glasses, Tim; we have a case or two of the old stuff left."

The firelight gleamed in the mahogany and on the dark pictures and hangings, the logs roared and crackled, the wine creamed upward in delightful foam, the cabochon emeralds winked wickedly from the cabinet. There was a tinkling of glasses, a bubble of laughter, a chorus of "Merry Christmas!" in various tones. Everybody had a glass of wine, even the butler and the maids. Mr. Duval had two or three. Everybody save the athletic Mr. Slade. He was quite happy with another pitcher of hot water. The guests began to prepare to go. There was a shaking of hands, a bidding of farewells, a putting on of wraps, a slow exodus.

"This has been a short party, but it has been a peach," said Mr. O'Brien. "We must all do it again."

They piled into the autos, some into Duval's, some into the deputy commissioner's, a merry crowd of holiday makers.

Chesterfield, with O'Brien and Patricia, stood out in the snow watching them off. The babble of voices sounded fainter. They were gone. It was a still, beautiful night of brilliant stars. The last cloudy squadrons of the storm had ridden off, out of the sky.

The house, formerly dim lit, was now brilliant with light and wreaths in every window. Santa Claus was at his business.

"I'll show you where to put your car," said Miss O'Brien. "We have an old barn we call a garage, and there's lots of room in it."

They drove slowly into it, pushed shut the doors, and walked back across the snow.

"So you are not going to give the emeralds to Miss Dupuy after all?" said Miss O'Brien.

"Did she tell you that?"

"She told me the whole story. I think she's going to be happy with Mr. Cram—so happy. She thinks a lot of you, too."

"Everybody admires Pauline."

"This must have been as bad a day for you as for me."

"I think, looking back, I liked it on the whole. It seems a hundred years since this afternoon. I've lived! I won a squash tournament, and I lost a fortune. I was jilted, and then I fought with a policeman who is going to be a prize fighter. And I got my fortune back. And I've been surprised more in an hour or so than I thought possible—and mystified."

"That was the best of it, wasn't it?"

"No, the best of it was meeting you."

"Really?"

"Don't you know it was? Tell the truth. This is Christmas Eve when everybody ought to tell the truth. Our meeting was the best part of it, wasn't it?"

"Perhaps."

They were alone in the big room again, looking down at the cabochon emerald buckle. It had spoken to Chesterfield once before that evening. Now it addressed them both.

"Christmas Eve is almost over," it said. "It is seldom, even on Christmas, that I behave so kindly as I have to-day. In one half turn of the clock I have given you all that life has to give, all the illusion, all the glamour that makes life bearable and glorious. You have fought, you have been disappointed, you have been frightened, you have been stirred emotionally to the depths,

you have been happy. You are breathing now the enchanted air of the early spring of love. The Christmas rose has unfolded for you. The joy that lies hidden in the heart of things is yours.

"I have always stirred up strife. Ladies have sighed for me. I have made them jealous. Nobles have fought for me, I have made them mad. Many tragedies and few comedies have been of my making; never before, never again, one like this. Here I have given you the happy ending. I seldom do it, because it is seldom good art, and I have the soul of a hundred artists in me. Better close my case now, before I change my mind."

"Do you know," said Patricia, "I'm getting afraid. The emeralds scare me. Let's close the case."

She suited the action to the word.

Chesterfield looked down into her eyes. The kiss of Pauline was still on his lips, the languor of her eyes was in his memory—but she was well gone, a kindly memory.

Here were other eyes that could really talk to him, some one whose every gesture, every intonation was familiar and meaningful. Half unconsciously he held out one hand a little, and Patricia's small, warm hand found a nest there. The clock in the corner struck twelve. It was Christmas morning.

"And you'll lend me them for the day?" said Patricia. They were both suddenly self-conscious.

"For a hundred years."

"I won't need them that long."

Chesterfield looked up at the heavy chandelier above the cabinet. It was dark with evergreen through which shone scarlet berries, and other berries of waxy white.

"Do you know," he said, "I believe your brother has put mistletoe up in that chandelier?"

"Perhaps he has," said Patricia faintly and slowly. Her eyes opened bewilderingly, then drooped half closed, her breast rose in a deep and tremulous sigh. But she neither drew away from him nor sought to disengage her hand from his.



The Double-Cross Brand

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "Spring Tonic," "A Horse Deal in Hardpan," Etc.

The president of the Southwestern Cattle Company was careless about what cattle he branded, and none too careful about the sort of oil stock he unloaded. There were those who found him a profitable man to deal with, for all of that

THEY were picked men, and they rode big horses—not a mount under fifteen hands; each bay, sorrel, or black ropewise and fast. There were no pintos or roans in that bunch: no scrubs, no salty ones, no time wasters. "Ace" Darrow was foreman. His reputation, from Nogales to Cheyenne, spelled efficiency.

The riders were also chosen carefully, and, strangely enough, not one of them was a local man: Benson, from Montana, who tied "hard and fast" and wore a little, narrow-brimmed Stetson, jeans, and rowdy and to whom the word "cowboy" was anathema. He was a "hand."

Up from the border came Lingard, in answer to Ace Darrow's letter naming big wages and a short session. Lingard was long, slow of speech, gentle of manner. His spurs were silver-mounted, his weathered black Stetson wide-brimmed and high-crowned. He used a wide loop, rode loosely and roped in an apparently careless fashion—but he seldom missed.

With Lingard came "Choppo." He had another name, but never mentioned it. Choppo used the rawhide reata, señor. And there was much silver on his bridle, saddle, and spurs. There was silver in his voice, both when he spoke and when he sang to the thrumming of the guitarra. Quick, graceful, and high-strung, frankly keen for any game of chance, this dark, eternally smiling Mexican vaquero represented the other side of the border, along which Lingard and he had ridden many hard miles, singly and together. No one knew why they were friends—and no one asked.

Benson, of Montana; Lingard, of Texas; Choppo, of old Mexico; these three, with "Lin" Selden, of Dakota; Lee, of Wyoming, and Scott, of southern Utah forgathered at

the ranch house of the Southwestern Cattle Company, railroad fares paid, comfortable quarters at their disposal, and a commissary second to none in any land. "Theirs not to reason why—theirs but to do as they were told——"

It had been rumored down around Tucson that the Southwestern Cattle Company was in difficulties. Small cattlemen were glad of it. They knew—without being able to prove it—that the Southwestern had been slowly absorbing the stock of the small owners, for years. The State cattle inspector knew it—but could not prove it. Benson, Lingard, Choppe, with Selden, Lee, and Scott also knew it, for such news travels far and wide. An investigation was impending. George Stillman, erstwhile State senator, president of the Southwestern, sometime puncher, gambler, real-estate broker, capitalist, and in the golden course of events finally Senator George, found to his amazement—and it took considerable to amaze "Oily George"—that a dollar would not even buy fifty cents' worth of disloyalty since the State inspector had been found with three bullet holes in his back, presumably on his way to the Southwestern home ranch. Coincident with the finding of the body of the inspector, two of the Southwestern hands had disappeared. The coroner's inquest developed no tangible evidence. But a committee representing the small cattle owners met in secret and drafted a letter to a department head in Washington. The spindle upon which so much red tape is wound, began to revolve slowly. An investigation was pending; and Oily George Stillman had knowledge of it in the same mail that brought a reply to the committee's letter of appeal and protest.

Ace Darrow, long time foreman of the

Southwestern, was, strangely enough, known as a "square shooter," a straight man, hard-working, keen, loyal. Even the little cattlemen admitted this. Hence it was difficult to reconcile Darrow's association with Oily George. Yet Oily George had chosen Darrow for these very qualities. Oily George had more than once been seared with the double-cross brand, but never by his foreman. And Ace Darrow, while he knew that the Southwestern rode with a hungry loop and a hot iron, knew also that his wage was princely; that in any other occupation, or on any other range he could not earn one-tenth of what he was earning with the Southwestern. Ace had a wife, three children, a bank account, and a secret longing to emigrate to California, buy a small ranch somewhere near the sea, send his children to school, and spend his latter days in comparative ease.

Darrow keenly regretted the killing of the inspector, whom he had liked. And Darrow, shortly after the killing, journeyed to Los Angeles, where Stillman was spending the summer, and told Stillman plainly that such tactics could not be pursued while he was foreman of the S. W. The intimation was that Stillman knew something about the killing; that the two punchers had made their get-away comparatively safe by the use of considerable money. In fact, that had been proved by the officers who had trailed them to the border. Who had furnished the money?

Oily George disclaimed any knowledge of the matter. He had read the papers, of course. A private quarrel, no doubt. Such things were not unusual. And did his foreman intend to resign, or stay with the Southwestern until fall, when—and Oily George gazed shrewdly at Darrow—the Southwestern Cattle Company, as a corporation, would dissolve; the stock would be sold, the land thrown open to entry, the books closed, and the old S. W. brand blotted from the records of the State.

Darrow showed no surprise. "I'll stick."

"All right, Ace. Here are your instructions. Pay off every hand on the ranch—every damned one except the cook and the stableboy. Replace 'em with new men—but not local men. Cut 'em the best mounts we own and turn 'em loose to clean up. Brand everything in sight. Do this—and I'll give you ten per cent of the net profits of the sale of all you brand from now till Sep-

tember. And you can do it before the new inspector has got his saddle warm. You can get a train to Tucson at four-fifteen this afternoon."

Darrow left without shaking hands with his employer. In fact, Darrow was through with the S. W. the day he heard of the killing of the inspector. He had made the journey to Los Angeles to tell Stillman so. But this sudden change of policy on the part of the Southwestern had caused Darrow to change his mind. A few more months, and he would be free to do as he pleased. And ten per cent of the profits of the sale of the cattle would just about enable him to retire to a California ranch.

When Darrow arrived at Tucson he had mentally listed the men he would hire. And because he suspected Stillman of some duplicity, Darrow decided to hire men whom he knew—and as few of them as could do the work thoroughly. His first choice was Benson, of Montana, whom he had ridden with in the old days. Then Lingard and Choppo, with whom he had worked eight years in Sonora. Selden, of Dakota, was young, and not in a class with the others, but he was a fair hand, and, moreover, of kin to Darrow—his wife's brother. Lee, he had known when traveling with the wild-West show—Darrow himself having been a fancy rider and trick roper. Scott, of Utah, the last man chosen, and the oldest, was a thorough cattleman, and, in fact, had been Darrow's guide, philosopher, and friend when Darrow was a boy learning to ride and rope in the Luna Valley of New Mexico.

Taken altogether there were no better hands in the country than the six Darrow had written to. And each was a friend of Darrow's—beyond any question of salary.

In fact, while the pay he offered was big, three of the men did not need it—Selden, Lee, and Scott. They came, rather because they thought Ace had some hard deal to handle and needed them. Lingard, Choppo, and Benson came for the money that was in it, primarily, although if Darrow had appealed to them for aid, they would have come—salary or no salary.

The day following their arrival at the Southwestern, Darrow showed his friends the cavy and told them to help themselves. He said nothing about the work to be done—but that was unnecessary. One and all they knew the reputation of the old S. W. That day was spent in riding about the

country; that and the next. Darrow showed them a map of the S. W. territory, and told them about the more prominent landmarks. In reality they were hunters, hunters of unbranded stock. Each rider carried a short running iron and knew how to use it. They elected to work in pairs. Choppo, of the South, chose Benson, of Montana, for his companion. Lingard and Scott rode together, and Selden and Lee.

The line shacks were stocked with provisions. Mounts were chosen and tried out. Save for the cook and a stableman, the home ranch was untenanted. Ahead of the seven riders loomed a hot, hard four months' work. With five picked horses in his string, each rider headed into the task, and each determined to set a record in the branding of stray cattle. Each had his peculiar method of tallying: Lingard chalking his day's tally on the door of the line shack; Scott, who worked with him naturally had no tally to keep. And so with Benson, who let Choppo keep their tally by notching a sort of coupstick which he carried tied to his saddle. Selden kept his tally in a little notebook, using a cartridge for a pencil. On the fly leaf of the book was written the firm name of Benson & Lee.

Meanwhile the investigation, so long rumored, was in progress. Strangers occasionally called at the Southwestern ranch house, and, if Darrow happened to be absent, were invited to make themselves at home. Meeting Darrow they were entertained royally in so far as commissary and housing went, and invited to inspect the ranch from line to line, Darrow taking the attitude that a visitor might be a possible buyer of cattle or horses. Once, during the summer, Darrow received a letter from Stillman warning him that something was going to pop, shortly, and urging him to "keep the boys interested in their work." Naturally Darrow said nothing of this to his men. They were working overtime as it was, playing an interesting game, endeavoring to make a record at—well, speaking plainly, stealing cattle. Down fences were not mended. The S. W. held the cream of the grazing and cattle were more likely to stray in than out. Moreover, the fall round-up would take care of any stock outside the S. W. range.

Toward the end of September, Benson, Lingard, and Selden compared tallies. Benson led, with a record of one hundred and twenty head of stock, or an average of about

one a day. Lingard came next, with ninety-eight head to his credit, and Selden showed a total of eighty-two: a grand total of three hundred head. Cattle were selling at five cents. Darrow estimated that this would net the Southwestern about forty dollars a head, or something like twelve thousand dollars. The high wages paid his six riders were, of course, charged up to the regular running expenses for the entire ranch. The twelve thousand was in reality, velvet. Ten per cent would mean twelve hundred dollars bonus for Darrow. But Ace Darrow was playing for big stakes—and his six friends had backed him to win. They knew of his ambition to own a little fruit ranch in California. They knew his wife, and his children; they knew Ace. And without Darrow having said much—just a word here and there—they knew Oily George. Oily George's one weakness was poker. For the sake of a game he would play with any one, for any stakes, and he played well. He would be coming down to the round-up, soon. He would meet the new men, and undoubtedly he would suggest an evening of poker. Oily George was not above deliberately winning back the wages he had paid his riders, in what he was pleased to call a "gentleman's game." This much Darrow had told them. They said nothing.

When Stillman told his foreman, in the Los Angeles hotel to "brand everything in sight," he thought he had put over a clever deal. Stillman did not realize, at the time, that the spring calves of the S. W. had not as yet been branded.

When Ace Darrow told his six friends to "brand everything in sight" he was simply following his employer's instructions. When the new hands brought in their tally—three hundred head—Darrow estimated that they had branded some two hundred and fifty spring calves, and about fifty strays, reckoning loosely.

When Joe Scott, old-timer, silent as a turtle, shrewd and hard-bitted, found himself tacitly elected leader of the branding expedition, and when Lingard, Benson, and Choppo hinted at things dark and sinister—Darrow having left them to themselves to enjoy a rest, the third day after their arrival at the Southwestern—the aforementioned and time-honored Joseph Scott gazed round the little circle as if he were about to make a remark, coughed dryly, jerked his blunt thumb in the direction of Darrow's

cottage and, stooping, drew a Lazy D in the dust of the yard. Then he gazed round at his companions. Choppo slapped his thigh and swore eloquently in Spanish. Lingard nodded. Benson whistled a tune and looked away. Young Selden laughed outright. Lee slowly rolled a cigarette and said: "Why not?" as though to himself. Old Joe Scott smoothed out the Lazy D and gazed across the range thoughtfully. This happened shortly after their arrival at the ranch. Darrow had no inkling of their intent.

Scott, when on his first day's ride across the range, merely to get the lay of the land, had noticed the Lazy-D brand on one or two cattle. Most of the cattle were branded S. W.

He had asked no questions. But that night, returning to the ranch house, he had answered many questions asked him by Ace Darrow's boy, who had taken a fancy to the old man. The talk ran to brands, saddles, horses, and Indians. Scott explained that the Indians often branded their horses with some odd and most peculiar signs—and he made one or two in the dust of the doorway. The boy grew interested and straightway drew a somewhat shaky Lazy D, informing Scott proudly that that was his father's brand, all registered and everything, and that his father owned nearly a hundred head of stock all himself. "He's going to sell 'em when we go to California," said the boy.

Scott had nodded thoughtfully. The boy was flattered by Scott's interest in him. Scott took a day to think it over. Then he made his decision, subject, of course, to the unanimous approval of the other riders. They all knew that they were putting one over on Darrow, and putting a still bigger one over on Stillman. Silently they enjoyed the joke, and silently they anticipated the arrival of Oily George. Choppo, however, sang much in the evenings, and when he did not sing he smiled—even in his sleep. His companions were great men, they were clever men; they stole from the stealer—who had set them the task of stealing, and was paying them for it.

Then, without warning, Oily George played his trump card. Fortified by the authority of the papers which he bore, a gentleman of legal persuasion and illegal inclination, a Mr. Pike, appeared at the ranch, accompanied by some fifteen punchers of local fame. Ace and his six friends were promptly paid off, and it was politely but firmly inti-

mated that they were free to follow their own devices, henceforth and forevermore. The S. W. had gone into the hands of a receiver. The ranch itself, all stock, implements, and appurtenances, good will and what not was to be sold, eventually. In the meantime, the receiver would be in charge. Ace could not figure it out—but the receiver had signed authority to "receive." That evening, out by the corrals, Ace told his friends just how the calf had jumped.

"Boys, we're fired," he said.

"Mebby you are—but not us," said Scott. "We quit, yesterday."

"And we got our pay," said Lingard.

"And we earned it," asserted young Lin Selden.

"I love you, California," hummed Lee, of Wyoming.

Benson pushed his little Stetson to one side of his head. "I move we move to Tucson, and git rested up. I aimed to stick around till them cattle is sold. You may need a hand to help you cut out your own stuff, Ace."

Darrow gazed round at his old-time friends. "Boys, I didn't figure I'd tell you—but you've worked so dog-gone hard and fast and said nothing about it, that I just got to open up. Stillman said he'd give me ten per cent of the proceeds of the sale of the stuff we branded, after June 1st, and take my tally for it. I had hard work believing him then, but I figured he was in deep and wouldn't try to double cross me. He did. I own to that brand, right now. But if she'd 'a' broke like I figured, I was going to split the ten per cent bonus with you all."

"Don't say that we know that you meant it," said Benson. "We know."

"We know more'n that," said Selden.

"Well, keep it to yourself, Lin." And Darrow's voice was humorously kind. Lin was the youngster of the outfit.

"We aim to," said Lingard. "But I won't die happy till I get Oily George in a poker game. I want him to win back my wages. I ain't used to wealth. I feel all swelled up, and I kain't sleep nights."

"We ain't done so bad," said Lee; but his real meaning escaped Ace, who was gazing hard at the ground.

"Let's saddle up and find out if Tucson is moved away since we left," suggested Lingard. "Jest kain't wait till I git to a drug store. I'm dry."

"Six hands, that I know, is goin' to sleep out on the flat to-night," stated Scott. "Tomorrow mornin', about sunup, Ace is goin' to load his stuff and the missis and kids and hit the trail for Tucson. He'll need help. Lingard, you'll have to stay dry till tomorrow. Then I figure to cut me a top hoss and ride to town, deceiver or no deceiver. You fellas can walk if you want to. Me, I ride."

"And I reckon we eat, likewise?" suggested Benson.

"Yes. We eat—right in there." And Ace waved his arm toward his cottage. "And boys——" Ace began.

"Shut up!" said Lee. "We're paid already."

That night, six bed rolls—each bed roll plainly marked with the initials of its owner, were carefully spread out on the flat to the east of the ranch buildings. The receiver, talking with Ace in the seclusion of the cottage, questioned him as to the intent of the former hands.

"They'll leave in the morning," said Ace.

"That's good. I'd hate to see any trouble. My men are rather hard to hold."

"They won't be—if any of my boys should happen to start anything. Your men would be hard to catch."

"Of course, Darrow, I depend upon you to see that—er—everything goes off smoothly. President Stillman has assured me that you always avoid trouble, when possible."

"There'll be no trouble so long as your outfit keep out of the way. I'm loading my stuff in the morning. I'll send the wagon and the buckboard back from Tucson."

"That will be all right. I understand you have a few head of cattle on this range yourself—about eighty, I believe."

"Between eighty and a hundred."

"Well, President Stillman will be here at the round-up. No doubt he will look after your interests."

"No doubt he'd like to, but I think I'll stick around and help him a little. And when you write to him next, just tell him I said so. He'll want to know."

Mr. Pike, the receiver, departed.

At ten next morning the wagon was loaded with Ace's household effects. Mrs. Darrow and the children were installed in the buckboard, and the dauntless six, sweating and happy, strode toward the corrals to cut out

a mount each for the ride to town. They had saddled up and were on their way back to the ranch house where Ace awaited them, when Mr. Pike, the receiver, made his first mistake. He insisted that the horses remain on the ranch. He had positive instructions to see that not a head of saddle stock was used by others than his men.

"And us *walk*?" queried old Joe Scott.

"But there's the wagon. I think you could manage to ride on top of the—er—furniture."

"Us!"

Mr. Pike didn't know just what to say.

"Mr. Darrow——" began Mr. Pike.

"Nope. 'Tain't his funeral," asserted Lingard. "It's us you was talking to."

"I dislike to use force," said Mr. Pike.

"So do I," said Lingard. "But sometimes it works."

Darrow turned and called from the wagon seat. "Come on, boys!"

Choppo, slyly spurring his horse, jumped him at Mr. Pike. Then Choppo set the animal up in show style, with Mr. Pike directly beneath the horse's forefeet. Mr. Pike left there—and so did the riders. As stated at the beginning of this story, the horses were picked mounts. They had had several days of rest in the corrals. They desired above anything else to go somewhere, and they went. Nor were they followed. Mr. Pike simply telephoned to Tucson to have the men who accompanied Darrow arrested for horse stealing. And herein Mr. Pike made his second mistake.

It happened that no one accompanied Darrow to Tucson. He arrived driving a wagon-load of furniture; and Mrs. Darrow arrived with him, driving a buckboard. The six riders had long since arrived, stabled the horses and were engaged in the pleasant pastime of passing a bottle up and down the bar of the National Hotel, an indoor sport at which the town marshal was expert, and he had to be, because he had to take six drinks before he could pay for one. Subsequently he agreed to take charge of the horses, assume all responsibility for them, and return them to the S. W. at no expense to his hosts. He happened to be an old-time cattleman himself.

Inspired by the town marshal's good will: and on the basis that one good turn deserves another, the now mellow six escorted that officer to a room in the hotel and put him to bed, first having removed his boots.

Then they forgathered at the desk and paid for his room. But still they felt that they had some good will to spare. So, led by Lingard, the Texan, they hunted up a real-estate office, located a cottage for rent on the outskirts of town, and rented it in the name of Ace Darrow, Esquire, term one month, paid in advance. They were not hilarious, nor even frisky. Two and two they marched down the street, made a right turn, and entered the hotel again, their accurate formation only slightly disarranged when Scott, endeavoring to keep up with the long-legged Lingard, inadvertently stepped in a spittoon of papier-mâché, and had to call a halt while he removed the loose cover of the spittoon from his foot. Otherwise things were quite permanent.

The bartender welcomed them with a wide smile. They were the real thing, and they would not try to tell him their troubles. Presently they thought of the town marshal and wondered if he were still in bed. Straightway they filed out, crossed the lobby and scorning the assistance of an elevator, they mounted the stairs and tapped gently at the marshal's door. But that ominous bird of yore maintained a classic silence. Softly Lingard opened the door. The anxious six filed in and gazed down upon the slumbering official. "The Law sleeps," asserted Benson solemnly.

"She's sure got a peach," said Lee.

"Let 'er buck," whispered Lingard.

They filed out, softly closing the door. Their apparent solemnity would have done justice to a funeral, providing the deceased had been a friend of theirs. And in so far as his official capacity was concerned, the town marshal was deceased for the time being.

"Somebody's got to tell Mrs. Darrow," stated Benson, when they reached the lower floor.

"Or they won't know where to go," said Lingard.

"I'll tell 'em," volunteered Selden.

"You're my friend," said Joe Scott, shaking hands with Selden.

"Yes!" snorted Lee. "And mebbey we won't catch hell when Mrs. Darrow sees Lin. His little foot never slipped all by itself. We done pulled it out from under him. Mr. Scott—bein' the gran'father of this outfit—you ought to be ashamed of yourself! Just like that."

"We kin go along with Lin, and let him do

the talkin', and we say nothin'," suggested Benson. "That'll show Ace and the missis that we're all right. Then she won't suspicion we been drinkin'."

"Why, we ain't started yet," asserted Lingard. "Let's all go down and meet Ace, and show him where to drive to. I'd hate to see him git lost."

"So would I," said a voice. The six whirled on their heels. Ace stood just within the swing doors. He smiled knowingly.

"We been rentin' a cottage," said Benson.

"Had an awful time finding it," said Lee.

"No, we didn't," asserted Joe Scott. "But we would now."

Ace was slightly puzzled until Lin explained matters. And Ace "took one" for the sake of old times. He declined another, having in mind the future. "Six don't smell your breath any worse'n one," suggested Benson.

"It isn't just the smell, boys. My missis'll stand for me taking one or two. It ain't that. I just wanted to tell you that President Stillman of the Southwestern Cattle Company, arrived on the three-o'clock train. He usually stops at this hotel."

Silence. Then Benson spoke: "The town marshal is upstairs asleep. Room 14." Which seemed to be somewhat irrelevant.

"We laid him to rest," stated Scott.

"I'll show you where the house is," said young Lin.

"The house? Say, Lin——"

"Come on outside and I'll tell you about it. You can see the boys later."

"There's five of us left yet," asserted Lingard. "We were seven. Yes? I done went to school once, but only once. But since then I learned to spell what follows 'D' when you're mad."

"Lazy D, fer instance," suggested Benson.

When the Southwestern Cattle Company went into the hands of a receiver, it was understood by Mr. Pike and one or two of the creditors, that Oily George himself was the biggest creditor, having lent as an individual, certain moneys to the Southwestern as a corporation. According to the books of the Southwestern this was so. Oily George had been investing heavily in Texas oil lands—as an individual—and thus far his money was in the ground and likely to stay there. His holdings had produced no oil, while all

about his holdings, east, west, north, and south, oil had been found. Out of Texas came the call: "More wells, more money." Oily George had ditched the Southwestern to meet his obligations. He was gambling for big stakes, and, as usual, playing a crooked game. So were the Texas promoters, for that matter.

Trusting no one, now that he had dispensed with the services of Ace Darrow, Oily George journeyed to Tucson to personally supervise the sale of the Southwestern cattle. He put up at the National Hotel. He telephoned out to the ranch. Mr. Pike appeared at the hotel. They conferred.

Meanwhile Lingard, Scott, and Benson had taken rooms at the hotel, choosing as their roommates, Choppo, Lee, and Selden, respectively. Scott and Lee occupied the bridal suite—not through choice—but because Scott had found out that Stillman inevitably took the room next to the bridal suite, a room on the ground floor, that had formerly been used by the proprietor. One door of this room, seldom used, opened on the barroom. Oily George, for strategic reasons, always occupied this room. The door opening on the barroom provided an avenue of retreat when policy demanded. This much Scott, aided and abetted by Lingard, had ascertained from the bartender, who had himself frequently escorted Senator Stillman to his room, when the senator had temporarily lost his sense of general direction.

After a brief consultation in the bridal suite, which the six had chosen as a committee headquarters, it was voted that they should not appear in the dining room at dinner that evening; but rather that they should separately and circumspectly leave the hotel and forgather at a restaurant a few blocks down the street. They would dine there, and then, separately and circumspectly return to their hotel rooms and await the call to arms. As they dined, each swore a noble oath to forgo temptation in the shape of liquor until the following day. The only intimation they had that the evening would be other than purely social, was Lingard's question. "You got your gun handy, Choppo?" Choppo had. Choppo always had. The rest of the secretive six were unarmed.

"About ten, to-night, just drift down to the Bridegroom's Wikiup," said Lingard, as they finished eating. Only that and nothing more.

And Lingard, because of his plan, which would need some thought, was first to return to the hotel. As he got his key from the desk the clerk handed him a telegram. "It is addressed care of the Southwestern, Mr. Lingard. But we knew you were in town."

Lingard glanced at the telegram. It was from his home town:

Struck gusher on section ten. New York party offers fifty thousand. Will you sell lease, or outright.
H. L. STEBBINS.

Lingard folded the telegram and pocketed it. His reply was characteristic:

Answer to-morrow.

LINGARD.

Then he drifted to his room. His desert homestead, which he had all but forgotten, had come to life again in the shape of valuable oil property. A year previous, when Stebbins had asked Lingard if he would lease the property to a wildcat oil company, Lingard had given his consent to the transaction. Uncle Henry Stebbins, local legal light and friend of Lingard's, had drawn up the lease—a short-term lease, netting Lingard a small income. Lingard had looked upon the transaction as a joke. Uncle Henry had not.

Dave Lingard studied the telegram long as he sat on the edge of the bed. Fifty thousand was a fair day's pay. But a gusher was cheap at fifty thousand. Why, any little old gusher that had any self-respect could gush fifty thousand a month and never sweat a hair! And oil at two dollars a barrel——"

Lingard strolled back to the desk and sent another wire:

Who is party backing operations under present lease?
LINGARD.

Perhaps it would be a better scheme to accept royalties than to sell outright. It depended upon the integrity of the present operators.

Then Lingard shook his shoulders. The oil deal was closed, for the time being. Mr. Stillman would now receive his whole and hearty attention. Texas was a long way south—and Mr. Stillman and a poker game were in the immediate vicinity. Again Lingard hied him to his room. Presently Choppo came in, followed by Benson and Lee.

"This ain't the bridal soot," Benson informed Lee.

"The groom is in there talkin' to young Lin. I'm jealous."

"Well, seein' we're all here, let's all go there," suggested Lingard. "There's more room to talk."

They found old Joe Scott solemnly lecturing young Lin about the danger of intemperance, Scott illustrating his lecture with himself as the horrible example. Lin was enjoying himself.

"We done found the bride cryin' in her negligay," asserted Lingard. "And we fetched her back."

"That's all he knows about brides!" snorted Lee. "I was weeping in my kemono. I'm going right back to mother."

"Now, I thought 'neglijay' was French for 'neglected,' asserted Lingard. "Mebby I'm wrong. But 'kemono' sure is a new name for a handkerchief."

"You may be a pretty fair cowhand, Dave," said Lee. "But the dictionary is no friend of yours."

"I might spell 'gusher' if I tried," asserted Lingard darkly.

"You must of went to a young ladies' boardin' school," said Selden. "But why be mysterious? It's ten, and nothing stirrin'."

"Well, let's sit down. Here's my idea. Right next to this here room is another room. They ain't so much room in it as in this room, but I figure they's room for all. Lin, you can stick outside in the hall and see that nobody disturbs the senator while he's playin' poker. He's goin' to play. I ain't asked him; but I'm pretty sure he'll play."

"Now, I figure to set in. And I figure Joe here will set in, and Lee. Lee can see clean through the back of a card and count the spots on the front. I've knowed him to do it. We all will entertain the senator, which leaves Choppo and Benson for the audience. And it won't cost the audience a cent. Lin, he can stand outside in the hall and listen to the rattle of the chips. That's the safest way to play poker."

"You hand me a kid's job," complained Lin.

"Nope. Your job is to see that nobody bothers the senator while he's busy. You may have to do some figurin'."

"Turn 'im loose," said Joe Scott softly.

Stillman and Mr. Pike were in earnest conversation when some one tapped gently on the door. Pike rose and opened it. Lingard nodded recognition. Mr. Pike hesitated. Meanwhile Lingard entered, closely followed by Scott, Benson, and Choppo. Stillman

rose, smiling. Lingard introduced himself and his friends. Just then some one tapped on the other door, which opened on the bar-room. Mr. Pike questioned Stillman with his eyes. Stillman nodded. "Guess I called at the wrong door," said Lee as Pike let him in. Then Stillman introduced the callers to Pike, who mumbled something about having met them before.

"Now, gentlemen," said Stillman grandiosely, "what can I do for you?"

"Lots." Lingard turned to his companions. They nodded.

"And houses, perhaps?" said the senator, smiling.

"Nope. Not in this town. It's like this: We been workin' for the Southwestern, brandin' stock, and sweatin' up our saddles for quite a spell. A few days ago we done quit, with our fo'man, Ace Darrow. I reckon you know Ace. We're strangers in these parts. Well, we got paid off, the day after we quit. Mr. Pike there, he paid us. We got somethin' like eight hundred dollars apiece that ain't workin'. Ace done told us you sure could play poker. We just come in to see if you couldn't arrange a little game. As I said, we're strangers here, and we don't know how to git rid of our money."

"Oh, so you're the boys that Ace hired last June, eh?"

"The same. We thought mebby you could tell we was hands, without askin'."

"Well, really, boys, Mr. Pike and I were talking business. If some other night would do——"

"Why, this suits us fine! Benson, seein' as you don't play poker, you can sit over there by the button that rings the bell, and save Mr. Pike the trouble of punchin' it in case we need anything. Choppo, you can entertain Mr. Pike by tellin' him how to make a hoss rear without hurtin' his mouth—I mean the hoss'. That leaves four of us, one table, and one deck of cards which ain't been opened yet. I don't see nothin' to hinder our startin' right in."

There was something about Lingard's manner that suggested business: not alone the business of playing poker, but almost any kind of business that might happen to come before this self-appointed committee. Stillman's smile evaporated. He fell back upon the premise of wounded dignity.

"This is an insult—a frame-up—a hold-up! You are either drunk or crazy! I call Mr. Pike to bear witness that I absolutely

refuse to have anything to do with you, socially or otherwise."

"We figured you'd say somethin' like that," drawled Lingard. "Now, I call Mr. Pike to bear witness that you're goin' to set in a game of poker with Messrs. Lingard, Scott, and Lee, and set in it till either you or us is broke. Mr. Pike, what do you say?"

Mr. Pike said nothing. Lingard gestured toward Choppo. "Prod him, Choppo."

Choppo seemed to have found a gun, somewhere. There it was, in his hand, and a second previous, Choppo's hands had been empty. Choppo prodded. Mr. Pike rose to the prod. "I—this is outrageous!"

"So is brandin' other folks' cattle," said Lingard. "Ain't it, senator?"

Oily George's fat face seemed to swell visibly. His eyes bulged. He gulped and sat down. "Damned if I'll even talk to you," he snorted.

"You don't have to, George," said Lingard softly. "All you got to do is to make your hands work. Recollec', we know what you hired us to do—and we're willin' to swear to it. You play, or you lose the sale of three hundred head of stock that weren't branded till we hit this country. The game will be straight, but I'm willin' to say that we'll take all you got, if we can git it. Mr. Pike is goin' to stick right clost and see that nobody tries a crooked move. It's goin' to be a gentleman's game, George, but we're willin' to let you set in, seein' as it is private."

Lingard spoke softly, appealingly, as though to a child. Meanwhile he tossed an unopened pack of cards on the table. Scott drew up a chair and sat down. Lee, stepped over and sat opposite Scott. Lingard politely requested Mr. Pike to sit on the bed. They needed another chair. Stillman glanced furtively at their faces. They were not bad faces, nor were they weak faces, but rather the faces of men who had lived much out of doors: men like Darrow, apparently straightforward, hardy, loyal. Moreover they were cattlemen—not gamblers. That was evident.

"I haven't much with me," said Stillman in an ordinary tone, "only a couple of hundred, cash. I'm willing to lose that much, to get rid of you."

"It'll cost you more than that," said Lingard. "You see, senator, Scott and Lee and I, got about eight hundred apiece. It'll take

more than two hundred to warm up the action. Can't you dig a little, George?"

"I can give my check, if necessary."

"Mebby you can—but not to us."

"And you call this a gentleman's game, eh?" And Oily George smiled sarcastically. "Why, you three, working together, could raise me out of my boots—trim me to a finish. Suppose you just pool your cash and let one of you play against me. Then I'll have a fighting chance."

"Well, seein' as you feel that way about it, I'm willin' if the boys are. How about it, boys?"

"Suits us," said Scott.

"Then here goes, senator." And with the money carefully sorted beside him, Lingard counted out fifty dollars. Oily George tossed five ten-dollar bills on the table. They thinned out the deck so that they could get quick action, cut for deal, and agreed to play cold hands, no draw, until one or the other was broke. The game, as a game, was not interesting. The results might be. Oily George forgot where he was and why he had consented to play poker with this stranger from Texas. All Oily George thought of was the man opposite him and the stack of bills and silver on the table. Once in a game, Oily George would play until there was no money left to play for.

In a half hour, Stillman pushed back from the table. His ready cash was gone. He hesitated, and finally laughed. "You trimmed me. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I have some oil stock, in that satchel, there—something like twelve thousand shares. I'll put it up against just twelve hundred dollars cash, and stick in the game. It's up to you."

"Just as you please," said Stillman.

"Let's look at that stock," suggested Lingard.

Stillman rose heavily and fetched the satchel to the table. Lingard opened and examined one of the stock certificates. "Small company," he observed casually. "Wildcat concern. How much stock did the company issue, altogether, senator?"

"Twenty thousand shares. I own twelve thousand, and paid two dollars a share for it."

"I reckon you was stung, then. A fella *might* unload that stuff for ten cents a share. I dunno. Tell you what I'll do. I'll just give you a chance to win back your measly two hundred, and twelve hundred on the

side, against this paper. I'm a sport. I'm no piker."

"Somebody at the door, there," said Benson.

"Excuse me." And Lingard pushed back his chair and stepped to the door. "What? Who? No, he's busy. Oh, is that you, Lin? You want me? All right."

Lingard stepped out into the hall. "Telegram for you. I signed for it. Told the hotel clerk you was havin' a committee meetin' in there, with orders that no one was to bother you."

Lingard ripped the envelope open and read the wire. It was brief. It read:

G. C. Stillman controls.

STEBBINS.

Lingard thrust the telegram into his pocket and stepped back into the room. Oily George sat fingering the stock certificates. Choppo, smiling at Mr. Pike, who sat on the bed, curled a brownie, or, speaking less colorfully, rolled a cigarette. Benson sat by the push button near the door. He seemed absorbed in his own reflections. Lee was critically inspecting a cigar the senator had just given him. Old Joe Scott was watching Lee. "Only Lin, to say he was gettin' tired of waitin'," remarked Lingard casually.

Lingard drew up to the table, counted out twelve hundred dollars, and shoved the money toward Stillman. "Put up your stock, senator. High card wins."

"What! Twelve hundred on the turn of a card? I'm no millionaire."

"I ain't, neither. You figure that stock ain't worth ten cents a share. And that's about what you paid for it. Are you game?"

Feigning reluctance, Stillman deposited the stock certificates alongside Lingard's money.

"And Mr. Pike can turn the cards," said Lingard. "That ought to be fair enough."

"Come on, Pike." And Stillman gestured to the lawyer.

"A card to the senator, and one to me," said Lingard, smiling.

Mr. Pike was nervous, but he managed to shuffle, and deal the two cards, face down on the table. Senator Stillman turned his card—the ten of spades. Slowly Lingard turned his. It was the ten of clubs. Stillman swore softly and wiped his forehead. "Another," Stillman whispered hoarsely.

Pike's hand shook as he dealt the two cards. Promptly Stillman and Lingard turned their cards. Each showed a queen.

"Once more," laughed Lingard.

Before they turned the third card, Lingard held up his hand. "Just a minute. The bet goes—and I'll bet you the rest of this pile"—and he tapped his pocket—"that I beat you."

"This is fast enough for me," said Stillman. And he turned his card. It was the jack of diamonds. Lingard held his hand over his own card. "That side bet is still open, senator."

Stillman shook his head. Lingard flipped his card over. It was the king of hearts.

"Fair enough," said Joe Scott. "You ain't won nothin', Dave, but you give him a chanct."

Just then the telephone tinkled. "Pike, will you answer it?" Mr. Pike was quick to follow Stillman's suggestion. Choppo would have stopped Mr. Pike, but Lingard nodded that it would be all right. Meanwhile Lingard gathered up the stock certificates and tucked them in his inside coat pocket. "And now, senator, we ail will be curlin' our tails for home. Most of us are stayin' up on the next floor; if you git lonesome——"

"It's Spencer. Says he wants to see you about that Texas oil stock," stated Mr. Pike, turning from the telephone.

"Oil stock be damned! Tell him to go to—or, no. Tell him to step over here."

"So we'll be leavin'. If you should want to buy that stock back, I'll be in town until after the round-up." And Lingard started toward the door leading to the barroom.

"That's locked," said Stillman.

Lingard paid no attention, but turned the knob and holding the door open, ushered his companions out. "Good night, senator, and don't forget to remember us to Ace when you see him."

When Mr. Pike got through telephoning to the Mr. Spencer above mentioned, he turned to find Oily George smiling broadly. He chuckled, grew facetious, seemed decidedly pleased about something. Mr. Pike gazed solemnly at his employer. Pike failed to see anything humorous in the situation.

"When that long-legged Texas waddie pays the assessments on that oil stock, he'll wish he'd never seen me," chuckled Stillman. "It's worth just about ten cents a share less than nothing."

"But you lost two hundred."

"Not lost, Pikey. Merely invested. Those cow chasers think they have put one over on your uncle George. Now they're satis-

fied. That was all bluff about their staying in town till after the round-up. And if they do stay in town, they'll get so drunk spending that extra two hundred, that they won't know a cow from a box car. I know the breed."

Next morning, shortly before he started for the ranch, Stillman was detained by the new State inspector of cattle and his old foreman, Ace Darrow. The senator was prepared to bluff Darrow, if Darrow referred to the promised ten per cent bonus, but Ace acted as though he had never heard of such a promise. He merely stated that as he had some stock on the Southwestern range, in his own name, and bearing his own brand duly registered, he would arrange to help cut his own stuff, and, in so doing, facilitate its delivery to the chutes. Ace also informed the senator that he had sold his own cattle at a fair price, and merely waited for the tally, to have them billed to Kansas City. Stillman could find no fault with the arrangement. Stillman smiled his oily smile, shook hands with the new inspector, and invited him out to the ranch.

Stillman's smile faded quickly when Ace and the inspector had departed. Just a few hours previous, or, to be exact, at twelve-thirty that morning, Oily George had learned through the broker Spencer that Section 10, of the Texas Experimental had developed a gusher, and that the stock had gone sky-high and was still flitting heavenward. Oily George reviewed the previous night's happenings minutely. He wondered if that man Lingard actually knew of the gusher, or had simply played in luck. He stepped to the desk and looked up the number of Lingard's room. Lingard had not yet come down. Oily George, feeling that minutes were precious, ascended the stairs and tapped at Lingard's door. Lingard received him in his underwear and a sleepy smile.

"Sorry to disturb you," said Stillman. "But business will have to be my excuse. About that oil stock. I received word last night, after you left, that the stock had advanced slightly——"

"Tha's good," yawned Lingard.

"And I thought that possibly I could make it an object to you to sell it back to me. Of course you can suit yourself——"

"Usually do, senator."

"About selling, I mean. Now this is confidential.. *You* know, and *I* know just why Ace hired you and your friends to come over

and work for the Southwestern, last spring. The less said the sooner forgotten. I——"

"I'm a hell of a good little forgetter, senator. But go ahead and name the ante."

"Well, I'll be frank. If you will turn that oil stock over to me, I'll give you a clear bill of sale for the cattle you and your riends branded this summer, and accept your own tally, which, I understand, is about three hundred head. You to pay me a dollar in hand, to make the transaction legal. I'm selling the cattle to you. That should net you about twelve thousand, instead of twelve hundred."

"Sounds mighty good to me," said Lingard sleepily. "And just to show you that there ain't no hard feelin's, I'll take your offer. If you can give me a clean bill of sale for the stuff we branded this summer, I'll turn over this here oil stock to you."

"Fine! I thought you were a man of good judgment. Just get a rig at the livery—charge it up to me—and drive over to the ranch this afternoon. Bring your friends, if you like. And stay as long as you like. We'll have a barbecue, and something to drink——"

"And just nacherally raise hell," laughed Lingard.

"You bet. Well, so long. I must be moving."

Choppo, Lingard's bedfellow, was staring up at Lingard with wide, questioning eyes. "Dave, I think you say to me that stock paper she worth mebbly fifty thousand dollar. Then how for you sell him back for twelve thousan', yes?"

"Choppo, you didn't get the point. Stillman ain't got that stock, yet."

Three days later, the great S. W. herd was rounded up and toward the end of the fourth day Darrow, Lingard, Scott, Lee, Choppo, and Selden, working together, had cut out some three hundred and eighty head of cattle branded with the Lazy D. Among these cattle were at least two hundred and fifty spring calves. It was a problem that even the State cattle inspector could not solve. That eighty-odd cows—Darrow's little herd—should have had over two hundred husky calves, was beyond the imaginings of the most optimistic cattleman that ever wore chaps. When Darrow made the tally he called Lingard and Scott to one side and questioned them. Their expressions were childlike and bland. "All you said was to

brand everything in sight," drawled Lingard. "We done it."

Stillman hunted up Darrow and had a talk with him privately. "You ran a whizzer on me," concluded Stillman.

"You must think it, seeing you got the nerve to say it," retorted Darrow. "But what are you going to do about it?"

Oily George did not like the expression in Darrow's eye. Oily George decided that he could do nothing about it. He had been trimmed at his own game. Then it flashed through his mind that Lingard had some oil stock—"If you can give me a clean bill of sale for the cattle we branded this summer, I'll turn the oil stock over to you." Stillman could almost hear Lingard's drawling intonation.

Leaving his new foreman in charge, Stillman drove back to Tucson and hunted up Spencer, the broker. "Find out who owns that section, north of Red Star, Texas. Get his name and address, if it costs you a thousand. Then see what you can do with him. Buy outright if you can—anything up to fifty thousand. If you can't buy outright, buy the lease. Get control of that strip of land if you have to steal it. Get Pike to help you. If you put this deal through you'll never have to do another day's work in your life."

About ten o'clock next morning Stillman's telephone tinkled. Stillman had had a bad night and had slept late. He rose and answered the call. Spencer, the broker, informed Stillman that he had located the owner of Section 10 of the Red Star lease, and, moreover, that the owner was now in his office, had intimated his willingness to sell, and would, if convenient to the senator, call upon him at any hour he might name. "Send him right over," quavered Stillman, hardly able to believe this news. And hanging up the receiver he dressed hastily.

A few minutes later Oily George opened the door to Dave Lingard. Stillman blinked, smiled, held out his hand. "I was expecting another caller," he informed Lingard. "But that's all right. Step right in."

"Spencer told me you wanted to buy my oil land—the Red Star lease. Thought I'd see what you had to offer."

"Your oil land! Your lease! Say, aren't you tired of trying to kid me?"

"Nope. But I ain't kiddin', this journey. Here's a couple of telegrams you might read."

Stillman read the telegrams slowly. Then he handed them back to Lingard. Following that the senator sat down heavily in the nearest chair. He said nothing. There was nothing to say.

Lingard turned and walked out.

Later, as Stillman gazed out of the window he saw a procession file across the street to the station. The figures in that procession seemed familiar. They looked like picked men, and each deposited a sacked saddle on the station platform. Presently a wagon drew up and from it was dumped a number of bed rolls.

Stillman heard the distant whistle of the noon train. Lingard and his companions were leaving town, to return to their homes in Texas, Montana, Wyoming, Dakota, Utah, and old Mexico. Only one of them, young Lin Selden, had bade farewell to Ace and Mrs. Darrow, and he had done so hastily, as the decision to leave town had been made but an hour before train time. As an aggregation, in all probability they would never meet again. As an aggregation, they did not care to say good-by to their old friend Ace. He would understand, even as he understood why they had branded certain cattle with the Lazy D instead of with the S. W., without informing him of the fact.

Stillman saw the bed rolls and saddles disappear into the baggage car. He saw the six picked men disappear into the depths of a Pullman. And just as the train pulled out, Stillman saw Ace Darrow coming down the street on the run. Ace shouted something, and waved his hat. Then he turned quickly and strode up the street. Stillman caught himself drawing a double cross, with his finger, on the dust of the table.

Look for other stories by Knibbs soon.



"Who Am I? Can't Y' See!"

By Theodore Seixas Solomons

Author of "The Implacable Friend," "The Young Barbarian," Etc

It took the joyous hearts of little children and the spirit of Christmas to soften that long grudge of old Sam Knowlton's against the mining camp of Candle—though Jerry Driscoll had something to do with it, too

WELL, what use are they to the white people up here?" I asked the old road-house man.

We were talking of reindeer, as we smoked our pipes after a big ptarmigan dinner. A Laplander, or Eskimo—he was too far off for us to tell which—had driven a small band of the brown-and-gray horned creatures across the dreary wastes of the little arctic river back of Cape Deceit, and that had started the old road-house man on one of his none-too-frequent yarns.

"You mean you don't see much of them among our little mining settlements on the coast here. No, you don't. The ones Uncle Sam imported long ago have done fine, all right; and they've grown to thousands. But they was intended for the natives, and for the Laps that taught the natives to handle the critters. And they've got 'em, and a darn good thing it is for them, and for the whites, too—to be able to buy the meat and the skins and the sinew.

"They keep the herds a long ways from the placer camps. The whites don't want them for sledding, dogs being faster and easier managed on long trips in the open, while for heavy freighting, close in around the settlements where trails are good, horses have got both deer and dogs beat."

The old road-house man cocked one eye. "Strictly speaking, the only time I ever see the live deer themselves be any benefit to a white man was one occasion that was extraordinary, and—barring Jerry Driscoll—accidental! And, at that," added the old road-house man very judgmatically, "the reindeer was only incidental-like. It's part of the way old Sam Knowlton came back to Candle, and though I knew it in a general way, like other old-timers round here, the real insides of the story I got from my old friend Jerry Driscoll, the mail carrier."

Having got off to this start, the old road-house man continued substantially as follows:

You see, Candle, the principal one of the little placer camps on Kotzebue Sound here, was about four years old, when Jerry got his first mail contract and showed up late in the fall. He was breaking out a trail with a crack team of Malemutes from the upper country. First thing he did when he hit Candle was to ask what had become of old Sam Knowlton, who used to be a kind of partner of his around Klondike, years before.

"Old Sam, the man-eater?" somebody answers him. "Why, he's somewheres round the Buckland River."

"Doin' what?"

"Oh, chewin' up the timber and cursin', I expect!" says the feller indifferently.

Fact was, old Sam Knowlton was one of three men that first discovered gold on the sound here—the first real gold on the Arctic Ocean. But he got nothing out of it. You could trust old Sam for that. Like many another before him, he was too good a prospector to be a miner, as some would put it, or, as others might tell you, too short in his temper and too old-fashioned a sour dough for the kind of Alaska we've got to-day. Anyhow, Jerry Driscoll never saw him till the next winter, when his route was changed to take in a little camp on Muckluck Creek, where there was some fellers sassy enough to make the mail-service superintendent set up and notice them. That obliged Driscoll to veer off from the Keewalik River, which runs down to Candle, and hit the Buckland below Muckluck, a two days' extra mush, and a dangerous divide to boot, just for the pleasure of tellin' those kickers that wanted to see themselves stuck on the postal map of Alaska that there weren't a dog-gone thing

for 'em. "And it's tickled to death I am for that!" as Jerry would up and tell 'em straight. And still they was glad to see him, him being a human bein'. And he'd get a hunk of caribou meat if there was any loose.

Changing his route, that way, threw him over into old Sam Knowlton's estates in the spruce timber on the eastern branch of the Keewalik. It was here the old feller had hid himself off the trails of men running from anywhere to anywhere. Way Jerry tells of first meeting up with him again was whoain' his team on the ice and seein' old Sam, cap off, gray hair and beard flying in a thirty-mile breeze as sharp as a weasel's claw, cutting wood.

"G' dout o' here!" he yells. And Jerry can hear him plain, though he's a quarter of a mile away out across a windy bar. But Jerry *gees* over his team, comes right on, and stops under the bank, with old Sam, his parka off, his ax held like a long-stemmed pipe in his great hand, towering over him and yelling out:

"You from Candle?"

"No," says Jerry, "just goin' there."

"Jes' as bad!" roars Sam. "G'on off; and camp a good ten mile away, too." Then, Jerry saying nothing, he goes on only a shade less tyrantlike. "It's good enough weather, ain't it? What in hell and blazes you want to come invadin' around me for?"

"Well, now, it's like this, Sam," says Jerry, as easy and natural as if the old codger's typhoon was a reg'lar Alaska amenity between two friends. "Y' see, it's this way: I knew you was a cross between a grizzly b'ar and a howling hyena of the desert, but yet, and for all that, you used to know your friends!"

"No friend of mine comes from Candle, or to it, neither," rasps Knowlton. And like as if his arms was hot—it's at least forty below—he peels up the sleeves of his parka, as if he's gettin' in shape to mix it proper. He comes to the edge of the bank and stares down at Jerry, close, and he says, just about one notch lower than a bull would bawl: "If you warn't going to that hell's pit of the hull arctic creation, I'd think mebbe you *did* favor some a tol'able square cuss I knew oncet."

With that Jerry, who is as cunning a second-generation bog trotter as ever you see, and, besides, knows his man, comes right up the bank fearless, and holds out his hand.

"Tol'able square, huh? Just '*tol'able*

square,' you antiquated old hunk of white whale, you! It's *that* you say to Jerry Driscoll, is it?"

Old Sam, he's been doin' a war dance round him, but when he hears that name he drops his ax, strides up to Jerry, and whispers: "Hell's bells, boy! If I ain't glad to see you, anyhow. Put her thar!" And they visit a minute or two, till Jerry's howlin' team interrupts the chinnin' and old Knowlton runs down to the river, tucks a husky under each arm and fair drags 'em, team, sled, and all, up the bank and into a spare shed he's got off to one side of his igloo, or shack, or whatever you feel you got to call it.

Jerry was for turnin' his camogens loose, but not a dog would old Sam let out of the shed. Well, that was strange, thought Jerry, for the old boy had loved a dog better'n he did the average human, and rangin' free was more than a hobby with Sam Knowlton, for dogs or men. But the place was dry enough, and Driscoll shrugged his shoulders and followed the old man into the cabin.

Driscoll says it wasn't the kind of a home in the timber that Sam Knowlton would have made for himself or anybody else fifteen years before. Even at that, it wouldn't have been so despiritin' a place if old Sam hadn't been too proud to get a sash or two of winder in Candle and give the place a little light. It had an earth floor, it was none too clean, and—well, you could see that old Sam Knowlton was gettin' considerable past his prime as a sour dough. It didn't make Jerry feel any too good that night—or the rest of his mail trip, for he and the old boy had been some close in the past. In fact, Jerry had got the first he knew of many things, including dog drivin', from old Sam Knowlton in Circle City, in pioneering days.

"Set down; set down," says old Sam. "And I'll cook you up some of what little I've got."

He begins to look uncomfortable, and poked fierce at the stove. He was one of these red-faced old fellers, and he gets redder. "I ain't much fixed fer comp'ny," he blurts out, and Jerry, who has thrown a canny eye over the shack, believes him.

"You don't have to be with me, Sam," he says. "I'm livin' on the government, and I go well heeled for grub."

"What you doin'?" asks Sam, whirling around.

"Mail carryin', of course." And he tells him all about how he come to be off the regular trail route between Nome and Candle. Old Sam growls:

"I reckon I'd let them Candle men rot before I'd carry mail to 'em!" And after supper, by questions slick and easy—as Jerry Driscoll well knows how—to keep the old boy's temper lidded, he gets the story—what little there was of it.

Old Knowlton, you must understand, was some punkins of an Alaskan in the good old days, some figger in the upper country before the Alaska code of civil procedure and deppity marshals was thought of; and he always said the Far North and law books never was meant to mix. But they did, in Candle; and Harry got splashed plumb out of the batter!

He had the old prospector's easy way of duckin' out over the country and forgettin' the calendar. And when him and two others staked the main creek on Candle, old Sam, after rocking out a little dust, went off on some fool chase up the Kobuc and wasn't heard from for a year or more. When he come back—broke, of course—and started to rock out another grubstake on one of his Candle claims—why, he didn't have no more ground than a mockin' bird! That meant only one thing—Candle had been stampeded in the meantime by a sure-enough bunch of all sorts and conditions of folks from Nome. They had come a-pilin' overland all sorts of ways across the Seward Peninsula, and around by water, in every kind of craft, through the Bering Strait.

Somebody, of course, had been watching Knowlton's claims, and, first of the year, had relocated them for lack of assessment work being done—all regular enough under the mining laws of the revised statutes of the United States, but damnable *irreg'lar* accordin' to go-as-you-please old-timers like Sam Knowlton, Frank Knight, "Forty-mile" Forsyth and that bunch of relics, who had only two planks to their political platform—a gentleman's game, if you played it, and a miners' meetin' for you—and *what followed*—if you didn't!

The other old boys had scattered out, I believe Jerry said; but old Sam, he was stuck. He protested around some, in his breezy way—the same that had give him the pleasant little nickname* of Sam the Maneater. And probably it might have been serious if the relocater, or the jumper, as

Sam naturally called him, had remained in those parts, which he hadn't! No, he had the presence of mind to be absent, having deeded to some one else, and him to another. And two of the best claims, as it turned out afterward, had been bought by Tom Bradshaw, a darn good man from around Nome way, who had settled right down to work them.

Now, this was too remote, you might say—putting the responsibility on *him*. So all old Sam does is give him a good cussin' out, which you could a-heard clear up to the magnetic meridian, and which ends with tellin' him he has got his opinion of anything callin' hisself a man that buys ground in Alaska on lawyer's papers without first seeing that it don't really belong to some old sour dough that might have been blazin' trails for *him* while *he* was a suckin' infant!

Bradshaw takes it amiable. He just winks and gets out of the wrath zone, and by and by he sends word to him that there's a fraction of one of the claims that old Sam can have if he likes, meanin' it in kindness, you know. But they say when that word come to Knowlton it was the last straw! His ruddy face turns purple, and he near throws a apoplectic fit. Make *him* a *present* of a fraction of *one* of *his own* claims! He only saves his blood vessels by bilin' his temper over into words. They do say the atmosphere around him fair shriveled and cracked. He doesn't mince nothin' nor is any ways mealy mouthed or diplomatic in his strictures concernin' Candle and Candle Creekers. And shaking the dust of the place from his moccasins, he decamps, with what little outfit he's got, into the timber upriver where he figgers nobody coming or goin' to Candle, less he's turrible lost, will ever come within rifle range of his water-hole trail.

All this is three or four years before Jerry hits him, and he's only been near Candle once, when he just *had* to take a raft of logs close. Other times he floats 'em down to the main Keewalik and sells 'em to loggers there, lettin' them make the profit rather than go on down and sell his own wood and have to take the gold dust of them blank-blanketty, hell-spawned Candle vermin—dust like as not from *his very own claims*! That's the explanation he makes to Jerry for being hard up, and, having little or nothing in the place. He makes it light, and talks big about some prospects he's got—'some rock that looks pretty good, up yander

on the mountain. And if she pans out, I'm off Alaska for life," he says. "I got a reg'lar hornets' nest of grandchild'en *somewheres*, and I aim to go outside and look 'em up, and spend the rest of m' life teasin' them kids—if I kin find 'em!"

Driscoll sees a side light on the empty kennel—he hasn't got money for dog feed, and he can't catch his own, the salmon run not extending up on his branch of the river, count of a fall. That's it, old Sam owns up.

"But why," interrogates Jerry, "must you keep my own camogens penned?"

"Because I got deer," says Sam. "Jerry, you damn fool, you think I'm without a critter at all! Out there, just over the brow of the hill, is four of the slickest, fattest, purtiest things you ever see wearing horns. Traded some extree shootin' irons I had for 'em and, to boot, helped herd for half one summer. Say, boy, they're sure friendly, and know m' voice! Well, now, if your dogs was to get free around here and there come a breath of wind to their noses from over the hill, they'd be runnin' them deer and themselves clear over to the Koyukuk divide afore you could get into your webs and after 'em!"

"No need to ast you if you got 'em broke good?" says Jerry, grinnin'. Every old-timer knew what a gentle hand old Sam Knowlton had for critters.

"Follow me around like dogs," says Sam, with fond pride. "I packed one in on my back when I thought he'd broke a leg—the rest hornin' in around. Funniest thing you ever see!"

"Do you drive 'em in a sled?"

"Sure do—my own make, too."

"I'll bet! Anythin' there's any blacksmithin' in you always could make!"

"Plenty in my sled. High basket sides, arched up front, fancy back. The outfit looks good!"

And before Jerry left—a blizzard held him up three days—he sees the outfit hitched and loaded with dry wood. They work like old stage horses, though they eye Jerry kind of wild. You bet old Sam has 'em hid out again when Jerry hitches up his team and lights out for Muckluck Creek.

"Well, air y' coming back again?" says old Sam. He says it ~~and~~ of wistful.

Jerry takes him in. He's stalwart yet, but some stooped, and very gray and hairy and unkemp' and old and discouraged. But

because he's got a stout heart a-thumpin' still he don't know these things.

Jerry, he steps on one foot and then the other, and looks him over kind o' furtive, and leers around—at the smoke a-curlin' lazy among the scatterin' spruce tops in that God-forsaken neck o' nothin'! And suddenly he closes one eye and says:

"By the way, Sam, what's the date?"

Sam, he clears his throat and gets red.

"What the hell kind of gov'ment mail carrier are you, anyways? You, supposed to be on skejjul time, a-asking me that! The date's November, or, barrin' that, it's December."

"Well, what's a calendar, more or less, in our young lives, anyhow?" soothes Jerry, chucklin' light.

"Right!" says Sam straightenin' up. "So long!"

The old feller stands and watches him, and never moves a muscle till he's clear out of sight!

"Say," says Driscoll when he runs plump into Tom Bradshaw on the main street—and the only one—of Candle, so-called, "City." "Who do you think I see in the timber when I run my new trail route over to Muckluck Creek."

"Who's that?" says Bradshaw. He was one of the busiest operators in Candle. The winter mining was getting bigger each year, with the hoisting of low-grade gravel from the benches. Like quite a few others, he'd brought his family up from Nome, and it was a reg'lar little perambulator camp they had there now, with small kids a-worryin' pups to pull toy sleds and tobogganin' down the steep banks, and skating all the short day on the wind-swept glare ice of the river.

"Old Sam Knowlton!" replies Jerry.

Bradshaw give a laugh. "Eat you?"

"Nope; him and me's old pals. Barrin' that he's some savage on Alaska havin' growed up without his permission, he's all right with me, personal."

"Oh, I've got nothin' again the old fire eater, if he *did* give me an outrageous bawlin' out some years ago. I guess it got on the old boy's nerves some to lose his ground. Only himself to thank, though. By the way, Driscoll," says Bradshaw, business in his voice now. "Is there any way you can get me a good blacksmith from Nome? We're trying to keep two self-dumpers operating, and they're always sticking in the unlock, and nothin' for it but to send some

jack up the eighty-foot jin pole and down the cable to pry her loose. This amachoor blacksmith we got here makes things wuss every time he tampers with 'em. I need a little strap iron, too, and a piece of steel. Can you bring 'em for me?"

Driscoll scratches his ear. "I'm late now, Mr. Bradshaw, and the next trip being the Christmas trip, I'll be sure full up with packages——"

"Oh, drat Christmas, anyhow!" growls this worried miner.

"Hey, what's that, pop!" calls out a kid near by, his voice coming muffled through the fur of a husky pup who's tryin' to make a get-away out of his arms.

Bradshaw grins. "Not a pop'lar sentiment around Candle this year," he says.

"I'll do my best for you," Jerry Driscoll promises him. "Don't forget to gimme your list."

The cross-Peninsula round trip of two hundred-odd miles, is a two weeks' run, all goin' well, but the mail contract gives them an average of three weeks to allow for stops for the purpose of givin' blizzards and such the right of way! Hence Jerry Driscoll should not have worried because it was three weeks before he was back at the gravel bar fronting the forlorn shack of old Sam Knowlton. Presumably he could still make Candle on time.

It was the middle of the morning when he appeared around the tail of the long bar, and all presumption died a natural death after one look at him! He was under half speed, and shovin' hard at the handlebars of his long, low basket sled, at the front of which were attached his leader and three discouraged-lookin' team dogs, their feathery tails hangin' down doleful, their eyes agog, as they strain in their collars, their red tongues out, and their throats panting. Jerry himself looked all in as old Sam slid stiffly down the bank and walked out to meet him across the bar.

"Well, say, you idiotic son of a mail carrier, what in seben dashes has got into you, Jerry Driscoll, a-comin' along h'yere that a way!" he howls. "Purty-lookin' pictur' you make with that whoppin' load and fo' dogs! Where's the rest of your big spankin' team, hey?"

"Help me in, Sam," says Jerry, when he gets his breath, leanin' faggedlike on the handlebars, "and I'll tell you 'bout it by and by."

When they get into camp and Jerry drags in his mess kit, he tells old Sam a sure heart-rendin' story of hard luck and trail misfortune!

"I was camped down at the forks last night," he says, "all shipshape, dogs fed, me smokin' me old corncob, when in blows a smooth, sociable mug—may the likes of him freeze his feet clear up to his eyebrows!—and asks to camp with me. He's got three or four sorry-lookin', half-starved specimens. He's from *Candle*, I expect!"

"From Candle, sure," corroborates old Sam, scowlin' sympathetic. "I know the breed. A no-good, scoundrelly son of a sea cook, hey!"

"Entertainin' brute," pursues Jerry, remisscent. "Spin yer an earful of hair-raisin' yarns——"

"I reckon he could," further agrees Sam. "And plausible as the blind doorkeep of the lower-most pit o' hell—you bet I know 'em!"

"Takes in my hull outfit all the while he's prattlin' his condemned gabble, y' see? I kind of thought he's admirin' my pups a lot, but I suspicions nothin' till, in the morning, my camp mate's gone—lit out how early I don't know. And when I calls m' dogs to hitch 'em up—well!"—Jerry waves his hand toward the dog shed—"them's what's left!"

He stops and looks a earnest, tragic, terrible look at old Sam for sympathy, but all the old man-eater says is—and he bites it off sarcastic: "Serves you right for taking a gov'ment run to a leper colony like that there Candle." And he blows his nose and swears at the stove, and brisks around like he don't care a tinker's rap for the whole affair.

Jerry sits sad for a while. Then he remarks casual that he's fearful late now, and if he don't get that there load of mail, which is mighty particular mail, into Candle tomorrow some time, he forfeits his contract and all he's earned already for the hull season. It's an awful whopper, but old Sam, knowing nothin' about the postal regulations concerning averages, takes it like gospel.

"Now, what do you think of that?" the old man hollers. "If Uncle Sam's growed to be that kind of a tinhorn, I'm blessed if I don't change my name to 'Willie.'" He rants for a little, and then chops sudden. "Say," he says, squintin' at the skillet of beans and pawin' them rapid with a home-

made fork. "It's too bad you can't drive reindeer, now ain't it?"

"Too bad I can't," admits Jerry, mournful.

Old Sam fair scrabbles them beans to a pur-ray.

"If it wasn't for havin' to punish my eyes by lookin' at them porch-climbin' cut-throats down thar, I'd be gosh-all-fired hung if I wouldn't mush your load down there, m'se'f, with my fo' critters!"

"Hell, man," says Jerry, as cunnin' as a fox, "I'd rather lose everything I got in the world than let you demean yourself that low, just for me." He lets that soak a minit, then he comes along again: "I'll admit right now that the dogs I got left is my fastest, and with a empty sled I could most probably catch that condemned dog thief yet—somewheres between here and Seattle."

"Sure you could," hollers Sam, his old eyes blazin'. Like every old Yukon pioneer, he felt about as amiable toward a dog thief as they used to be sociable with a horse thief in the old West. "Ter perdition with them Candle swine!" he thunders, a-hittin' the table with his hand. "I'll only have to run in there to the post office and dump your load at 'em contemp'shus, and out again, won't I? And, meantime, you're stripped down to the last ounce of outfit and poundin' the snow after that truly rep'ersentative Candle citizen—I'll bet he's the mayor of the town—that stole your dogs. Like as not he knowed you wuz my friend!"

"Mebbe," says Jerry, smilin' faint.

Sam grabs him by the collar. "Let's get ready pronto!"

"It's durn white of you, old-timer," says Jerry. He shoots out his skinny paw, and old Sam grabs it, and it's a bargain.

They don't stand gassin'. Old Sam snatches up his old Mackinaw and a bunch of braided deerskin halters and starts off to the hill, while Jerry transfers his load to Sam's big fancy deer sleigh—and does it most careful and particular!

Back comes Sam with his deer, and a sure pretty bunch of bright, spotted little cattle they was, cool-nosed, clean, horns and hoofs shiny and heads proud. Jerry's canines smells 'em and howls through the shed; but he's got them and their gear shut in tight—all but the bells off of their harness. And, somehow, there's a lot of them bells!

"What's all them?" asks Sam, who is just hitchin' in his lead span. Never havin'

a trail to narrer him, he drives 'em in pairs, which fact seems to tickle Jerry.

"Well, y'see," answers the mail carrier, innocent, "the government is awful partic'lar about bells being on every mail team." And he makes Sam string the jinglers all over the collars and back straps of the animals, and there's plenty left for the curved rails of the sleigh.

"Ain't you goin' to cover all this truck?" says Sam, meanin' the packages and more packages, and then some, that's fillin' the sled brimful.

"Your sleigh's so big, the canvas won't lap over," explains Jerry. Matter of fact, he's folded a big tuck in it on the bottom while Sam was away after his fiery steeds.

"Suits me," says old Sam, venomous. "If it comes on to snow or drift and them Candle folks get's their fool stuff all messed up and wet—I should worry!"

But Jerry is a rare judge of weather. He's been squintin' at the sky all roun', and he knows she'll hold fair for a spell. The last thing he says is: "Say, Sam, is that old Mackinaw the best thing you got?"

"Why, ain't it good enough for them jail-birds down the river?" he asks, fierce and proud.

"Pienty," accords Jerry promptly. "Only I was thinkin' they might get the idee you was broke or hard-up—kind of seedylike. Get me? Now, aharum! For instance, I got me, when I was in Nome, a nice, warm-lookin'——" and he jerks out of his duck sack a fur-trimmed contrivance which looks like a coat, a parkey and a serape had all got fandangoed into one. He eyes Sam anxious. But Sam, he don't look at it, hardly. He's bitin' to Jerry's first words, and he rasps out:

"Say, I'd rather let your dogs go and your contract get foreclosed on you than have them dashed blank, blank dashed Candle galoots think for one minute that old Sam Knowlton is anyways up against it!" And he gets his big carcass into the thing. He chucks his camp stuff in the rear of the sled, calls in some gloo-gloo Lap lingo, to the deer, and off they shamble, leavin' Jerry slit-tin' his eyes in a canny leer, and rubbin' his skinny hands.

He watches the old fire-eater strike up on the tundra and trot along over the crust for a mile or two, and then he hitches his four dogs to his empty sled and takes the river trail. Mebbe half a mile down—and totally

unexpected to any one who might have been jogging along with him—his dogs, with no word from him, swerves sidewise, darts suddenly up the bank, following a single dog-sled track, and breaks into a wild gallop up a small tributary gulch. As they run, four muzzles slants toward the sky, and four howls wake the frosty stillness. Instantly, five anxious, answering howls come back from a dense clump of spruce just ahead, and five big, gray, friendly, husky dogs spring up stiff against their chains and paw the air. Their harnesses is hangin' from a bush.

"Hullo, boys," says Driscoll, "think we wuz never comin' back? Forget it!"

The spankin' team of nine is soon back on the river and takin' their regular long-distance gait on the old trail. But Driscoll makes no attempt to follow old Sam, who has taken a tundra route, where there's feed for his deer.

All that afternoon of the twenty-fourth of December—and worse the next morning—he was by big odds the most wanted man in Candle! The weather was great—clear, sparkling, still. Fact, it was so beautiful that a lot of them forgot the blizzards and driftin' winds of the last three weeks and couldn't think of no excuse for the mail carrier not showin' up. Orders for the where-with of holiday cheer, that had gone out to the States on the last boats in October, orders on the merchants in Nome, gifts unknown in particular but mighty certain in general, from relatives and friends on the outside and inside—all this glad stuff was known to be stowed in Jerry Driscoll's long, low, light-runnin' basket sled. But where was Jerry? By young and old—especially young—if ever any one got sincere *absent treatment* to show up *presently* and *with presents*—Jeremiah Driscoll was sure that guy!

It was framed up to be a gala day. The family population of the village had increased sixty-five per cent last fall, and that meant that the town of Candle, instead of being just *gregarious*, as you might say, had become really and truly social, and this Christmas was aimed to prove it. That is, if! If Jerry Driscoll hove to in the offing of the Keewalik River with the outward and visible signs, as the prayer books says, of Christmas sociability!

Well, now, the young folks was all for him—bettin' on him! They was optimists.

Early in the mornin' the oldest of 'em was out on the river, just up above the town where the biggest pools are of still water that freezes smooth, and had swep' the ice clear as a mirror. And while team after team of miners that had knocked off from their work on windlasses and in drifts was jinglin' into town and finding their families and tillicums, and slickin' up a little, and the womenfolks was frostin' cakes or fixin' up wreaths and stuff in the big dancing place over Tom Lindsay's store, where the whole village was going to have the hi-u potlatch feed, the river was by long odds the most strategical place for the juvenile population. It was there they could work off the first ebullitions of this here Christmas spirit, and at the same time make as little nuisances of themselves as little nuisances *could* make at a time like that.

When the sun come up near noon, out they was on sleds no bigger'n a minit, and toboggans the same. A few had hoops and old toys and things, and pretty near all had skates on. They was actin' just like that kind of a mix-up always does, except for one peculiar thing! They'd sled or skate down-river, like the mill tail of Hades, and then turn and sled or skate upstream as slow as a snail crossin' a patch of chilled molasses. Why? Because the one that first sees Jerry Driscoll gets a prize, and the one that first carries the glad tidings into Tom Lindsay's place gets another. Tom Bradshaw has offered both of them, not because he's a bit keener on Christmas than any other *pater familias* that has got several youngsters crazy over it, as because he wants a blacksmith so bad, and his self-dumper repair iron.

So them kids, though playin' all the time, has got their eyes peeled on the upriver landscape seven and nine-tenths minutes out of every eight; and so it was till about twelve-forty-five.

It was a wonder they heard it, with all the racket they was makin', but one of them yells "Bells!—He's coming!" And a dark, moving object appearing on the instant, this hawk-eyed kid that discovered it, Judge Campbell's girl, Allie, beats it downriver for the settlement, followed by all the biggest boys and girls. The rest bunch up and wait for the sight to get bigger. When it does, a cloud of small, kid laughter goes up shrill, for it isn't a dog team, and Allie Campbell and those rangier boys that legged it ahead of her for Lindsay's are fooled! Then pres-

ently the children look at each other and their eyes get big. If it isn't a dog team, what, for goodness' sakes, is it?

Jerry Driscoll spent the night of the twenty-fourth on an island of the river, just as old Sam Knowlton, after tethering his deer, spent it in a clump of willers in a shallow draw of the bleak tundra. He doesn't take to the river till next morning, and Driscoll beats him into Candle by an hour or two. He not only intended to beat Sam into town, but to keep mighty dark after he gets there! He makes camp a good half mile up the river flat, and hoofs it down close to Candle, his old drill parkey hood pulled well over his face. He takes up a post of observation on a high point where he can look far up the river, and when he sees old Sam and his horned family in the distance, he goes into Tim Sullivan's cabin and subsidizes Tim to take a message to Tom Bradshaw, and then to tie up any dogs he might see running loose in town—an unlikely thing that day.

"Well, hullo, Driscoll," says Bradshaw, entering the cabin. He's a big, bluff, hearty feller. "What's all this? Where's your outfit?"

"Shush!" says Jerry. "This is private. Close the door. Say, didn't you want some things of me bad?"

"Well, *bad* ain't the word! How about 'em?"

"Bringin' a blacksmith—one that kin mend that contraptious invention of the father of all Gordeen knots in iron, called a self-dumper—clear over here for you when Nome's booming with work! Say, you had your nerve with you to even ast it!"

Bradshaw looks kind of disappointed, but he can't deny what Jerry says. "Mebbe you got the iron, anyhow?" he rejoins, hopeful.

"Well, yes, I have—and *I haven't!*"

"If I kin take my choice," says Bradshaw, quick as a flash, "let me have the 'have' half of that."

"Now, Bradshaw, here's me proposition now, man to man. If I bring you a guy that can prestidigitate every kink and clevis and bolt and bucklever in them dumpers of yours—and do it in his sleep as easy as awake—and if I bring you your iron, too, *and* all your jimcrack dolls and tin soldiers and plum puddings and Christmas junk—*all* of it, see? Then do you do as I tell you and ast me no questions, or do you not?"

Bradshaw studies the grinnin' mail carrier a minute or two. He knows and likes the feller pretty well, and he takes a chance. He says, "All right, you nut, what's on your mind—provided you still think you got one!"

"You know old Sam Knowlton? We was talking about him, you mind, last trip?"

"Sure. How does he figger?"

"Discovered this creek—figgered some then, you got to say! Well, he used to be a particular friend of mine—and is to-day. He's alone in a miserable shack in the timber, half starved—eatin' his heart out alone—alone, and hopeless, except for some crazy idee he's got of findin' some grandchildren he swears he's got—on *some* continent or hemisphere, he don't exactly know which! He puts in all his spare time trying to convince himself he still hates you Candle fellers. He's too proud to give in, and——"

"I know that, Jerry," says Bradshaw, quietlike.

"Well, what you don't know is that he's by long odds the best man that ever struck red iron in Alaska. I've got him down here—by a trick."

"You brought that howlin', yellin' old lunatic down with you?" says Bradshaw, horrified and incredulous.

"Not just 'brought,' no," corrects Driscoll, and he spills the story of his little ruse.

"The only chance!" says Driscoll. "The only chance on God's white earth of gettin' old Sam Knowlton where he ought to be!"

"Only chance is right, I guess," agrees Bradshaw.

"If him, or some one, don't spill the beans!"

"With that sweet temper of his, it'll take strong men to hold him," warns Bradshaw.

"The strongest you got in Candle for that purpose is out there now," declares Jerry.

"Where?"

"Out to the skating pond, of course," answers Jerry mysterious. "Come on!"

They skirt around and crawl through the brush to the edge of the bank. The small kids is below, hushed to whispering, while they're watching the strange layout that's approaching.

Now, remember, the deer men has always fit shy of a settlement—being that dogs have such a weakness for venison on the hoof. There wasn't but few of them Candle folks that had ever seen a reindeer, and none of the children—as sly old Jerry Driscoll

well knew. And here was this spick, span, jingling team of four reindeer, a-slappin' up trotwise on the river trail, with long, gray-whiskered Sam Knowlton driving them! They steadies to a walk as they come up, and when the kids let out a yip, the deer stops stock-still in their tracks. Say, if you ever see a bunch of *dumfounded*, *be-wildered*, *dee*-lighted children in all your born days, them was the ones!

"It's Santa Claus!" shrieks out six-year old Esther Bradshaw.

"Oh, how *can* it be!" says Mollie Cameron, clasping her hands.

"Just like the picture books! Mary, Mary, *where* is it?" yells Esther, and she runs and grabs a big, varnished, cloth picture book one of the kids has, and they opens it up to the double page and checks off old Sam's outfit!

All kinds of packages, mostly in Christmas wrappings and trimmin's, all slightly frosted over, is sticking up all over the big fancy-arched sled, the bells is glinting in the sun, the deer breathing steam. Old Sam, he's the wonder of them all, with his ruddy face and long white whiskers, and his big coat and cap—red stuff, with white fur collars and cuffs and such. He sure has the picture-book Santa Claus looking like a cheap imitation!

"Jerry, Jerry, for the love of Mike!" whispers Bradshaw. "How did you tog him out that way?"

Jerry answers him in a stage whisper. "I just about stole that rig from a professional Christmas saint that the Nome Bazaar always hires for Christmas week. I'm liable to do time for that yet!"

Old Sam he comes round and surveys this bunch of near-crazy children who's yelling "Santa Claus" at him and crowdin' round him, and he strokes his whiskers, and they yell some more, and he gets mad and rasps out:

"What's all this about, stopping us that a way? *This is my busy day!*"

"*Course* it is!" they shrieks at him delighted; and they crowd the sides of the sleigh and begin pawin' over the packages, and the ones old enough to read is calling out the names.

"Say, you Candle kids," says Sam, terrible severe. "What you doin' in that sleigh. What you think I come down here for, anyhow?"

Another shriek of pure glee peels out.

"Ain't he funny!" giggles the little girls, and one boy speaks up bold and says "You crawled down a hundred million chimneys last night, and *still* you've got a sled full. Say, he must have a cache halfway down from the north pole."

"Have you, Santa Claus?" pipes up two or three, and the Santa Claus idea begins to percolate. He's been in the Far North since the Russian occupation, and has mostly shunned settlements old enough for anything like families, so you can imagine how far back in his memory he has to dig to get at what it's all about.

"What day is it, to-day?" asks Sam, looking weak as a cat.

"*Christmas!*" they shout.

"And what did you say I was?"

"*Santa Claus!*" they responds in an ear-splitting treble. And with that Esther Bradshaw she shoves the open book in his hands and says: "You is *much* prettier than your own picture!"

Poor old Sam sits on the side of his sleigh and gazes at that Santa Claus and his reindeer team that's painted gaudy over two pages, and as I'm an Alaskan and a Christian, it's a real photograph!

Back down the buried trails of the past, down through the layers of the long, cold, outland years it trickles till it washes the thick time dust away from his childhood memories. And they shine out clear to him—clear visions of his boyhood home and his mother's face! Slowly his old eyes turn round to his sleigh, and forward to his gay-harnessed deer, and down to himself and his queer get-up—all just like the picture book. And he stands up and starts to cuss, and chokes it off, and then laughs till the tears roll down his face.

"Jerry Driscoll, you old pirate, if I ever get my paws on you!" he mutters into his whiskers. And back he sets again on the sled, and the kids start to climb over him, and ask him questions about his toy factory at the north pole.

Now, up comes a crowd from the town, in parkeys, fur coats, bareheaded, and every other way. There's the older kinds again, and their mothers and big sisters; and the rest is men—a fair sprinkle of the whole camp. But Sam, his sled being slued round, doesn't see 'em coming on the noiseless ice.

"Here's where *you* join that bunch, Bradshaw," says Jerry, "and make peace for the

old man-eater. If it can ever be done, it's now! The strong men you talked about needi:' is there!"

"Coming?"

"No; round his knees—they're the ones! When an old walrus bull like him dreams about the grandchildren he's got 'some-where's in the world,' any grandchildren, anywhere's in the world, will fill the bill! Me, I'm stayin' in the brush for yet a spell. My life's safer here. I'll see you later. Get out and face him!" And he pushes Bradshaw sideways out of cover.

The big Candle miner crawls out unobserved and joins the gang that's stealing up on old Sam and the children. The old feller, with a kid on each knee, is sayin':

"All them bright things you see on them Christmas trees is just bits we gouges out of the Aurora Borealis when my deer and me takes little mushin' trips round the moon and——"

"They're coming!" exclaims a small one, and Sam turns and looks at the little Candle mob. In a minute they're right up on him, and, believe me, they surveys this scene in absolute and total flabbergasterment! Sam Knowlton rises and looks into the faces of the men—his enemies! There's some that knows him, and these keep silent. There's more that don't; and one of them speaks up and says:

"Who are you!"

The time has come that this old fire-eatin' Kentuckian has dreamed of, and for four mortal years has well rehearsed, with grindin' teeth—who he'd tell 'em *he* is, that they'd throwed out like a dog, and *what they* was that done it!

He stands up. His fist is clenched. The bale fire is in his eyes. And he means to tell 'em—to tell 'em, looking right at Tom Bradshaw, the worst of them all! But here is young Billy Cameron on one side of him, and little Esther Bradshaw on the other, their small hands a-tuggin' at his sleeve and nudgin' him confidential. He feels the kids' eyes all on him, bright and twinklin' and *trustful*! Esther, she whispers to him, fearful excited:

"Tell 'em, tell 'em!"

And he can't throw them kids down!

He feels out with his hands for them, while he jerks his head up and says, kind of testy:

"Who am I? Y' dern fools, can't y' see? I'm Santa Claus!"

Speakin' of wildness! Say, some of the folks managing that Christmas party that ten minutes before was almost crying over Jerry Driscoll not showing up—well, just before they went *clean* out of their heads, Esther Bradshaw runs up to her ma and says, so's you could have heard her clear over to Nome:

"Muvver, muvver, you has deceived me; you *has* so! You told me there's no such thing as Santa Claus!"

While the crowd yells and howls at that, she drags her mother up to old Sam—and Tom, of course, is with her—and the two men look each other steady in the eye.

"Shake hands wiv Mr. Santa Claus, muvver," says Esther, with all the airs of an eighteen-year old, and Mrs. Bradshaw does, most cordial.

"You, too, favver."

Bradshaw holds out his hand. "I've wanted to for a long time," he says, very plain and simple.

Old Sam looks off a minute. His mouth is hard set, but there's signs of moisture in his eyes.

"Shake hands wiv my favver, Santa Claus," says the little lady, as sweet as a blueberry blossom; and the old man-eater's eyelids twitches.

"*Sure*," he says, meek as a lamb, and he takes Tom Bradshaw's hand.

They give old Sam the post of honor at the big time. In fact, he gives out the presents—like he ought to! He's promised to get Bradshaw out of his blacksmithin' difficulties, and to be a kind of a workin' partner. And when the big feed is on, in pokes Jerry Driscoll, bound to get some of that Christmas dinner. He's been kept posted how things was comin', and he's satisfied his life's now tolerable safe.

"How'd you get here?" asks Sam, delighted, as well as astonished. He's only about one-third wise to Jerry having framed him deliberate, to make him, for a fact, the most celebrated character in fiction!

"The damn fool that stole my dogs," says Jerry, who is as bold a liar as ever breathed, "must have got cold feet. He gradually turns round to go back to Candle. Then he gets scared, and drops 'em. I finds 'em on the trail, all nicely chained to saplin's. They gives me the glad hand, and here I be!"

"Sit down and have something to eat," in-

vited half-starved Sam grandly. "You'll find the grub ain't half bad!"

And Jerry, complying, does him one more turn directly. Before he leaves Candle to face them mighty unsartin' blizzards, he wants to clinch the bonds, so old Sam Knowlton will be fixed for what is left to him of life. He uses local pride to clinch the thing!

Being called on for a speech, after the nuts, raisins, and candy course is on, he says:

"Kids and big ones: It's no doubt school vacation, but, just the same, I'd like to call your attention to a little matter of discoverin' geography. Every place has to be discovered, and it's known to be a hard graft, with poor grub, or none at all, and full of dangerous chances. The man that does it is sure entitled to the credit. America was discovered by a man, and Candle was dis-

covered by a man. I don't know what-all America ain't produced, but Candle has already produced one million seven hundred and fifty-six thousand dollars' worth of mighty pretty gold dust—not to speak of some mighty pretty kids.

"Now watch me close, children, when I say that howsomever Candle may not be the greatest producer, she was the greatest Christmas present ever was. Get that, kids?"

"Sure," the brats come back quick. They was gettin' pretty full, but they brings it out strong.

"All right," says Jerry. "Now, then—America was discovered by——"

"Christopher Columbus!" they hollers.

"And Candle Creek?"

"By *Santa Claus!*" they yells, and for five minutes you couldn't hear yourself think.

More of Mr. Solomons' work will appear in early issues.



STEALING AND THE LAW

KLEPTOMANIA, when you understand it, is an unanswerable argument that, in the domain of crime, illness is frequently the moving cause. It is also, when you realize how the States of the Union punish or fail to punish it, a striking example of the difficulties men encounter in trying to secure justice by law.

In some of the States it is defined as an irresistible impulse to steal, but, notwithstanding a definition which manifestly puts the act beyond the offender's own control, the impulse is not recognized as a legal defense unless, coupled with it, is the additional infirmity of inability to distinguish between right and wrong. In other States the view taken of the offense is more humane and in fact more logical. There the courts, having admitted that the impulse is irresistible, accept that fact as a defense.

Psychologists, who are so busy nowadays with solutions of the mysteries of human conduct, throw up their hands at the idea of imprisonment, or punishment of any kind, for the bona-fide kleptomaniac. Irresistible stealing, they explain, is a mental disease, one which is curable when treated by an expert neurologist or alienist, and, when it is manifested in the act of stealing, can always be traced back to certain unpleasant or unwholesome impressions made on the childish mind. Another interesting fact is that an adult man is seldom a kleptomaniac. This form of stealing is found almost exclusively among women, girls, and boys near the age of adolescence.

Detectives in department stores soon learn to distinguish between the kleptomaniac and the calculating, unmoral appropriator of other people's property. The kleptomaniac has on her face during the act of stealing a peculiar expression which it is not easy to mistake. Usually, the lips are a little parted, the eyes have in them a dreamy, far-off look and the nostrils dilate and contract rapidly. Most kleptomaniacs, in spite of their cleverness in stealing, are but dimly aware of what is going on in their immediate vicinity during the commission of the offense. As soon as this is accomplished, however, they start into acute realization of what they have done and of where they are.

Najib's "Yowltide"

By Albert Payson Terhune

Author of "On Strike," "The Thirteen Puzzle," Etc.

Christmas time in far-off Syria was not as merry as it might have been for Kirby. Also it held its troubles for little Najib, who found his beloved Christiana false in a novel way

FURTHERMORE, howadji," spoke up Najib, as he appeared in the doorway of Logan Kirby's tent, "if you possession any book about the yowltide, it would bepleasure me to lend it from you and——"

"A book about the—what?" asked Kirby, looking up absently from a letter he was reading for the twentieth time, and gazing in perplexity at his wriggling little henchman in the tent doorway. "A book about the——"

"About the yowltide, howadji," repeated Najib, edging into the tent and smirking supplicingly at his chief. "I would enseek to learn myself more in its customs. There was a yowltide, once—perchance every month—when I was at Coney's Island. I did not infest that yowltide. For we were making a show, that day. But I bestopped me outside the window of the hall where the yowltide was preparing itself to yowl. And I heard many children besinging themselves with much sweetness. And they sang a melodisome chant that began to chant by telling about 'Three Wee Kings of Orientar,' and they then——"

"Oh!" broke in Kirby, enlightened. "You mean 'yuletide.' I——"

"Of an assuredly, howadji. As I said. The yowltide. And if there be any books here," with a glance at a pine shelf in the tent corner, laden with dog-eared technical works on mining and with one or two classics scattered among their ranks, "any books which description the yowltide—or perchance that tell more as to those three wee kings from Orientar—or——"

"If you're trying to ask for a book that deals with American or European Christmas customs," said Kirby, "I doubt if there's such a thing within a thousand miles—unless at some mission on the west side of the

Jordan. Certainly there's none, out here in this God-forsaken pink-and-brown land of Moab. Christmas stops short of the Moab Mountains. Or"—tapping disgustedly the letter he had been rereading—"it did, till this year. And it's as well it does. How could we get up any sort of Christmas spirit—either sacred or jolly—in a Moslem wilderness on the far side of nowhere? No, Christmas is a thing to dream about and get homesick over and then to forget—out here."

He meandered on, more to himself than to his puzzled listener. And, as he talked, he glowered annoyedly at the letter. Najib waited in due respect for Kirby to fall silent. Then the little Syrian took up the tale again.

"But, howadji," he pleaded, "even if you do not possession a book that tells of the yowltide, then, of a perhaps, you can be-tell me of it, so that I shall know."

"What do you want to know about it?" demanded Kirby crossly. "There's no use trying to explain its wonderful sacred significance to a Mohammedan like you. Besides, it wouldn't interest you. What you want to know, I suppose, is the way it's celebrated in families; and all that sort of thing. Well, if you think I'm going to get all homesick and miserable, telling you how we used to have a royal good time, back home, at such seasons, you're mistaken. But, for the love of Mike stop jarring my nerves by calling it "yowltide!" It's——"

"But those children yowled most sweetly" urged Najib. "Those children I belistened myself to, at Coney's Island. The children who beyowled themselves about the three wee kings of Orientar."

"Are you trying to quote: 'We Three Kings of Orient Are?'" asked Kirby. "If so——"

"Yes, howadji. Even as I quotioned it, but now. The yowltide chant. I call it

'yowltime' because I cannot say the sound of its last name. Here," he ventured, picking up one of Kirby's pencils and scrawling with slow and painful intensity on the back of a scratch pad. "Here is the yowltime's last name. Or perhapsfully its first name. I read it so oftenly at Coney's Island. See, howadji?"

Kirby looked at the pad. On it, Najib had printed shakily the word, "Xmas."

"It was thus it bespelt itself on the cards of gay coloring at Coney's Island," went on the Syrian. "But my tongue cannot say it in the English. If——"

"That is an abbreviation of 'Christmas,'" explained Kirby, trying not to grin. "An abbreviation. 'Abbreviation' means 'short for.'"

Najib was profoundly impressed; as always he was, when he struck a new English synonym or expression. He studied the printed word, with his head on one side; his eyes half shut, his lips moving. Then he picked up the pencil again and began to print other words beneath the first. Kirby watched him, in bewilderment; and sought vainly to make out the meaning of the new words which the fat little man was scrawling.

"Thus it is, howadji," proclaimed Najib, in pride, as he shoved the pad under his chief's eyes, "thus it is that I belearn myself all this new-laid English in one time. Listen."

But Kirby was not listening. He was striving to decipher what Najib had written. Half aloud, he spelled out:

"Xmas Xtian. Xtal. Xtopher. Xten. Xp. X."

"What in blue blazes——" he asked perplexedly.

Najib, indicating each cabalistic word in rotation with a stubby and unwashed finger, translated proudly:

"Christmas. Christian. Crystal. Christopher. Christen. Crisp. Chris;" explaining, as he reached the last: "The pressed-agent person at Coney's Island entitled himself 'Chris.' It is a name. It is the shortness—the abbreviate—for 'Christopher.' Oh, howadji, I have betaught me the spell of many a English word, this hour! I have learned me to spell them in a shortness. To abbrevify them, as you——"

"Stop!" groaned Kirby. "Let it go at that. It would take ten hours for me to explain. And I haven't ten hours or even ten

minutes to waste in teaching the mysteries of the English language to a man who murders English as you do. If you wanted to read up, on Christmas customs, because of this letter I showed you to-day—you needn't trouble yourself. This letter spells extra work and extra bother and extra trouble and extra time-wasting for both of us. That's all it means. And there is no need in your trying to master any Christmas customs, on account of it. You won't be asked to throw yourself into the spirit of the thing—only to stick to the double job this will mean. It's lucky we've gotten those Alexandretta shipments off our hands and the other consignment started for Damascus. That leaves us with a little breathing space. Otherwise, we'd be snarled up for weeks, by this thing. Now, chase along and set a couple of the men to grading that knoll top for the camp site. *Tamam!*"

"*Aiwa*, howadji," assented Najib dutifully, in response to the time-honored Arabic phrase for ending an interview.

But as he sidled out of the tent, he murmured regretfully in English:

"Still, it would have been pleasurable, at the least, to know what befalled those three wee kings of Orientar! And now, perchance, I shall never know even where is that strange Kingdom of Orientar; or why it has three kings, instead of one sultan, like our blessed Padishah—on whom be the peace of the Most High and of the Seven Khalifs!"

Left alone in his tent, Kirby fell to reading once more the letter which had arrived that morning, by muleteer, from Jerusalem; and which had heralded a wholesale upsetting of the mine's workaday routine.

Out there, in a cup of the immemorial Mountains of Moab, was the flourishing little antimony mine for which the Cabell Smelting Company of New York held a concession from the Turkish government. Because his father had been a missionary to Syria and because his own early boyhood had been passed there, Logan Kirby had been sent out by the Cabells as manager of the mine.

His superintendent and general factotum and adoring henchman was Najib; a squat and swarthy little Damascene who had once spent two gloriously unprofitable exile years with an all-nations show at Coney Island. During those two years, Najib had picked up a language which he believed fondly to be English; and of which he was inordinately

proud. Indeed, seldom of his own accord would he speak to Kirby in any other tongue—not even in his own Arabic.

All this was in the days when Syria was under Turkish dominion; and before the World War changed the face—if not the heart—of the Near East. Thus, the holding of so rich a concession was a ticklish job; and one calling not only for resource and diplomacy, but for an intimate knowledge of Oriental ways and psychology. Thus, too, it was that Kirby proved himself invaluable to his employers; by steering a clever course between reefs that must have swamped the mine's prosperity, had the helm been in less expert hands.

The letter—which had set Kirby to worrying over future lost time and had set Najib to seeking closer information on yuletide customs—was from Henry Cabell, Sr., president and chief stockholder and titular head of the Cabell Smelting Company. It announced that Cabell and his wife had been touring Europe; and that they had decided to run over to Syria for the Christmas season. Cabell explained this odd decision by saying:

As you may or may not know, Mrs. Cabell is acquiring considerable fame as a writer of fiction and of articles on the "Travelogue" order. It has occurred to her to compile material for a forthcoming "brochure," to be entitled "Christmas in Many Lands." She has spent the Christmas season in no less than seven countries, during the past quarter century; and has observed closely the characteristic yuletide customs in each.

She thinks that the account of a Christmas in the Syrian wilderness would be a charming climax for this work; hence, as we are now at Brindisi, and can be in Jerusalem in less than a week, we are starting at once. We shall pick up a camping outfit at Jerusalem or at Jaffa; and shall make the trip to the mine on horseback. I am given to understand that the roads are good and more than moderately safe. This will also give me a long-desired opportunity to inspect in person our property there.

You will please see that everything possible is done for our comfort, and that every facility is given to Mrs. Cabell to study Syrian Christmas customs. Our party will include Mrs. Cabell, myself, and Mrs. Cabell's maid—in addition to such dragoman and grooms as we may bring from Jerusalem as our escorts, et cetera, on the three-day journey. As we expect to start tomorrow, from Brindisi, and shall remain in Jerusalem only long enough to hire our horses, tents, et cetera, you may expect us within two or three days after your receipt of this letter.

Logan Kirby got up, shook himself impatiently, and frowned afresh at the letter. Then he sat down, unlimbered his type-

writer, addressed an envelope to his employer, in care of the American consul at Jerusalem, and hammered out the following reply:

DEAR MR. CABELL: Your letter of December 10th is just at hand. I am sending this answer by special dispatch, hoping it may reach you before you start for the land of Moab. Needless to say, we shall feel honored by a visit from Mrs. Cabell and yourself; and shall do all in our power to make you comfortable, in this decidedly primitive region.

But if Mrs. Cabell is coming here to glean material for her forthcoming book on "Christmas in Many Lands," I warn her she will be grievously disappointed in her quest. In the first place, there are no "Syrian Christmas Customs" in the sense of national or home celebrations. Except in the homes of native Christians—and into those homes no outsider can hope to be admitted—there is no general Christmas observance. You will realize this, if you will stop to reflect that Syria is a Mohammedan country, and under the domination of the sultan. Here, officially, Christmas is not Christmas. It is not even December 25th. It is merely "the twelfth day of the Second Rabi'a."

There is, however, one beautiful and unique observance of Christmas in Syria. Namely, the Christmas Eve ceremonies at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem—five miles south of Jerusalem; and reached by good carriage road. The sacred procession to the church—the solemnly beautiful midnight mass, there—the "Chorus of the Shepherds" through the silent streets and over the hillside, at three in the morning—the presence of countless reverent pilgrims who have traveled thither on foot to kneel at the manger, on the Saviour's birthday—all this makes a yuletide visit to Bethlehem an experience to remember forever.

Thus, I advise most strongly that Mrs. Cabell substitute it for her proposed trip to the mine. The so-called roads between here and the Jordan are the roughest mountain trails. Nor are camp fare and camp accommodations, here in the wilderness, at all suitable for any woman. If, in spite of this, you and she decide to come to the mine, I repeat I shall do all in my power to make your stay agreeable.

Sealing the letter, he shouted for Serkeese, the mine's scrubby little muleteer. Kirby bade him saddle a fast horse and set forth at once for Jerusalem; there to deliver the envelope at the United States Consulate. He scribbled an auxiliary note to his friend, the consul, begging him to send a *kavasse* to every hotel in the Holy City in an effort to locate the Cabells and to see they got his letter.

Then, having done all in his power to deflect the threatened invasion, Kirby set to work with gloomy pessimism at his preparations for the guests' arrival. Which was fortunate. For, on the morning of December

24th, the cavalcade topped the pass to westward and rode down into camp. There was a blue-and-gold dragoman with the usual outfit of gaudy tents and of servants. And, just behind the dragoman rode three white persons. All three were of more than generous proportions. And their wiry little unshod Syrian mounts looked jaded and weary. Kirby recognized the pompous and white-mustached Henry Cabell, from olden days. He recognized, too, the obese and grenadier-like woman in the dust-colored riding habit, at Cabell's right hand.

On the eve of his departure for Syria, years earlier, he had been honored by an invitation to dine with the Cabells; and the memory of their lofty patronage toward him on that evening was still whimsically fresh in his mind.

To Mrs. Cabell's right, now, rode a second feminine figure as ample as her own; clad in dusty, black bombazine. This third person was evidently the maid Cabell had mentioned. Her face was very red, and she was perspiring freely. She eyed the primeval scene before her with unmasked disfavor.

"Yes," boomed Cabell as Kirby came forward, "we got your letter—got it the day we left. But Mrs. Cabell didn't care about the Bethlehem celebration. Says she's seen it in print, before. Says she'll get something much more unique out here—closer to the heart of the people and all that, you know."

Mrs. Cabell was sitting her exhausted pony with the stately dignity of a meal sack. She acknowledged the mine manager's greeting by a gracious bobbing of her pith-helmeted head. Her pendulous cheeks shook, with the motion, the dewlaps of grayish skin swaying slightly. She permitted Kirby to lift her from the saddle. After the momentary contact with her weight, he glanced in panting sympathy at her dejected horse.

Kirby led the way to the knoll top prepared for the visitors' tents—about a hundred yards from his own weather-soiled tent and another hundred yards from the huddle of huts around the mine mouth. Already, the dragoman was bossing the job of erecting these guest tents—instructing his stolid brown servants in high-pitched Arabic blasphemy, and exhorting them to haste with a series of insults which, in a civilized land, would have served as ample defense in a homicide trial.

Najib, toppling under a mountain of luggage, pattered along in the immediate wake

of the newcomers. The Cabells and Kirby and the maid had reached the half-erected main tent and were turning to look down toward the busy mine, as the Syrian came puffing up. The maid was nearest him. At sight of the oddly clad and laboriously lurching little man, she grinned.

Even Kirby was impressed, not to say startled, by that grin. For it split the maid's middle-aged and rubicund face, transversely. And it revealed a veritable army of enormous teeth. It was the aspect of these teeth which caught Kirby's amazed attention.

The teeth were a veritable network of gold and silver filagree. They had not the conventional aspect of teeth which have been filled or capped by gold. Instead, tiny criss-crosses of gold ran hither and thither on their huge and snowy surface, after the manner of inlay on a Satsuma jar. And, amid the flashing little channels of gold were islets and promontories of gleaming silver. In the mouth of this stout damsel, the silver had not tarnished, as usual, to blackness; but shone with all its primal luster.

Not a visible tooth had escaped the dual adornment. For the most part, the shallow caps and "necks" were of silver; while the broad intervening space was arabesqued with gold. But there were striking exceptions to this rule. Nor was the maid chary of displaying her glittering charms. At her grin, the mature lips drew well back from the teeth, displaying also a brief glimpse of super-red gums. Kirby turned his inquisitive glance from the dental phenomenon, almost at once; lest his wonder should be manifest in his face. And his gaze chanced to rest on Najib.

The little Syrian was standing, spellbound; his own wide mouth ajar, his beady little black eyes popping well-nigh out of his head as he surveyed the smiling siren in front of him. Piece by piece, the pile of luggage slipped from his nerveless grasp or avalanched from his slumped shoulders.

Hypnotized, he stood in a circle of bags and boxes and rugs, while he feasted his eyes on that array of precious metal and on the expanse of ruddy face surrounding it. A sharp word in Arabic from Kirby brought Najib back to himself. Starting as if from a dream, he began to pick up the things he had spilled. Yet, never once did he let his astounded eyes shift from the dental display before him.

Mrs. Cabell noted how stupidly he floundered over his task of gathering up the dropped luggage, and she turned to the maid.

"Here, Christiana!" she commanded. "Help that poor little native with the bags. If he drops that hatbox again, it may——"

"Christiana!" babbled Najib in a daze. "*Christiana!*"

Over his swart visage broke a light of heavenly inspiration. And, as the maid bore down on him for her share of the burden, he exclaimed in sudden rapture at his own brilliancy:

"X-tiana!"

The maid halted abruptly in her advance.

"Keep yourself to yourself, you fat little heathen!" she exhorted in righteous wrath. "And don't go getting so free with decent folks' names!" She grabbed a flowered hatbox and a much-labeled suit case from his numb hands and flounced off toward the tents. Gaping after her, the Syrian watched with all his soul in his eyes.

"X-tiana!" he breathed, in muted ecstasy. "*X-tiana!* Oh, how happy! is the yowl-tide that brang her here! I——"

"Najib!" barked Kirby.

At the sound Najib started, once more, as though from a trance; and, gathering together the luggage, trotted off up the knoll in Christiana's broad wake.

The day was busy, for Kirby. While Mrs. Cabell rested from her ride he showed her husband over the mine and deciphered for him the reports of the past three months' work. Later, he lunched with the Cabells and spent the bulk of the afternoon in sending to the nearest hill villages for extra supplies. For, at luncheon, Mrs. Cabell had outlined to him her plan for Christmas.

"We'll have our yule dinner in the evening," she decreed. "I don't want the hackneyed fare of turkey and cranberry jelly and mince pie and——"

"I'm glad!" interposed Kirby with fervor. "For there isn't anything of the sort within hundreds of miles, at nearest."

"I want," said she, "a native Christmas dinner. I'll get you to write out the menu for me in full, so I can incorporate it into my article. Mind you, Mr. Kirby—a typical Syrian Christmas feast. And now for the guests——"

"The—the *what?*" asked Kirby.

"The guests, of course. I want it to be a rousing big banquet. I want all the local

people of any importance asked to it. It is short notice, I know, but——"

"But, Mrs. Cabell!" protested Kirby, "the only people of any importance for a hundred miles in any direction are in this luncheon tent, at the present moment. In the mud villages, hereabouts, are only fellaheen and hillfolk."

"Mr. Cabell tells me he learned, at Jerusalem," she interrupted in rebuke, "that there are garrisons at Mejd-el-es-Teb and at Wady Imbarak. Surely, the officers could be invited over for dinner! After the dull routine of barrack life, they'd jump at the chance. And nothing brightens up a dinner table like a smattering of military men. Then, there must surely be landowners who would——"

"Mrs. Cabell!" urged Kirby in growing worry. "Don't you see—the officers of a Turkish regiment wouldn't come here to eat with—with 'infidels,' as they consider us. Especially not to celebrate a Christian festival. Besides, they would not eat at the same table with a woman—an unveiled woman, at that."

"Why not, I should like to know!" challenged Henry Cabell. "If my wife isn't good enough to break bread with any saddle-colored Turk——"

"It isn't that!" Kirby hastened to explain. "It's—it's the way women are regarded over here. In a sense, the Moslems have a higher ideal of womanhood than Yankees have. Outsiders don't realize it; but it's so. A self-respecting woman can travel, day or night, through any Mohammedan city, without being insulted. But they have a more—a more exclusive idea of them than we do. An unveiled woman——"

He paused, cornered. To his relief, Mrs. Cabell recalled, just then, excerpts from a most entertaining lecture she had attended during a Chautauqua course—a lecture on "Child Widows of the Orient;" wherein the lecturer had advanced precisely those same views.

After a long discussion, it was arranged that the Cabells and Kirby should dine alone together, on Christmas night, feasting on a typical Syrian menu, served in native fashion; and that, after the banquet, gifts of money should be dispensed among the miners and guards, by Mrs. Cabell's own fair hand, in true Lady Bountiful fashion.

It was a sorry substitute for her first gorgeous plans. But it would at least abound

in local color. And the "reception" to the natives, afterward—this and their touching gratitude for her gifts—would write up well in Mrs. Cabell's proposed book. Even as she talked over the arrangements with the unhappy Kirby and with her bored husband, she hit on a right brilliant title for this Syrian article. She declared she was going to call it "How I Brought Christmas to the Land of Moab."

Yet, as Logan Kirby plodded back to his own tent, to set in motion the details for the feast, his heart was heavy. He saw he was making a bad impression on his employer by the needful vetoing of so many of Mrs. Cabell's pet projects.

Cabell's first patronizing good nature was merging into surliness. If this silly visit should result in failure, it might well prejudice him against his mine manager. Many a competent man, nearer home, was angling for this job of Kirby's. And, by offending the company's domineering old president, he would do more toward ousting himself from his managership than by a dozen mischances to antimony shipments. Yes, much hung on the success of this undesired visit.

To add a trifling weight to his burden, as Kirby stepped from the luncheon tent, he noticed a clump of fellaheen—men, boys, children—hanging around the visitors' camp and staring with frank curiosity at the paraphernalia of the Feringi intruders. Sharply Kirby strode toward them.

"*Imshi!*" he ordered.

The natives gave back at his curt order. But, before they could retreat more than a yard or so, Mrs. Cabell came to the tent door, exclaiming

"Oh, don't drive them away, Mr. Kirby! The poor things add such delightful local color to the scene! Let them stay. And," smitten with a charming idea, "tell them they must come here to-morrow night after dinner and bring all their friends and their families! We'll scatter coins to them, as Christmas presents, when we give the miners and the guards their yule money."

Kirby's mouth flew open, in blank horror. Then he checked his first impulsive speech, and forced himself to say calmly:

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Cabell. Very sorry, indeed. But in this region the people think it is a virtue to rob unbelievers. If I didn't keep the mine property clear of these fellaheen, in a week there wouldn't be a drill or a pick or a scrap of cable or anything else of

value left. If I let these fellaheen stay hanging around here—especially if I tell them to bring others——"

"Kirby!" boomed Henry Cabell, in a voice that might have emanated from a somewhat asthmatic lion with tenor proclivities, "I don't think you quite understood my wife. She asked you to let those poor picturesque natives stay here and to have them bring their friends to her party, to-morrow-night. And that's what you'll do, if you please. You seem to forget this is my property and that I have some slight cause to expect my orders and my wife's won't be disobeyed or argued, at every turn."

Swallowing a fierce retort, Kirby turned to face the wondering group of hillfolk. Speaking in a kindly tone, even in an inviting tone, he addressed them in colloquial Arabic.

"Swine and offspring of unclean one-eyed she-camels!" he cooed politely. "Mangy carrion whose remains shall one day find their rightful resting place in the stomachs of hogs and vultures!—if you are not gone from here within the minute, my guards shall scourge the leprous flesh from your vile bones. *Imshi, abras! In-al-abuk!*"

As the clump of sightseers muttered in angry fear and melted before his invective, like slush under hot sun, Logan Kirby turned back to the scowling Cabell and to his sputtering wife.

"They thank you for your generous invitation," he translated the fellaheen's wordless mutter; "and they are off to summon their friends to the baksheesh-distributing, to-morrow night."

Then he went to his own tent. He was worried, not only over the danger to his job, but because of a certainty that these natives would not stay away from the visitors' encampment. They were sure to steal back, under cover of night, for further inspection of the wonders displayed in the Feringi outfit, and, more than probably, to lay hands on anything portable which chanced to be within reach.

Before entering the tent Kirby made his way downhill to the barrack hut of the Turkish guards. There, summoning the greasy sergeant, he bade him post two men, nightly, at the knoll foot, so long as the Cabells should remain.

As he had anticipated, the sergeant refused. He and his soldiers, he explained loudly, had been sent by the pasha—on

whom the seventy-and-seven blisses of es-Semme!—to guard the mine and the mine property. It was no part of their duty to stand sentinel over the goods of any stray Feringi who might take it into their infidel heads to camp on the crest above the mine. Nor did it matter that Cabell Bey owned the Concession. The guard were not serving him, but the pasha—on whom, again and yet again, the seventy-and-seven blisses of es-Semme and the favor of Mahmoud of the Lion of Allah!

Back to his tent went the dispirited Kirby. And there, awaiting his orders, he found Najib. Briefly he told the Syrian what things to buy and what other arrangements to make. In evident abstraction Najib listened. Then, instead of leaving the tent on his mission, he burst forth with a sort of galvanic ecstasy, an ecstasy so intense that he lost for a moment his shaky command of English and chanted aloud in Arabic:

"Howadji! She is as the houris who sing to slumber the souls of the prophet's warriors in es-Semme! Her mouth is like unto silver and precious gold and to the mines of Ophir! Blessed among woman be the mother who bore her! Blessed be her noble sire! May he be also the father of an hundred hero sons! Blessed be the happy day whereon she was born! Blessed—"

"Have you been sampling the guards' hashish?" demanded Kirby. "What on earth are you blithering about?"

"About?" echoed Najib dreamily, lapsing back into English, his face slack and vapid with a purely imbecile simper. "About, howadji? Why, of an assuredly, I am en-speeching myself about—her!"

"Her?" repeated Kirby, all at sea.

The simper deepened to a grimace of idiocy.

"X-tiana!" breathed Najib.

"Who in blazes——" began Kirby. Then he remembered. "Oh, Mrs. Cabell's fat maid?" he said. "What about her?"

"She is indeed of a pleasurable weightiness," assented the dazzled Najib. "She is, of a sooth, 'built for endurance, rather than for speed,' as the catalogue person emprinted it about our new mine engine. I have had much sweetness of words with her this afternoon. And when she besmiles herself—oh, it is as the alleyway of paradise popping opened! Sawest you ever such a divineness of teeth, howadji? I would rapture to have

a band of Badawi attackle our camp; that I might get beslain in salving her from harm!"

"Najib, you wall-eyed little fool!" howled Kirby in a gust of sudden laughter. "I verily believe you're in love with the old catamaran!"

"Catamaran!" mused Najib, with all his wonted eager interest in any novel English word. "Yea, blessed is she among catamarans. Fairest is she of all created catamarans! Of an assuredly. And my heart becleaves itself to her, howadji. It—is in my mind to marry myself with her, howadji, and——"

"Marry her?" gasped Kirby, with another unconquerable guffaw. "Why, man, you've got a wife already, in Damascus, haven't you?"

"Laughter," reproved Najib, cut to the soul by his chief's ridicule, "laughter is for hyenas—and for women! Yes, howadji, I have me the wife of which you speak of, in Damas-es-schem. And a wife, as well, in Nablous. But, by the holy law of the Prophet—on whom the blessings of the Ages of the Ages!—a good and true believer may marry himself with four wives. And, lo, I have but two. Them and all the world would I forsook for X-tiana, the beautisome!"

"Listen!" ordained Kirby, his laughter gone. "We're already in as much of a mess here as I care for. If you go making love to Mrs. Cabell's obnoxious old maid, you're liable to get us in worse trouble than ever."

"Obnoxious!" repeated Najib relishfully.

"Isn't this Cabell visit enough of an infliction," pursued Kirby, "without your adding your share of annoyance to it? Mr. Cabell told me, before lunch, to-day, that that maid is the apple of his wife's eye. Mrs. Cabell insisted on their dragging her all over Europe with them, and——"

"You just now bespoke yourself of X-tiana as 'obnoxious,'" interposed Najib. "It is a word I do not know. It is, I trust, of a compliment. Bespoken of her, it could undoubtedly be nothing less. What does it mean?"

"It means just what she is. No more, no less," growled Kirby. "Let it go at that. The point I'm getting at is—you've got to forget this asinine notion of yours, and attend to business. We're in a peck of bother, and——"

"I am your servant," returned Najib, with a certain queer dignity. "And in all that betains to the mine, I am contentful to obey

you. But I am not a slave. And in my marryings I am a free man. I have a heart of love for X-tiana. It is my right. I know your Feringi strange weddage customs. I know one must bewoo himself, long, to a woman, before that he can hope to bewed himself with her.

"I know also that if he seek to wed with her so swiftfully as among believers, he is likesome to find himself downward and outward in his woo. So I have made me up the mind. When she departs here on the morrow after the morrow, then I shall depart here in pursuance of her. And I shall befollow her with my woo, until she will agree to me.

"It is so decisioned, howadji," he ended sorrowfully. "Much do my eyes betear themselves, at the thought to leave you. No human man could endraw me from you. But X-tiana is not as men. She is as an houri of es-Semme. Wherefore, I go. This day, when I had talked much to her, she bade me begone. And I bewent. But after tomorrow I shall bewent wherever she begoes. *Inshallah!*"

He picked up the list of provisions from the table and left the tent. Kirby stared after him, aghast.

This temporarily love-crazed little native was unspeakably valuable in the mine service. For years Kirby had trained him. It would be impossible to replace him satisfactorily. No new man could be broken in for many months.

Kirby felt as though his job and all his hopes were crashing down about his ears. He knew enough of Oriental character to steer clear of interference with a native who was in love. He knew, too, that Najib had every intention of keeping his weird love vow of following Christiana across the world. And, because he was fond of the simple little fellow, Kirby winced at thought of the vicissitudes that awaited Najib on such a mad quest. Jail or an asylum promised to be the destination he must reach. In the meantime, his antics would not prejudice Cabell further in his manager's favor.

With a grunt of disgust, Kirby sat down to write out in full the menu he had promised Mrs. Cabell; the menu which was to be incorporated into her brochure as a "typical Syrian Christmas feast." Many a native banquet had Kirby attended. And with these and the materials at hand in mind, he wrote:

Shorba—a soup of chopped kid and raisins, thick with oil.

Riz-Siméon—rice boiled in allspice and cloves and mace, with a rancid sauce composed of clarified butter poured over it.

Leben Immon—goat, seethed in boiled milk and garnished with raisins, dates, and currants.

Mahsee Khousa—a squashlike gourd, hollowed out and stuffed with rice and meat.

Khibi—two layers of pounded meat and barley, baked in a round dish and marked off in almond-shaped portions. Between the layers chopped onions or leeks, pine nuts and tiny meat balls. A sauce of clarified butter poured over it.

Mejedra—a side dish of boiled lentils—supposed to be the "red pottage" for which Esau sold his birthright.

Halawi—sesame seed, boiled in oil and honey.

Baklawa—lozenge-shaped pastry, heavy as lead, soaked in clarified butter and stuffed with figs and almonds and honey. Cloyingly sweet.

He laid aside the amplified bill of fare, picked up his cap, and went down to the mine. As he passed the group of new tents, he saw Mrs. Cabell poring grimly over an Arabic phrase book she had picked up in Jerusalem, while the plump maid toiled over her mistress' gray and wispy coiffure.

From afar, Najib was neglecting his work to watch the proceedings with a fatuous smile. Henry Cabell was not in view. But a succession of reverberantly V-shaped sounds from his bedroom tent showed how peacefully he was recuperating after his long ride.

In the distance, just beyond the Concession Tract, huddled some ten or fifteen natives, watching the mystery of the hair-dressing. Kirby shook himself impatiently and went on to the mine.

There had been blue Christmases in Logan Kirby's Syrian career—Christmas days when his mind strayed beyond the encircling barriers of brown and pink mountain peaks and crossed the gray seas to America, there to reveal wistfully in memories of joyous home Christmases. And, after such mental absences, he was wont to return to his grimy and monotonous exile life with a sick heart and a gnawing sense of dissatisfaction at his lot.

Then, ever, he would brace himself by plans for his future, when he should have made this mine so great a success that Cabell should send for him, in line of promotion, for some high post in the home office. And with this glad goal in view he would throw himself with added zest into his labors.

But, for sheer misery, this Cabell-infested

Christmas made all previous Syrian yuletides seem ecstatic, by contrast. Not only did everything go wrong, but as the day progressed, Kirby's ill luck increased.

In the morning the visitors and himself went for a ride, up a peculiarly impassable trail, known as Wady-es-De-eb—the Cañon of the Wolf—to a lofty peak, whence, as a rule, the view was stupendous. Mrs. Cabell was anxious to see Mount Nebo—Moses' burial place, in order to verify in her mind a poem of her long-vanished school days, beginning

By Nebo's lonely mountain.

But while the three were still in the wadi, a mountain scud of rain swept down on them, chilling and dampening the unacclimated visitors; and starting one of Henry Cabell's few remaining indigenous teeth to aching. And, when they had toiled to the peak's summit, the same curtain of drizzling rain blotted out the view, as with a gigantic wet towel. They could not see Nebo. They could not see, with any clearness, a single mile in front of them.

Mrs. Cabell all but wept. Her husband, who apparently had a hazy idea that Nebo was some sort of commercial trade-mark or the name of a book, glowered afresh at Kirby, and seemed to hold him personally responsible for the lady's sniffing disappointment.

On their return to camp, there was more trouble. Christiana came storming forth from the tents, before the trio could dismount, and tearfully complained to Mrs. Cabell that she had been vilely insulted.

It seemed Najib had taken advantage of his chief's absence, to leave the mine for an hour of lovelly converse with the maid. But, before he had chatted with her for five minutes, she had driven him forth in fury, menacing him with a hot-water kettle from the kitchen tent, and threatening him with dire punishment, if ever he should dare come near her again. Through the ground swell of Christiana's indignant grief, Kirby gathered that Najib had addressed her tenderly as an "obnoxious old catamaran."

Mrs. Cabell, in hot wrath at her dear satellite's distress, demanded that the miserable little native be dismissed, forthwith, from the mine service. Cabell sternly indorsed her decree. But he followed Kirby away from the scene of tears and mumbled:

"Keep the fellow out of sight, till after

we've gone, to-morrow morning. If he's a good worker, you needn't fire him, so long as you can keep my wife from finding he's still here. Nobody with the brain to call Christiana an 'obnoxious old catamaran' is going to be fired, if I can help it. It's the phrase I've been trying to think of, to describe her, for the past three years, and somehow I couldn't hit on it."

Only mildly relieved, Kirby went to Najib's hut, to give orders that the henchman keep out of the Americans' way, during the next eighteen hours. He found Najib far from cast down at the rebuke from Christiana.

"She begins to have a love at me!" he reported, in high hope. "She beflirts herself, like the lady I read, into a Feringi love tale, at Coney's Island. In that book story, the lady bewhacked the woo person playsomely on the arm with her fan. It is true, because there was likewise a book picture of her, doing it. And the wooist was glad, the book story said, because he knew then that she was beginning to enamor herself with him. So am I happy, beyond all other men, howadji, for that my woo with X-tiana begins to success itself. She had no fan to bewhack me with. So she made as though to tap me on the arm with the water kettle. Oh, gladdest of all yowlides!

"And yet, howadji," he added wistfully, "our own customs, the weddage customs of the believers, are so much better and shorter! I besent me a friend to the fathers of my other wives. The fathers named a dower price for me to pay. I named a price under than half the price the fathers named. There was a sweet behagglement for an hour. Then we agreed. The marriage feast was made. And that was the all of it. But, oh, howadji, X-tiana is worth the painfulness of the pursual. Her teeth——"

Kirby stamped out of the hut and left Najib to rhapsodize alone.

The native banquet was a rank failure that night. The greasiness and the strange spiciness and the cloying sweetness of the various Syrian dishes found scant favor in the sight of the Cabells. And Henry Cabell, after gorging on *baklawa*, announced gloomily that he felt as though he had swallowed six clock weights. He prophesied for himself agonies of dyspepsia.

Mrs. Cabell fared little better in her dispensing of Christmas baksheesh to the mine workers, after the feast. True, each man

kissed her hand, in sloppy native fashion, as he received his silver coin from her pudgy fingers. And this she enjoyed mildly until she detected one ambitious hand kisser trying with industrious furtiveness to bite out the diamond from a ring she wore. Then she wept. And Cabell stormed.

Kirby, realizing that his job hung by a thread, went to his tent early as the guests were to start back for Jerusalem at sunrise. In spite of his worry, the strain of the past two days sent him quickly to sleep.

He was in the middle of an annoying dream—wherein Henry Cabell was discharging him from the company's employ, and was doing it in grand-opera recitative—when the recitative slurred into a panicky whimpering. It was this whimpering which awoke him.

Kirby sat up in his cot. The great white Syrian stars had vanished from the velvet sky. The yelp of jackals and the far-off howl of wolves and the sobbing "laugh" of hyenas, which puncture the mighty silences of a Moab night, had died down. The first ghostly hint of gray dawn was tingeing the east. And, still, that panicky, unearthly whimpering sound continued. Kirby got up, slipped into a pair of trousers and boots, and went out to investigate.

The camp lay still, except that a little figure was toiling up the steep slope from the huts. By the elusive faint light, Kirby recognized Najib, and went forward to meet him.

"*Nahar-ak sa-eed, Itowadji!*" the native greeted his chief. "I beheard me much strangeness of noise, as I was awaking. I behear me of it, yet. And I came to see if anything was amissful. Is——"

The queer sound increased in volume. And now both listeners could tell that it issued from the visitors' camp. Thither, by tacit consent, they hurried. Before they could cover half the distance, a tent flap was flung open. Out into the dim gray light bounced a truly remarkable figure.

It was a woman of great bulk, swathed in a shapeless scarlet wrapper which flapped and waved in the gusts of dawn wind that swept across the peaks. The woman was weeping. From her wide-parted lips issued the unearthly whimperings that had aroused Kirby and Najib. At sight of the two men, she bore down on them, her draperies swinging awry like the canvas of an ill-sailed ship. And they saw she was Christiana.

Najib burred aloud, in lovably welcome, and quickened his pace. But, fast as he moved, the maid sped toward him still faster. As she drew near she demanded shrilly:

"Oo shole zhem, oo lisshle niggeh! Gibbhem uph; o' I'll hazh oo in przzhml!"

"Howadji!" sputtered the thunder-stricken Najib, cowering back from the weird verbal onslaught, and turning as ever to Kirby for aid. "Howadji, does she bespeak herself in—in a language, perchance? And is—is there *words* to it?"

"I think," answered Kirby, only a trifle less at a loss than his henchman, and raising his voice to drown a second avalanche of speech from the irately oncoming Christiana, "I think she's accusing you of stealing something, and that she's threatening to send you to prison if you don't give it up. Perhaps," unkindly, "she's referring to her heart. But I am inclined, from her manner, to doubt it. She——"

"Gibbhem uph!" shrilled the maid goblinly, as she advanced with brandished fists on Najib. "Gibbhem uph, oo sphieff! Oo shole muh teessh; oo——"

A screech of genuine horror from Najib broke in on her fierce diatribe. For now she was close to him and to Kirby. And, even by the faint light, they caught a clear view of her distorted face. Her cavernous mouth was spread open to an unbelievable expanse. And that mouth was a truly horrible sight. It was toothless as a newborn infant's!

Najib, beholding, screeched aloud, once more, in stark dismay. He eyed the mouthing woman with fright; and he clutched Kirby's arm for protection from the awful apparition. False teeth were unknown to him and to his kind. Najib looked on the toothless Christiana, now, as might an American at a woman whose entire face had fallen away from her skull.

Kirby himself was startled at the tremendous difference made in her aspect by the loss of those two rows of horselike and gold-and-silver-inlaid dentals. She looked thirty years older and indescribably hideous. To add to the gruesomeness of it all, she had kept right on talking, or rather shouting, in that jargon of the newly toothless.

"Ouh oo hizgh 'em, oo sphieving niggeh?" she squawked, her raucous voice soaring to high heaven, amid the solemn silences of the mountain dawn. "I *gnow* oo shole 'em! Oo weh lookhinh ah 'em, au zhe zhime! Gibbhem hoo muh! Oo——"

"I gather," translated Kirby, through the babel of racket, "that she says she knows you stole her teeth, because you were looking at them all the time. And she——"

Out from the Cabell bedroom tent catapulted two sketchily attired and mountainous figures. Husband and wife, awakened by the godless din, had fared forth to investigate. At sight of Mrs. Cabell, the maid scuttled deliriously up to her, redoubling her plaints and trying to explain her loss.

From the disjointed patois he caught, as Christiana approached the dumbly marveling Cabells, Kirby gleaned an impression that the maid was saying she had awakened and had stretched out her hand, as usual, to the water glass by her bed, in which the cherished teeth spent every night, and had found them gone. Bewailing their loss, she had searched the tent and then had come out of doors to seek further for the ravished treasures.

But the tale of woe was never completed. For, as Christiana, mouthing horribly and displaying her bereft cavern of void gums, came near enough to her employers for the details of her twisted face to become visible, Mrs. Cabell recoiled with a little cry of disgust and, seizing her husband by the shoulder, drew him along with her to the tent. The maid followed, still bewailing her loss.

"Well!" mused Kirby, as he went back to dress, "it's happened now, all right! If anything had been needed to add a nightmare touch to this failure Christmas, the stealing of those extra-illustrated teeth did it! They'll never believe it wasn't somehow my fault! I knew, when they encouraged those hillfolk to hang around, that something was likely to be swiped. Good Lord! And I sent in an application for a raise, last fall, too! I hope Cabell won't remember that!"

But Cabell did remember it. He remembered it, two hours later, when, after a glum breakfast, the tents were struck.

Mrs. Cabell and Christiana—the latter's face swathed to the eyes in a green veil—had been hoisted to the saddles of their overtaxed mounts. A groom held Henry Cabell's pony. Kirby had exchanged stiff good-bys with the visitors, and stood sullenly waiting for them to go. Then it was that Cabell waved to his little cavalcade to start on ahead of him. And as they began to shuf-

fle away down the pass, he turned back and confronted the wondering mine manager.

"Kirby!" he said sharply, scowling up into his manager's grim face. "This has been a rotten Christmas. The rottenest ever. Your fault."

"It was your own fault!" contradicted Kirby hotly. "I warned you, by letter, not to——"

"Shut up!" ordered Cabell. "Let me finish what I'm saying. Your fault that the camp wasn't better guarded. That's how those Golconda teeth got stolen. If the teeth hadn't been pinched, my wife would have kept on toting that—that obnoxious old catamaran around with us till doomsday. Lord, how I've always hated the sight of that woman! But the missus simply wouldn't let her go. Now she's seen the way Christiana really looks—without 'em—and heard the noises she makes—well, the missus had a healthy fit of hysterics, after we got back in the tent, this morning. Says it'll make her sick to think of the creature, after this; let alone to see her. Wants me to send her back to the States, as soon as we get to Jerusalem, and pension her. Never wants to set eyes on her again. My wife's very—very susceptible to the—to the beautiful, Kirby. Very. Can't bear ugliness or grotesqueness. So we're rid of Christiana. Rid of her, forever—glory be! All your fault, Kirby!"

He paused; then continued in the same staccato fashion

"Got your application for a raise. Forwarded to me from New York last month. I was going to turn it down. By last night I was minded, a lot, to get rid of you, altogether, to pay you for our rotten time here. But we're rid of—the whatdyecallit catamaran instead. You get your raise, Kirby. You get it. I'm cabling my secretary from Jerusalem, anyhow, and I'll mention that in my cable. This is a hell hole to live in. Man deserves a raise for staying here. One of these days I must get you something to do in the home office. Merry Christmas! So long, Kirby!"

He scrambled aboard his waiting pony and cantered down the pass, after the others. Long and dazedly, Kirby stared after him. As he stood there, the sun butted its way through the horizon murk and turned the shadowy peaks to living flame. In the hollow beneath, the mine windlass began to creak to an accompaniment of thirty work-

ers' tuneless hoisting chant of "*Allah saeed! —Nebi sa-eed!*"

Up the knoll behind Kirby came the patter of fast-running bare feet. The manager turned. Najib was breasting the slope, the sunrise light illumining his swarthy face into a transfiguring glow. In his clasped hands he held something close to his breast.

"Well?" queried Kirby, "what are *you* doing here? I thought you were going to follow your adored Christiana across the whole world. Better start, before she gets any more of a lead."

"Start?" repeated Najib in virtuous repugnance. "Howadji, it breaks me the heart to hear you bespeech me so. I am never going to desertion from you. And of an assuredly not to follow a—a woman person whose face is as the face of—of a hippopotamus' babe. I enworshiped not her, but her smiling heavenly teeth. And those I shall keep for the ever and for the allways, howadji. Beholden!"

Opening his carefully cupped hands, he disclosed in the palm of each a set of huge and gleaming false teeth; adorned with much chasing and embossing of silver and of gold.

"Najib!" gasped Kirby incredulously. "It was you who stole——"

"No," denied Najib, with no rancor at all, which led Kirby to know he was for once telling the truth, "no, howadji. It was not my fortune to bethieve them. You see, I did not even comprehend me that they would come off. But, as I came from my hut, now,

in sorrow at my loss of what had beseeemed itself a bright dream, I was met with a lad from the village yonder. He told me he had made a rounding of all the tents in the darkness, running his arm up underneath of the flaps, to find what he might find to take. And his hand, in the one tent, befound a glass on a table. A glass is of value to those poor heathenful hillfolk, howadji. He betook it. And he amazed himself to see in it—*these!* He was ignoranceful and knew him not what were they. So he asked me, for these folk know I am a man of much wiseness and of traveling. I told him they were an ill-fortune charm of much evilness, and I took them away from him. I shall entreasure them for always, howadji. With—with your sweet permission, howadji! And, oh, I becrave me that you will permit!"

"H'm!" muttered Kirby, half to himself. "If I send these after the Cabells, Christiana may be able to make herself solid with her mistress again. And that will be a blow to poor old Cabell, now that he's so tickled over losing her. My first duty is to my employer. Keep them, Najib!"

"Allah be obeyed!" chortled the little Syrian gratefully, his beady eyes gloating over his treasure. "Oh, most joyousest of yowlitides, that brang me so wealthsome a gift! A gift that—that—— How does your wise Feringi proverb say itself, howadji? 'Every teeth has a—a silver lining.' And—and 'behind the teeth the gold's still shining!' *Maschallah!*"



CONVINCING EVIDENCE

HE had been shipwrecked and cast upon a desert shore. Hungry, alone, frightened, he made careful exploration of the surrounding country, fearing every step would bring him upon a clump of cannibals. He had calculated from the last-known position of the ship that he was in a country inhabited by the dreaded head hunters. For three days he starved and trembled.

On the fourth evening he caught sight of a glow through the bushes several miles away. Too hungry to forgo this slim chance of saving his life, he approached the camp fire. Would he be given food, or would he be served up as a meal? He shuddered but pressed on.

A few rods from the fire, the sound of talk came to him. He shivered again. A little later he heard distinctly a big bass voice:

"All right, but why in thunder did you draw one card?"

The shipwrecked man dropped to his knees and rejoiced:

"Thank Heaven!—a Christian country!"

Godsend to a Lady

By B. M. Bower

Author of "You Ask Anybody," "Cow Country," Etc.

"Casey" Ryan mixes a little philanthropy with considerable poker and ends where he started—with the addition of a pair of socks

CASEY waved good-by to the men from Tonopah, squinted up at the sun, and got a coal-oil can of water and filled the radiator of his Ford. He rolled his bed in the tarp and tied it securely, put flour, bacon, coffee, salt, and various other small necessities of life into a box, inspected his sour-dough can and decided to empty it and start over again if hard fate drove him to sour dough. "Might bust down and have to sleep out," he meditated. "Then again I ain't liable to; and if I do I'll be goin' so fast I'll git somewhere before she stops. I'm—sure—goin' to go!" He cranked the battered car, straddled in over the edge on the driver's side, and set his feet against the pedals with the air of a man who had urgent business elsewhere. The men from Tonopah were not yet out of sight around the butte scarred with granite ledges before Casey was under way, rattling down the rough trail from Ghost Mountain and bouncing clear of the seat as the car lurched over certain rough spots.

Pinned with a safety pin to the inside pocket of the vest he wore only when he felt need of a safe and secret pocket, Casey Ryan carried a check for twenty-five thousand dollars, made payable to himself. A check for twenty-five thousand dollars in Casey's pocket was like a wild cat clawing at his imagination and spitting at every moment's delay. Casey had endured solitude and some hardship while he coaxed Ghost Mountain to reveal a little of its secret treasure. Now he wanted action, light, life, and plenty of it. While he drove he dreamed, and his dreams beckoned, urged him faster and faster.

Up over the summit of the ridge that lay between Ghost Mountain and Furnace Lake he surged with radiator bubbling. Down the long slope to the lake lying there smiling sardonically at a world it loved to trick

with its moods, Casey drove as if he were winning a bet. Across that five miles of baked, yellow-white clay he raced, his Ford a-creak in every joint.

"Go it, you tin lizard," chortled Casey. "I'll have me a real wagon when I git to Los. She'll be white, with red stripes along her sides and red wheels, and she'll eat up the road and lick her chops for more. Sixty miles under her belt every time the clock strikes, or she ain't good enough fer Casey! Mebby they think they got some drivers in Californy. Mebby they *think* they have. They ain't, though, because Casey Ryan ain't there yet. I'll catch that night train. Oughta be in by morning, and then you keep your eye on Casey. There's goin' to be a stir around Los, about to-morrow noon. I'll have to buy some clothes, I guess. And I'll find some nice girl with yella hair that likes pleasure, and take her out ridin'. Yeah, I'll have to git me a swell outfit uh clothes. I'll look the part, all right!"

Up a long, winding trail and over another summit, Casey dreamed while the stark, scarred buttes on either side regarded him with enigmatic calm. Since the first wagon train had worried over the rough deserts on their way to California, the bleak hills of Nevada had listened while prospectors dreamed aloud and cackled over their dreaming; had listened, too, while they raved in thirst and heat and madness. Inscrutably they watched Casey as he hurried by with his twenty-five thousand dollars and his pleasant pictures of soft ease.

At a dim fork in the trail Casey slowed and stopped. A boiling radiator will not forever brook neglect, and Casey brought his mind down to practical things for a space. "I can just as well take the train from Lund," he mused, while he poured in more water. "Then I can leave this bleatin' burro with Bill. He oughta give me a

coupla hundred for her, anyway. No use wasting money just because you happen to have a few dollars in your pants." He filled his pipe to smoke and muse on that sensible idea and turned the nose of his Ford down the dim trail to Lund.

Eighty miles more or less straight away across the mountainous waste lay Lund, halfway up a cañon that led to higher reaches in the hills rich in silver, lead, copper, gold. Silver it was that Casey had found and sold to the men from Tonopah—and it was a freak of luck, he thought whimsically, that had led him and his Ford away over to Ghost Mountain to find their stake when they had probably been driving over millions every day that they made the stage trip from Pinnacle down to Lund. For Casey, be it known, was an old stage driver turned prospector. He had a good deal to think of while he drove, and he had time enough in which to think it.

The trail was rutted in places where the sluicing rains had driven hard across the hills; soft with sand in places where the fierce winds had swept the open. For a while the thin, wobbly track of a wagon meandered over the road, then turned off up a flat-bottomed draw and was lost in the sagebrush. Some prospector not so lucky as he, thought Casey with swift, soon-for-gotten sympathy.

A coyote ran up a slope toward him, halted with forefeet planted on a rock and stared at him, ears perked like an inquisitive dog. Casey stopped, eased his rifle out of the crease in the back of the seat cushion, chanced a shot and his luck held. He climbed out, picked up the limp gray animal, threw it into the tonneau and went on. Even with twenty-five thousand dollars in his pocket, Casey told himself that coyote hides are not to be scorned. He had seen the time when the price of a good hide meant flour and bacon and tobacco to him. He would skin it when he stopped to eat.

Eighty miles with never a soul to call good day to Casey. Nor shack nor shelter made for man, nor water to wet his lips if they cracked with thirst—unless, perchance, one of those swift downpours came riding on the wind, lashing the clouds with lightning. Then there was water, to be sure. Far ahead of Casey such a storm rolled in off the barren hills to the south. "She's wettin' up that red lake a-plenty," observed Casey, squinting through the dirty wind-

shield. "No trail around, either, on account of the lava beds. But I guess I can pull across, all right."

Doubt was in his voice, however, and he was half minded to turn back and take the straight road to Vernal, which had been his first objective. But he discarded the idea. "No, sir, Casey Ryan never back-trailed yet. Poor time to commence now, when I got the world by the tail and a downhill pull. We'll make out, all right—can't be so terrible boggy with a short rain like that there. I bet," he continued optimistically to the Ford, which was the nearest he had to human companionship, "I bet we make it in a long lope. Git along, there! Shake a hoof—'s the last time you haul Casey around."

"Casey's goin' to step high, wide, and handsome. Sixty miles an hour or he'll ask for his money back. They can't step too fast for Casey! Blue—if I git me a girl with yella hair, mebby she'll show up better in a blue car than she will in a white and red. This here turnout has got to be tasty and have class. If she was dark—" He shook his head at that. "No, sir, black hair grows too plenty on squaws an' chili queens. Yella goes with Casey. Clingin' kind with blue eyes—that's the stuff! An' I'll sure show her some drivin'!"

He wondered whether he should find the girl first and buy the car to match her beauty, or buy the car first and with that lure the lady of his dreams. It was a nice question and it required thought. It was pleasant to ponder the problem, and Casey became so lost in meditation that he forgot to eat when the sun flitted with the scurrying clouds over his wind-torn automobile top.

So he came bouncing and swaying down the last mesa to the place called Red Lake. Casey had heard it spoken of with opprobrious epithets by men who had crossed it in wet weather. In dry weather it was red clay caked and checked by the sun, and wheels or hoofs stirred clouds of red dust that followed and choked the traveler. In rain it was said to be boggy, and travelers failed to travel at all.

Casey was not thinking of the lake when he drove down to it. He was seeing visions, though you would not think it to look at him; a stocky, middle-aged man who needed a shave and a hair cut, wearing cheap, dirt-stained overalls and blue shirt and square-toed shoes studded thickly on the soles with hobnails worn shiny; driving a desert-scarred

Ford with most of the paint gone and a front fender cocked up and flapping crazily, and tires worn down to the fabric in places.

But his eyes were very blue and there was a humorous twist to his mouth, and the wrinkles around his eyes meant Irish laughter quite as much as squinting into the sun. If he dreamed incongruously of big, luxurious cars gorgeous in paint and nickel trim, and of slim, young women with yellow hair and blue eyes—well, stranger dreams have been hidden away behind exteriors more unsightly than was the shell which holds the soul of Casey Ryan.

Presently the practical, everyday side of his nature nudged him into taking note of his immediate surroundings. Casey knew at a glance that half of Red Lake was wet, and that the shiny patches here and there were shallow pools of water. Moreover, out in the reddest, wettest part of it an automobile stood with its back to him, and pygmy figures were moving slowly upon either side.

"Stuck" diagnosed Casey in one word, and tucked his dream into the back of his mind even while he pulled down the gas lever a couple of notches and lunged along the muddy ruts that led straight away from the safe line of sagebrush and out upon the platterlike red expanse.

The Ford grunted and lugged down to a steady pull. Casey drove as he had driven his six horses up a steep grade in the old days, coaxing every ounce of power into action. Now he coaxed with spark and gas and somehow kept her in high, and stopped with nice judgment on a small island of harder clay within shouting distance of the car ahead. He killed the engine then and stepped down, and went picking his way carefully out to them, his heavy shoes speedily collecting great pancakes of mud that clung like glue.

"Stuck, hey? You oughta kept in the ruts, no matter if they are water-logged. You never want to turn outa the road on one of these lake beds, huntin' dry ground. If it's wet in the road you can bank on sinkin' in to the hocks the minute you turn out." He carefully removed the mud pancakes from his shoes by scraping them across the hub of the stalled car, and edged back to stand with his arms on his hips while he surveyed the full plight of them.

"She sure is bogged down a-plenty," he observed, grinning sympathetically.

"Could you hitch on your car, mister, and

pull us out?" This was a woman's voice, and it had an odd quality of youth and unquenchable humor that thrilled Casey, woman hungry as he was.

Casey put up a hand to his mouth and surreptitiously removed a chew of tobacco almost fresh. With some effort he pulled his feet closer together, and he lifted his old Stetson and reset it at a consciously rakish angle. He glanced at the car, behind it and in front, coming back to the flat-chested, depressed individual before him. "Yes, ma'am, I'll get you out, all right. Sure, I will." While he looked at the man he spoke to the woman.

"We've been stalled here for an hour or more," volunteered the flat-chested one. "We was right behind the storm. Looked a sorry chance that anybody would come along for the next week or so——"

"Mister, you're a godsend if ever there was one," added the lady. "I'd write your name on the roster of saints in my prayer book, if I ever said prayers and had a prayer book and a pencil and knew what name to write."

"Casey Ryan. Don't you worry, ma'am. We'll get you outa here in no time." Casey grinned and craned his neck. Looking lower this time, he saw a pair of feet which did not seem to belong to that voice, though they were undoubtedly feminine. Still, red mud will work miracles of disfigurement, and Casey was an optimist by nature.

"My wife is trying out a new comedy line," the flat-chested one observed unemotionally. "Trouble is it never gets over out front. If she ever did get it across the footlights I could raise the price of admission and get away with it. How far is it to Rhyolite?"

"Rhyolite? Twenty or twenty-five miles, mebby." Casey gave him an inquiring look.

"Can we get there in time to paper the town and hire a hall to show in, mister?" Casey saw the mud-caked feet move laboriously toward the rear of the car.

"Yes, ma'am, I guess you can. There ain't any town, though, and it ain't got any hall in it, ner anybody to go to a show."

The woman laughed. "That's like my prayer book. Well, Jack, you certainly have got a powerful eye, but you've been trying to look this outfit out of the mud for an hour, and I haven't saw it move an inch, so far. Let's just try something else."

"A prayer outa your prayer book, maybe,"

the flat-chested one retorted, not troubling to move or to turn his head.

Casey blinked and looked again. The woman who appeared from the farther side of the car might have been the creature of his dream, so far as her face, her hair, and her voice went. Her hair was yellow, unmistakably yellow. Her eyes were blue as Casey's own, and she had nice teeth and showed them in a red-lipped smile. A more sophisticated man would have known that the powder on her nose was freshly applied, and that her reason for remaining so long hidden from his sight while she talked to him was revealed in the moist color on her lips and the fresh bloom on her cheeks. Casey was not sophisticated. He thought she was a beautiful woman, and asked no questions of her make-up box.

"Mister, you certainly are a godsend!" she told him again when she faced him. "I'd call you a direct answer to prayer, only I haven't been praying. I've been trying to tell Jack that the shovel is not packed under the banjos, as he thinks it was, but was left back at our last camp where he was trying to dig water out of a wet spot. Jack, dear, perhaps the gentleman has got a shovel in his car. Ain't it a real gag, mister, us being stuck out here in a dry lake?"

Casey tipped his hat and grinned and tried not to look at her too long. Husbands of beautiful young women are frequently jealous, and Casey knew his place and meant to keep it.

All the way back to his car Casey studied the peculiar features of the meeting. He had been thinking about yellow-haired women—well! But, of course, she was married, and therefore not to be thought of save as a coincidence. Still, Casey rather regretted the existence of Jack, dear, and began to wonder why good-looking women always picked such dried-up little runts for husbands. "Show actors, by the talk," he mused. "I wonder now if she don't sing, mebbey?"

He started the car and forged out to them, making the last few rods in low gear and knowing how risky it was to stop. They were rather helpless, he had to admit, and did all the standing around while Casey did all the work. But he shoveled the rear wheels out, waded back to the tiny island of solid ground and gathered an armful of brush, covered himself with mud while he crowded the brush in front of the wheels, tied the

tow rope he carried for emergencies like this, waded to the Ford, cranked, and trusted the rest to luck. The Ford moved slowly ahead until the rope between the two cars tightened, then spun wheels and proceeded to dig herself in where she stood. The other car, shaking with the tremor of its own engine, ruthlessly ground the sagebrush into the mud and stood upon it shaking and roaring and spluttering furiously.

"Nothing like sticking together, mister," called the lady cheerfully, and he heard the music of her laughter above the churn of their motor.

"Say, ain't your carburetor all off?" Casey leaned out to call back to the flat-chested one. "You're smokin' back there like wet wood."

The man immediately stopped the motor and looked behind him.

Casey muttered something under his breath when he climbed out. He looked at his own car standing hub deep in red mud, and reached for the solacing plug of chewing tobacco. Then he thought of the lady, and withdrew his hand empty.

"We're certainly going to stick together, mister," she repeated her witticism, and Casey grinned foolishly.

"She'll dry up in a few hours, with this hot sun," he observed hearteningly. "We'll have to pile brush in, I guess." His glance went back to the tiny island and to his double row of tracks. He looked at the man.

"Jack, dear, you might go help the gentleman get some brush," the lady suggested sweetly.

"This ain't my act," Jack dear objected. "I just about broke my spine trying to heave the car outa the mud when we first stuck. Say, I wish there was a beanery of some kind in walking distance. Honest, I'll be dead of starvation in another hour. What's the chance of a bite, hon?"

Contempt surged through Casey. Deep in his soul he pitied her for being tied to such an insect. Immediately he was glad that she had spirit enough to put the little runt in his place.

"You *would* wait to buy supplies in Rhyolite, remember," she reminded her husband calmly. "I guess you'll have to wait till you get there. I've got one piece of bread saved for junior. You and I go hungry—and cheer up, old dear, you're used to it!"

"I've got grub," Casey volunteered hos-

pitably. "Didn't stop to eat yet. I'll pack the stuff back there to dry ground and boil some coffee and fry some bacon." He looked at the woman and was rewarded by a smile so brilliant that Casey was dazzled.

"You certainly are a godsend," she called after him, as he turned away to his own car. "It just happens that we're out of everything. It's so hard to keep anything on hand when you're traveling in this country, with towns so far apart. You just run short, before you know it."

Casey thought that the very scarcity of towns compelled one to avoid running short of food, but he did not say anything. He waded back to the island with a full load of provisions and cooking utensils, and in three minutes he was squinting against the smoke of a camp fire while he poured water from a canteen into his blackened coffeepot.

"Coffee! Jack, dear, can you believe your nose!" chirped the woman presently behind Casey. "Junior, darling, just smell the bacon! Isn't he a nice gentleman? Go give him a kiss like a little man."

Casey didn't want any kiss—at least from junior. Junior was six years old and his face was dirty and his eyes were old, old eyes, hot brown like his father's. He had the pinched, hungry look which Casey had seen only among starving Indians, and after he had kissed Casey perfunctorily he snatched the piece of raw bacon which Casey had just sliced off, and tore at it with his teeth like a hungry pup.

Casey affected not to notice, and busied himself with the fire while the woman reproved junior half-heartedly in an undertone and laughed and remarked upon the number of hours since they had breakfasted.

Casey tried not to watch them eat, but in spite of himself he thought of a prospector whom he had rescued last summer after a five-day fast. These people tried not to seem unusually hungry, but they ate more than the prospector had eaten, and their eyes followed greedily every mouthful which Casey took, as if they grudged him the food. Wherefore Casey did not take as many mouthfuls as he would have liked.

"This desert air certainly does put an edge on one's appetite," the woman smiled, while she blew across her fourth cup of coffee to cool it, and between breaths bit into a huge bacon sandwich which Casey could not help knowing was her third. "Jack, dear, isn't this coffee delicious!"

"*Mah-mah!* Do we have to p-pay that there g-godsend? C-can you p-pay for more b-bacon for me, mah-mah?" Junior licked his fingers and twitched a fold of his mother's soiled skirt.

"Sure, give him more bacon! All he wants. I'll fry another skillet full." Casey spoke hurriedly, getting out the piece which he had packed away in the bag.

"He's used to these holdup joints where they charge you forty cents for a greasy plate," the flat-chested man explained, speaking with his mouth full. "Eat all yuh want, junior. This is a barbecue and no collection took up to pay the speaker of the day."

"We certainly appreciate your kindness, mister," the woman put in graciously, holding out her cup. "What we'd have done, stuck here in the mud with no provisions and no town within miles, Heaven only knows. Was you kidding us," she added, with a betrayal of more real anxiety than she intended, "when you said Rhyolite is a dead one? We looked it up on the map, and it was marked like a town. We're making all the little towns that the road shows mostly miss. We give a fine show, mister. It's been played on all the best time in the country—we took it abroad before the war and made real good money with it. But we just wanted to see the country, you know—after doing the Cont'nent and all the like of that. So we thought we'd travel independent and make all the small towns——"

"The movie trust is what puts voodville on the bum," the man interrupted. "We used to play the best time only. We got a first-class act. One that ought to draw down good money anywhere, and would draw down good money, if the movie trust——"

"And then we like to be independent, and go where we like and get off the railroad for a spell. Freedom is the breath of life to he and I. We'd rather have it kinda rough, now and then, and be free and independent——"

"I've g-got a b-bunny, a-and it f-fell in the g-grease box a-and we c-can't wash it off. And h-he's asleep now. C-can I g-give my b-bunny some b-bacon, Mister G-godsend?"

The woman laughed, and the man laughed and Casey himself grinned sheepishly. Casey did not want to be called a godsend, and he hated the term mister when applied to himself. All his life he had been plain Casey Ryan and proud of it, and his face was very red when he confessed that there was no

more bacon. He had not expected to feed a family when he left camp that morning, but had taken ample rations for himself only.

Junior whined and insisted that he wanted b-bacon for his b-bunny, and the man hushed him querulously and asked Casey what the chances were for getting under way. Casey repacked a lightened bag, emptied the coffee grounds, shouldered his canteen, and waded back to the cars and to the problem of red mud with an unbelievably tenacious quality.

The man followed and asked him if he happened to have any smoking tobacco, and afterward begged a cigarette paper, and then a match. "The dog-gone helpless, starved bunch!" Casey muttered while he dug out the wheels of his Ford, and knew that his own dream must wait upon the need of these three human beings whom he had never seen until an hour ago, of whose existence he had been in ignorance and who would probably contribute nothing whatever to his own welfare or happiness, however much he might contribute to theirs.

I do not say that Casey soliloquized in this manner while he was sweating there in the mud under hot midday. He did think that now he would no doubt miss the night train to Los Angeles, and that he would not, after all, be purchasing glad raiment and a luxurious car on the morrow. He regretted that, but he did not see how he could help it. He was Casey Ryan, and his heart was soft to suffering, even though a little of the spell cast by the woman's blue eyes and her golden hair had dimmed for him.

He still thought her a beautiful woman who was terribly mismated, but he felt vaguely that women with beautiful golden hair should not drink their coffee aloud, nor calmly turn up the bottom of their skirts that they might use the under side of the hem for a napkin after eating bacon. I do not like to mention this—Casey did not like to think of it, either. It was with reluctance that he reflected upon the different standards imposed by sex. A man, for instance, might wipe his fingers on his pants and look his world straight in the eye. But, dog-gone it, when a lady's a lady, she ought to *be* a lady.

Later Casey forgot for a time the incident of the luncheon on Red Lake. With infinite labor and much patience he finally extricated himself and the show people, with no assistance from them, save encouragement. He towed them to dry land, untied and put

away his rope and then discovered that he had not the heart to drive on at his usual hurtling pace and leave them to follow. There was an ominous stutter in their motor, for one thing, and Casey knew of a stiffish hill a few miles this side of Rhyolite.

It was full sundown when they reached the place, which was not a town but a camp beside a spring, usually deserted. Three years before, a mine had built the camp for the accommodation of the truck drivers who hauled ore to Lund and were sometimes unable to make the trip in one day. Casey, having adapted his speed to that of the decrepit car of the show people, was thankful that they arrived at all. He still had a little flour and coffee and salt, and he hoped that there was enough grease left on the bacon paper to grease the skillet so that bannocks would not stick to the pan. He also hoped that his flour would hold out under the onslaught of their appetites.

But Casey was lucky. A half dozen cowboys were camped there with a pack outfit, meaning to ride the cañons next day for cattle. They were cooking supper, and they had "beefed a critter" that had broken a leg that afternoon running among rocks. Casey shifted his responsibility and watched, in complete content, while the show people gorged on broiled yearling steaks. I dislike to use the word gorge, where a lady's appetite is involved, but that is the word which Casey thought of first.

Later, the show people very amiably consented to entertain their hosts. It was then that Casey was once more blinded by the brilliance of the lady, and forgot certain little blemishes that had seemed to him quite pronounced. The cowboys obligingly built a bonfire before the tent, into which the couple retired to set their stage and tune their instruments. Casey lay back on a cowboy's rolled bed with his knees crossed, his hands clasped behind his thinning hair, and smoked and watched the first pale stars come out while he listened to the pleasant twang of banjos in the tuning.

It was great. The sale of his silver claim to the men from Tonopah, the check safely pinned in his pocket, the future which he had planned for himself swam hazily through his mind. He was fed to repletion, he was rich, he had been kind to those in need. He was a man to be envied, and he told himself so.

Then the tent flaps were lifted and a daz-

zling, golden-haired creature in a filmy white evening gown to which the firelight was kind, stood there smiling, a banjo in her hands. Casey gave a grunt and sat up, blinking. She sang, looking at him frequently. At the encore, which was livened by a clog, danced to hidden music, she surely blew a kiss in the direction of Casey, who gulped and looked around at the others self-consciously, and blushed hotly.

In truth it was a very good show which the two gave there in the tent; much better than the easiest-going optimist would expect. When it was over to the last twang of a bango string, Casey took off his hat, emptied into it what money he had in his pockets, and set the hat in the fire glow. Without a word the cowboys followed his example, turning pockets inside out to prove they could give no more.

Casey spread his bed apart from the others that night, and lay for a long while smoking and looking up at the stars and dreaming again his dream; only now the golden-haired creature who leaned back upon the deep cushions of his speedy blue car was not a vague, bloodless vision, but a real person with nice teeth and a red-lipped smile, who called him mister in a tone he thought like music. Now his dream lady sang to him, talked to him. I consider it rather pathetic that Casey's dreams always halted just short of mealtime. He never pictured her sitting across the table from him in some expensive café, although Casey was rather fond of café lights and music and service and food.

Next morning the glamour remained, although the lady was once more the unkempt woman of yesterday. The three seemed to look upon Casey still as a godsend. They had talked with some of the men and had decided to turn back to Vernal, which was a bigger town than Lund and, therefore, likely to produce better crowds. They even contemplated a three-night stand, which would make possible some very urgent repairs to their car. Casey demurred, although he could not deny the necessity for repairs. It was a longer trail to Vernal, and a rougher trail. Moreover, he himself was on his way to Lund.

"You go to Lund," he urged, "and you can stay there four nights if you want to, and give shows. And I'll take yuh on up to Pinnacle in my car while yours is gittin' fixed, and you can give a show there. You'd draw a big crowd. I'd make it a point to tell folks

you give a dandy show. And I'll git yuh good rates at the garage where I do business. You don't want nothin' of Vernal. Lund's the place you want to hit fer."

"There's a lot to that," the foreman of the cowboys agreed. "If Casey's willin' to back you up, you better hit straight for Lund. Everybody there knows Casey Ryan. He drove stage from Pinnacle to Lund for two years and never killed nobody, though he did come close to it, now and again. I've saw strong men that rode with Casey and said they never felt right afterward. Casey, he's a dog-gone good driver, but he used to be kinda hard on passengers. He done more to promote heart failure in them two towns than all the altitude they can pile up. But nobody's going to hold that against a good show that comes there. I heard there ain't been a show stop off in Lund for over a year. You'll have to beat 'em away from the door, I bet."

Wherefore the Barrymores—that was the name they called themselves, though I am inclined to doubt their legal right to it—the Barrymores altered their booking and went with Casey to Lund. They were not fools, by the way. Their car was much more disreputable than you would believe a car could be and turn a wheel, and the Barrymores recognized the handicap of its appearance. They camped well out of sight of town, therefore, and let Casey drive in alone.

Casey found that the westbound train had already gone, which gave him a full twenty-four hours in Lund, even though he discounted his promise to see the Barrymores through. There was a train, to be sure, that passed through Lund in the middle of the night; but that was the De Luxe, standard and drawing-room sleepers, which disdained stopping to pick up plebeian local passengers. So Casey must spend twenty-four hours in Lund, greeting men who hailed him joyously at the top of their voices while they were yet afar off, and thumped him painfully upon the shoulders when they came within reach of him.

You may not grasp the full significance of this, unless you have known old and popular stage drivers, soft of heart and hard of fist. Then remember that Casey had spent months on end alone in the wilderness, working like a lashed slave from sunrise to dark trying to wrest a fortune from a certain mountain-side. Remember how an enforced isolation, coupled with rough fare and hard work, will

breed a craving for lights and laughter and the speech of friends. Remember that, and don't overlook the twenty-five thousand dollars that Casey had pinned safe within his pocket.

Casey had unthinkingly tossed his last dime into his hat for the show people at Rhyolite. He had not even skinned the coyote whose hide would have been worth ten or fifteen dollars, as hides go. In the stress of pulling out of the mud at Red Lake he had forgotten all about the dead animal in his tonneau until his nose reminded him next morning that it was there. Then he had hauled it out by the tail and thrown it away. He was broke, except that he had that check in his pocket.

Of course it was easy enough for Casey to get money. He went to the store that sold everything from mining tools to green perfume bottles tied with narrow pink ribbon. The man who owned that store also owned the bank next door, and a little place down the street which was called laconically "The Club." One way and another, Dwyer managed to feel the money of every man who came into Lund and stopped there for a space. He was an honest man, too—or as honest as is practicable for a man in business.

Dwyer was tickled to see Casey again. Casey was a good fellow, and he never needed his memory jogged when he owed a man. He paid before he was asked to pay, and that is enough to make any merchant love him. He watched Casey unpin his vest pocket and remove the check, and he was not too eager to inspect it.

"Good? Surest thing you know. Want it cashed, or applied to your old checking account?—it's open yet, with a dollar and sixty-seven cents to your credit, I believe. I'll take care of it, though it's after banking hours."

Casey was foolish. "I'll take a couple of hundred, if it's handy, and a check book. I guess you can fix it so I can get what money I want in Los. I'm goin' to the city, Dwyer, and I'm goin' to have one hell of a time when I git there. I've earned it. You ask anybody that ever mined."

Dwyer laughed while he inked a pen for Casey's indorsement. "Hop to it, Casey. Glad you made good. But you better let me put part of that in a savings account, so you can't check it out. You know, Casey—remember your weak point."

"Aw—that's all right! Don't you worry none about Casey Ryan! Casey'll take care of himself—he's had too many jolts to want another one. Say, gimme a pair of them socks before you go in the bank. I'll pay yuh," he grinned, "when yuh come back with some money. Ain't got a cent on me, Dwyer. Give it all away. Twelve dollars and something. Down to twenty-five thousand dollars and my Ford autymobil—and Bill's goin' to buy that off me soon as he looks her over to see what's busted and what ain't."

Dwyer laughed again and unlocked the door behind the overalls and jumpers, and disappeared into his bank. Presently he returned with a receipted duplicate deposit slip for twenty-three thousand eight hundred dollars, a little, flat check book and two hundred dollars in worn bank notes. "You ought to be independent for the rest of your life, Casey. This is a fine start for any man," he said.

Casey paid for the socks and slid the change for a ten-dollar bill into his overalls pocket, put the check book and the bank notes away where he had carried the check, and walked out with his hat very much tilted over his right eye and his shoulders swaggering a little. You can't blame him for that, can you?

As he stepped from the store he met an old acquaintance from Pinnacle. There was only one thing to do, in a case like that, and Casey did it quite naturally. They came out of The Club wiping their lips, and the swagger in Casey's shoulders was more pronounced.

Then, face to face, Casey met the show lady, which was what he called her in his mind. She had her arms clasped around a large paper sack full of lumpy, things, and her eyes had a strained, anxious look.

"Oh, mister! I've been looking all over for you. They say we can't show in this town. The license for road shows is fifty dollars, to begin with, and I've been all over and can't find a single place where we could show, even if we could pay the license. Ain't that the last word in hard luck? Now, what to do beats me, mister. We've just got to have the old car tinkered up so it'll carry us on to the next place, wherever that is. Jack, dear, says he must have a new tire by some means or other; and we was counting on what we'd make here.

"And up at that other place you've men-

tioned the mumps has broke out and they wouldn't let us show for love or money. A man in the drug store told me. Mister, we certainly are in a hole now for sure! If we could give a benefit for something or somebody. Mister, those men back there said you're so popular in this town, I believe I've got an idea. Mister, couldn't you have bad luck, or be sick or something, so we could give a benefit for you? People certainly would turn out good for a man that's liked the way they say you are. I'd just love to put on a show for you, mister. Couldn't we fix it up some way?"

Casey looked up and down the street, and found it practically empty. Lund was dining at that hour. And while Casey expected later the loud greetings and the handshakes and all, as a matter of fact he had thus far talked with Bill, the garage man, with Dwyer, the storekeeper and banker, and with the man from Pinnacle, who was already making ready to crank his car and go home. Lund, as a town, was yet unaware of Casey's presence. Casey looked at the show lady, found her gazing at his face with eyes that said please in four languages, and hesitated.

"You could git up a benefit for the Methodist church, mebby," he temporized. "There's a church of some kind here—I guess it's a Methodist. They most generally are."

"We'd have to split with them if we did," the show lady objected practically. "Oh, mister, we're stuck worse than when we was back there in the mud! We'd only have to pay five dollars for a six months' theater license, which would let us give all the shows we wanted to. It's a new law that I guess you didn't know anything about," she added kindly. "You certainly wouldn't have insisted on us coming if you'd knew about the license——"

"It's two years, almost, since I was here," Casey admitted. "I been out prospecting."

"Well, we can just work it fine! Can't we go somewhere and talk it over? I've got a swell idea, mister, if you'll just listen to it a minute, and it'll certainly be a godsend to us to be able to give our show. We've got some crutches among our stage props, and some scar patches, mister, that would certainly make you up fine as a cripple. Wouldn't they believe it, mister, if it was told that you had been in an accident and got crippled for life?"

In spite of his perturbation Casey grinned. "Yeah, I guess they'd believe it, all right,"

he admitted. "They'd likely be tickled to death to see me goin' around on crutches." He cast a hasty thought back into his past, when he had driven a careening stage between Pinnacle and Lund, strewing the steep trail with wreckage not his own. "Yeah, it'd tickle 'em to death. Them that's rode with me," he concluded.

"Oh, mister, you certainly are a godsend! Duck outa sight somewhere while I go tell Jack, dear, that we've found a way open for us to show, after all!" While Casey was pulling the sag out of his jaw so that he could protest, could offer her money, do anything save what she wanted, the show lady disappeared. Casey turned and went back into The Club, remained five minutes perhaps and then walked very circumspectly across the street to Bill's garage. It was there that the Barrymores found him when they came a seeking with their dilapidated old car, their crutches, their grease paint and scar patches, to make a cripple of Casey, whether he would or no.

Bill fell uproariously in with the plan, and Dwyer, stopping at the garage on his way home to dinner, thought it a great joke on Lund, and promised to help the benefit along. Casey, with three drinks under his belt and his stomach otherwise empty, wanted to sing something which he had forgotten. Casey couldn't have recognized Trouble if it had walked up and banged him in the eye. He said sure, he'd be a cripple for the lady. He'd be anything once, and some things several times, if they asked him the right way.

Casey looked very bad when the show people were through with him. He had expected bandages wound picturesquely around his person, but the Barrymores were more artistic than that. Casey's right leg was drawn up at the knee so that he could not put his foot on the ground when he tried, and he did not know how the straps were fastened. His left shoulder was higher than his right shoulder, and his eyes were sunken in his head and a scar ran down along his temple to his left cheek bone. When he looked in the glass which Bill brought him, Casey actually felt ill. They told him that he must not wash his face, and that his week's growth of beard was a blessing from Heaven. The show lady begged him, with dew on her lashes, to play the part faithfully, and they departed very happy over their prospects.

Casey did not know whether he was happy or not. With Bill to encourage him and give him a lift over the gutters, he crossed the street to a restaurant and ordered largely of sirloin steak and French-fried potatoes. After supper there was a long evening to spend quietly on crutches, and The Club was just next door. A man can always spend an evening very quickly at The Club—or he could in the wet days—if his money held out. Casey had money enough, and within an hour he didn't care whether he was crippled or not. There were five besides himself at that table, and they had agreed to remove the lid. Moreover, there was a crowd ten deep around that particular table. For the news had gone out that here was Casey Ryan back again, a hopeless cripple, playing poker like a drunken Rockefeller and losing as if he liked to lose.

At eight o'clock the next morning Bill came in to tell Casey that the show people had brought up their car to be fixed, and was the pay good? Casey replied without looking up from his hand, which held a pair of queens which interested him. He'd stand good, he said, and Bill gave a grunt and went off.

At noon Casey meant to eat something. But another man had come into the game with a roll of money and a boastful manner. Casey rubbed his cramped leg and hunched down in his chair again and called for a stack of blues. Casey, I may as well confess, had been calling for stacks of blues and reds and whites rather often since midnight.

At four in the afternoon Casey hobbled into the restaurant and ate another steak and drank three cups of coffee, black. He meant to go across to the garage and have Bill hunt up the Barrymores and get them to unstrap him for a while, but, just as he was lifting his left crutch around the edge of the restaurant door, two women of Lund came up and began to pity him and ask him how it ever happened. Casey could not remember, just at the moment, what story he had told of his accident. He stuttered—a strange thing for an Irishman to do, by the way—and retreated into The Club where they dared not follow.

"H'lo, Casey! Give yuh a chance to win back some of your losin's, if you're game to try it again," called a man from the far end of the room.

Casey swore and hobbled back to him, let

himself stiffly down into a chair and dropped his crutches with a rattle of hard wood. Being a cripple was growing painful, besides being very inconvenient. The male half of Lund had practically suspended business that day to hover around him and exchange comments upon his looks. Casey had received a lot of sympathy that day, and only the fact that he had remained sequestered behind the curtained arch that cut across the rear of The Club saved him from receiving a lot more. But, of course, there were mitigations. Since walking was slow and awkward, Casey sat. And since he was not the man to sit and twiddle thumbs to pass the time, Casey played poker. That is how he explained it afterward. He had not intended to play poker for twenty-four hours, but tie up a man's leg so he can't walk, and he's got to do *something*.

Wherefore Casey played, and did not win back what he had lost earlier in the day.

Once, while the bartender was bringing drinks—you are not to infer that Casey was drunk; he was merely a bit hazy over details—Casey pulled out his dollar watch and looked at it. Eight-thirty—the show must be pretty well started, by now. He thought he might venture to hobble over to Bill's and have those dog-gone straps taken off before he was crippled for sure. But he did not want to do anything to embarrass the show lady. Besides, he had lost a great deal of money, and he wanted to win some of it back. He still had time to make that train, he remembered. It was reported an hour late, some one said.

So Casey rubbed his strapped leg, twisting his face at the cramp in his knee, and letting his companions believe that his accident had given him a heritage of pain. He hitched his lifted shoulder into an easier position and picked up another unfortunate assortment of five cards.

At ten o'clock Bill, the garage man, came and whispered something to Casey, who growled an oath and reached almost unconsciously for his crutches; so soon is a habit born in a man.

"What they raisin' thunder about?" he asked apathetically when Bill had helped him across the gutter and into the street. "Didn't the crowd turn out like they expected?" Casey's tone was dismal. You simply cannot be a cripple for twenty-four hours, and sit up playing unlucky poker all night and all day and well into another

night, without losing some of your animation; not even if you are Casey Ryan. "Hell, I missed that train ag'in," he added heavily when he heard it whistle into the railroad yard.

At the garage the Barrymores were waiting for him in their stage clothes and make-up. The show lady had wept seams down through her rouge, and the beads on her lashes had clotted stickily.

"Mister, you certainly have wished a sorry deal onto us," she exclaimed when Casey came hobbling through the yawning doorway. "Fifteen years on the stage and *this* never happened to us before. We've took our bad luck with our good luck and lived honest and respectable and self-respecting, and here, at last ill fortune has tied the can onto us. I know you meant well and all that, mister, but we certainly have had a raw deal handed out to us in this town. We—certainly—have!"

"We got till noon to-morrow to be outa the county," croaked the flat-chested one, shifting his Adam's apple rapidly. "And that's real comedy, ain't it, when your damn county runs clean over to the Utah line, and we can't go back the way we come, or—and we can't go anywhere till this big slob here puts our car together. He's got pieces of it strung from here around the block. Say, what kinda town is this you wished onto us, anyway? Holding night court, mind you, so they could can us quicker!"

The show lady must have seen how dazed Casey looked. "Maybe you ain't heard the horrible deal they handed us, mister. They stopped our show before we'd raised the curtain—and it was a seventy-five-dollar house if it was a cent!" she wailed. "They had a bill as long as my arm for license—we couldn't get by with the five-dollar one—and for lights and hall rent and what all. There wasn't enough money in the house to pay it! And they was going to send us to jail! The sheriff acted anything but a gentleman, mister, and if you ever lived in this town and liked it I must say I question your taste!"

"We wouldn't use a town like this for a garbage dump, back home," cut in the flat-chested one, with all the contempt he could master.

"And they hauled us over to their dirty old justice of the peace, and he told us he'd give us thirty days in jail if we was in the
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county to-morrow noon, and we don't know how far this county goes, either way!"

"Fifty miles to St. Simon," Bill told them comfortingly. "You can make it, all right if——"

"We can make it, hey? How're we going to make it, with our car layin' around all over your garage?" The flat-chested one's tone was arrogant past belief.

Casey was fumbling for strap buckles which he could not reach. He was also groping through his colorful, stage-driver's vocabulary for words which might be pronounced in the presence of a lady, and finding mighty few that were of any use to him. The combined effort was turning him a fine purple when the lady was seized with another brilliant idea.

"Jack, dear, don't be harsh. The gentleman meant well—and I'll tell you, mister, what let's do! Let's trade cars till the man has our car repaired. Your car goes just fine, and we can load our stuff in and get out away from this horrible town. Why, the preacher was there and made a speech and said the meanest things about you, because you was having a benefit and at the same identical time you was setting in a saloon gambling. He said it was an outrage on civilization, mister, and an insult to the honest, hardworking people in Lund. Them was his very words."

"Well, hell!" Casey exploded abruptly. "I'm honest and hardworkin' as any damn preacher. You can ask anybody!"

"Well, that's what he said, mister. We certainly didn't know you was a gambler when we offered to give you a benefit. We certainly never dreamed you'd queer us like that. But you'll do us the favor to lend us your car, won't you, mister? You wouldn't refuse that, and see me and little junior languishin' in jail when you knew in your heart that——"

"Aw, take the darn car!" muttered Casey distractedly, and hobbled into the garage office where he knew that Bill kept liniment.

Five minutes, perhaps, after that, Casey opened the office door wide enough to fling out an assortment of straps and two crutches.

Sounds from the rear of the garage indicated that Casey's Ford was "r'arin' to go," as Casey frequently expressed it. Voices were jumbled in the tones of suggestions, commands, protest. Casey heard the show lady's clear treble berating Jack, dear, with thin politeness. Then the car came snort-

ing forward, paused in the wide doorway, and the show lady's voice called out clearly, untroubled as the voice of a child after it has received that which it cried for.

"Well, good-by, mister! You certainly are a godsend to give us the loan of your car!" There was a buzz and a splutter, and they were gone—gone clean out of Casey's life into the unknown whence they had come.

Bill opened the door gently and eased into the office, sniffing liniment. The painted hollows under Casey's eyes gave him a ghastly look in the lamplight when he lifted his face from examining a chafed and angry knee. Bill opened his mouth for speech, caught a certain look in Casey's eyes, and did not say what he had intended to say. Instead:

"You better sleep here in the office, Casey. I've got another bed back of the machine shop. I'll lock up, and if any one comes and rings the night bell—well, never mind. I'll plug her so they can't ring her." The world needs more men like Bill.

Even after an avalanche human nature cannot resist digging, in the melancholy hope of turning up grewsome remains. I know that you are all itching to put shovel into the débris of Casey's dreams, and to see just what was left of them.

There was mighty little, let me tell you. I said in the beginning that twenty-five thousand dollars was like a wild cat in Casey's pocket. You can't give a man that much money all in a lump and, suddenly, after he has been content with dollars enough to pay for the grub he eats, without seeing him lose his sense of proportion. Twenty-five dollars he understands and can spend more prudently than you, perhaps. Twenty-five thousand he simply cannot gauge. It seems exhaustless. It is as if you plucked from the night all the stars you can see, knowing that the Milky Way is still there and unnumbered other stars invisible even in the aggregate.

Casey played poker, with an appreciative audience and the lid off. Now and then he took a drink stronger than two-and-three-fourths per cent. He kept that up for a night and a day and well into another night. Very well, gather round and look at the remains, and if there's a moral, you are welcome, I am sure.

Casey awoke just before noon, and went out and held his head under Bill's garage

hydrant with the water running a full stream. He looked up and found Bill standing there with his hands in his pockets, gazing at Casey sorrowfully. Casey grinned.

"How's she comin', Bill?"

Bill grunted and spat. "She ain't. Not if you mean that car them folks wished onto you. The tail light's pretty fair, though. And in their hurry the lady went off and left a pink silk stockin' in the back seat. The toe's wore out of it, though. Casey, if you wait till you overhaul 'em with that thing they wheeled in here under the name of a car——"

"Oh, that's all right, Bill," Casey grunted gamely. "I was goin' to git me a new car, anyway. Mine wasn't so much. They're welcome."

Bill grunted and spat again, but he did not say anything.

"I'll go see Dwyer, and see how much I got left," Casey said presently, and his voice, whether you believe it or not, was cheerful.

After a while Casey returned. He was grinning, but the grin was, to a careful observer, a bit sickish. "Say, Bill, talk about poker—I'm off it fer life. Now look what it done to me, Bill! I puts twenty-five thousand dollars into the bank—minus two hundred I took in money—and I takes a check book and I goes over to The Club and gits into a game. I wears the check book down to the stubs. I goes back and asks Dwyer how much I got in the bank, and he looks me over like I was a sick horse he had doubts about bein' worth doctorin', and as if he thought he mebby might better take me out an' shoot me an' put me outa my misery. 'Jest one dollar an' sixty-seven cents, Casey,' he says to me. 'If the checks is all in, which I trust they air!'"

Casey got out his plug of chewin' tobacco and pried off a blunted corner. "An' hell, Bill! I had that much in the bank when I started," he finished plaintively.

"Hell!" said Bill in brief, eloquent sympathy.

Casey set his teeth together and extracted comfort from the tobacco. He expectorated ruminatively.

"Well, anyway, I got me some bran'-new socks, an' they're paid for, thank God!" He tilted his old Stetson down over his right eye at his favorite, Caseyish angle, stuck his hands in his pocket, and strolled out into the sunshine.

When Dynevor Died

By William Morton Ferguson

Author of "The Guilty One," "Apple Green," Etc.

Mr. Ferguson has given us an unusually fascinating mystery to solve in this story. As if this were not enough, he has filled it with a host of people interesting in themselves. The dryly humorous Morney, the quaintly real Rutherford and the latter's captivating daughter, Jill, are only a few of them. You will be glad to meet them and live with them for a while. Not least among them is that "melancholy Dane" called "Hamlet"—a dog in a thousand, whose motto is "handsome is as handsome does."

(A Four-Part Story--Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

MORNEY'S canine companion—one of those nondescript quadrupeds that is known commonly as a "nigger dog," a creature apparently without ancestry or hope of posterity—conducted a stealthy raid and finally succeeded in catching one. Then he cocked the white iris of his dismal wall eye and elevated a ragged, elephantine ear. A figure had appeared suddenly from among the trees, that of a large young man in a suit of immaculate flannels. He bore the promise of a paunch and a chin that failed.

"What the devil do you mean by catching fish here?" he demanded angrily.

"Who's catching fish?"

"What? Why, *you* are!"

"You flatter me," said Morney, with an engaging air. "The only one that's had a bite is Hamlet."

"Which?"

"The dog. He's melancholy and a Great Dane, hence the monicker."

"Ea, ha, mirthful laughter! You're one of these merry little village cut-ups, eh? Just about as funny as a coffin. You don't mean to call that cross between a bull-dog and a window shutter a Great Dane, do you? But whatever it is, you two clear out, pronto; I tell you you can't fish here."

"True for you, brother; I've caught my pants twice, but that's all. However, I'll admit I'm no piscatorial demon; to my mind

the great drawback to the sport is that you have to hook the blamed things and pull 'em in yourself. Now, if they'd invent a patent rod that would do all that for you, I'd be the best little fisher going."

"Yes, and you'll go now. This is private property, and you know it. You let me catch you here again——"

"But I was told anybody could fish here."

"You were not. Don't try any of that fluff on me."

"I may be a liar," said Morney, proceeding to reel in his line, "but I hate to be told it by some folks."

"Yes? Well, I'll tell you more than that. Do you think we stock this lake for all the bums in the county? Next time you try any of this poaching you'll get a dose of bird shot in the summer kitchen. Beat it!"

He advanced aggressively but paused as the dog growled, and the short hair along his chin stood up in a ridge. Then he took a backward step, caught his foot in a creeper and sat down hard. When he arose his face was crimson, the seat of his flannels a vivid green.

"I see you're no true Irishman though fond of the sod," said Morney mildly. "You shouldn't be wearing the red above the green."

"I'll run you off!" shouted the other. "I'll show you and that mutt of yours—— Hey, Buster!" He whistled shrilly as his roving eye caught a flash of white among the trees.

A large white bull terrier broke cover and came obediently to heel. Its eyes were small, pink, and cruel, the ears and tail cut, and it wore a heavy spiked collar. It had quite a reputation as a killer and in its private graveyard reposed many a half-grown and inoffensive victim; for it was one of those mean and vicious animals that can't be trusted even with a puppy.

"Sic him, Buster!" cried his master gleefully, designating the brooding figure of Hamlet. "Atta, boy!" And Buster needed no second bidding; the emotion aroused in his ample bosom at sight of this mongrel daring to trespass on his preserve had only been restrained by obedience to his master, and now he shot from the latter's side like a white thunderbolt.

According to all the rules and regulations one of two things should have happened; either Hamlet should have tucked his long train between his legs and hit the high spots for the next county or he should have been massacred ingloriously where he stood; instead of which he met his adversary halfway and, what was more, got the first grip. Neither Buster nor his astonished owner had the least idea how it had happened, Buster being famed for his quickness and instinct for the jugular. Yet now he had been beaten to it; perhaps he had been overeager or merely the victim of an accident; but, accident or not, Hamlet had secured a grip worthy of a veteran pit dog. It was a deadly one; ignoring the spiked collar—his own scrawny neck was naked—he had fastened unerringly on Buster's throat and jaw so that he couldn't open his mouth.

Hamlet was bigger boned all over but, thanks to systematic underfeeding, neither dog had any advantage in weight. Buster was as game as they come, and "in the pink," yet he could do nothing to break that grip. He tried every trick and failed; he was down, thrashing about in a frenzy, but he might as well have tried to win loose from a wolf trap. Hamlet spread his legs, sunk his head still lower, and hung on in bitter silence.

"He's killing him!" yelled the outraged owner, looking round vainly for a weapon, yet careful to give the arena a wide berth. "Call your damned brute off!" And, indeed, Buster was in a bad way, choking over the medicine he had given many another. His tongue protruded, his eyes rolled, he gurgled, his muzzle was covered with bloody foam,

and his vicious struggles were growing perceptibly weaker.

Morney knew that a fight between such adversaries is rather more easy to start than stop. He knew also that many a dog has been injured seriously by the asinine efforts of some would-be peacemaker or partisan, and he had been ready to see that Hamlet got fair play. But, an animal lover, it was no part of his program to stand by and watch the struggle brought to its inevitable conclusion. It was quite evident that Hamlet was out for a killing and that, in the way of physical violence, nothing short of a red-hot poker or a surgical operation would seduce him from that grip. Evident also that no intelligent assistance might be hoped for from Buster's master who, wreathed in purple language, stood by impotently and seemed more incensed at his dog's defeat than grieved at its approaching fate.

Morney did the only thing possible; he got a grip on Hamlet's scruff, another on Buster's collar, lifted both bodily and heaved them into the lake. He followed in person, the cold douche failing to break Hamlet's grip; that willing and tenacious spirit was evidently under the impression that he was being shown a new way to finish his adversary. Morney soon undeceived him; he dragged Buster's muzzle above water and held Hamlet's under, offering him the choice of suffocating or loosening his hold.

Freed at last from that wolf trap, bleeding and water-logged, Buster made off down the lake; the spirit perhaps was still willing, but the flesh was weak and he didn't attempt to emulate Lot's wife. Hamlet scrambled out, shook himself, and then proceeded to interview his colony of parasites just as if nothing had happened and a balked homicide was all in the day's work. But the eye he cast on Morney, wringing lake water from his trousers, was full of misgiving.

"I'll have you jailed for this!" shouted Buster's owner. "You cursed thief, you come in here with that gorilla, steal my fish and half kill my dog!" Emotion getting the better of him, he suddenly let fly a kick at the stooping figure of Morney; it missed, and they clinched.

They jazzed for a few minutes on the sward, and then the suit of flannels landed headfirst in three feet of lake water.

"I apologize for trespassing," said Morney, standing on the bank and addressing the

spluttering and slime-covered figure. "As I said before, I didn't know you owned this puddle. I apologize handsomely, and if I've done anything you're sorry for, I'm glad of it. If you want to make a song about it my name is Morney, and you'll find me at the widow Flannery's, Main Street and Bond."

He shouldered his fishing rod and, tailed by Hamlet, departed in the opposite direction from that taken by Buster until he came to a white, wooden bridge that spanned Pinelake on the Hammersley Turnpike, as that part of the county highway was known locally. The town of Pinelake lay about a mile to the south and thither Morney headed.

Presently he heard from behind him the warning hoot of a motor horn, and he stepped instinctively toward the wall of pine and birch bordering the road. From round a curve there bellied a balloon of dust and from it shot a six-cylinder bobcat, the homing sun striking a million fires from its windshield, headlights, and nickelwork.

It would be impossible to say how the affair happened, much less attempt to describe it; perhaps Hamlet turned too late, the glare blinded him or his wall eye deceived him. The car, though doing a good thirty, was under perfect control, and it did its best to avoid the meeting; but when the brakes stopped screaming and the dust settled, Hamlet, knocked headfirst into a bunch of stinkweed, appeared to have embarked on his last long journey.

One had a glimpse of another Morney as he knelt by that caricature of doghood and took the grotesque head on his knee; his flippant and devil-may-care expression had been sponged out, and with its going he looked suddenly old and careworn.

"Oh, I'm *so* sorry!"

The old look returned to Morney's eyes as he arose and faced the driver of the car, a diminutive person in an orange jumper, white velvet-corduroy skirt and Georgette blouse—one of those simple costumes that can be purchased anywhere these profiteering days for a mere song. Morney reflected that his weekly insult might be value for her pumps and ornate silk hose. And he became rather conscious of his trousers which hadn't profited from their immersion.

"Oh, I'm *so* sorry!"

"So am I," said Morney.

"And do you think he's—he's dead?"

"Impossible. You only ran over him once."

She turned away from the inanimate figure of Hamlet, stretched on his odoriferous bier, bit her lip, and colored. "I—I know just how you must feel. I'm truly sorry, but it wasn't my fault. I wasn't going twenty miles an hour——"

"No, thirty."

"I wasn't! Nothing of the kind! If your dog had only looked where he was going——"

"Or you had only gone where you were looking."

Her chin was up, the stain had deepened in her cheek, and the eyes that had been misty and contrite were hard and bright with the light of battle. She looked him over with that impersonal aggravating and contemptuous stare peculiar to even the gentlest of the gentler sex and which is more deadly than a blow. It suggested unnamable things concerning Morney's clothes, face, morals, deportment, ancestors.

With the air of one giving alms to a mendicant she produced a gold mesh purse. "Although it wasn't my fault, I shall pay for the dog," she announced frigidly. "That seems to be the chief industry hereabouts. What did you value him at?"

Morney considered. "Well, that's hard to say. The truth is, I wouldn't have sold him for any money."

Her abbreviated upper lip curled still more. "Oh, of course; the old story. I've never yet run over a hen that didn't turn out to be the champion layer of the county, or a mongrel that wasn't a bench winner. I shall give you five dollars."

"Kamerad!" cried Morney. "I simply couldn't take it; it would be an outrage on the fair name and memory of that noble animal. His value can't be estimated, but I wouldn't have taken fifty dollars for him."

"No, I dare say you wouldn't. Why not make it a hundred? You must think I know very little about dogs; that one there couldn't have fetched a price anywhere but at the bone factory or museum. Five dollars is more than its value, and you know it. I won't haggle with you, but neither will I be imposed on."

"But you're quoting prewar prices," said Morney. "Even dogs have gone up. And, madam, that noble creature had points and attributes unsuspected by the casual eye. Don't be led astray by appearances; he was

one of that rare and special breed, the true *canis familiaris*——”

“What nonsense! There’s no such breed. I realize that his sentimental value may be worth something to you, and so I’ll make it ten.”

Morney sighed and accepted the crisp ten-dollar bill. “Oh, Hamlet, what a falling-off was there!” he quoted. “However, I thank you, madam; yet I suffer a certain bashfulness in accepting such a generous sum from a total stranger. Somehow I feel that I don’t deserve it.”

“I know you don’t.”

“Then why give it?”

“Why, your dog, of course!” she snapped, staring at him.

“But that wasn’t my dog,” said Morney. “Is it possible you thought it was?”

“Is—is it possible——” She choked and glared at him. “But—you said you owned him!”

“Pardon me, I didn’t. I said I couldn’t sell him—which is the truth. A moral person can’t sell something he doesn’t own. I haven’t the least idea who owned him; I met him to-day as I was going fishing and he adopted me.”

“Well, you—you——” The appropriate epithet eluded her. She blasted him with a look, snatched the proffered bill from his hand and almost ran to the car, her complexion rivaling the sunset.

“Now,” mused Morney, eying the disappearing car, “a sensitive soul might almost imagine that that young person was slightly offended with me. Why? Heaven only knows; it must be in the air here—but may I be everlastingly hemstitched!”

This expletive was called forth by the resurrection of Hamlet who had arisen miraculously from his bier. There was censure in his sound orb; he looked at his adopted master as if to say, “You chump, why didn’t you freeze on to that ten-spot?”

CHAPTER II.

“Dog, you’re a holy wonder!” exclaimed Morney as he thumped the resurrected one in the ribs. “You haven’t even a broken bone—that’s easily verified, thanks to your X-ray architecture.”

He sat down by the roadside, filled an old brier that gurgled beautifully, and looked searchingly at Hamlet. “See here,” he said

sternly, “were you knocked cold or were you faking?”

Hamlet wagged his tail, stuck out his soiled vest, and looked dumb adoration.

“By gravy, you’re some dog,” continued Morney. “Take it any way you like, you’re some dog. You’re as full of surprises as a circus. First you bust Buster——”

“Hey, that your dog?”

Morney looked up leisurely. A week’s beard stubble and a faded green sweater, plus a slouch hat and a venerable pair of corduroys, had emerged from the trees on the opposite side of the road. Although it was far from the shooting season their owner carried a double-barreled twelve.

Morney shook his head. “Don’t know who owns him.”

“He’s a tramp,” volunteered the newcomer. “I seen him over in the sandhills this mornin’ and missed him. He’s slicker’n an old fox. Now then, young feller,” as he advanced and slipped a couple of shells into his weapon, “just move aside a bit. I’ll fix him this trip.”

Morney arose and stood in front of Hamlet. “I didn’t know there was an open season for dogs. What’s the idea?”

“Seein’ that it ain’t your mutt what business is it of yours?”

“I’m interested enough to make it my business,” said Morney, stepping forward, but still keeping between the shotgun and Hamlet. “What’s that dog been doing that you propose to murder him in cold blood?”

“I’m mindin’ my business, young feller, and mind yours. I’m the official dog catcher of Pinelake and that dog ain’t got no license——”

“Then shouldn’t you take him to the pound?”

“I should—not. I’ve got my orders from the mayor to shoot every dog what ain’t got a license. We always make a cleanin’ up of ’em in the spring. We’d one hydrophoby scare and that was plenty. I’ve bagged three to-day.”

“At so much per head, eh? Well, this is where you’re out of pocket; this is one you aren’t going to bag.”

“What’s that?”

“I’ve said it. I don’t care a hoot what your orders are; and if your mayor can’t find a decenter way of disposing of tramps than by pumping bird shot into ’em, it’s time you had a new one.”

"Look here, young feller, that'll be about all from you——"

"I haven't started yet; you'll know when I do. You try to shoot that dog and I'll clean your clock for you."

"You will, eh? I'd like to see you try it—hell's bells, the mutt's gone!"

It was so; Hamlet had vanished with the sun.

"All right," growled the dog catcher as Morney laughed immoderately. "Just you wait; I'll get him yet. And I'd like to see you horn in again."

"Better get a search warrant and a search-light," advised Morney as the other shouldered his gun and stalked off.

Morney waited a while, a frown between his eyes, and then reluctantly resumed his journey; but he hadn't gone far before a shadow slipped from the trees and drew alongside.

"Dog, your middle name must be lucky for you've dodged the grave three times inside an hour," remarked Morney. "Now, see here; you've adopted me, eh? In sickness and health for better or worse. All right. I'll keep you just as long as I can; if you've got an owner and he shows up I'll buy you from him. And now let's beat it home. I don't know how the widow Flannery's going to receive us, but if she won't take you, she'll lose me."

Arm in arm, as it were, they proceeded on their way; dusk had fallen and the arc lights, spanning the road at every quarter mile, began to open their bluish eyes and mock the gibbous moon. A tree toad started its evening serenade and the aromatic breath of the pines was like an antiseptic caress.

"Car coming!" warned Morney presently, as the throb of a motor cut the silence. "Hug the selvage, boy, and no didoes this time."

Far up the road the headlights showed like twin pale stars and they waxed so rapidly that Morney grabbed Hamlet by the scruff and yanked him onto the footpath.

"And they'll swear they weren't doing twenty per" he thought. "Yes, and I used to swear the same. Funny what a difference it makes whether you're the worm on the ground or the bird in the car. I wonder if it's that orange kiddie coming back. Guess I'll just time her this trip."

He happened to be standing about midway between two of the arc lamps and he knew they were spaced at intervals of four hundred and forty yards. He glanced at

his luminous wrist watch; it was exactly five minutes past seven. As the second hand showed five seconds past the five minutes the car shot under the first lamp.

"Coming some," thought Morney. "Doing fifty if she's doing——"

The car, now about a hundred yards distant, swerved sharply as there came the sound of a sharp report; then it shot across the road, vaulted the curb of the footpath, and crashed into a telegraph pole. It had all happened like the flicker of a cinema film.

Morney, paced by Hamlet, did the hundred yards in eleven seconds. He saw the damage at a glance, and it couldn't well have been worse; the car had turned turtle, the hood was crumpled flat, and all that remained to make the job complete was for the gas to take fire. He noted with a twinge that its color was maroon, the color of the car driven by the orange kiddie. What rotten luck! Of course, he didn't even know her name, but why hadn't he been nicer to her? Her heart was in the right place; he had seen tears in her eyes at the supposed death of Hamlet. She was most generous, too, for the accident hadn't been her fault. Why had he kidded her like that?

As these thoughts shuttled through his mind he came upon the body and saw that again the worst possible had happened; she had been flung clear and lay in the shadow of the shattered telegraph pole, her head at an impossible angle, and her face smashed to pulp.

But it wasn't the orange kiddie; after all he had been mistaken about the car. The victim wore a dark pongee motor coat and proved to be a woman, not a young girl. Morney judged her to be about twenty-five. As he knelt and raised her poor shattered head to his knee his eyes met the luminous dial of his wrist watch and he noted mechanically that the second hand was at the half; five and one-half minutes past seven. It was difficult to believe that but twenty-five seconds had sped since the car passed under that lamp; and in less than half that time the tragedy had happened and this woman had met her death.

At length he arose, only too conscious of the fact that it was a case for the coroner. Should he wait for a passing motorist or hunt up a constable? As if in answer to the mental query, he saw the lights of a car approaching from the direction of the town;

it drew up by the wreck and deposited a dapper little man who wore glasses and carried a black bag.

"Dear me, dear me!" he exclaimed, bustling forward. "What an unfortunate affair! Lucky I happened along. I'm Doctor Dicksee, you know. Now don't alarm yourself, sir; we'll have her round in a moment——"

"Her neck's broken."

The Dicksee optimism seemed shaken. "You don't say! Let me see. Why, God bless my soul! it's—it's Mrs. Dynevor! I—I know that coat, that hat! Oh, this is terrible!"

He arose at length and stared blankly at Morney. "Yes, it is Mrs. Dynevor; although it's impossible to recognize the features, I know it is she. How—how did this terrible affair happen?"

In a few concise words Morney gave his account of the accident.

"And Mrs. Dynevor was alone?" exclaimed Doctor Dicksee. "Yet that isn't their car. But, dear me, what is this?"

Morney had been too absorbed to notice Hamlet's absence. The dog now came bounding up to him, seized him by the coat sleeve and tried to drag him away; then it ran a few paces, turned and barked. Morney, following, came upon the orange kiddie; she had been flung clear across the footpath and lay in the undergrowth. She was unconscious and he carried her to the doctor's car.

"Why, it's Miss Rutherford!" exclaimed Dicksee. "Dear me, how unfortunate. Let me see—concussion; yes, but that's all. Lucky thing your dog found her. Now I think our best course is to go straight to the Dynevors; it's not far—the Merriion Road, you know—and on the way to the Rutherfords."

"But how about the hospital?"

"No. Unfortunately Mrs. Dynevor is beyond medical aid, and the other isn't a hospital case. She'll come round presently; don't worry about that. A miraculous escape. Now, sir, if I can call further on your assistance——"

All this time Doctor Dicksee was hopping about like an excited sparrow, his legs as nimble as his tongue; but it was Morney who laid the late Mrs. Dynevor in the tonneau, placed the unconscious girl on the seat, and climbed in between the quick and the dead.

"I'm the Dynevor's physician, you know,"

Dicksee volunteered, as he hopped aboard and started the engine. "In fact, I was on my way to their house. This most unfortunate affair must be broken to Mr. Dynevor gently."

Morney considered that driving up to the house with Mrs. Dynevor's corpse was hardly the best way of breaking the news gently. His own plan would have been to call at an undertaker's and a drug store, but he knew little of local topography. Moreover, he saw that Doctor Dicksee was a person of decided opinions. One of these opinions appeared to be that he, Morney, was a friend of the Rutherfords.

They crossed the little white bridge on the Hammersley Turnpike and turned into the Merriion Road which, in spite of his ignorance, Morney knew marked the Back Bay district of Pinelake. It was known as North Pinelake and residents were careful to make the distinction. Although within the limits it bore little relation to the town proper and the lake marked the physical and social boundary.

The car passed up a winding drive and under the porte-cochère of a house set in spacious grounds; the ground-floor windows were lighted, and Morney had the queer feeling that there was an air of subdued expectancy about the place, as if their coming was known. But it was manifestly improbable that news of the tragedy had preceded them, as their journey had taken but a few minutes. Although much had happened, it was now only twenty minutes past seven.

Doctor Dicksee was halfway up the steps when the hall door opened and a man came out hurriedly; he was portly, middle-aged, and wore a dinner jacket. Morney pardonably mistook him for Mr. Dynevor but soon learned he was the butler.

"This is very bad, sir!" he exclaimed. "Most sudden and unexpected——"

"Yes, yes, but not so loud, Tomlinson. And how did you hear of it?"

"Why, sir, it was me and the housekeeper that found him. Then I phoned you and they said you were on your way here. What, sir? Why, I mean Mr. Dynevor, of course. Yes, sir, dead; must have been a stroke for he went off like that," snapping a finger and thumb.

"Oh, good gracious me!" exclaimed Doctor Dicksee. "This is a nice state of affairs!"

CHAPTER III.

Morney felt like one called upon to act a leading part in the middle of a play he doesn't know. Doctor Dicksee, more fussed than ever by this new tragedy, still regarded him as a friend of the Rutherfords, while Tomlinson evidently thought him a medical acquaintance of the doctor. In any case, the butler seemed dazed by the swift, double blow; master and mistress had comprised the family, and now there was none to give him his accustomed orders. And it had all happened with such staggering suddenness that the news wasn't known as yet in the neighborhood; twenty minutes had passed since his discovery of Mr. Dynevor's remains and, after learning that Doctor Dicksee was on his way to the house, there seemed nothing to do but await his arrival.

"What about Miss Rutherford?" demanded Morney. "Do I bring her in?"

"No—that is, yes," exclaimed Doctor Dicksee. "Dear me, I'd almost forgotten about her. Oh, yes, bring her in by all means. Ah, Mrs. Bowles," as the housekeeper appeared, "kindly see to Miss Rutherford. Yes, yes, let her lie down somewhere; that's all she needs. No, she isn't dead or anywhere near it. And for goodness sake stop your crying; yes, I know it's all terribly unfortunate, but I want your help, not tears. I've a thousand things to see to——"

"And the first is this little girl," said Morney. "We can help the living, but not the dead. I want you to take another look at her."

Dicksee waved his arms. "I'm entirely satisfied, sir——"

"But I'm not. Come along, doc."

Dicksee hesitated and then obediently followed in the wake of the snuffling Mrs. Bowles who led the way to a reception room where Morney laid the still unconscious girl on a couch. Then he stood by and watched the doctor critically. He had enough medical knowledge to see with relief that the dapper little man, for all his fussiness, was skillful enough in his profession and that his first estimate of the girl's condition was correct.

"Simple concussion as I said," remarked Doctor Dicksee huffily. "She'll be all right presently." And, reassured, Morney turned to the task of bringing in Mrs. Dynevor's remains. This done, he followed Tomlinson and Dicksee to the study.

"I left everything just as it was," said the butler as he opened the door. "There he is, sir, exactly as we found him."

The study was on the ground floor and its twin French windows gave on a side veranda; the electrics were still burning, one a green-shaded wall light, beneath which was a typewriter table. The machine itself stood uncovered, and there were sheets of paper and purple carbons beside it.

Mr. Dynevor lay between the typewriter table and a large mahogany desk, and a glance showed Morney that he had been a fit subject for apoplexy. He was of the short-necked, full-blooded type and evidently considerably older than his wife. Morney, who had seen more than one victim of an apoplectic seizure, now recognized the unmistakable signs—the prominent staring eyes and fullness about the neck.

"Cerebral apoplexy; no question about that," said Doctor Dicksee emphatically as, following his brief examination, they lifted the body and placed it on a couch. "I had warned him to be careful. Now, Tomlinson, about what time did this happen?"

"Seven o'clock, sir. The hall clock was just striking seven when Mrs. Bowles and I heard the fall. The master was never what you could call a lightweight, and it fairly shook the house. We were in the dining room, just across the hall, and I rushed over, she following. I'd been in here at six and Mr. Dynevor seemed as right as rain; he was sitting at the table there talking to Miss Rutherford."

"When and what did he eat last?"

"Well, sir, he'd some cold lobster and a bit of chicken and a salad at six—to hold him, as he said, till dinner. Dinner wasn't to be till seven-thirty, because Mrs. Dynevor wasn't expected home till then."

"Just what I thought," exclaimed Dicksee. "When will people take advice and learn sense? I'd warned him strictly about his diet. He fills his stomach with that stuff and then bends over a typewriter. It isn't possible that he could have had any distressing news, anything likely to cause a violent shock?"

Tomlinson coughed behind his hand. "Not to my knowledge, sir; the only person that called was Miss Rutherford. She came about six to say that we needn't send the car for Mrs. Dynevor as her new one had come, and she was going into town and would bring her home."

"Do you think that by any chance Mr. Dynevor could have heard of the accident? Some busybody might have phoned——"

"That's impossible," put in Morney. "Aside from all else, Mr. Dynevor was dead before it happened. He died at least five minutes before his wife."

"Dear me, are you sure? Well, truly a tragic but not uncommon coincidence that husband and wife should die within a few minutes of each other. Tragic, and yet more merciful, perhaps, than it would appear; from what I saw of their married life I venture to think that, if given the choice, they would have elected to go together."

"If you please, doctor," said Mrs. Bowles, appearing in the doorway, but making no attempt to enter the room, while her protuberant eyes carefully avoided the object on the couch, "Miss Rutherford has come to and wants to see you immediate. And, Mr. Tomlinson, if you'll be so kind as to answer the hall phone, for I don't know what to say. I'm so all of a-tremble."

And so Morney found himself alone, Doctor Dicksee and Tomlinson bustling out in the wake of the housekeeper, apparently without giving him another thought.

At sight of a siphon, standing on a handsome cellaret, Morney suddenly acknowledged possession of a triumphant thirst. Looking round for a glass, he saw a tumbler on the desk that contained perhaps half a teaspoonful of a palish-yellow liquid; obviously whisky, in spite of the constitutional amendment. Obedient to an impulse, the result of his training and calling, he smelled it, then dipped in a finger and held it to his tongue. His expression changed instantly; his educated nose had detected more than the smell of alcohol, a faint ethereal odor entirely foreign to Scotch or rye, while there was a sharp burning taste equally unknown to the worst redeye. In the cellaret he found a large decanter of Scotch which, on examination, proved to be without the peculiar odor and taste.

He was never long in making up his mind, though he would have been the last to claim that his quick decisions were always the best; indeed, on more than one occasion he had grave reason to suspect the contrary. But, right or wrong, his decision was now made and he brought from his pocket a bottle that had once been the temporary home of a struggling family of earthworms. Into this he poured the residue from the tumbler

and, as he placed the bottle in his pocket, Tomlinson entered.

"That was an inquiry, sir," said the butler. "They've found the car, and now we may expect the whole neighborhood in."

"By the way, what did Mr. Dynevor have to drink with his meal?" asked Morney casually.

"Whisky and soda, sir," replied Tomlinson, still firm in the belief that this commanding person was a medical friend of Dicksee or some one vested with authority.

"Did you give it to him?" Morney was now seated at the desk; he had picked up a sheet of typewriting paper and, pencil in hand, appeared to be idly making designs in the aimless manner of one whose thoughts are elsewhere. But in reality he was taking down in shorthand the butler's statements. Tomlinson, from his place near the door, was unable to see this, even granting that he was familiar with stenographic signs.

"No, sir, I didn't give it to him. It was standing there half full when I brought in the tray." Tomlinson coughed behind his hand and nodded at the cellaret. "Mr. Dynevor, sir, always helped himself, and it wasn't only at meals; there was generally a glass of the stuff, standing there handy-like, on the desk."

"He didn't cry out before you heard him fall?"

"If he did, we didn't hear him, sir. And he was stone dead when we came in. Do you think, sir, the whisky and soda didn't go with the lobster salad—sort of helped to bring on the stroke? Between you and me, sir, he did a bit too much drinking."

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised, if it hadn't quite agreed with him. And he seemed entirely well at six—the time Miss Rutherford called? Did he see her here?"

"Yes, sir. She must have come in through one of those windows," pointing to the two that opened on the side veranda, "for I didn't know she was here until I brought in the tray."

Here the hall telephone again summoned Tomlinson, and Morney, folding the paper and placing it in the inside pocket of his coat, soon followed. An angry and tearful voice came from the reception room, where he had left Miss Rutherford, and he went over and looked in.

The girl was pale as plaster, her eyes swollen with crying, but otherwise she showed no ill effects of the accident. "You

are entirely wrong!" she was declaring vehemently to Dicksee who, in futile fashion, was attempting to lull a storm that evidently was of his own making. "I'm not responsible for—Mrs. Dynevor's death! I'm not! It's wicked and cruel of you to——"

"My dear Miss Rutherford——" Dicksee hopped up and down while he waved placating hands. "You misunderstand me, I assure you. I didn't say or mean——"

"You did! You know you did!" She struggled with tears and wrath. "And now let me tell you I wasn't at the wheel; Mrs. Dynevor was driving. And the accident wasn't her fault either; no one can help a blow-out." She paused, aware of Morney standing in the doorway.

Doctor Dicksee welcomed the interruption. "Ah," he exclaimed, "here is your friend, Mr.—ah—Mr.—dear me, I don't think I caught the name. He has been very helpful——"

"There must be some mistake," she interrupted coldly, an angry spot of color burning in her cheek. "I'm not acquainted with this—this gentleman."

"Dear me, is it possible?" Dicksee removed his glasses, polished them nervously, stuck them on his nose, and stared at Morney intently. "This is very strange; I certainly understood—you said, sir, you knew Miss Rutherford."

"I said I had met her," corrected Morney.

"Yes, this evening as I was going to town," put in the girl, flashing him a withering glance, "I ran over and killed a poor dog that wasn't his, and he tried to make me pay for it. That's the sum of our acquaintance, and I don't even know his name."

Morney made her a bow. "Pardon the oversight. My name is——"

"It is really a matter of indifference to me what it is." And she turned her back on him.

The doorbell rang and a moment later a flood of excited females poured into the room. There were squeaks of "Jill!" and, as Morney shoved for the open air, he had a fleeting glimpse of the diminutive Miss Rutherford disappearing in the human vortex.

The news of the double tragedy had evidently now spread quickly, for half a dozen cars were parked along the curb, and Morney met a number of people on their way to the house. In the rush of events he had for-

gotten Hamlet, but that gentleman speedily recalled his existence by shoving a cold muzzle into his hand.

"Guess you think I'm trying to Hooverize you on this grub proposition, eh?" greeted Morney. "But events have taken us by the forelock, my friend; we seem to have been pitchforked into the middle of what the local press will be sure to call a tragic double fatality—and it may be more tragic than they imagine. You see if a fellow considers it his duty to kill himself, and in such a way that suicide won't be suspected, is it some other fellow's duty to give the show away? Are we to make public a disgrace that he took such pains to hide? It would all depend on circumstances, you say? Quite so, and we don't know the circumstances; we don't know a blessed thing about the Dynevors or anybody concerned."

Musing in this fashion, he turned into the Hammersley Turnpike and crossed for the fourth time that day the little white bridge. Hamlet, as if suspecting that his adopted master was unable to furnish the much-mooted meal, shot off on the trail of an imprudent young rabbit; with him it was a serious business, not a sport, and he hunted silently.

"That's one side of the proposition," pursued Morney. "The other is, of course, that some kind friend may have put that stuff where it would do the most good. Lurid and rather awful, I know, but such things do occasionally happen even in the best regulated families. But here I am fixing up a nice six-reel shocker when I haven't even analyzed the stuff—and there's nothing to show that Mr. Dynevor took it. And again, that certainly looked like apoplexy."

A slight sound among the trees and undergrowth bordering the footpath brought him from his reverie, and he stopped and whistled, thinking it the dog. The next moment a segment of the night seemed to fall upon him, and consciousness was blotted out.

CHAPTER IV.

He was able to get out of bed a few days later in the Pinelake hospital, where he met a dry file by the name of Potts who turned out to be the house physician. Potts had graying hair and a cynical eye; he was a graduate of Johns Hopkins, and had been intended for greater things than his present berth.

"The fellow who gave you that swipe must be first cousin of Jack Dempsey," said Potts. "Lucky thing for you your folks thought of providing you with such a hard head, otherwise you'd have said good morning to St. Peter."

"Oh, it's hard enough—perhaps solid ivory." Morney, garbed in a dressing gown, gazed out of the open window for a moment in silence. "So I was robbed? For how much?"

"How much had you?" countered the house physician dryly. "They got you for all you carried. And I guess you'd have lain there all night, if it hadn't been for your dog. You're the new chemist at Rutherford & Co., aren't you? Well, I guess they knew Saturday was pay day——"

"There was only two days coming to me, so they didn't get much. By the way, is the Miss Rutherford who was mixed up in the Dynevor accident any relative of my boss?"

"I'll say so—his only child and the apple of his eye. Didn't you know that?"

Morney shook his head. "I only came here last Thursday, and I hadn't time to learn the local Who's Who. I thought she might be a relative, but wasn't sure. That was pretty awful about the Dynevors, wasn't it?"

The house physician nodded. "The funeral was yesterday—Mr. Dynevor's, I mean. The inquest on his wife's been postponed, pending the result of your injuries. I guess you must be considered a pretty important witness."

"Mr. Dynevor buried?" Morney pondered. "Let me see, what was it he died of?"

"Cerebral apoplexy."

"No mistake about that? Why? Oh, I don't know; somehow I got the idea that Doctor Dicksee wasn't particularly—and he seemed so blamed rattled. But how does he stand in this town—if you can chuck professional etiquette."

"I think his practice must be worth something like twenty thousand a year," said Potts laconically.

Morney grinned. "That doesn't tell me anything; I knew one who made fifty and yet I wouldn't trust him with a sick cat."

Potts' cynical eye twinkled suddenly. "Oh, it was apoplexy, all right; no mistake about that. I happened to see the remains at the undertaker's. By the way, I guess you needn't worry about it; even if you only had it two days you seem to have got in

right in your job at Rutherfords. There's been an inquiry from the office about you, every day; you're in the Rutherford private ward right now."

Morney expressed his surprise at this announcement. "It's mighty good of Mr. Rutherford to show this interest in me," he said. "And now may I have my duds? I want to see if that footpad left me as much as a clean handkerchief. I note with pain the absence of my wrist watch; did they get that, too?"

"No, we removed it. I guess your dog scared the fellow off before he'd a chance to take it."

"I'm glad of that; not that it was worth a whole lot, but I had it with me in France."

Potts eyed him with new interest. "So that's where you got that bullet scar in the foot? You were through the show?"

"A bit of it. We had to wait over there nearly a year, but it was worth waiting for."

"Army or navy?"

"Both; what Kipling calls 'a sort of a bloomin' harumfradite.' I did time with the Fifth Marines."

"You don't say! Why, my kid brother was with them—the Sixty-third."

"That wasn't my company, but there was a Corporal Potts in the Sixty-third—'Runty' Potts."

"The same," nodded the house physician. "He'd been with them in Santo Domingo and Vera Cruz——"

"Yes, a regular hard-boiled gyrene." Morney smiled reminiscently, his expression that of a fond parent. "Talk about a hard-boiled crowd! What's your brother doing now? I lost touch with him when I stopped a bullet in the left leg and was invalided out."

"Oh, Jimmie turned respectable and went to work. Then he died."

"What!"

Potts nodded and spoke with affected carelessness. "Yes, it's funny that, after going through so much, he should happen to die at home when it was all over. But it's often the way. Look here," he went on, "I remember your name now; aren't you related to Morney's, the New York chemical house?"

"Yes, the big noise there is my old man, and when he's up and prancing you can hear him over in Staten Island."

"I remember my brother writing something about you." Potts gave him a quick, sidelong glance. "It was a Lieutenant Mor-

ney who saved his life on Hill One Forty-two." He held out his hand.

Morney colored and looked as if caught in a crime and changed the subject adroitly.

"If it's a fair question, what are you doing here?" asked the house physician bluntly, at length. "I mean why choose Pinelake and Rutherford's to New York and Morney's?"

"Why aren't you in Roosevelt or Bellevue?"

"Because, for one thing, my father doesn't own them. For another—well, perhaps I haven't made the best of my opportunities—or myself, if you like."

"Maybe I haven't, either," grinned Morney. "I was in the business before going to the shave-tail school. But my father and I had a difference of opinion and—then I saw Rutherford's want ad and caught the next train here. They buy a slew of stuff from Morney's, and so in a way I'd a pull; but I told Mr. Rutherford that the governor had given me the distinguished-service boot and that he mustn't get the idea he'd be doing him a favor by taking me on. So I got the job on my merits—or thought I did. But this putting me here in the family vault—I'd like to think it was for my own sweet sake, but I've some sense of humor. I don't want to trade on my father's influence; and if it hadn't been that I carried the name, and my only references were from Morney's, I wouldn't have admitted the relationship."

"It's only natural, I suppose, that Mr. Rutherford shouldn't regard you quite as an ordinary employee, even if you are on the outs with your father. But don't forget that he's a buyer, not seller; as a general rule a big customer expects to receive favors, not give them, and I've never heard that Mr. Rutherford was an exception. So the fact that the biggest wholesale chemical house in the country is owned by your father may have nothing to do with it."

"Then why this preferential treatment?"

Potts got up and yawned. "Oh, Mr. Rutherford takes a great interest in his employees. And didn't you do something for his daughter the night of the accident? I guess he wants to show a proper appreciation of it."

When the house physician had gone an orderly appeared with Morney's clothes and the back files of one of the local papers for which he had asked. A brief search of his pockets revealed the fact that the bottle

containing the dregs of the tumbler was missing; likewise everything else as Potts had said. There was nothing but the folded sheet of paper containing his surreptitious shorthand notes of Tomlinson's statements and, replacing it in the inside pocket of his coat, he pondered the situation.

Obviously the most needy of footpads wouldn't make a point of stealing a supposedly empty and worthless bottle; on the other hand, if he worked in a hurry—and Hamlet had evidently supplied the hurry—he would seize blindly all he came upon and make a selection at leisure. This argument was supported by the fact that other comparatively worthless articles had been taken, even to his handkerchief. Yet, to return to the first theory, if his assailant's object was the bottle, might he not be cunning enough to give the affair the appearance of an ordinary highway robbery and thus divert suspicion?

"That would mean, of course," thought Morney, "that it wasn't suicide but murder and that the stuff in that glass was what I thought it. It would also mean that I'm up against a pretty smooth bird who isn't carrying many scruples. It would mean that he must have seen me taste that stuff and put it in the bottle; it wouldn't necessarily have to be Tomlinson or any one in the house; those windows were open, the blinds partly up, and the veranda mighty handy. Did they only mean to get the bottle or make a job of me as well? They nearly got me at that."

He arose and took a turn about the room. "So much for the six-reel shocker. On the other hand, it may have been an ordinary holdup; and there's Potts' statement that it was cerebral apoplexy. He saw the remains and I guess he's no fool."

He was engrossed with this argument when his day nurse entered with the information that there was a detective from police headquarters who wished to see him.

Morney, accustomed to the Mulberry Street type, was mildly surprised at the visitor's appearance; he was obese and unbuttoned, wore several chins and a gray slouch hat, and would have passed for an advance man of a one-night circus or a strolling corn doctor—anything but a member of his real profession.

"Howdy," he greeted, pulling up a chair to the window and opening his vest. "My name's Smith, a member of the numerous

tribe of Smith. Worse than that, it's John Smith. But I'm the *original* John Smith, the first and only original one. Now, I've come to see about this holdup of yours; there seems to be some strong-arm men starting to work this burg, and I'm real anxious to meet up with 'em."

"Then mine isn't an isolated incident?"

"How? Oh, you mean you ain't by your lonely? No, that's right; there's been some others. There's a pretty tough bunch in West Pinelake—you know the nigger and dago settlement acrost the tracks—but we can't say if it's any of 'em. They act mighty slick, layin' in wait along a dark bit of road or in a doorway, so that nobody's had a chance to lamp 'em. We're hoping it might have been different in your case, that you saw who gave you that wallop."

Morney shook his head. "I didn't see a soul and never knew what hit me."

"Same old story," sighed Smith, producing a well-thumbed notebook. "Now, if you'll give me a list of what you lost we'll keep an eye on the hockshops."

"The most they got was two five-dollar bills and some bird seed; the rest of the stuff was hardly worth pawning." And Morney gave a brief description of it.

"That all?"

"All you need bother about, I guess. But there was a large-size bromo-seltzer bottle that I used for holding worms—bait, you know."

Smith smiled tolerantly and spoke as a piscatorial veteran to an evident tyro. "Try an old tin tobacco box, son, with some holes punched into it; you'll find that good for sandworms. What was you after?"

Morney laughed. "Oh, anything. If it wasn't for the size I couldn't tell a sardine from a whale. And I hadn't sandworms, merely the common garden variety. Saturday was a half day, and I'd nothing better to do. I heard there was some fine trout in Pine Lake——"

"And was you using earthworms on 'em?"

"Sure, why not?" asked Morney in surprise. "And, by the way, hasn't anybody got a right to fish there? I was certainly told so."

"Where was you fishing—east or west of the Hammersley Turnpike? In the big or little lake?"

"I didn't know there were two. I went west of the bridge; the trees and grass looked nicer."

"My whiskers!" The original John Smith lay back and laughed long and joyously until he shook like a mountain of jelly. "Excuse me, son, but the idea of you going after them sacred trout the way you done! Why, that's the Hammersley property! They own that lake west of the turnpike. Though it's all called Pine Lake the turnpike makes two lakes of 'em, dams 'em, see? Yes, anybody can fish in the lower and bigger end, for it's city property; but it's hardly worth fishing. The little one is mighty different; it's stocked specially, and old man Hammersley would have a hemorrhage, if he saw an outsider with a rod there. Say, didn't nothing happen to you?"

"Well, yes; first there was a dog fight." And Morney related briefly the encounter with Buster and his master.

"My whiskers!" Smith slapped a mammoth knee. "Why, that was Casper Hammersley! His dog gets licked, and then you chuck him in his own sacred fishpond. Excuse me, but this is really funnier than my mother-in-law's funeral. And you'd have to know the Hammersleys to get the full beauty of it. Now, look here, son; the only reason you ain't been prosecuted for trespass and the Lord knows what is that young Hammersley's evidently kept the thing under his hat to save his face."

"It was an honest mistake on my part," said Morney. "I never noticed that the turnpike divided the lake, like you say, and I thought anybody could fish there. And now I want to say a word about this dog; I understand he hasn't been seen since that night, and I'm anxious about him. I've been told that, because he's a stray and hasn't a license, the city's entitled to shoot him full of buttonholes on sight." And he related his interview with the official dog catcher.

"Say," exclaimed Smith, "was that you? I heard Pete Skelly belchin' about it; for the short time you've been here you seem to have riled some folks pretty considerable. Yes, I know the dog by sight; caught a glimpse of him that night, and he ain't the sort you'd be likely to forget in a hurry. Sort of cross between mastiff and bull terrier with a little kangaroo and Nubian goat on the side? Well, looks ain't everything in this world, as my mother-in-law often reminds me, and mebbe he saved your life just as you saved his."

"Will you keep an eye out for him?" asked Morney earnestly. "Will you let it

be known that I'm his owner, until his rightful one puts in a claim, and that I'm good for his license and any fines that may be coming to him? Yes, and that if Mr. Skelly or any one else murders him, officially or otherwise, they'll settle it with me."

"I'll do that," said Smith. "Don't you worry, son; Skelly's been gunnin' for him, so I'll bet he's laying low and I guess you'll find him waiting for you on the doormat."

When at length the original John Smith had gone Morney turned to the half dozen copies of the *Pinelake Guardian* where he soon found confirmation of the statement that his assault and robbery was not an isolated incident; there had been several almost similar happenings, and the paper had a caustic paragraph on the matter. Next he looked up the account of Mr. and Mrs. Dynevor's death and what he learned concerning them may be summarized as follows: The late James Dynevor was related by marriage to Samuel Rutherford, his first wife having been the latter's sister. Samuel Rutherford was the proprietor and manufacturer of "Rutherford's Pepsin," and a dozen kindred patent medicines, and the factory was the biggest thing, in more ways than one, in the town. James Dynevor had formerly been a partner in the concern, but had retired from business shortly before his second marriage. He was some twenty years his wife's senior, and they had been married only six months or so.

There was not the remotest suggestion that James Dynevor had died from anything but cerebral apoplexy, and Tomlinson's story, given to the press, differed in nowise from his first account. Doctor Dicksee was spoken of as "our leading physician who had had deceased under his care for some time," and Miss Rutherford was not mentioned until it came to the account of Mrs. Dynevor's death. Regarding the latter it appeared that Mrs. Dynevor was an experienced motorist who often drove her own car. The Rutherford's new two-seater had only arrived that day from the makers and, anxious to try it, she had taken the wheel on the homeward trip.

Morney threw aside the papers, lay back in his chair, and considered the problem anew. Should he say anything about that stuff in the glass or should he not? It would mean that Mr. Dynevor's remains must be exhumed and that was something not undertaken lightly at the request of any-

body. He was an outsider, not even an acquaintance of the Dynevors; he had neither standing nor proof. It would be no longer in his power to say, "I've analyzed this stuff and it's deadly poison." And *was* it?

Was he prepared to take oath as to the nature of the residue in that glass? No, he wasn't; it wasn't a poison that could be identified offhand. Arrayed against mere suspicion and a certain amount of belief was the professional opinion of both Petts and Dicksee who stated that death was due to cerebral apoplexy. And there was the incontrovertible fact that his assault and robbery wasn't an isolated occurrence. What right had he, on such evidence, to formulate a charge of suicide or murder, involve the dead and living in a lot of notoriety? What was the right, the sensible, the proper thing to do?

"I'll say nothing about it," he now declared inwardly. "I guess it was a mistake to remove that stuff, but I needn't make it worse. According to my father, I always act first and think afterward—if I think at all—and I'm supposed to be too fond of minding other folks' business. Well, here's where I mind my own and don't butt in."

He arose and proceeded to dress, and this operation was hardly over when he saw from the window a gorgeous limousine, driven by a fat colored chauffeur, enter the hospital grounds. The solitary occupant of the tonneau was Samuel Rutherford.

CHAPTER V.

Samuel Rutherford was a self-made individual and looked it; a man with little or no capital doesn't reach the A1 stage in Broadstreet's without the struggle leaving an indelible stamp on face and even figure. He had achieved his commanding position in the patent-medicine world at the expense, among other things, of his digestion and hair; for, strange to say, not even the renowned "Rutherford's Tonic" could replace the missing thatch on its discoverer's roof, or the "Pepsin" help him to digest a meat dinner.

Thus, to cover his nakedness, he had recourse to an elegant wig whose efficacy was rather impaired by the fact that it was generally askew; for more often than not its owner forgot its native falsity, and his habit being, when absorbed or interested, to

scratch and rub his head, the result was that a bald area kept bobbing up and disappearing in a different sector of the Rutherford cranial map. This phenomenon was apt to have a rather startling effect on those ignorant of the cause and had been known to alarm children and timid old ladies.

For the rest, Samuel Rutherford was a little dried-up wisp of a man who looked almost old enough to be his own father. This appearance of extreme age—his wizened face was lined like a large scale road map—was ridiculed by his extraordinary bright and penetrating eyes, and by his ceaseless and dynamic energy of movement. Like Doctor Dicksee, he was seldom at rest a moment, and one wouldn't have been surprised to learn that he even walked in his sleep.

Yet his activity was different from Dicksee's; the latter conveyed the impression of a fussy old woman who could take her ease very comfortably when not in the public eye, but Rutherford suggested superabundant vitality that must always have some outlet, a machine that must run at high pressure or not at all. He spoke in jerky staccato sentences, often omitting pronouns and verbs, so that people said he talked like a telegram. Evidently he had no time to acquire certain refinements of dress or deportment and, though he spent the requisite amount of money on his wardrobe, the result was never altogether happy. For instance, he would insist on wearing a straw hat with a frock coat and had even been known to attempt brown shoes with evening dress.

He threw open the door of the private ward, waved a dismissal to the nurse, and scuttled into the room, followed by the house physician. He was garbed soberly, for him, his only dissipation being jazz socks and a ready-made bow tie that exposed his collar button.

"Up and dressed, eh?" he exclaimed in surprise. "How's this, Potts?" wheeling and fixing the other with his birdlike eyes. "In reply to inquiry this morning you——"

"It was my opinion that Mr. Morney wouldn't be up for a day or two, but he insisted——"

"Yes, I'm all right," broke in Morney, with a laugh. "I'll start work Monday—if the position is still open."

"Of course; why not? Isn't my habit to discharge a man for another's fault. Hum—ah—yes." This was a sort of absent-minded exclamation accompanied by a rub-

bing of the head that sent the wig slightly to starboard. "Been receiving any visitors?"

"Yes, there was a detective here by the name of Smith."

"What did he want? Oh, about your holdup? Hum—eh—yes. Smith's very good at making inquiries; writes things down in a book and they stay there. Publish it some day and call it 'Cases I Haven't Solved.' Should be a big volume. Highway robberies, disgrace to town and your experience caps the business."

"I must thank you, Mr. Rutherford, for all your kindness; it was very good of you to——"

"Not at all. Had to come here, anyway, to-day—on the board—thought I'd drop in and see how you were doing. Take an interest in every employee; can't expect proper service if you don't. Hum—ah—yes. Very good to my daughter the other night; understand she might have lain there for all hours. Good-by. Expect you at the factory Monday. And how about dining with us Sunday? Find it dull, not knowing folks. That's settled, then. Dine at two sharp. Don't forget. 'By." And he scuttled out before Morney had time to accept or decline the invitation or express a word of thanks.

"Well, what do you think of Samuel?" queried Potts, entering shortly afterward. "What you might call a live wire, eh?"

Morney laughed. "Is he ever still a moment, physically or verbally? He made me sort of itch."

"All fleas do. He has the dynamic energy of that insect; I suppose it's a necessary adjunct of the money-making instinct. There's a man who started with hardly a shirt to his back. He was born and raised here, and the inception of his present business was a salve made by his mother, a simple and old-fashioned remedy that caught on locally. Rutherford saw its possibilities and peddled it from door to door through every State in the Union, eating and sleeping anyhow, and I guess working eighteen hours out of the twenty-four.

"Being on the jump became such a habit that now he can't stop it. With the profits from that campaign, and some capital put in by Mr. Dynevor, he opened a small factory, branched out into cure-alls and—well, the result is Rutherford & Co. Of course, he deserves all the credit in the world, and the town is justly proud of him."

"And so Mr. Dynevor used to be the 'company?' Why did he sell out?"

Potts shrugged. "Oh, you hear a lot of queer stories in a place like this. They say Samuel didn't like Mr. Dynevor's marrying again."

Morney left the hospital shortly afterward and, on reaching his boarding house, was informed by the landlady that a visitor wished to see him. "Poynter's his name, an' a good wan, too, by the nose av him," she added. "What he wants I dunno, for he wouldn't say except that he was a lawyer." And her venerable but acute blue eye rested on Morney.

Visions of a threat for trespass on the Hammersley property, or some such pleasantness, passed before his mind's eye, for he was unable to conceive in what other manner he might have dealings with a local member of the legal profession.

"If yez don't want to see him, yez don't have to," declared Mrs. Flannery with a martial wave of a large mottled arm. "I told him yez was only after coming from the hospital."

"Thank you," smiled Morney, "but I feel equal to seeing even a lawyer."

He found the visitor in the sitting room, a place remarkable chiefly for its air of aggressive cleanliness, uncompromising upholstery, jazz wall paper, and a large crayon portrait of the defunct John Flannery. Mr. Poynter merited the remark concerning his nasal organ; it was very long, thin, and sharp and, aside from conventional purposes, its owner utilized it as a megaphone. It was guarded by small eyes whose lids almost cut the pupils in half, and one had also to take into account a wide, thin-lipped mouth.

But as if to offset all this evidence of astuteness, Gabriel Poynter's figure was pleasantly fat, the rest of his face chubby and wearing a perennial childlike smile. That smile on the Poynter countenance might have been painted on, for seldom was he seen without it. And it seemed to say, "I know my features are against me, but really, brother, I'm the most innocent and unsophisticated sort of fellow imaginable. Just try me and see."

He introduced himself in the most affable and offhand manner; hoped he found Mr. Morney completely recovered from his recent unpleasant experience; touched upon the weather and other highly interesting subjects, and finally, after thus describing a

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wide verbal circle, came round slowly to the object of his visit. In thus approaching his quarry from the rear, as it were, his method was similar to that of certain predatory animals.

"Very distressing occurrence, Mrs. Dynevor's death," he remarked. "I suppose you heard the inquest was adjourned? Yes. Now that you're able to appear I expect they'll hold it early next week. Of course, there's no necessity for one, and I dare say you aren't really important as a witness; at least, I understand you were too far away, and it was too dark for you to see anything; and Miss Rutherford can supply all the necessary information.

"But the coroner's a stickler for form and ritual, and so he'll insist on having you up. Have you met Quiller? Quite a character; one of the old, red-flannel school. Inquests are always a nuisance, but Quiller positively wallows in them, for he takes himself and his office with deadly seriousness." t

Morney waited patiently for a little light to appear through this cloud of words. His expression was very boyish and ingenuous, quite as innocent as Poynter's own.

"Yes," pursued the lawyer, with a laugh, "old Quiller would even subpoena the broken telegraph pole, if he could. Too bad that a man who really doesn't know anything has to give up a day's business and attend. In fact, we may say, the only thing you do know positively is that poor Mrs. Dynevor died before seven o'clock."

Morney smiled. "In fact, we may say, I don't even know that."

"Eh?" Poynter's eyes almost opened wide enough to disclose the pupils. "But I understood you had an idea of the exact time?"

"So I have. Mrs. Dynevor died after seven, not before. To be exact, five minutes and about ten seconds past the hour."

The lawyer smiled indulgently. "A hazarded guess, of course. No? Why, my dear young man, according to what I've heard you were so far away that you couldn't even see there were two people in the car. That's right, eh? Very well, then; why should you happen to look at your watch and, even if you did, how could you possibly see it in the dark? You were *midway* between the arc lamps; so, I believe, you told Doctor Dicksee. We've a very good power station, I admit, but those lamps are hardly good enough to carry two hundred yards. And there was no moon at that hour,

you'll remember." He leaned back and eyed Morney with an air of friendly complacency.

Morney returned the smile; then he pushed back his left sleeve and displayed the luminous dial of his wrist watch. "You see it's meant for the dark. Also, I happened to be timing the car." And he related the mishap to Hamlet.

Poynter still continued to smile, but his eyes were veiled and he thumbed his thin lips. "Even granting all that," he said carelessly, "your watch was probably fast."

"No, it never varies a minute."

In an absent-minded manner the lawyer drew from his pocket a roll of yellowbacks and riffled them carelessly. "But supposing it was fast and that Mrs. Dynevor died before seven?" And in the same absent-minded manner he peeled two fifty-dollar notes from the roll and laid them on the table. Morney didn't pretend not to understand, neither did he swoon or threaten to throw Mr. Poynter out of the window; he simply smiled and looked curiously from the money to its owner. "What does it matter when Mrs. Dynevor died?" he asked casually.

The lawyer gave him a sharp stab from the hooded eyes as if suspecting a gibe; reassured, his manner became, if possible, more confidential and friendly.

"I'll be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Morney, for I saw from the first that you're one of these reasonable and level-headed fellows that it's a pleasure to deal with. No hypocrisy about *you*. Now, it's simply a question of inheritance, as you may have guessed; if Mr. Dynevor survived his wife even by a second his estate goes to his next of kin, my client; if not, then Mrs. Dynevor had power to dispose of it. You see?"

"Now you must understand that I'm here entirely on my own responsibility; my client knows nothing about it. There was never any question but that Mrs. Dynevor had predeceased her husband—Miss Rutherford said the accident occurred before seven o'clock—until I happened to learn to-day from Doctor Dicksee of your statement to the contrary. By the way, did you mention it to any one else?"

Morney shook his head. "I've had no occasion."

"Good! I see you're also a young man who can keep his own counsel, an invaluable asset for one who means to get on in the

world. To resume, learning of your statement to Doctor Dicksee and hearing you'd left the hospital, I thought it wouldn't do any harm to come round and have a little friendly talk, without consulting any one. What a client doesn't know won't hurt him. I believe in trying to settle things with the least trouble possible.

"Said I to myself: 'Whether there's any truth in what this young man said to Doctor Dicksee remains to be seen. But here's a young fellow who has come to this town to earn a living and possibly identify himself with it permanently; I'm sure, if he's at all ambitious and level-headed, he'll see the matter in the right light, indeed the only rational light. Of course, it's nothing to him who gets the Dynevor money, but why should he prefer some outsider to get it?'

"What can an outsider do for him? How can he promote his interests? Would an outsider even have any influence with his employer, Mr. Rutherford? None whatever; the outsider will simply take the money, money that he really isn't entitled to, and Mr. Morney won't get as much as thank you. So why should he give this outsider the benefit of the doubt? For there must certainly be a doubt whether that watch was correct or the time noted accurately. Under such circumstances any man or any watch could easily make a mistake of, say, ten minutes.'"

Having delivered this somewhat forensic address through his nose, Mr. Poynter struck a Websterian attitude and looked closely at Morney. Receiving no comment, he continued: "Now such cases, that of husband and wife dying almost synchronously, are by no means uncommon and have given rise to much tedious and costly litigation. That litigation benefited nobody but members of my profession. Why, then, should I not encourage it, you ask? Well, Mr. Morney, there are two types of lawyers—those who try to make business for themselves at the expense of their clients, and those who are satisfied by serving the best interests of their clients. The satisfaction lies here," thumping his bosom, "and is beyond price. I belong to that school, call it old-fashioned if you like. People used to say, 'Oh, Gabe Poynter, he'll never get on in the law; he has too old-fashioned ideas about honesty and loyalty, and all that.'

"Well, to continue, I've taken it on myself to save my client the possibility of such

litigation. Now, circumstances have conspired to place you in a somewhat important position; I say 'somewhat' advisedly, for I believe you know as well as I that it has its distinct limitations. As I say, I would much prefer to avoid litigation but, of course, my client is prepared to fight the case to the last ditch to establish the fact that Mrs. Dynevor predeceased her husband.

"The estate isn't impressive, but that isn't the point; my client will fight for his rights on principle. I say rights, for there's Miss Rutherford's evidence that the accident happened before seven. To sum up, Mr. Morney, it is worth, perhaps, a couple of hundred to us to settle the matter out of court; at least, that's what I'm willing to pay, on my own responsibility, to avoid any possible litigation." And he placed two more fifties beside the couple on the table.

Morney yawned and glanced at his watch. "I dare say this is all very instructive in a way, Mr. Poynter, but I'm not interested. You see, I don't happen to be for sale."

Mr. Poynter looked pained. "Certainly not; why put it that way? In my client's interests I take it on myself to spend so much to save a certain amount of possible expense and you're clearly entitled—look here, I'll add another fifty on my own responsibility——"

"I tell you I'm not in the market. Have you tried the Dynevors' butler or housekeeper? Though I've no right to think they're in the market, either. Perhaps you could convince them that the hall clock was slow and that Mr. Dynevor didn't die until ten minutes past seven. But then there's the telephone message and their statement to Doctor Dicksee and myself. It really seems impossible in this case to sidestep the truth."

Poynter reddened slightly, but his smile was still working. "All right, Mr. Morney," he said, pocketing the money, "I see how it is. But I advise you not to overplay your hand. I'll let the offer stand, and——"

"You think I'm holding out for a bigger price, eh? You're really funny, Mr. Poynter, but there's such a thing as carrying a joke too far. I've respect for your years, but don't come here again with your old-fashioned ideas and honesty; understand once and for all that I'm not for sale. Why in thunder do you think I'm going to get up and swear to a lie? I don't care a rap who gets the Dynevor money."

"Now I wouldn't say that, Mr. Morney; I've told you that acceptance will mean more than the financial honorarium proposed. My client has some influence and position——"

"Oh, to the devil with you!" exclaimed Morney. "What is it to me who or what your client is? There's the door, Mr. Poynter."

"Oh, very well," replied the lawyer, backing toward the door, but still smiling and affable. "Hope you didn't misunderstand my little proposal, made entirely on my own responsibility. No offense meant and none taken, I'm sure. Good day to you, Mr. Morney; so pleased to have made your acquaintance. Beautiful weather we're having."

CHAPTER VI.

Morney's wasn't a suspicious nature, but neither was he by any means a fool and, as he pondered the interview with the advocate of old-fashioned honesty, it seemed impossible to evade certain conclusions. He had not inquired as to the identity of Mr. Poynter's client, so little had he been interested in the whole matter, but it seemed not unreasonable to infer that his name might be Samuel Rutherford. Rutherford was the late James Dynevor's brother-in-law and might conceivably be next of kin; if the newspapers had mentioned any one else he, Morney, had failed to see it.

Why had his employer visited the hospital and invited him to dinner? Was that what Doctor Potts had meant by saying that the fact of his being the son of George T. Morney, the multimillionaire, might have nothing to do with it? The house physician, more by manner than words, had somehow conveyed the impression that he knew or suspected something that was taking place behind the scenes. Even the original John Smith had managed to convey the same idea. Again there was Poynter's remark that an outsider would have no power to further his interests even with Mr. Rutherford, and that acceptance would mean more than the "honorarium" involved. Inversely, if he refused would that power and influence be used against him? Without saying so, Poynter had seemed to convey that threat. Nor could one escape the conviction that, for all his talk about acting on his own responsibility, the lawyer had come with the full knowledge and approval of his client.

"Devil take it," thought Morney, "my

boss must have a pretty queer opinion of me—and here I am forming the same of him. I've no right to think it's Rutherford, no right in the world. It's nonsense."

He dismissed the suspicion and matter from his mind as the sound of a seismic disturbance brought him out hurriedly to the veranda where he found Mrs. Flannery, broom in hand, emulating Horatius at the bridge. She stood on the top step and made hostile motions at a liver-colored, wall-eyed dog that dodged nimbly and tried to win past her formidable bulk to the door.

"Away hence wid yez!" she cried. "Gawd knows what I've done to have the likes av you—Mr. Morney, will yez be so kind as to give the toe av your boot to him. He's that slippery, like an ould eel. Musha, bad scrian to ye!"

Hamlet, catching sight of Morney, had charged under the broom barrage and fallen upon him like a long-lost brother.

"Weil, I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Flannery, pausing transfixed. "Yez don't mean to say yez own it?"

"No, it seems to own me, Mrs. Flannery. This is Hamlet of whom a greater man than I has written."

"Is that so? I never heard that name used but for a sort av a wee village. Mebbe yez mean omlet; he looks like wan. And where, may I ask, do yez intend keepin' him, Mr. Morney?" She folded her mottled arms and looking the picture of preparedness.

Morney raised guileless eyes. "Why, in my room; but I suppose the back yard might be better to start with. I can make a nice kennel from some of that old timber out there. I learned that sort of thing from one of these female magazines that teaches you how to make a bookcase out of an old sardine tin. You need a good watchdog, Mrs. Flannery, for what's to stop one of these footpads from kidnaping you some night and holding you to ransom?"

"The same thing that's stopped it these fifty years—me face," replied the widow Flannery grimly. "I ain't to be di-varted, Mr. Morney. Divvle a fut does that crathur put in this house, back yard or no back yard. Let him try it and it's more than housebroke he'll be. You know, Mr. Morney, the rules av this house."

"I know, Mrs. Flannery, but there are exceptions to every rule, and I feel confident you'll make one in this case. Let me tell you

something about this poor friendless orphan." And in moving accents he proceeded to recount the help rendered to Miss Rutherford and himself.

"But for this noble animal," he continued, "neither of us might have been found till morning. Consider, too, the intelligence and devotion he has shown in this particular instance; how did he know I'd left the hospital and that I lived here? Or, that my landlady, for all her hard tongue, has the softest heart——"

"Now, Mr. Morney, I tell yez I ain't to be di-varted. 'Tis little I wouldn't do to oblige you, but this is a rule I can't be after breaking for any one. Dogs is my particular perversion ever since I——"

"Now, Mrs. Flannery, this magnificent animal is an Irish terrier and his manners are perfect. Yes, an Irish terrier," he repeated unblushingly. "Now, Mrs. Flannery, could you refuse hospitality to a poor, friendless orphan from the Old Country? I know better; it will be 'Ceade mile failte' and nothing else."

"And you speaking the Gaelic! Get along wid yez, Mr. Morney; upon me word, yez could di-vart a corp at its own wake. Irish terrier, is it? Why, it ain't a dog at all!"

"Then your rule doesn't apply to him. Suppose you admit him under the head of kitchen utensils? I was informed by an admirer that he had a chest like a wash-boiler and a head like an old soup tureen. Anyway, as you deal by him so you deal by me. We're going to stick together, if it lands us in the county jail."

"Well, then have it your own way, Mr. Morney; you've di-varted me from my sworn purpose as usual, though how it is I dunno, and me after knowing yez but wan or two days! Run along and fix up the kennel and no more of your blarney. But to tell yez the truth, I'd 'a' mind from the first to give that poor divvle a home for, Gawd forgive me, there's something about the look av him that does be putting me in mind av poor Jaw'n."

Morney spent the rest of the afternoon in the back yard constructing a serviceable kennel, repairing the picket fence, and doing several other odd jobs that had been awaiting the attention of the local carpenter. To see him at work, bare of neck and arm, one would never have thought him only out of hospital after an assault that would have laid many a man on his back for weeks. And,

as he wielded hammer and saw, one glimpsed something of the tough and indomitable fighting material of which he was composed.

He finished this mild exercise by tubbing Hamlet and giving him such a scientific scouring with carbolic soap, beginning at the ears—those cyclone cellars of the flea family—that he emerged shorn of his parasitic army and several shades lighter in color. Personally Hamlet had no use for water, except as a beverage, but becoming fired with the novel idea of cleanliness and the laudable desire to clean house inside as well as out, or carried away by a catholic appetite that balked at nothing, he wound up the proceedings by very nearly swallowing the remains of the soap. And it was while Morney was dispossessing him of his fodder that a shadow fell upon the grass, and he glanced up to see Jill Rutherford, the personification of gorgeous daintiness, on the other side of the picket fence.

Morney advanced, soap in hand, as if washing mongrels in semipublic back yards was his peculiar profession. "This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Rutherford."

She ignored his greeting, all her attention being concentrated on the bedraggled figure of Hamlet who was rolling hilariously in the dirtiest spot he could find. "That—that dog!" she exclaimed, turning amazed and outraged eyes on Morney. "It's the same one; I know it is, because there couldn't possibly be another like him. He wasn't killed at all that day!"

"So it would seem. To borrow from Mark Twain, the report of his death must have been greatly exaggerated."

"You knew I hadn't killed him!"

"I repudiate the accusation. But won't you come in?"

She stared at him. "Come in? Where?"

"Oh, the entrance is round on Bond Street."

"Is it?" Her color had deepened, possibly borrowed from the crimson sunshade that she had begun to twirl viciously. "And—and so I've come to call on you?"

"So I see. It's awfully good of you, Miss Rutherford. If you'll just wait in the front parlor till I find my collar and coat. How did you know where I lived?"

"I didn't! You are the most outrageously impertinent and conceited and—and ignorant—I just happened to recognize that dog as I was passing here. Oh, what's the use of trying to explain to such a person as

you!" She stalked off, nose aloft, as if assailed by a stupendously offensive odor.

Morney watched the crimson sunshade vanish round the corner, then fetched Hamlet a joyous thump in the ribs. "And now, old son, we'll hike down to the town clerk and buy your official excuse for living; furthermore, a collar and chain and some provender. And don't you go teasing that little girl any more; yes, I know it's a great temptation, because she flares up like magnesium, but it isn't right, Hamlet. She's only a kid and a hoary old sinner like you ought to go in for dignity and the paternal manner."

Morney's idea of spending the Sunday afternoon would have been to take a long walk through the pine woods but, of course, it was impossible to refuse Mr. Rutherford's invitation. Aside from all else, he had the legitimate desire to stand well with his employer, to demonstrate to his father that he was quite capable of securing and holding a situation by his own efforts; at the same time modesty assured him that even here he was indebted indirectly to the name and position of that father. In his opinion the service he had rendered Miss Rutherford was of the slightest, and he couldn't bring himself to believe that it was at all the sole reason for Samuel Rutherford's interest and hospitality. The fact that he was the only son of the millionaire chemical king must make a decided difference.

His employer had omitted to give him his private address; perhaps he had forgotten or considered it unnecessary, everybody in Pinelake being supposed to know where Samuel Rutherford lived. Inquiry had shown Morney that, as he anticipated, the house was in North Pinelake, and thus, as he preferred to walk whenever possible, he now traversed the same route as that covered on the memorable Saturday.

Passing the neighborhood of his assault, he saw how easy of accomplishment such a deed would be, the trees and undergrowth making it an ideal spot for an ambush. It was near the place where he had had the interview with the official dog catcher and, as if to think of that individual was to conjure him up in the flesh, Mr. Skelly now appeared. In deference, perhaps, to the day he had discarded the faded green sweater and beard stubble, the Saturday night shave revealing an unsightly white cicatrix on his blue jowl. He carried a pine branch which he was whittling indolently with a clasp knife.

"Hello, sport!" he greeted. "Didn't know you first off. All dressed up like a horse, eh? Yaller gloves *and* a cane."

Morney's eyes and nose assured him that Mr. Skelly had been successfully evading the prohibition law, perhaps enough to effect his temper it not his legs. He passed on in silence, but the official dog catcher followed.

"Yaller gloves *and* a cane," he repeated as if suffering from a personal grievance. "All dressed up like a horse. Yaller gloves'n a cane *and* silk socks." A deeper note of injury appeared in his voice at this new discovery; and as he fell into step behind Morney, fresh items of the other's wardrobe called forth further comment.

Now Morney had some reason to feel touchy about his sartorial efforts; although the son of a millionaire, it was a solemn truth that he had come down to a solitary suit of "Sunday best," and this he had brought over with him from London, treasuring it reverently and using it only on the most sacred occasions. Now, the Bond Street where the suit had been bought and the Bond Street where he resided are as far apart sartorially as geographically; the Flannery neighborhood only affected two kinds of gloves, those you hit people with and those you wear when officiating as pallbearer. Morney's regalia had aroused intense interest in the neighborhood and provoked a flood of rapture and reminiscence from his landlady, who paid the high compliment of likening his appearance to that of "poor Jawn on the day we was churchied."

Thus he was hardly in the humor for the present novel situation, to be attended by a sort of bell ringer who announced in a loud, pained voice the principal articles of apparel one wore. And obviously he could not be thus paged into fashionable and populous North Pinelake and up to the door of the Rutherford mansion, though that seemed to be Mr. Skelly's agreeable intention. Happily they were in an unfrequented neighborhood and had met no one thus far.

"Yaller gloves'n a cane'n silk socks'n a silk shirt'n a big choker *and* a blasted, dinky English suit. Y'never could get a rig like that nowhere but in ruddy England. United States clothes ain't good enough for him. Room, me good people, for Lord 'Elpus. Bow your necks and scrape. Room for the big dressed-up stiff——"

"Say, I'm fed up with this pantomime," said Morney, suddenly turning on him. "Do

something with that hole in your face before it's done for you. If you weren't drunk as a——"

"Drunk! Who says I'm drunk? Who in blazes can get drunk these days? Do I look like a guy that keeps a private cellar?" This was a new grievance, and Skelly waved his cudgel and then offered it for microscopic inspection. "Don't you go sayin' I been drinkin'; don't you do it. You're one of these Mr. Fixits that go around puttin' everybody right, ain't you? Been three days in hospital, ain't you? Well, you'll go for three more, if you ain't careful. You done me out of that dog—yes, I heard you got a license for him—and now you want to ruin my rep-reperation. Drunk! Never soberer in m'life. I'll show you. Will you fight me, you big stiff?"

"No, not to-day, thanks."

"No, nor any other day. And you was the one that was gonna clean my clock for me! Yah! That for you, Percy Pimpernel!" Overcome by his emotions, Skelly let fly a blow with the cudgel that, as Morney ducked, knocked his straw hat into the road. The next moment they had clinched.

Skelly explained afterward how he had tripped and, in falling, struck his jaw against an unfriendly tree stump, the sort of accident that can happen to the best of us. He'd had something for breakfast that hadn't agreed with him and made him "sort of dizzylike;" and, anyway, he'd only been fooling. Why, say, he could lick a whole carload of big stiffes like that without raising a sweat. He probably believed all this, yet the fact remained that the next thing he knew Morney was saying: "I'm sorry, Skelly, but you ducked into that one. Now, for the love of Mike, be reasonable and beat it home before they start quizzing you about that breath of yours."

"You've took advantage of a sick man," mumbled Skelly; and, nursing his jaw, he zigzagged up the road, looking very sick indeed.

Morney retrieved his hat, which fortunately had escaped serious damage, and then made an alarming discovery; the tight yellow gloves had split across the back. But this wasn't the worst; an unwonted coolness in the nether part of his anatomy advertising the fact that fatal damage had been done in a vital spot.

"My sacred pants!" he gasped. "Torpedoed amidships as I'm a sinner!"

It was true; perhaps the cloth profiteers were to blame or the suit wasn't meant for private fights, perhaps it fitted too well or Skelly had basely given a surreptitious slash with his clasp knife; but, however it had happened, the result was a large rent in a most vulnerable quarter.

"This is a sweet situation," he ruminated. "I haven't time to go home and, anyway, I've no other pants; it would mean wearing old duds. And I couldn't go home this way, unless I borrowed an umbrella. There's nothing for it but a salvage job."

Entering the woods, he selected an arboreal dressing room; and presently a bluejay that inhabited a neighboring tree looked down from its perch and was intrigued by the sight of a young man, sitting cross-legged in linen shorts with his trousers in his lap, who sang blithely:

Brian O'Linn had no breeches to wear,
So he got a sheepskin for to make him a pair;
With the woolly side out and the skinny side in,
"They'll be pleasant and cool," said Brian
O'Linn.

"And I only wish I'd my thread and needle," added Morney, who during his soldiering had become expert in certain housewifely duties. "However, luckily we never travel without safety pins. Now we put them on the inside thusly, reënforced by a handkerchief folded on the bias. It won't show under my coat—I've marked the Plimsoll line—and if I remember not to stoop or repose too much faith in 'em we'll do famously. What sayeth the poet?

There's a hole in my pants,
But my coat is so long,
That if I don't stoop,
They'll come to no harm.

Before leaving he tested the efficacy of the salvage operations, assuring himself by the sense of touch that the Plimsoll line was well hidden when he stood erect. "Remember, no violent movements and easy on sitting down. Aye, aye, sir, easy she is. For'n fours, hard a-starboard and by the right flank!" And with his cane over his shoulder he marched out of the woods and almost into the arms of Jill Rutherford.

TO BE CONTINUED.



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

GEORGE T. DINASE, the Detroit lawyer, was holding forth on what he called "the hit-or-miss ways of present-day life in America." Everybody, he said, was trying to unload his most solemn obligations on somebody else and exerting every ounce of energy to accumulate money.

"Patriotism? Statesmanship? Observance of the highest ideals?" he demanded with mordant sarcasm. "Not on your life! It's devil take the hindmost, and who'll hold the bag while I sidestep responsibility? The nation's on a spree of carelessness.

"A man in my town is typical of what I say. He was in his library one evening counting up his profits and mapping out schemes for a bigger intake the next day. In came an embarrassed young man full of blushes, confusion, and bitten-off words. He was a suitor for the man's favorite daughter.

"Mr. Fleming," the youngster at last became partially articulate, 'will you—that is—er—may I ask you—er—'

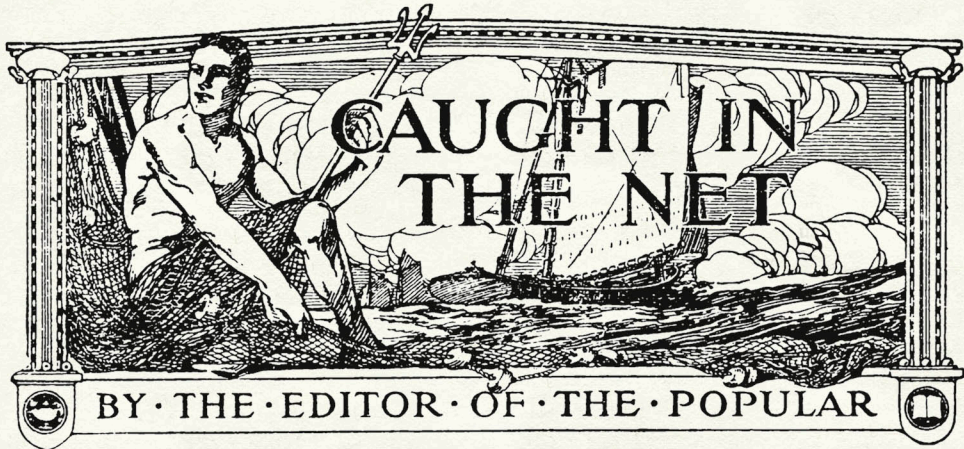
"Sure, my boy!" assured Fleming, reading the boy's mind. 'You may have her, and I hope you'll be happy.'

"What do you mean?" asked the other. 'Have her—for what?'

"Why, my daughter! Isn't that what you wanted to ask me?"

"Why—er—no, sir," the boy blurted out. 'What I want to ask you to-night is—ah—will you indorse my note for a hundred dollars—er—for just thirty days?'

"I should say not!" exploded Fleming. 'Suffering crime! I hardly know you!'



HARD-HEADED POINTS OF VIEW

FOR ages the accepted adjective applicable to the successful business man has been "hard-headed." Whatever his other virtues or defects, he is considered liable to see things minus glamour. Whether he is always more endowed with foresight than other citizens is for one to decide for oneself. Also, of course, even business men do not always see eye to eye, and whether or not that which a majority of them think about any given question is to be taken as the best "hard-headed" opinion on that question is likewise for each to judge for himself. Nonetheless, a report such as recently issued by a prominent brokerage house, embodying answers of over 4,000 representative men of affairs to various questions of a commercial, financial, and political-economical nature has a practical interest all its own.

Regarding whether the League of Nations or the matter of reduced taxation was the more important question, "business" replied fairly emphatically that they considered that the latter was, by a vote of 2,641 to 1,030. Though just what is indicated by this answer, beyond a certain apparent apathy to the League question and a natural greater interest in their own affairs, is hard to say. Touching another semipolitical matter involving the recent railroad rate increase and the present condition of railroad operation under private management, an overwhelming majority of these men of affairs proclaim themselves as infinitely more resigned to the present railroad state of affairs than to the thought of any return to resumption of government control. A majority of two to one find that railroad congestion is being relieved. As to that other burning question of the day, prohibition—or, more particularly, as to whether there shall be absolute prohibition or a liberalization of the law permitting light wines and beer—business is more evenly divided among itself. Two thousand one hundred and forty-eight favor liberalization, 1,723 oppose it. As coming from men whose watchword is "efficiency," there would seem to be cheer in this latter referendum for those on either side of the fence.

Coming to questions of purely commercial or financial significance, the beliefs registered become even more interesting. Opinion is evenly divided as to whether there will be an early improvement or a further contraction in business, and about as many find banking accommodation readily obtainable at fair rates as find credit scarce and high. In reply to the question of how much unemployment exists the answers are more definitely encouraging. Three thousand two hundred and eighty-two, out of nearly 4,000 who answered, report that they find little unemployment.

Human nature being what it is, it is not at all surprising to find a large majority of those questioned voicing the conviction that most people, wage earners included, favor the abolition of the excess-profits tax and a reduction of the income tax. Their criticism of existing taxation conditions, however, is not entirely "unconstructive." Two thousand six hundred and twenty-one give it as their belief that a consumption tax of one per cent or one and one-half per cent on total business or sales of every going concern would be generally favored, as against 973 who hold that such a tax would be unpopular.

On the whole, though there is not space for all of them, the answers to the commercial and financial questions which these men are especially qualified to pass judgment on are optimistic. Incidentally, as a straw to show which way the wind is blowing, a cheering hint of coming abatement of public extravagance is found in the answers of these business men to the question of whether they find the demand for passenger automobiles likely to keep up. Though practically all of them report wages as either remaining stationary or advancing, the preponderant expectation among them is for a reduction in the demand for one's own "car." There is a reassuring sound of returning sanity about this.

FEDERAL REVENUE RECEIPTS

FEDERAL revenue receipts, from income and excess-profits taxes, collected for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1920, were \$3,957,701,374. Formerly this would have represented the exact amount receivable from both these sources for the business or calendar year of 1919, for, until 1919, income and excess-profits taxes for a given calendar year were payable by June 30th of the ensuing year. Beginning with taxation for the calendar year of 1918, however, these taxes were made payable during the ensuing year in four equal payments, payable quarterly, on March 15th, June 15th, September 15th, and December 15th. Consequently, of the above receipts of \$3,957,701,374 for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1920, the amounts paid in on the dates of September 15th and December 15, 1919, represent the last two payments on the calendar year 1918—when highest rates were in effect, and only the two installments paid in on March 15th and June 15, 1920, represent payments on the calendar year of 1919, for which the rates of course were lower. Taking the sum of these latter two payments, however, to be half of the \$3,957,701,374 in question, though this of course is not exact, and estimating that the payments to come on September 15th and December 15th, of this year will be equal to the sum of the March and June payments, we find this figure of \$3,957,701,374 representing the total receipts for the calendar year 1919 approximately, after all, if not exactly.

To arrive at the total of receipts from these taxes for the calendar year of 1918 we have, to begin with, the exact total of payments made on the new quarterly plan on the dates of March 15th and June 15, 1919—\$2,600,783,902. As above, for purposes of a rough estimation taking the payments made on September 15th and December 15, 1919, to be half of the \$3,957,701,374 collected for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1920, or approximately \$2,000,000,000, we arrive at a rough total of receipts representing taxation for the calendar year of 1918 of about \$4,600,000,000. This was our high year of taxation, that for the calendar year of 1917 being \$2,839,027,930. In this latter calendar year of 1917, the latest for which figures have been analyzed, the corporation tax for the country was approximately \$2,158,000,000, and the individual tax \$681,000,000, or roughly, in proportion of seventy-six per cent to twenty-four per cent.

OPPORTUNITIES MULTIPLY

BEFORE the man of ideas opportunity looms larger to-day than at any time in all our history. The human race has come out of the war with greater needs than before, only to find that the means of meeting those needs are, in most instances, less than ever before. Fame and fortune await the man who can show the peoples of the earth how to live at less cost or with less exertion. He does not have to concentrate his thought on either luxuries or the unusual and the outre. Every-day needs clamor for his genius.

He who can cheapen the construction of houses, or invent a substitute for the materials now commonly used in house construction, or speed up the actual building time, can gather in all the money he cares to ask for. From Cincinnati, Ohio, to Dublin, Ireland, there rings forth the cry: "More houses! Cheaper dwellings!" London reëchoes the call. So does practically the whole of France. The scheme for the settlement of Palestine is being threatened by the difficulties encountered in the housing plans. "Room to live in comfortably!" is the prayer of all civilization. That the demand is no mere

cry of "Wolf!" is proved by the estimates of American experts that, in the next fifty years, the sawlog timber of the United States will be used up, and that, unless protective measures are adopted, the yellow-pine timber supply of the South will be exhausted in the next ten or fifteen years. A reasonably cheap substitute for present building materials means millions for the man who finds it.

Another field for the activities of genius lies in the handling of foodstuffs. It has been estimated that the city of New York alone could save one hundred million dollars a year, if she had better means for receiving and distributing the food supplies that come to her. Central terminal markets have been discussed and even planned, but so far without avail. What is wanted is the organizing and executive genius who, having the sure vision, can prove to others that he knows how to handle all that food so as to eliminate the waste for which the people are compelled to pay. So the story goes, along the whole range of human needs. Speed up production, put down the cost of manufacture, facilitate and quicken transportation, create substitutes for old materials—scheme any one of these industrial and commercial miracles, and the world's gold and gratitude are yours.

POSTING THE NAMES OF STREAMS

RIVERS and creeks are often the most noted, as well as the most conspicuous features of a long trail. Next to mountains, streams are the great landmarks of the country. The list of streams of historic interest is as long as the complete list itself.

But who knows the Wabash River when he comes to it as he tours across the country on an automobile trail? Who recognizes the Suwanee River in its own valley?

It is perfectly possible for an automobile tourist to go from coast to coast and, on arriving on the far side, not know when or where he crossed such wonderfully interesting waterways as the Illinois, the Maumee, the Allegheny, the Arkansas, the Mohave, or any other of the scores of famous streams that must be leaped if he follows the National Old Trails, the Lincoln Highway, the Ocean to Ocean, or any of the less-known roadways of the transcontinental group. Actually, on a journey that covered eight thousand miles of automobile highway, across and back, only the Mississippi was absolutely known, and it was necessary to ask where was the Sandusky, the Illinois, and even the Missouri was crossed without knowing it!

Every school history is vivid with the tales of settlements in the Mingo Bottoms, the Sandusky, the Platte. A thousand streams are history's abiding place. Yet in the whole country, hardly a score or so of bridges have signs on them that name the creek or river. The paint that renews the obsolete "ten dollars fine for crossing this bridge faster than a walk" could indicate to ten thousand tourist's minds a stream of vivid importance.

SPELLING AND GENERAL CUSTOM

ATTEMPTS made from time to time by reformers or educational societies, in the United States, to bring about, by rule, a general simplified system of English spelling, have so far failed. The last to abandon the effort was the Modern Language Association of America, which at a recent meeting in Columbus, Ohio, decided to withdraw its sanction from the innovations proposed by the advocates of simplified spelling. Some of the reasons given for this were the failure of the new spelling to make progress, the lack of public interest in the movement and strong objections to it held by members of the association.

As a matter of fact nearly all changes in spelling which have been generally accepted, have been brought about by custom. Many words are now spelled with fewer letters than formerly. Surnames of families and names of places have changed in spelling through custom and remain changed, and it would be difficult, if not impossible, to trace how these changes started and continued until they were generally adopted.

In England such changes began centuries ago. Any one who has seen a copy of Chaucer's poems in the original spelling would be puzzled over its cumbrous elaborateness. Later when women supposed to be witches were put to death by law the spelling

was still cumbrous. One woman in an official legal document of the time was described as "Ane raynke wytche and enchaunteresse."

In the United States the changes have come about more rapidly than in England. It is not very long, counting by years, since the spelling of "Esquimaux" became "Eskimo," "programme" became "program," and the spelling of many other words in frequent use became changed. Many otherwise well-educated people are weak on spelling when they write letters or documents and briefer spelling of some words is a relief to them. We have now, among surnames, "Cholmondeley," abbreviated to "Chumley," "Majoribanks" to "Marchbanks," "Worcester" to "Wooster," and other similar changes of names, the new spelling indicating how the original spelling sounded when correctly pronounced.

How the different changes came it would be useless to try to trace. The words appeared now and then in their new spelling in print. The new spelling was copied, it became popular, and custom brought about its general and recognized use. A large proportion of the recognized new spelling of English words, before these changes took place in the United States, had no relation to their etymology. The abbreviation of the spelling saves time and sometimes a little thought and anxiety in the case of some even well-educated people who fail in spelling. And the changes will go on by degrees, not by hard and fast rules, but by force of custom. Such words as "etiquette" and "phthisis" will be in their turn abbreviated in their spelling to the relief of a great host of people, regardless of appearance or etymology.

CONSCIOUS AND SUBCONSCIOUS MEMORY

TO most people lapses of memory have occurred at times, during which they have forgotten, for the time, persons and places long familiar to them. These lapses, however, are not to be confounded with amnesia or aphasia, by which there is a loss of memory, the result of certain ailments; but occur to people under normal mental and physical conditions. Instances have been known where men and women have completely forgotten the name of a person or place previously remembered and talked of by them at frequent intervals, most of their lives, and who suddenly at the end of several years, recalled the name, which had remained in their subconscious memory all the time.

In dreams forgotten scenes or happenings are recalled on rare occasions, by mature people, which appeared or took place when they were very young. For a minute or so after they awake they have sometimes a conscious recollection of them, but five minutes later they disappear from their conscious memories as completely as if they had never been.

Those who have made a special study of mnemonics hold that if anything is once retained in the memory it remains in the subconscious memory after the conscious recollection of it has left the mind. In the course of years, such an unconscious memory of happenings or of forgotten people may be revived in the conscious memory through some fortuitous combination of circumstances, and can be remembered consciously with little effort afterward. In many cases, however, of remembrances, in dreams, of things forgotten, the conscious memory regarding them remains a blank.

There is a growing interest in the study of mnemonics which it is thought has produced unexpected results sometimes in cases like those mentioned. People with congenitally poor memories can strengthen them by persistently and systematically trying expedients to jog their conscious memories. Those who are in the habit of forgetting names can aid the memory by frequently writing them. It has been shown in the past, as well as in the present days, that the memory can be stretched, just as people by persistence in exercising them can strengthen or improve their other faculties. It is the cultivation, consciously or unconsciously, of the memory that leads to any one becoming well educated or well informed. The exercise of the memory is the first aid to education. One boy or girl may leave school or college and forget most or a good part of what he or she learned. Others, wittingly or unwittingly, cultivate their memories and aid this work by reading and study after their school experiences are over. This

also enables some people to jog their subconscious memories, unconsciously—and frequently with good results.



POPULAR TOPICS

MORE than half the people of continental United States now live in towns or cities of 2,500 or more inhabitants. Of the population of 105,683,108 given in the latest census report, 54,816,209, or 51 per cent, are urban dwellers. In the last decade there has been an increase of 28.6 per cent in town and city population and an increase of only 3.1 per cent in rural population. Considering the purely country districts separately from incorporated places of less than 1,500 inhabitants, there has been a population decrease of 227,555, or six-tenths of one per cent, in the last ten years. There are now 6,449,998 farms in our country—88,496, or 1.4 per cent, more than there were in 1910. In the decade ending in 1910 there was an increase of 624,130 farms, or 10.9 per cent.



A FRENCH scientist has estimated that the average man fifty years old has spent 6,000 days in sleep, 6,500 at work, 800 in walking, 4,000 in amusement, 1,500 in eating, and 500 in bed, sick.



IMMIGRANTS arriving in the United States during the last fiscal year brought \$32,950,000 with them. The average for heads of families was \$119. In 1914 heads of families averaged \$42.



ANOTHER great influx of immigration is predicted. It is estimated that between three and four million Italians, and over three million Poles, are shortly to start for our shores. Many Germans also intend coming here when formal peace is made.



NO one who travels for business or pleasure is especially happy over the recent increase in railroad passenger rates, but we still are better off than our English cousins. The present English rate is 6.5 cents a mile, with an extra charge for baggage. The American rate averages 3.9 cents a mile, with baggage carried free.



THE war department has started reorganization of the National Guard, on a basis of 200 men for each representative in the Senate and House. This allotment is to be increased each year until there are 800 men to each senator and congressman. According to this plan, the enlisted strength of the National Guard, by July, 1924, will be 427,000.



TOTAL internal revenue collections for the fiscal year that ended June 30th last were \$5,498,075,468, as against \$3,850,150,078 for the fiscal year of 1919. Three billion nine hundred and fifty-seven million seven hundred and one thousand three hundred and seventy-four dollars of the 1920 total was paid as income and profits taxes.



PORTO RICANS like American government. All of them who have not, under oath, declared their intention of refusing to become citizens, have been granted the full privileges of citizenship. Only 228 persons refused to take advantage of this opportunity, and most of these later changed their minds and climbed aboard the band wagon. The population of the island is now 1,297,772, an increase of 16.1 per cent in the last ten years.

Through the Snows

By Roy Norton

Author of "David and Goliath," "Old Harmless," Etc.

Old Harmless certainly knew how to be faithful—almost too much so. But it was all the fault of that "no-account, trillin' Injun"

YES, sir, I reckon there never was a finer man borned in this whole world than Mister Heald," declared Old Harmless to the partners, David and Goliath, when feeling that they had neglected him for four weeks they made a visit to his cabin. "And, although I wa'n't exactly hankerin' for company, seein' as how I got that fine phonygraft and all them nice records you boys bought me, I'm right thankful to the Lord Almighty and you for persuadin' of me to let him build a addition on to my shack. And ain't she some palace? Look at her!"

The patriarch swung his head with its massive mane of white hair and framing of white beard, and waved with his pipestem at the "Palace." To him it doubtless seemed that; for it was the most pretentious and commodious log cabin in all that unfrequented wilderness of the Big Divide. It had features that "Uncle Bill" Harmon had never seen before, such as a partitioned bathroom with a commodious porcelain tub; a lean-to kitchen with a real iron range, and an adjoining extension where, when Mr. Heald ran away from civilization and came to rest, fish, or hunt, a Chinese cook was installed.

It had real rugs on its floors, a real fireplace and what Uncle Bill called "real store-boughten funnyture." It had a veranda along two sides with a real floor and real rustic balustrade, and it was so large that two or three hammocks could have been slung in it. Inside, also were more books than Uncle Bill had ever before seen outside a bookshop—whole shelves of them. "Clar' ter goodness," he said. "Don't see how a man can find time ter read all them. Me? I've got along with my old Bible for more'n fifty years, an'—damn it, they ain't nobody called me a fool yet and got away with it! No, siree! And look at them

fancy rifles and guns of hisn. I've seen him cuddle 'em and nuss 'em, as if they was his own flesh and blood. Thinks the world of 'em, I reckon—maybe more'n he does of his books."

But on one point he stood firm, that nobody was permitted to deride either Heald or any of his belongings, because, after but one summer they had spent together, Old Harmless had elevated Heald upon a pedestal and was as proud of him as if he were his own son.

"That there boy," he said, reckless of the fact that Heald, the financier, was nearly sixty years of age, "has just got to have his fling. And I never seen a kid yet that didn't blow in his money on somethin' or another. Talk ter him? I've spent hours tryin' to get him ter save up; but all he ever does is ter grin and say 'Goin' ter, some time, Uncle Bill; but just now let me kind of throw my heels my own way.' When he left he says, 'Uncle Bill, you better move into my side of the cabin and live when I ain't here, just ter look after things and so's you'll be more cumfatable.'"

The old man relighted his pipe and chuckled:

"Says I to him, 'Cumfatable, hell! I'll look after them things of yourn all right, son, but I reckon a cabin that's been home to me for more'n fifty year is good enough for me ter stay in yet. And as far as that there fancy bathtub of yourn is consarned, I've washed my hide in the stream down there whenever I though it was dirty enough ter need it, for more'n fifty year—even in winter when I had ter bust the ice! And if I do say it myself, I reckon it's a better bathtub than yourn, because the water keeps clean all the time. Anyhow, it's been good enough for me and all my birds outdoors here ter wash in."

Old Harmless stopped his kindly drawl

and shook his head, and for the hundredth time voiced an apology.

"I reckon you boys must have thought I was a cantankerous old cuss when I hung fire so long about lettin' Mister Heald come up and build himself what he calls his den here in my gulch, and if it hadn't been for your pesterin' me so long and havin' been so all-fired good ter me, I don't think I'd have done it. You see it's because I didn't like this gulch of mine, that I diskivered gold in and saw a camp grow in and then die away, ter be mucked about by anybody.

"But I ain't sorry now that I give in ter you. Heald's an awful lot of company ter me, and minds what I tell him, too! Never catches no more trout than we kin eat, never shoots as much as a quail or a partridge in my gulch, and, by crackey, he likes my birds most as well as I do myself! And they like him. He's a powerful sight of company for me, too, because you boys is so busy, and I don't blame you for not wantin' ter walk the five mile across the Divide very often. Nope, that boy ain't hurt my gulch none at all."

The partners smiled, knowing that it was Heald that owned the gulch and all its bordering lands, and that, entirely ignorant of that ownership, Old Harmless in reality was merely a squatter on the financier's land, and that it was Heald's determination that he should be permitted to reside there, unmolested, considering himself a landed proprietor, and the owner of the gulch he had discovered in the "fifties," until his life came to an end. They knew of the rugged financier's affection for the old patriarch, for Heald himself had told them, laughing at the old man's sturdy innocence, his great love for the gulch and all living things therein.

"Uncle Bill Harmon—Old Harmless, as they call him—is too fine and clean and rare to be annoyed by anything or anybody on this earth and—what's more, he shan't be, if I can help it. I can afford to protect him, and, by jingoes, I will!" Thus had Heald declared his determination when they had last seen him, as he was on his way out to the busy world from which he came. "I want you fellows to look after him, for me. I can't get him to accept anything that will make life easier for him—not so much as a sack of flour! Independent old cuss he is, and no cadger. I like him for it. He's—he's sort of adopted me for a son, I think, and so I'm adopting him.

"I suppose there are very few men in the world who have ever really loved me. He does. It's genuine and honest love. No question about it. And I'd be a dirty dog if I didn't appreciate it. Look after him as if he were a mine of pure gold, for he is all of that and more. There are very few men such as Uncle Bill in this world. He believes, honestly and completely, that the Lord God Almighty is his partner. I'm not certain but that it's true. I can't let a faith like that die for lack of help or attention."

It was in the fall season when Heald reluctantly went away, annoyed because some of his numerous projects demanded his personal attention; and to Goliath, who accompanied him to the main road where he could get conveyance, he voiced his regret.

"I had made up my mind to stay up there with Uncle Bill until the open season came on, when I could take to the hills and get a deer or two. I promised myself that. And now I've got to pull out again. But you can bet on this, Goliath, that, if I can, I shall be back with the snowfall. So long!"

Goliath recalled this when the first snowflakes fell and told Old Harmless; but the patriarch of the hills shook his head.

"Nope, I shan't have that young feller with me ag'in before summer. I reckon he's an awful busy man when he's on ter his job. You'd orter see the batch of mail me and him gits when he's here. Why, do you know, they's days when me and him gits as many as twenty letters all in one batch. I uster count 'em when I tuk 'em outen the box over on the road.

"Me and him uster take turns goin' over there ter git 'em. And the way that young feller'd go through 'em, with my help, were a caution. He'd just open the batch, read 'em, scribble somethin' on a corner, and then me and him would do 'em up in one passel and next time we went ter the box we'd just chuck that passel in."

"How'd you help him, Uncle Bill?" David asked dryly.

"Me? How'd I help him? You think I didn't, don't you? Well, I did, because he said so. He uster say, 'Come on now, Uncle Bill, and we'll git this offn our hands, me and you will. You just sit down there and give me moral support. I kin work a lot faster when you're sittin' there smokin', and thinkin'; but it won't be necessary for you to talk till after I git done.'"

The snows fell heavily that year; so deeply that to any but one on snowshoes the upper country was impassable. A wandering timber cruiser blazed his trail with an ax on the trees and, when spring returned, the white slashes were found to be twelve feet above the surface of the ground. The deer in their winter coats sensed it and recklessly fought their way through drifts to lower levels on the inaccessible side, where the wilderness offered better food and shelter. Even the blue jays seemed to croak complaints and nature took on a chill and motionless pose as if the winds themselves were frozen and discouraged.

Old Harmless prepared to plod through the trail he had kept open to his latest drift into the hillside, where, he was confident, despite a hundred previous failures, he would strike the ledge that had thrown the placer gold that had once enriched the gulch. That he had tunneled, molelike, a hundred yards beneath the mountain, following a seam that had never broadened and never thrown much gold, did not at all discourage him. He banked the fire in his fireplace, pulled on his cap, and started for the door before he remembered a most important part of each day's routine, and muttering aloud, "Humph! Gittin' old, I am! Most forgot ter mark my calendar."

He walked across to where, suspended by an old shoe lace, hung a gaudy picture of a most startling if not entrancing young lady, took the stub of a pencil from the shelf above it, licked the point of it with his tongue, and carefully crossed off a red number "30."

"By Heck!" he ruminated. "Day after to-morrer's the fust of next month, and it's always on the fust of the month that David and Goliath comes ter stop overnight with me. And to-morrer's the day I got ter go over ter the main road and look in the mail box ter see if that young feller Heald has wrote me anything. Said in his last letter he sort of hoped ter be out this way this month. Humph! He ain't goin' ter find no deer on this side of the Divide if he does come, and I don't give a cuss neither; because I don't like ter have folks shootin' of 'em. Purty little fellers that never does no harm ter nobody unless it's one of them dam ranchers. Ranchers ain't no good no-how by my way of thinkin'!"

That night he was still considering the next two red-letter days in his monthly toll,

and before retiring to bed he went out on the porch to scan the weather, which was always his final act for each day's activities. A big full moon had just edged over the tops of the hills, and he watched it climb upward until it had cleared the ridge in safety and wrought great black shadows beneath the pines upon the white snow below. He hummed an ancient tune in his cracked voice, and gently closed the cabin door, as if loath to shut out the glories of that wonderful gulch of his, in whose adoration he had become almost pagan.

"Goin' ter be clear and a right good day to-morrer, for goin' over for the mail, if there is any."

And when he awoke his prophecy had been fulfilled. He worked, as was his custom, all the forenoon; had his meager lunch, and then, slipping on his snowshoes and taking a final look at the cabin, trudged away through the woods for his journey that in its round would necessitate eight miles of travel. In the mail box beside the road, with its crown of piled snow, he found his monthly letter from Heald, and scanned the postmark before opening it, as if to prolong the anticipation of what might be read within.

"Humph! Mailed her in Denver nearly two weeks ago. Reckon it's been in this here box for nigh on ter six days."

He opened the envelope and got out his steel-bowed spectacles to read the letter, after which he reread it, and put it in his pocket.

"Hopes ter be out this way, but ain't dead sure he can come, eh? Still hankerin' and honin' ter shoot a deer, because he's promised a friend of his some hawns! Um-m-m! Reckon it's a good thing David and Goliath's comin' to-morrer night so's it gives me an excuse ter keep his room fired up and warm for him, if he do come."

With his long, ungainly stride he slipped back over the snow following his own trail, save in one place where he diverged long enough to watch two jays quarreling and scolding until they flew away. He paused, as he always did, when he came to the sharp edge of the steep hill that gave him his first view of the gulch and the great cabin that lay far beneath in the hollow, with its roof blanketed with snow, and then across at the black spot on the hillside where he had dumped the waste from his prospecting tunnel.

Then leisurely, and with a sense of homecoming, he took the zigzag trail down the side and stepped up on the end of the porch and bent over preparatory to slipping the thongs of the snowshoes from his ankles. Suddenly he stopped in that bent posture, as if arrested by sight of something, and his keen old eyes opened widely. With an exclamation he took a step or two more, and stared at little splotches of snow on the floor that he kept so scrupulously clean. They tracked across to a window, at which he frowned angrily, and then with trembling hands tested.

The window had been forced up and the catch was broken. With a shout of alarm and anger Old Harmless rushed into his own cabin which was never locked, took the key to Heald's abode from the place where he kept it concealed at the bottom of the clock, and, rushing outward again, opened Heald's door. For but a minute he stared around, and then suddenly lifted his clenched fists above his head and shook them angrily.

"They've stole them two rifles! Them rifles what I've kept oiled and clean! Them rifles that Mister Heald told me he spent two hundred dollars for and had made special. The ones he was so fond of. Stole 'em! And he trusted me ter look after his things!"

For a few minutes his anger was supplanted by despair, and he wandered round the comfortable room, almost aimlessly scrutinizing it to learn whether anything else of value had been taken; but finally concluded that the rifles alone were missing. He was dazed and bewildered by what to him was a tragedy, and then his characteristic resolution returned as if from some recess where it had been deposited in his youth, and hastily he went outside to scan the snow. Its story was plain to his experienced old eyes. There had been but one man, who had, first of all, made certain that the patriarch was neither in his side of the cabin, nor up at the tunnel, and had then returned, lifted the window with an ax blade, taken the rifles, slipped on his snowshoes, and gone.

Harmon, old as he was, had not passed the age of action. He went deliberately into his own humble side of the cabin, took his worn pack straps from a wooden peg, laid out two blankets from his bed, apportioned food sufficient to last him, with abstemiousness, for two full days, put matches and tobacco in his pocket, rolled the pack and

tied thereon a little pan and tin cup that must serve for all culinary operations, and, when this was done, took down the rifle that had never killed in his hands, save for food. Then, almost by afterthought, he recklessly tore from his precious calendar a sheet; jerked loose the stub of a pencil, licked it by force of habit, and wrote:

dcere david and goliath. Sum sunof a dog
has stold mister healds too rifles & im takin the
trail ter git him. maik yoursels to hom till i
git back or ef i dont git back. i wont be back
at all without them rifles yours truly

WILLIAM HARMON.

He took a look at the fire to assure himself that it was long dead, shut his door, nailed the note thereon, and slipped out to the edge of the porch where his snowshoes with their long heel bows were stuck in the snow as if waiting for his feet, slipped them on, shifted his pack to a more comfortable position, drew a long breath, and struck the trail. It led boldly up the gulch, and then into the spaces beneath the climbing forest.

Away off in the distance across a magnificent valley lay Baldy Peak, standing like a stone sentinel, with its crest aflame in the sunset, a landmark for all the country round. The trail, after following the ridge, turned that way.

"I reckon I got a long way ter go," muttered Old Harmless as he followed the trail marks where they dipped into the valley, and then, "Hello! He come this way in the first place. He's back-trackin' all right. Damn fool! Thinks he can go carelesslike, and that I'm too old ter catch him!"

The trail was still distinct and easy to follow, but the winter sun waned, went down, and twilight followed. In the cold, high spaces the trees were still, the snow a blank and mystifying evenness of dull white. The patriarch, now and then, had to pause and bend low to catch the marks scratched upon its surface. His progress was rendered more slow. In the darker hour when the light reached its lowest ebb of dimness awaiting the moon, he stopped, made a tiny fire, melted snow, boiled tea, and poured it into his cup, after which he fried some strips of bacon, took a cold flapjack from his pocket, and dined. He was refreshed from his weariness, and thankful that the moon had now arisen in full brilliance. In its light he could catch tiny drifts on the sheen of the snow, where the snowshoes of his quarry had

skirted them in ceaseless progress. They were like little waves upon a still sea save that their shadows were fixed.

The legs of Old Harmless began to feel weak and tottering. Regretfully he noted that it took two of his strides to equal one of the man ahead. He struggled to step longer.

"Dang it all!" he muttered. "There was a time when I'd 'a' bet that Piute couldn't have gone as fast as me on the laces. But I'm gittin' awful old for a job like this. Got ter ketch him though. Them rifles is——"

His mind drifted to the distressing thought that he had proved recalcitrant, and he shut his teeth and thrust doggedly ahead. A rime of white gathered on his long, white beard; snow frost congealed on his eyebrows and his patient, gray eyes, old but keen, felt strained until now and then he blinked them widely to drive away the unemotional tears produced by the cold. His steps grew constantly more slow. His snowshoes weighed tons. When he began the long ascending miles on the far side of the valley they seemed endless planes stretched upward toward the moon.

When, panting, he stopped, and glared at the traces in the snow, the pressure of foot through mesh was still strong, the distance between marks as regular as the spacings on a tape, indicating the tirelessness of a machine. No novice to the webs was this who trailed ahead somewhere in the distance with two precious rifles thrown carelessly across his back.

"You cain't keep it up forever, drat ye!" Uncle Bill muttered. "I'll git you yet, if I have to chase you plumb up into the moon! You're travelin' stronger'n I am, but—by heck, I'm still comin' along!"

It was one o'clock in the morning and long after he had taken to counting steps between rests, before Old Harmless sat down with his back against a tree, and felt that his sturdy old heart was whimpering with despair. He looked up at the distant stars, and slowly removed his cap upon which the frost of his breath had congealed into a fantastic binding.

"Lord," he said appealingly, "I ain't no quitter. You know that. I hates ter bother You, but—I'm in a hell of a fix! I need You. I don't see how I'm ever goin' ter ketch that thief that's got them rifles, if You don't just naturally come down and help me out. You see, I ain't as young as

I uster was. You ain't a-goin' to shake me now, are You? Me that ain't done nothin' wrong he could help in all his borned days, and has tried ter play the game fair and square? But if I've done anything ter deserve all this orful trouble, please, Lord, let me die here in the snow; because if You cain't help me some, I just cain't go on no more!"

His irresistible faith healed his fatigue, and, after a time, he got to his feet and staggered onward, contented in the thought that now he could continue forever, and that his feet were endowed with a Mercury's wings. After a time he sang, in his cracked old voice, wavering broken tunes; but they were to him songs of triumph. And then urging his weary feet ahead, ever on the trail, he began to discern off in the distance a black shadow that he was outstripping in his terrible race. He shouted aloud his defiance. He ordered the thief to stop and wait for him. Once he took the old rifle from his shoulder, fumbled for the catch with trembling fingers, and was preparing to fire on that figure of his phantasma when he stopped and thought, "No, I ain't never shot a man for more'n forty year and never at any other time, if it could be helped, so I'll try ter ketch him without that."

He slung the rifle back over his shoulder and staggered on. Nothing but the innate woodlore and experience of long years in observation of tiny, inconsequential things, enabled him to cling to the trail; but the trail, white, immaculate, moved ever ahead, sweeping downhill and up, over frozen brooks, beneath long glades of trees, and across bare ridges, in an endless continuity. He wove sidewise now and then and began to rub the back of his hand across his eyes to clear his vision. The moon had crossed all that wonderful path of stars and was dipping into the far and vague southwestern pall of mysterious purple, that deep, quiet place into which she crept at the end of each night's work.

The moon, Old Harmless thought, must be very tired, after such a journey, and—so was he. He strove to revive himself with ancient marching tunes, and they became confused. He was giddy with the ceaseless strain. His ears brought drumming noises and strange symphonies and distant shouts. Perhaps it was the fugitive ahead, hurling back his defiance. Uncle Bill raised his own voice and cried his determination.

"Ef you don't drap them rifles purty soon, I'll draw a bead and shoot! Ain't no use in your tryin' ter git away. I'm on your trail. It's me, Bill Harmon, that's after you, and I'll keep on follerin' you ef I have ter build a raft ter float me over the scaldin' waters of hell!" he roared.

To his delirious and overwrought imagination the fugitive replied with taunts, and, forgetting the religious part of his spirit, and reverting to the callous days of the argonauts, Uncle Bill swore with long-forgotten oaths. Now he was certain that he was gaining on that flying figure ahead. He panted, raced for a final desperate spurt, was unaware that he was bumping from tree to tree, and then upon the moonlight trail there was a splotch of black that lay very still, grotesque in its sprawling shape, and a rifle, long and quaint, was still clutched in an outflung hand as if, to the end, there had been determination evolved by a great injustice.

Old Harmless opened his eyes part way only, because the lids were so tired that it required persistent effort to open them at all. For a long time he studied the rough poles of a roof and tried to think that they were those of his own cabin, and that he had only suffered a trying dream. No, these weren't the familiar shapes.

Then he looked for the sight of trees lifted with imperturbable dignity above vast fields of snow, and for the austere light of a cold and vanishing moon. But—surely this was sunlight! Slowly his bewildered senses came to realize and interpret sound. Some one was talking, quite as if repeating something relative to which his auditor was concerned. The voice sounded like that of David's, and away off in that misty distance, it said:

"No, you ain't got it yet. You see, it was this way: Goliath and me come a day sooner than usual, and when we got to Uncle Bill's cabin, along in the evening, we finds a note. Stuck on the door it was. That's it—there in your hand. And we couldn't make her out at first, then we saw the trails, and Goliath says, 'Pardner, I reckon it's up to us to join in, ain't it?' and I says, 'Sure.

Uncle Bill may git himself in a pretty tough fix.' So we hit the trail.

"We follered it and follered it, until I thought it wasn't ever goin' to end. Then, just about when I was for givin' up and goin' back, we see's something away off up on the top of a ridge. It was weavin' sideways, this way and that, but it kept goin', and so we went on. Then we finds something lyin' there in the snow, all doubled up, with a pack on its back—and it's Uncle Bill.

"We takes turns totin' him, Goliath, him bein' the biggest, doin' most of it, and we follered the trail, knowin' that it must end somewhere, some time—and it brung us to this here cabin, and we didn't expect to find you here nohow."

There was a minute's lapse, and then Uncle Bill heard vaguely another voice that said, "Don't suppose you did. I wanted to shoot a buck. Heard they were on this side of the Divide—run downward from the snow and cold. Came up here with the chap that owns it, and sent his Indian guide across with a note to Uncle Bill telling him to give this redskin my two rifles. But the fool loses the note, finds Uncle Bill gone, breaks in and gets the rifles because he wants to make it back over here before day-break. Hang it all! I wouldn't have had this happen to Uncle Bill for all the rifles in the world!"

And at that Old Harmless, who had finally identified the voice as that of Heald's, over whose property he kept such jealous ward, choked a trifle, opened one eye, felt a big lump in his throat, didn't know whether to sit up and swear through sheer emotion, or to laugh with joy. He finally decided to lie still and quiet.

"Lord," he murmured between his tired lips, "I'm right thankful ter You; because if anything had happened ter them rifles, I reckon I couldn't never have faced You again. But if You'll forgive me for it, when I git rested and strong enough to pile out of this here bunk, I reckon I'll just naturally kick hell out of that careless, no-account, triflin' Injun for losin' of that there note. Yours truly, Amen!"



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. Influenced by Julia, Tucker takes ten thousand dollars in stock for his water rights, uses it in speculating in Lost Wagons, and is cleaned out in the juggling of the stock. Buck, who has gambled with stock received in payment for freighting, also goes broke. Tucker learns that St. John, Ketcherside's superintendent, has imported laborers who don't know gold when they see it. He buys a nugget from Horse-shootum, an Indian, but can't learn where it came from. Then he goes prospecting unsuccessfully, and meets Buck at Stovepipe Hole. Apparently the old man is prosperous, and after a few drinks he starts to talk.

(A Four-Part Story—Part III.)

CHAPTER XV.

A PRINCE.

HOW sharper than a serpent's tooth is base ingratitude! Tucker eyed old Buck grimly, determined in his heart to wring his secret from him. In some way, somehow, old Buck had made a strike, and he had intercepted him as he was making his get-away and now Buck was trying to hold out this secret on a man who had fed him and sheltered him. He was trying to stand him off with vague and specious promises, about what he would do at the railroad; but Tucker knew that if he did not collect then, he would never see his money again. And eight hundred dollars to a man living on corn pone was beyond the dreams of avarice. All he had to do was be firm.

"Aw, sure; sure!" he exclaimed as Buck began a weak defense, "I know all that bunk by heart. Ain't you been telling it over to me every time you got a drink? Well, tell me about this stake, then. What is it, Mr. Buck, that you've found?"

"Gold!" whispered Buck, leaning over across the fire, and Tucker dropped his cup.

"Gold?" he repeated, and old Buck nodded solemnly.

"Gold!" he answered, and smiled.

"Tuck," he went on, "you been a good friend to me—the best friend I ever had. Kin I trust you now or——"

"Damned right you can trust me!" returned Tucker. "Tell me quick, before you drop dead."

"Well," temporized Buck, "I want you to promise me you won't tell it to a living soul. I've had a hard life, Tuck. Everything has been against me—all I ask is to make a clean git-away."

"Sure," agreed Tucker. "That's reasonable—I'll help you. Have you got the stuff in your wagons?"

"Four hundred pounds of it," nodded Buck. "You might say it's all pure gold."

"Only it's coated over with lime, eh?" suggested Tucker knowingly, and Buck cocked his head.

"Who told you that?" he demanded, and Tucker handed over a rock. It was hardly a rock, it was a nugget of gold with the lime

still stuck on one side—the nugget he had purchased from Horse-shootum.

"Where'd you find yours?" inquired Tuck in an easy, conversational way; but Buck would not come to the point. Like the messenger in Shakespeare he went back to the beginning instead of replying with a word.

"Well, now I'll tell you," he began, after taking another drink, "you must've walked over it a thousand times. And them mining engineers, and that smart Aleck they call Sinjin—they wouldn't know gold if they saw it. But me—I knowed it as soon as I seen it, from the top of a ten-foot wagon; and I slipped back there, that night, and dug out four hundred pounds of it, and covered the rest of it up. I've got mine, Tuck, and now you go git yours—I'll tell you jest where to find it. But, for the love of cripes, don't let the company git onto it."

"Where is it?" demanded Tucker, his heart in his mouth, but Buck could not get the words out. Or if he could, he would not, preferring to roll them like a sweet morsel on the tip of his garrulous tongue.

"I'll come to that," he said, with ponderous dignity. "You remember old Ketcherside's Englishman? He had two names—St. John and Sinjin—and they put him in charge of the mine. Well, of all the danged fools that ever claimed to be a mining man this Sinjin is—you couldn't believe it! And he hired a bunch of bohunks out of some Colorado coal mine that couldn't talk, only by signs. Well, you'd think, by grab, that that mine was a country place, the way this man Sinjin went to work on it; a-smoothing the ground here and raking it off there, and building them danged roads everywhere. Didn't know how to mine so he went to building roads and, by cracky, he struck this here gold! Run into it *spang*, like he'd started out to find it, right up where that white ledge crossed!"

"What ledge?" clamored Tucker. "Hell, all them ledges are white. Was it one of those limestone dikes?"

"No wider than your body," nodded old Buck triumphantly. "But where she crossed, it came—pure—gold!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" sighed Tucker. "And they found it!"

"Found nothing!" snorted Buck. "Don't you hear what I'm telling ye? They threw that stuff *into—the-road!* And walked over it, mind ye, and covered it half up with limestone—and never knew it was gold!"

"You're drunk!" declared Tucker, rising up in unbelief; but old Buck was wagging his beard.

"Jest as true as I'm setting here they done what I'm telling ye, and I seen it from the top of my wagon. And that night I sneaked over there and dug out four hundred pounds of it, and filled the hole up smooth. But in the morning I went hog wild, I was that crazy to make my git-away. It seemed like I could actually *fly*. I threw on all my feed, and hooked on the water wagon, and pulled out without saying a word. They warn't no one there to see me go, and I've been on the road three days without meeting a single soul. Now, don't that beat the world?"

"It sure does," agreed Tucker, still outwardly calm. "Which way from the mine is this hole?"

"Straight north," expounded Buck, "about eight hundred feet. A man couldn't miss it, if he tried."

"Is there much left in the hole? Or did you make a clean sweep? There couldn't be much, it's so rich."

"There's lots of it!" declared Buck with drunken gravity. "Hundreds of pounds of it—thousands, millions. I couldn't begin to take all of it. I was that skeered some one would see me I danged nigh swallowed my heart. Now you're a friend of mine, Tuck—best friend I ever had—you go up there, savvy, and git yours. It's on company ground, and they'd raise heck if they ever caught ye—"

"I'm going," said Tucker, "right now."

He stumbled off into the darkness to catch up his mules, still struggling to comprehend the miracle; but, as he was bringing them in, a cold chill passed over him. Old Buck had not shown him the gold. He had spoken of it, and described it, and told where it came from, but he had not produced the ore; and an ounce of gold is worth more, in mining, than all the jaw bone in the world. Another thought came to Tucker, changing his chill to a perspiration—could it be that old Buck was crazy? He didn't act like it, now, but when he first came in—well, he certainly had acted queer.

But whether he was drunk or sober, crazy or sane, Tucker was determined to ride to the mine; and if he found the gold still there, he would scrape the hole clean, if they sent him to Siberia for life. He had made up his mind to that. Any company with no more sense than to hire Sinjin for a

superintendent, and a bunch of bohunk coal miners for the crew, deserved to be robbed on general principles, and if they discovered the deception they would hardly dare to make a protest on account of the exposure that would follow. And, oh, what a laugh he would have on old Ketcherside, if he could make a clean get-away with the gold! But there was one thing yet to do—he must see a chunk of Buck's ore.

"Buck," he began when he got back to the fire, "you're sure taking a chance, with that ore. Don't you know they could send you to the penitentiary for life, if they found all that stuff in your wagons?"

"Well, I'll tell you," answered Buck, "I don't aim for them to find it—I'll put up a fight for that gold. If you'd reached for your gun, boy, when you stepped out of that dugout, I'd've bored you through and through."

"Oh, you would, eh?" observed Tucker, boldly taking a sack of grain to feed to his gaunted mules. "But let me tell you something, Buck—that ore can't be identified if you knock off the lime and melt it up. It's just gold then, and the company or nobody can't prove that it came from their mine."

"Aw, they'll never ketch me—what's the use?" said Buck, and took a long drink.

"What's the use?" repeated Tucker. "Say, did you ever stop to figure where I got that chunk of ore that I showed you? Well, I bought it from Horse-shootum, savvy? And another thing, Mr. Buck, have you noticed how Shorty Swingle keeps hanging around that mine? First his burros are gone, and then this and then that—he's got his eye on them nuggets!"

"No!" exclaimed Buck in frank astonishment, and then he sprang to his feet. "Come on, Tuck," he said, "hep me dig that stuff out—it's buried under the grain."

"Sure thing!" returned Tuck, and was over the wagon top before Buck could climb the wheel. He dug, and dug deeper, heaving the sacks about like sofa pillows as he burrowed to the bottom of the wagon bed; and when he came to the gold and felt the heft of it, he sat down and drew a long breath. Here was gold in grain sacks and in canvas wagon sheets, which, if this moth-eaten old freighter could ever get away with it, would give him more than he had earned in a lifetime.

"Buck!" he said when they had dragged the gold out and spread it on a canvas by

the fire, "you're the luckiest man in the world. But I'll tell you right now, if you don't hammer all that lime off, you'll get pinched the minute you strike Barstow. Get out your dutch ovens—we'll see if mesquite coals won't melt it."

A fire burned late that night at Stovepipe Hole and the coyotes drew nearer and howled, but no one else saw them or sensed the conspiracy to rob Ira N. Ketcherside of his gold.

"Good enough!" declared Tucker after the last nugget had been beaten clean and melted down over a bed of coals. "You're fixed, Buck, unless you get drunk. But the first time you get cuckooed you're going to blab the whole business; so let's kill the rest of this bottle."

"I'm agreeable!" maundered Buck; "a last drink with Tuck, the truest, kindest friend that ever lived. I appreciate it, Tuck, and jest to show you how I feel I'm going to give you this last chunk of gold. It ain't as big as the rest, but if anything should happen, if them bohunks should run across that cache—well, I want you to accept this, from Buck."

"Hell—no!" protested Tucker, quite knocked off his feet by this sudden and unexpected generosity; but Buck was insistent and, the hour being late, he took it and saddled to go. It was wonderful when you thought of it, what a pint of whisky could do in rousing old Buck's better nature; though, of course, the old walloper had tried to beat him out of his money, and even held out on the secret of the gold. But now, all that was past.

"Buck," he said holding out his hand in farewell, "I take it all back, what I said. You sure are a prince—when you're drunk."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STRIKE.

As Tucker rode off into the night, his mules on the trot and every nerve taut for the adventure, his pack of grain started to shift and he stopped; and as he dismounted to adjust the load a high voice cleft the silence—it was old Buck, singing by the fire:

"Oh, mother dear kiss me good ni-ght,
For I my evening prayers have said.
I'm tired now and sleepy too-oo,
So put me in my little bed."

"The old walloper!" he muttered and laughed to himself, for Buck was not so bad.

It was only that the world, through seventy long years, had scarred and seared his soul; and it took old King Alcohol, who had ruined his life, to restore that soul to its own. When he was sober he was mean, and crafty, and scheming and slave to the basest ingratitude; and then, as the liquor roused up his better nature, his soul sloughed off its integuments. First he became a normal man, not too wedded to his own way; and then he became honest, then generous; and as page after page of his life book was turned back he became at last an innocent child. And there he sat, with a fortune in stolen gold, and sang that old mother's song. Tucker laughed again, softly, and went on his way, for he, too, had a duty to perform.

It was his duty and privilege—or so he esteemed it—to show up Mr. Sinjin's inefficiency; and also—oh, what a privilege—to rob Ketcherside of his gold and expose him to the laughter of the world. To ride in and steal his gold, and make away with it, and return to flout the loss in his face—for less than that Tucker would take chances on his life, to say nothing of going to jail. He romped on up the trail till the morning star found him watering his mules at Mesquite Spring. Then he retreated up a side cañon, where no one would come across him, and slept the sleep of the just. He was going to trim Ketcherside and avenge for all time the wrongs of trusting janitors and stenographers.

And that queen of all stenographers, the Titian-haired Julia, how would she receive him now? When he came in on his mule, with chunks of gold in both hands, would she be there to make his triumph complete; or had she taken his advice and cashed in on her stock and left Ketcherside—and him—forever? He wondered, and wondering slept, and when he woke up the sun was behind Tin Mountain.

As the soft light faded from the mountains to the east and the valley was filled with dark shadows Tucker rode down to the water like an outlaw or a horse thief, not even leaving his tracks in the trails. He took the high ground and made a trail of his own, and as night came on again, he rode far to the north before he swung back to the mine. There was one piece of ground that he claimed to know; but when, with mules hidden, he slipped back to his old claim, he was lost amid Sinjin's improvements.

Not only were there houses, and a huge

gallows frame and roads cut along the hills; but the ground, as Buck had said, had been smoothed off and raked over until it looked like a lawn in the moonlight—a grotesque mockery of a lawn, the dark cinders from the crater combed and barbered like real grass, and with borders of white rocks along the paths. He drew away, for the camp was dead and silent, and crept up the ridge to his vein.

He would know it in pitch darkness, that long, clean line of quartz, cutting along the slope of the hill, and as he followed it toward the mine he came across the road which Sinjin's bohunks had built. It was laid out to grade and neatly ballasted with white limestone, the same rock which had yielded the gold.

Tucker was beginning to sweat now and to scramble about anxiously. He left his sacks and started to dig, but at a slight noise from below, where the bunk house lay sleeping, he dropped down and scrambled into a gulch. It was the very gulch that they had set out to fill up, and, as he crouched against the bank, he felt the soft slipperiness of talc—and talc and ore go together! He bored into the road bank like a dog after a ground squirrel and, deep down in the smother, he found his rock.

It had a heaviness like no other, the huge heaviness of gold, and the nuggets chucked softly together. He sat back and cursed for joy. Here was a place that old Buck had not even been to, for the nuggets lay together in a mass; they were nested like hen eggs at the bottom of the gulch, where they had worked their way down through the waste. Burrowing feverishly into the dirt and paving the limestone behind him, he raked the gold into his hat; and each time it became full or threatened to burst he dumped his load into a sack. In half an hour he had all he could stagger with, and yet his load seemed ludicrously small; so small, indeed, that he thought his strength was failing and sat down to win back his breath.

Here he knew was the principal place where the bohunks had dumped their gold. What Buck had found had been the scattered fragments, strewn along the surface of the road; but he had found the glory hole, the riddle in the roadbed where the grader had dropped its load. But what a heart-breaker it was to leave so much behind while he carried this one load to his mules!

A second and a third load followed in

rapid succession; and then he gathered part of a fourth; until at last, panting with weariness, he filled up the long burrow and turned regretfully away. There was more, but the day was at hand; and so, while the camp slept, he hazed his mules far to the south and turned up a cañon that he knew. It was called Dry Bone Cañon on account of a horse's skull that some Indian had placed on a rock; and he rode on up to a ledge of barren quartz and lime that cropped out down its slope. For his gold had to be buried somewhere, and buried at once, before some prowler took up his trail; and what place was there anywhere that would give him a better alibi than this same barren ledge of limestone? It was up a dry cañon where no one would stumble upon it; and at the same time, if he were caught, he could claim it was ore in place, for this new gold was coated with lime.

The stray nuggets that Horse-shootum had found had been worn down by erosion until they showed the dull gleam of gold; but this ore from the vein itself, where the crossing ledge of lime had produced a chute or chimney of solid metal, was coated and coated again. First the inner gold was crusted with brown silica, boiled on tight during the deposition of the mineral; and outside of that was a second coating of lime, laid on later by the leaching of surface waters and now the rock itself was powdered with talc from the selva along the ore walls. Perhaps Buck had caught the gleam of some broken fragment, or noticed the peculiar formation; but to a casual bohunk from the coal mines of Colorado, there was nothing to indicate gold. And so the poor wage slaves had dumbly dug out this fortune and strewn it along the road.

Tucker buried his treasure hastily in a crevice of the ledge, at a spot where not even a mountain sheep would pass; and then, dragging a bush to blot out his tracks, he rode back to the mouth of the cañon. The sun was well up and his mules were fretting for water, but for an hour and more he kept them rambling across the dry washes, making tracks for the trailers to follow. For follow him they would, Indian trailers and white men, and if they found his cache of ore they would steal it as ruthlessly as he himself had stolen it from Ketcherside. But not all of it was there. He still had the samples which he intended to flash at Gold Trails; and, since he was playing a rough

game, he had held out two sacks to bury along the trail to Stovepipe Hole. This would serve for a stake, if he had to leave the country and was unable to get back to his main cache; and he dropped it casually down a badger hole, without even dismounting, just before he made camp at Surveyor's Wells.

For twenty, yes thirty miles, he had traveled through a boulder patch that extended from mountain to mountain; from Tin Mountain to the west and the Grapevines to the east, a solid mass of boulders set in sand. But this was not the soft and drifting sand that had tempted the badger to dig; it was sand set like cement by the water of desert cloud-bursts—said that would barely take a track. The best Indian living could never back-trail him through that limitless field of wash boulders, and as for the badger hole, it was one of ten thousand in the sand flats around Surveyor's Wells.

Everything had been thought out, against the chase that would follow when he rode in and announced his great strike; and to make it doubly sure, Tucker circled back past Stovepipe Hole and came dragging into Gold Trails from the south. In the excitement of his flight he had forgotten the niceties of life and his face was streaked with sweat and dust; his hands were grimy talons, his boots bursting out. But he rode into camp like a king.

"Hello there," he hailed as Bullfrog Smith came out to gaze, and Bullfrog shouted back, but feebly. Things were not going so well in the erstwhile boom camp, and Lost Wagons was lagging most lamentably. The sight of this man who had been its discoverer only brought up evil memories to Bullfrog. He remembered the thousands of dollars that he had parted with forever when he had tried to make his fortune on the stock. He even remembered the time when Tucker had warned him against buying it, only to buy it himself, in the end. But—well, you never can tell, so Bullfrog shouted greetings, but the rest of the old-timers looked glum.

"Git down, git down," he invited almost cordially, "did you find something good on Tucki Mountain?"

"Who said I'd been to Tucki?" inquired Tucker guardedly, and suddenly the old-timers took notice. They rose up from their seats along the edge of the sidewalk. A group in the street looked back; and from

his office across the way, where he had been glaring forth hatefully, Personality Plus bounced out.

"W'y, Shorty Swingle," returned Bullfrog, his eyes beginning to glitter, "you don't mean to tell me——"

"I've struck it!" nodded Tucker, and paused.

"You've struck *what*?" demanded Hogaboom, rushing over to confront him, and Tucker scowled back at him insolently.

"I'm not talking to you," he said.

"A-aw, boozhwah!" scoffed Hogaboom, flapping his hands derisively. "You haven't got the price of a drink!"

"Well, have you?" challenged Tucker, and Bullfrog Smith whooped, for something told him that Tucker had won. What told him he could not say, more than the tone of his voice and the masterful look in his eye; but he knew it—Slim had struck it again!

"You don't need the price, with me, Tuck!" he exclaimed, almost affectionately. "Come in, me bye, and drink on the house!"

"I'll go you!" returned Tucker, dropping down from his mule; and it was noticed that he took off his saddle bags. They were heavy, very heavy, for their bulk.

"Well, what's doing?" inquired Tucker, glancing up at Bullfrog's stock board where Lost Wagons was quoted at two-eighty. "What's happened at the mine since I was gone?"

"Oh, nahthin', nahthin'," replied Bullfrog despondently. "She's dead, to tell you the truth. Working a big bunch of bohunks, but she don't produce the ore—never's turned out a pound, that we know of."

"They're afraid to sink on it!" responded Tucker grimly. "It's there, but they're afraid, that's all."

"You may be right," assented Bullfrog, waving Hogaboom impatiently away, "but what's this now, about a strike? Shorty was in here last week and some Injun had told him you was prospecting on Tucki Mountain."

"Aw, them Injuns," scoffed Tucker, fumbling portentously at his saddlebags, and he dumped a pile of ore on the bar.

"What's that?" yelled Bullfrog, as he caught the gleam of gold, and Tucker stepped back and grinned.

"Gold!" he said. "Didn't I tell you I'd struck it?" And every man in the house made a rush.

"Oh, my Gawd!" howled Bullfrog Smith,

grabbing up a mighty specimen. "She's gold, byes; nahthin' but gold!"

"Lemme see that!" clamored Hogaboom, making a snatch for the specimen, and Bullfrog struck back at him spitefully.

"Out of my house, youse!" he shouted. "How manny times must I tell ye? Git out—ye ain't wanted here, no time! Well, byes, this calls for the drinks!"

He strewed the glasses down the bar with a joyous dexterity, filling them up with a practiced jolt of the bottle. And as the crowd from outside came running in to see they drank to Death Valley Slim.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON A PLATTER.

Tucker's triumphal entry had fallen a little flat—he had not dared to ride in with the gold in both hands, it was taking too big a chance. For somebody might have seen him, when he was going to steal the ore, and he would be running his neck into a loop; or the bohunks at Lost Wagons might have blundered across the nuggets, in which case the hunt would be on. They would be looking for him, for Buck, for Shorty Swingle, for every man who had been seen prowling about that mine, and the most he could hope for was a hundred yards' start and a straightaway course to the hills. But no, the gods were with him, they had smiled upon his project; and suddenly, almost insolently, he flashed his gold.

"Where'd you get it?" they clamored, but he waved them away and raked the nuggets back into his bag.

"From my mine," he announced, "over across Death Valley. What you want me to do—lead you to it?"

"Sure!" they cheered, but he only smiled grimly and handed his saddlebags to Bullfrog. "Put 'em in your safe for me," he directed. "I'll be back pretty soon—got to take my mules down to the corral."

He stalked out of the saloon, followed by the entire male population, and there stood Julia Cleghorn.

"Good morning!" he greeted with a patronizing grin. "Well, I've struck it—you can keep your Lost Wagons."

"Oh, thank you," she murmured and glanced back at him mockingly as he was swallowed up by the crowd. He blushed red—she had parried his thrust. Without knowing what he was talking about, she

had sensed his general arrogance and punctured his swollen pride with a word. It was kind of him indeed to allow them to keep Lost Wagons, especially as the stock was at two-eighths. That was a long ways below five dollars, but still, as mines go, it was not so tragically bad—it was just a dollar-eighty above par. She could sell out her stock and nearly triple her money and—well, she evidently had not broken with Ketcherside. He was glad, in a way, she had not—he wanted her to be there, at his triumph. For now, with his new mine, yielding almost pure gold, he could make Lost Wagons look cheap.

He rode down to the corral and turned in his weary mules and, as he came back past the bank, he saw Ketcherside looking out to him, boring him through with his searching gray eyes. It was as though the massive crystals of those trembling glasses had gathered up power like a burning glass, and once more Tucker turned away, for here was a man who could read men's hearts like a book. He could divine their inner thoughts and mold them to his will with the masterful ease of a hypnotist; and there was something about his stillness, his absolute poise, which daunted Tucker even in retrospect. He remembered the time when he had gone in to beard the millionaire and make him pay real money for his water rights; and the quick and sure way in which Ketcherside had disposed of him was proof enough of his powers.

Tucker passed on up the street, quite sobered from the intoxication which comes from success and raw whisky; and, though they dragged him into the saloon, he absolutely refused to drink, and his answers were most evasive. Yes, he had discovered a rich mine, there was the gold to prove it, but he was not giving out where it was. No, he was not going to stock it, not for any sum whatever, the pure stuff was good enough for him. He had just come to town for a hair cut and some boots—yes, he'd been over some pretty rough country—and if anybody thought they could back-track him to it, they were perfectly welcome to try.

That was all, from Tucker, and while he bought boots and fine raiment the rush across Death Valley began. It was inevitable, of course—there is a rush after every strike—but the wise ones still lingered, watching Tucker with wolfish cunning, still hoping

to get him drunk. He was a marked man now, the gang followed him everywhere—to the barber's, to the store, to the corral; but along toward evening he gave them all the slip, just in time to meet Julia on her walk.

She came down the gulch with a swinging stride, quite oblivious to the bold glances of passing men; but when Tucker appeared from the general direction of the corrals she looked up and actually smiled. Assuredly God in His infinite mercy had given her a forgiving nature, for Tucker had spoken rather rough.

"Well, well," he grinned, stepping briskly over to meet her, "so you've decided to keep your mine, eh? I had a hunch you would."

"Yes, we talked it over," she answered soberly, "and Mr. Ketcherside thought it was best."

"Fine, fine," he returned, falling in beside her, "how is the old 'pothecator, anyway? Trimmed any more widows and orphans since he took my little all? Well, he's a great man, Miss Cleghorn, a great man!"

"Yes, he is," she answered demurely, "and especially to us who know him. And, by the way, he'd like to see you."

"Oh, he would, eh?" jeered Tucker, suddenly rearing up his head and regarding her importantly. "Kind of interested in my new mine, I guess."

"Yes, we all are," she replied. "Is it really so very rich? The accounts of it seemed frightfully exaggerated."

"Yes, but not *my* accounts," he said. "All I'm doing is showing the gold—here's a little piece I saved out for you."

He reached down into the pocket of his dove-colored corduroys and produced a sizable nugget. "Little present," he explained, and she thanked him.

"Isn't it heavy!" she cried. "Is it all pure gold? And what is this stuff that's stuck to it?"

"That's lime," he replied; "and the black stuff is silica—it occurs in a limestone formation."

"Isn't it wonderful!" she began, and then, remembering their last meeting, she stopped and blushed. "I don't see how you find it," she ended.

"Find it by looking for it," he mumbled. And then, with a smile: "Yes, it is wonderful—I never will forget that night."

"I hope," she faltered, "you didn't misunderstand me—I don't get like that very

often. But that day he was so unreasonable and impatient and exacting, that I—well, I lost my courage, that's all."

"He's a hard man to work for," observed Tucker morosely. "I can see that with half an eye. Why don't you quit the old penny pincher, anyway? How'd you like to be the wife of a rich young mining man? Say, that would be something like!"

"Nope," she responded with a brief, half-jesting smile, "I'm satisfied to be a secretary. But it does seem unreasonable, when you've tried so hard to please, to have him make a fuss over a nickel. But every cent must be accounted for at the end of the day, and all our books must tally; and he won't even let us get together for a minute and find out if anything is wrong. I sometimes think he doesn't trust anybody."

"That kind don't," grumbled Tucker. "All they think about is money and how to do the rest of us out of it. And take it from me, Bright Eyes, that old boy is going to clean you, if you keep on playing around with his stock. You saw what he did to me, and to all the rest of these wise guys. What's to keep him from doing it to you?"

"Well—he won't," she said at length, and Tucker burst out in a passion.

"He's a robber, I tell you—don't you think I know the breed—you can tell 'em by the look in their eye! And he's been a killer—didn't he get his start in the stock-yards? Well, what pity will he have on you, then? Did he spare any of them hogs and keep them for pets? Well, not so anybody could notice it; he made them into Ketcherside's bacon! You touch that old boy's pocket and you touch his heart—he believes in cleaning them *all*! If he'd been old Shylock, do you think that Bassanio would've got away without paying his debt? He'd have frozen him like a beef and extracted that pound of flesh without losing a drop of blood—if he bled a little afterward, that was *his* business!"

"You seem right up on Shakespeare," she smiled sarcastically. "I wonder if you're another college boy, gone wrong?"

"Yes, sure I am!" he raged. "The same as he's a gentleman. Are you going to keep on working for that robber?"

"Why, yes; I am," she stated, "if it's any of your business. I have always found him perfectly honorable."

"'Honorable!'" he mocked. "Well, there's honor among thieves, but damn me

if I believe he's got it. Oh, excuse me; don't you like swearing? Well, being with him, you know, and imbibing his high ideals——"

"You're excited," she suggested, though rather tremulously.

"Oh, I'm excited, am I?" he ran on, hardly noticing her at first; and then he stalked on gloomily.

"Let's just be friends," she said, "and leave business matters out of it. I know you don't like Mr. Ketcherside."

"Well, do *you*?" he demanded, the blood still in his head. She did not answer at once.

"Sometimes I do," she admitted presently. "But—he's such a cold man. He's as stern and impersonal as a god. But, oh, I do like the way he's always treated me, and I can't bear to desert him and sell my stock. If it weren't for him I wouldn't have a share, I'd just be working for a salary; and it wouldn't be loyal or honest or right for me to offer it now. Don't you see what they would think if Mr. Ketcherside's secretary should throw all her stock on the market? It wouldn't depress the stock so much, because he takes care of that, but—it would look like a lack of confidence. And if I quit working for him, I'd have to go to work for some one else; so what's the difference, anyway? These business men are all the same, and while, of course, I'd like to please you——"

"Oh, that's all right," he said, "don't you worry about me. But—well, go ahead, kid, and have your fling. And then, when you're broke, when he's robbed you like all the rest of them, come around and I'll give you a job. But I see right now you're never going to respect me till I've gone in and taken a fall out of that dog robber; so, much as I hate to do it——"

"I understand!" she laughed. "You're going to slay this horrid monster, and bring me his head on a platter."

"I'll bring you his heart, kid," he said with deep meaning. "I'll touch him where he lives—in the pocket."

"You'd better look him up in Bradstreet's," she warned. "It might make you change your mind."

"You don't know me," returned Tucker. "But say, ain't this the place where I—where we——"

"Yes, we'd better be turning back," she said.

"Ain't you scared, or nothing?" he de-

manded insistently, as they stood there in the dusk. "How'd your cash balance come to-day—all right?"

"Yes, it balanced," she chided, pushing his protecting arm away. "And please don't—let's not be foolish."

"All right," he promised, and strode on in silence. "Won't need that diamond ring, then?" he inquired.

"No," she replied, "I'm afraid not."

"I wonder," he hinted, "if there's some young business man back in Frisco—some smooth guy that you can really respect—that's saving up to buy a ring?"

"Why—well, several of them have suggested it," she acknowledged archly, "but—there's really nothing definite."

"Good enough!" pronounced Tucker. "Now you watch *my* smoke—you watch me take a fall out of Ketcherside. Makes you laugh a little, eh? You don't think I can do it. Well, say, how would it strike you, if I did?"

"Fine!" she replied, smiling up at him through the darkness. "But you haven't done it yet."

"You watch my dust," he said, and smiled back.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PERSONALITY PLUS BUYS IT.

Since all was arranged, except the trifling detail of how he was to take the fall out of Ketcherside, Tucker wisely decided not to tackle him right then and gave his entire attention to Julia. They lunched together at the Oasis, they took a walk every evening when the wind was not too bad, and every time that they changed the films they went to the Gold Trails Picture Palace. That was about the limit of the legitimate pleasures which were offered by this hell-roaring camp, but sometimes when they felt real devilish they strolled up the gulch and looked in through the dance-hall doors. After that they retired to the ladies' parlor of the St. Francis and Tucker told stories while she laughed. It was really a wonderful week.

But all wonderful weeks end, and the sordid affairs of life will encroach on the most glorious of romances. Tucker was sitting by the stove of the Happy Days Saloon when Personality Plus strode in. His face was burned brick-red, his hat was tied down to keep it from blowing away; and his trim

suit of khaki was sifted full of dirt from the sandstorm that was raging without.

"Welcome home!" observed Tucker, after Personality Plus had bought and tossed off a single drink. "What's the news from Death Valley and points west?"

"You haven't got any mine!" declared Personality Plus with conviction, as the crowd laughed to express their utter scorn. "I believe you stole that ore!"

"Yes, but where?" jeered Tucker. "Why not find where I stole it and then you could steal some yourself?"

"You got it from old Buck!" charged Hogaboom wildly, "we found where you'd camped, at Stovepipe Hole."

"Oh, is that so?" returned Tucker, without the flicker of an eyelash. "Pretty nice to have a friend like old Buck."

"He went off without his pay," went on Hogaboom accusingly, "and that shows there's something wrong. The boys are on his trail—both ways."

"Fine! Fine!" applauded Tucker though his heart sank a little. "I hope the danged fools don't croak."

"We got caught in a sandstorm," continued Hogaboom, still accusingly; "it covered up all your tracks. But we know for a certainty you haven't got a mine. If you had, you'd be out there, watching it."

"Oh, I would, eh?" parried Tucker. "Well, I don't need to watch it, if you and your Injuns can't find it. What you want me to do—lead you out and put you on it, so you can rob it the way you did Lost Wagons?"

"You're a liar!" shouted Hogaboom, and Tucker rose up, laying off his long, black overcoat.

"Say that again," he suggested pleasantly, but Personality Plus took it back.

"Or I mean," he qualified, "I didn't rob Lost Wagons. It was taken by somebody else."

"Well, *you're* a liar!" stated Tucker; "and I can prove it to you with this!" He held up a rough-knuckled hand. "You not only robbed the mine, but you used the ore to sell stock in your Lost Wagons Extension! You're a nerry high priest to come back and tell a *gentleman* that he hasn't got any mine!"

"Well, you haven't!" declared Hogaboom, "or at least, we couldn't find it——"

"Well, say what you mean!" warned Tucker. He slipped into his new overcoat

and sat down comfortably by the fire and Personality Plus glared spitefully.

"There's a friend of yours, looking for you," he spoke up at last, and old Horse-shootum came forward from the door. He had edged in, out of the wind, while they were engaged in their controversy, and now he hobbled feebly to the fire.

"Injun col'l!" he whimpered, holding out his black hands, and Tucker sensed a touch. It happened about once in so often.

"Hello, Horse-shootum!" he greeted. "Where you go—shootum horse?"

"No—no shootum horse," answered Horse-shootum. He stood a while, gathering his rags about him closer and complaining in Shoshone to himself, and then he fixed his keen eyes on Tucker. "You come!" he said importantly, beckoning him over toward the door, but Tucker was feeling contrary.

"Nope—no come. Too cold—what you want? Maybeso you findum mine?"

For a moment the crafty eyes of Horse-shootum looked startled, he glanced at Tucker and then at the crowd; and then as they all watched him he began to fumble in his clothes, and Tucker suddenly awoke to the truth.

"Here! You come!" he cried, rising up and making a grab for him, but Horse-shootum had flashed the nugget. It was not an ordinary nugget, it had lime on one side of it and the cavities were black with silica.

"Me-e-e ketchum mine!" announced Horse-shootum defiantly. "How much you pay—thlis gol'?"

"Forty dollars," returned Tucker, appraising it on the instant and reaching down into his boot.

"Let me look at that!" said a voice, and before Tucker could interfere Personality Plus had snatched away the nugget.

"I'll give you sixty!" he yelled, petting old Horse-shootum on the back and smiling into his face ingratiatingly. "You know me, Horse-shootum—me Injun's friend, savvy? How much you take, go show me mine?"

"How much you give?" demanded Horse-shootum succinctly, and his beady eyes twinkled expectantly.

"Aw, now here," broke in Tucker, pushing Personality Plus away, "you leave that old Injun alone. He hasn't got any mine, he just picks up these nuggets—I bought one myself from him, last month."

"Sixty dollars!" beckoned Hogaboom,

counting the money out enticingly. "All right?" And he passed over the bills.

"Nah—here, I'll give you eighty!" And Tucker pushed him aside and thrust his own money on Horse-shootum.

"Eighty dolla'—thlis gol'?" inquired the old Indian carefully, and Hogaboom drew away in disgust.

"What'd I tell you?" he demanded of the gaping crowd. "He gets this gold from the Indians!"

"Sure!" acknowledged Tucker, as he pouched the telltale nugget and hustled Horse-shootum out the door. "Why don't you buy in a little, yourself?"

"I don't have to," returned Hogaboom, starting purposefully toward the door, and Tucker gazed after him curiously.

"Well, let the poor boob go!" he cursed at last, after making a false start to follow him. "What do I give a damn what he finds?"

Tucker had a well-developed hunch, based upon years of experience, that Horse-shootum would never take him to the treasure; but as he heard Hogaboom's automobile begin to cough and explode he rushed over and burst out the door.

"You ketchum money?" he shouted, as he spied Horse-shootum in the back seat. "Well, you look out—him no good—he no pay you!"

"Me-e-e ketchum money," returned Horse-shootum, his wrinkled face one big grin, and Tucker nodded approvingly. Then he touched his lips warningly and looked at Horse-shootum through his fingers, the same indicating the bars of a jail, and the wrinkled face set like a mask.

"He's wise," muttered Tucker. But was he? The automobile bucked and started, only half hitting on account of the cold, and Horse-shootum rose up in alarm; but Personality Plus jerked him back by the coat tails and went thundering away up the grade. Tucker gazed after him doubtfully, for he was heading for Lost Wagons, and butted back into the saloon.

"Lemme look at that nugget," said one of the chair warmers as Tucker drew up to the fire; but Tucker, too, was wearing a mask. He ignored the request and, after a long silence, the men about the stove exchanged glances. He was afraid to show them the gold. Tucker stalked out at last, pacing up and down the street, doing everything to keep down his uneasiness; and when,

late that night, they heard Hogaboom's machine he braced himself in his chair.

What if the ignorant old Indian, despite his signaled warning, had taken the promoter to the cache? What a scattering there would be, and what a call for the guards. It would be moving day for Death Valley Slim! But—Horse-shootum would never do it; he was too crafty, too wise; he would take Hogaboom somewhere else. The Indian never lived that would show a white man a mine, though he might take him close and let him find it; but he would never show him the gold for, according to Indian belief, right there he would drop stone dead.

The automobile bubbled down the grade and stopped outside the saloon, the door heaved, and Pete Hogaboom bulged in.

"You gimme that nugget!" he shouted at Tucker, his voice almost choked with excitement. "You're a damned thief—you've been digging up my gold!"

"Your gold!" came back Tucker, rearing up to meet him. "Since when did you have any gold?"

"It came off of my claim! I'm going to have you arrested! I knew you didn't have any mine!"

"Yeah, I bet ye," jeered Tucker and laughed at him insultingly. "Well, go ahead and have me arrested."

"Well, I will," declared Hogaboom, beginning to pull off his gloves and unwrap the scarf from his ears; "he took me to the very spot."

"Right on your claim, eh?" suggested Tucker. "That was quite a coincidence. Did you find any more of the ore?"

"It's all been stolen!" raged Hogaboom, his face turning red, "I claim every nugget that you've got."

"Prove your property?" inquired Tucker. "Show the place where it came from? Seems to me you're taking a whole lot for granted. Just because an old Indian takes you up some sand wash and says that's where he got this nugget, you run off at the head and claim all my gold, and all the rest of the gold in the world. Did you ever stop to think that an Indian's testimony isn't competent—that his word don't prove *nothing* in court? Well, stop then, and think; and you take back what you said, or I'll take it out of your hide!"

"Well—of course——" qualified Hogaboom. And then, very reluctantly, he admitted that he might be wrong. "But I'm

not through with you yet!" he yelled back from the doorway. "I'll prove it! You wait—you damned thief!"

"Huh! His gold!" snorted Tucker as the wild-eyed saloon bums gathered about him to get his account. "He never had any gold. And, if he did, by grab—if this gold came from his ground—look at all the ore he stole from *me*. But what does he bring back? Does he bring back any gold—does he find any ore in place? He brings back nothing but that gall and gab of his and the word of a horse-eating Injun."

"Yes, but Slim," reasoned Bullfrog Smith, who had joined in on the conspiracy to get Tucker to reveal his hidden gold, "ain't this nugget the same as your ore? Ain't it coated over with lime like, and——"

"Oh, sure, sure!" sulked Slim. "I see you're all against me. Mighty little thanks a man gets in this camp. Didn't I make you, with Lost Wagons? Well, get off of my neck, then. To hell with you and your push!"

"Ahr now, Tuck, bye," wheedled Bullfrog, "don't go getting so cranky. What's a word or two now, between friends? But why don't you, like a good bye, go and locate your claim properly and build up the town again?"

"Sure, and walk out of camp again, after you've all had a shot at me and cleaned me, down to a dime? No, thank you, Mr. Smith. I'll play this hand myself, without any advice from *nobody*!"

"I'll fix you!" bawled a voice as the door burst open again, letting in a blast of cold air. "I'll get you—I'm going to see Ketcherside!"

"Well, you'll crawl, then!" threatened Tucker, making a dash out into the darkness, but Personality Plus had fled.

"Good enough," grinned Tucker, when he was safely outside the door, and went down to unsaddle his mule.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CLAY FEET OF THE GOD.

Personality Plus was a shifty fighter, more given to covering up than to exchanging wallops in the open; but when there was gold in sight he mixed in and roughed it, for that is the way gold is won. With a lady now, it is different, or the ordinary affairs of life where good will and fair dealing count; but in the scramble for gold all the

rules are set aside and the battle royal is on.

There was a man in Gold Trails who had used Hogaboom spitefully, even accusing him of stealing his ore; and Hogaboom in return had stolen this man's advertising to sell stock in Lost Wagons Extension; but Hogaboom knew that Ira N. Ketcherside would join him in ganging Tucker Edwards. That is the way in battles royal, where ten sturdy fighters step into the ring together; they gang up in twos and threes, dragging the big men down first, then turn and fight it out for the spoils; and Tucker Edwards must be downed and made to give up his secret before Ketcherside and Hogaboom could fight for it.

They got together in the morning, in Ketcherside's private office, and then Ketcherside sent out for Tucker Edwards. He was in a fine fury, goggling his eyes like a crab as he awaited the arrival of this reprobate; but Tucker was quite calm, having waited a goodly while before he condescended to attend the conference. He came in smiling, attended by Miss Cleghorn, the only messenger who had been able to persuade him; and Ketcherside dismissed her with a choppy nod of the head, for he wanted no witnesses to this drag-out.

"Sit down, sir," he commanded, waving Tucker to a chair, but Tucker preferred to take it standing. Somehow he felt stronger that way.

"Mr. Edwards," began Ketcherside, holding his wrath below the boiling point, "I understand from Mr. Hogaboom that you and some Indians have been engaged in looting my mine. Now, I don't need to point out to you that this is a serious offense, involving a long term of imprisonment; nor that I, as the president of the Lost Wagons Company, am in duty bound to prosecute to the utmost. But at the same time, considering that you are the discoverer of our mine and that the purchase price may have seemed to you inadequate; I shall be willing under certain circumstances to overlook what you have done—provided you will restore what you have stolen."

"Isn't this going pretty strong?" inquired Tucker boldly. "It may be all right for me to be tried, convicted, and sentenced without getting a word in edgeways; but if I remember correctly, Mr. Hogaboom robbed your mine himself, and now you're thick as thieves. Didn't you see him with your own

eyes, when I put you in possession of Lost Wagons, coming out with a bag of stolen ore? Well, you did, and I can prove it; and I can prove that he robbed me and sold the ore to an assayer."

He paused and met Ketcherside's eyes and for once he did not quail, for Ketcherside knew he was wrong. He knew that Pete Hogaboom had done all of this, and more, and that it would look very bad in court; but at the same time he believed that the king can do no wrong, and financially he was a king.

"That is quite beside the point," he spoke up testily. "I am talking of what *you* have done."

"Well, what have I done?" challenged Tucker aggressively. "And before you go any further I'd like to inform you, Mr. Ketcherside, that this rough stuff doesn't go, with me. I'm free-born and half white. I don't care how rich you are, you can't call me a thief and get away with it."

"Do you recognize this nugget?" inquired Ketcherside, holding his voice to a deadly calm, and Tucker burst into a sweat. It was the present he had given to Julia.

"Yes," he said. "That's a piece of gold that I gave to your secretary, Miss Cleghorn."

"Oh!" grunted Ketcherside. "So you admit it, then? Where did you get this nugget, Mr. Edwards?"

"Where did *you* get it?" glowered Tucker, for it cut him to the quick to think that Julia had betrayed him.

"I got it from Miss Cleghorn," returned Ketcherside evenly. "Kindly answer my question, if you will!"

"It's none of your business," replied Tucker sulkily. "But I'll say right now I never stole it."

"Yes. Now, here is a piece of gold that you turned in at the store in exchange for some clothing, and so forth. Where did you get this gold, Mr. Edwards?"

"I got that from my mine," answered Tucker promptly. "Anything else you'd like to know?"

"Not at present," purred Ketcherside. "Bring in the Indian, Mr. Hogaboom. I shall prove that this gold was stolen."

"You'll play hell," sneered Tucker and turned about angrily as old Horse-shootum hobbled in.

"You ask him," directed Ketcherside, and

Hogaboom picked up the first nugget, the one that Tucker had given Julia.

"You know that rock?" he asked, and Horse-shootum nodded.

"Yes. Knowum," he grunted.

"Where you ketchum?" demanded Hogaboom. "Up road, where you showed me? You sell this gold to Slim?"

"Yes. Ketchum up load. Yes. Sellum to Slim. Him tladam tent—thlis gol."

"How much he pay you?" interjected Tucker cunningly, "to tell all this?" And Horse-shootum answered, straight out.

"Ten dolla'," he said, and stood looking blank while Tucker slapped his leg and whooped.

"That's right, Horse-shootum!" he laughed. "Always tell the whole truth. Well, I guess I don't go to the pen!"

He jammed his hat on his head and started for the door, but Ketcherside called him back.

"Just a moment!" he roared, breaking his pose of easy mastery and springing up with a wolfish snarl. "Just a moment! Come back, here! Come back!"

"You go chase yourself!" retorted Tucker, but he found the door locked, or at least it would not open for him. "Uhr, locked me in, eh?" he observed, turning back to face Ketcherside. "You're right there with this strong-arm stuff."

"No! You are *not* locked in, sir!" cried Ketcherside in a frenzy. "The door can be opened, at any time. But let me tell you, Mr. Edwards, I'm going to prosecute you to the limit, if you don't return that gold!"

"Now, here," challenged Tucker, advancing upon him angrily, "what the devil have you got into your head? What makes you think you own this gold that I turned in at the store? Have you got any more in your mine?"

"Well—well, no," admitted Ketcherside, swallowing his Adam's apple furiously. "Some miscreant has stolen the last of it."

"Huh, huh!" crowed Tucker, "you'll cut a pretty figure. And so you're going to send me to jail! Well, you want to look out or that's where you'll land, selling stock in a worthless mine. You dog-goned old crook, you've sold millions of shares in a mine that ain't worth anything. You're afraid to go down on it and all the ore you had has been swiped by some lousy old Injun. That'll sound good before the Corporation Commission."

Ketcherside snatched off his glasses and rose up as if to strike him, and then like a mask his old dignity returned and his face became suddenly set.

"Sit down," he said to Tucker. "Mr. Hogaboom, I will excuse you—please take that vile Indian with you."

He sank back into his chair and tapped his glasses against his hand, and Hogaboom and Horse-shootum filed out.

"Now, Mr. Edwards," he began in a soft, quiet voice, "there seems to be a mistake here, somewhere. I was informed by Mr. Hogaboom that he had positive evidence that you had sequestered our ore. Some one has done it, we know, because his tracks are plainly evident at the place where he dug out the gold; but, unfortunately, most unfortunately, not a piece of ore is left to show where this treasure all comes from."

"Yeah—too bad," nodded Tucker, and drew his lips down grimly to suppress a mocking grin. He saw now like a flash the clay feet of this great god, this man who claimed to be a king; he saw him twist and squirm, trying to get around the fact that his mine was a barren hole. Yes, and now those gray eyes, which had had him fixed and fascinated when he had appeared there regarding his water rights, were looking far away, and the thick-lensed glasses were off as he tapped them against his wrist. It was a thick, hairy wrist, such as a butcher might have, a wrist that had once directed the knife; but he, Tucker Edwards, had no call to fear him now, for the killer had been tamed with one blow. He had realized his own impotence, and that mention of the commission had floored him like a pole-axed steer. It was a chance blow, but it had struck a vital spot.

"Mr. Edwards," spoke up Ketcherside, after a long, contemplative silence, "I am going to ask you a favor. I want you to go with me to the mine and point out the source of those nuggets."

"Who—me?" cried Tucker, in well-simulated surprise. "Why, I don't know a thing about it. This old Indian, Horse-shootum, has been picking them up for years—I've bought one or two of them from him—but neither he nor anybody else has ever found the source. How long do you think they'd be there, if we did?"

"Not very long," acknowledged Ketcherside with a world-weary sigh. "Have you many more specimens on hand?"

"Well, now that's a leading question," replied Tucker. "I don't feel I can quite trust you, Mr. Ketcherside. After what you have done, trying to trap me here with Hogaboom——"

"Please forget it!" appealed Ketcherside abjectly. "He is very untrustworthy. I made a great mistake to see him—I regret the matter very, very much."

"I believe it," returned Tucker and waited.

"How much, Mr. Edwards," coaxed Ketcherside softly, "how much will you take for those nuggets?"

"I thought so!" burst out Tucker, and started for the door. "You're a crook," he spat back. "I won't sell 'em."

CHAPTER XX.

THE LOST BREIFOGLE.

Tucker left Ketcherside's office in a fine glow of righteous anger, determined to expose him to the world; but on sober second thought he decided not to do it, because—well, of course, he *had* stolen the ore. At the same time he felt infinitely superior to Ketcherside and also to his erring secretary; and when he met her in the hall he glared at Julia accusingly, for she had given away his nugget to Ketcherside. He brushed roughly past her and stepped out into the street, now suddenly swarming with men.

The sandstorm of the day before had subsided to a Nevada zephyr, barely strong enough to blow off a man's hat; and in the middle of the throng that had come out into the sunshine was Shorty Swingle, mounted on a burro. One hand was in the air, waving his battered old sombrero, and he was yelling in raucous triumph.

"I've struck it, boys!" he whooped. "It's the Lost Breifogle, sure! She's a wor-ld beater, boys—pure gold!"

"Pure gold!" repeated Tucker, and his heart sank at the words. His own mine was supposed to yield pure gold.

"Lemme look at that rock!" he demanded fiercely, fighting his way through the cheering crowd, and when he got up to Shorty he snatched away the specimen—and knew Shorty Swingle for a liar. "Where'd you find this?" he asked, and Shorty stopped his Irish howl long enough to grab back the nugget.

"None yer business!" he yammered. "What in cripes' name do you think I am? D'ye think I'd show the Lost Breifogle?"

A-ah, I've been hunting for it for years, boys; from Daylight Springs to the Twin Buttes, and looking for them two white spots everywhere; and at last, be gee, I found it, jest like they all described it, with the gold laying right on the ground! And there was the skeleton of an Injun, and some old, worn-out kayaks! Gawd A'mighty, boys, she sure looked *good*!"

"Sure enough?" cried Tucker, and when Shorty looked down at him he gave him a furtive wink.

"A-ah! Surest thing you know!" chanted Shorty, grinning broadly, and he gave Tucker a certain look.

"Well, come and have a drink, then!" invited Tucker cordially, "I've been looking for the Breifogle for years!"

"I—I'll go you!" cheered Shorty, dropping down off of his burro and stopping to untie a small bag. "Heft that, Tuck, me boy, it's pure gold!"

"Fine! Fine!" nodded Tucker, and then, behind his hand. "I'm wise, Shorty; don't pull it too strong."

"Ho, ho! The Lost Breifogle!" shouted Shorty to the hilltops. "I'm r-rich, dod-dot it. I'm r-r-rich! Didn't I find the St. Patrick and the World Beater and all of 'em? Didn't I start the big rush to Bullfrog? A-ah—they was nahthin', boys, nahthin'—I wouldn't spit on 'em, now! The Lost Breifogle has got 'em *all* faded!"

"And if old Ketcherside spots you," hissed Tucker in his ear, "he'll send you to Siberia for life."

"She's a world beater!" chanted Shorty. "Gimme a drink, Bullfrog, a drink; and give the boys a drink, out of *this*!"

He slammed down a nugget and Bullfrog glanced at Tucker Edwards before he spread the line of glasses down the bar. It was the very same gold as Tucker's. But business is business, and Bullfrog's business was booming, so he chucked it into the till and said nothing; but there were others not so charitable, and with eyes just as keen, and the word quickly passed to the street. There the few self-respecting citizens who had refrained from entering the saloon forgot their fine-spun scruples and rushed in; and within the space of a few minutes a hundred rumors had sprung to life, only to die with the telling of the next. Shorty had discovered the Lost Breifogle, he had found Slim's lost mine, he and Slim had been robbing the Lost Wagons; they were having a drink to-

gether and laughing between themselves at the way they had trimmed old Ketcherside; and then that rumor of rumors, destined to be believed like holy script—Lost Wagons had struck pure gold!

The crowd began to thin, to dwindle away, in a minute the Happy Days was deserted; and the old, crazy gang that had gone broke once on Lost Wagons was back at the broker's office. They were buying on margin and bidding the price up with their puny little hundred-dollar orders; for their enthusiasm was unfeigned and, quick as wires could tell the tale, the news flashed over the continent. Brokers in Chicago and San Francisco, without waiting to verify anything, plunged in and began to buy on their own account; and the sight of their insanity set every one else to buying until the price went up to eight dollars. Then the market broke abruptly, as it has a dirty way of doing when the professional bears get to work. But, for once, those bold raiders came out second best and had to buy back around ten.

It was a wonder, a miracle, an exception to all rules, the biggest excitement in years; and yet, back in the Happy Days, the two men who had caused it both swore that it was all a fake. They ran down Lost Wagons, as a mine and as a company; they protested that they knew nothing of its gold; they even went further and begged and implored everybody to sell out while the madness was on; and all the time, in spite of it—or it may be, because of it—Lost Wagons went up and up. Tucker rose up and made a speech, calling them the prize boobies of the century and warning them they would regret their damfoolishness; but in spite of all he said—or more likely because of it—Gold Trails spent its last dollar on stock. And on margin, too, paying ten per cent down, with the brokers bucketing half the orders; until Ira N. Ketcherside, through the bank, which he controlled, called their loans and made them be good.

The bear raid came then, sending the stock down a little, but just as Gold Trails was quaking for its winnings, Lost Wagons went up to ten-ten. That night the Happy Days was a beehive of excitement, with every man boasting of his clean-up, for most of them had bought in early when the stock was around three dollars, so that the drop had not wiped out their holdings. They had doubled and tripled their earnings, and many of them had pyramided, taking their

profits and buying in again; and even they had won, won more than all the rest, and were standing pat to win still more. They all talked at once, and the whisky ran like water; but against them, all the time, two voices were raised up—Tucker Edwards' and Shorty Swingle's.

Shorty was getting very drunk, but Tucker stayed with him, for they were beset by a band of ravening wolves disguised in the sheep's clothing of friends. These friends bought the drinks and forced them upon Shorty, they feigned a total disbelief in his mine; and with a thousand jests and wiles they tried to wring out the admission that the gold had come from Lost Wagons. Already the powerful automobiles were thundering off across Dry Lakes, a second stampede was at its height; and before morning every claim that had not been worked would be jumped, as well as some that had. The phrase "legal rights" became a very relative term as interpreted by these devotees of Judge Colt; and the Lost Wagons Company sent out fifty armed guards to protect their property from invasion. But through every thing, until Shorty went to sleep, Tucker Edwards stood out against it all.

He was like a man who had released a mighty floodgate, whose waters would sweep them all to destruction; but, finding them deaf to his warnings, he left them to their fate and went down and saddled up his mule. There was a hereafter coming for him if he dallied too long in the presence of this imminent disaster—and especially with that gold in the safe. The demand was becoming insistent that he should produce his two saddlebags and prove or disprove the thousand rumors; and to-morrow, or the next day, Ira N. Ketcherside might step in and claim the gold as his own. All Gold Trails would be behind him, for it would send up their stock, but Tucker had quite other plans. That gold had a value a hundred times its normal worth, and it must be moved before the wolf pack pulled him down.

It was three in the morning when Tucker rode up to the door and Bullfrog Smith was nodding behind the bar. It had been a great day for Bullfrog, but he had been patronizing his own bar, and the whisky had rather got the best of him. His battered face was inflamed, his eyes drooped blearily, and his brain was dead for sleep; but even then some fixed idea came back to him dimly and he refused to deliver the saddlebags.

"They're mine, ain't they?" demanded Tucker and, as Bullfrog still demurred, he jabbed him with the muzzle of a six-shooter. Bullfrog opened up then, without raising any outcry, and the next minute Tucker was gone. He rode a long way, and when he came back the saddlebags were safely hid. The sun was coming up, Gold Trails was astir. At the bar of Bullfrog's saloon he found Shorty Swingle, having a drink with Personality Plus.

"What, buying a drink?" whooped Tucker facetiously, but nobody joined in his laugh. "Have one with me, Shorty," he invited enticingly. "How's the discoverer of the Breifogle, this morning? And so there was piles and piles of gold?"

"You're a crook, Slim!" declared Shorty, swaying and regarding him drunkenly. "All you think of is to give the camp a black eye. But me, now I'm different—I'm a good feller, savvy? I believe in doing what is just and right."

"Sure! Sure!" agreed Tucker, and glanced speculatively at Hogaboom. He was wondering how far things had gone.

"You're always knocking!" charged Shorty. "You ain't got no true spirit. You're against progress and—and—everything."

"Sure!" agreed Tucker. "But I never forget a friend, Shorty. Come on over and I'll buy you your breakfast."

"I can't eat this town grub!" complained Shorty noisily. "Nothing but fluff-duffs—I got to have me beans."

"Sure!" jollied Tucker, while Hogaboom looked daggers. "I know the very place. Down at Mike Stewart's chili joint—he cooks 'em in oil cans, with beefsteaks and such on the side. Come on, Mr. Hogaboom, you're a prospector, too—come on and have some beans!"

"No, I don't like 'em," answered Hogaboom cuttingly. "And Shorty and I have other plans. We're going to the Oasis, where those pretty girls all are, and have a planked steak and champagne. How will that suit you, Shorty—all them pretty blondes, you know—"

"Nah! I don't like this town grub!" declared Shorty, still more lustily. "I got to have me beans, or I ain't right!"

"Well, come on!" laughed Tucker, "I'll lead you to the beans. And if you want some champagne you let me buy it for you

—didn't we prospect for the Breifogle together?"

"Hah! We did that!" chortled Shorty; "but I beat you to it, Slim! You ain't so danged smart as you think! And I'll buy me own beans—and me champagne, too. Come on, boys, all of ye, down to Mike's!"

He started for the door, rousing all the sleepers as he went by them and inviting them to join him at Mike's; and Personality Plus, deprived of his prey, followed enviously along behind. A band of twenty men came trailing down to Mike's place, where the old-timers always went for their beans; and the regular custom was crowded out into the street as table after table was filled. The beans were all cooked, and there were lots of them, too, with plenty of bacon and chili pepper; and while Mike served them in soup plates the quart bottles of champagne were set along the board like beer.

"Here's to yuh, boys!" toasted Shorty, releasing a cork and pouring the sparkling wine into their tumblers; but when he reached into his pocket to make payment with a nugget he let out a yelp of dismay.

"By the holy, jumping, Jehu—I've been rolled!" he hollered. "Me nuggets are gone, and everything. Some dhirrty son of a goat has r-robbd me in me sleep. L'ave me at him—it was Bullfrog Smith!"

"Ah, no! Ah, no!" broke in Tucker soothingly. "He only put your sack in his safe. I saw it there myself when I made him open up and—"

"He's robbed me!" clamored Shorty, kicking over a couple of chairs as he raced out into the street; and when Tucker arrived he was standing before Bullfrog Smith with both fists raised up to high heaven.

"You did, too, I tell ye!" he shouted shrilly. "I seen you meself—you did take 'em!"

"Yes, sure he took 'em," echoed Tucker, "I saw 'em in his safe. Make him come through, Shorty; he's got 'em."

"You're a liar!" snarled Bullfrog Smith, swelling and hissing like a snake. "I did *naht*—I know *nahthin'* about 'em!"

"Well, you were drunk, then," retorted Tucker. "Because I saw 'em in your safe. Remember when you gave me my saddlebags?"

"Say, who called you in on this?" de-

manded Bullfrog truculently, tapping him insultingly on the chest with one finger. "D'ye mean to say I'm a liar?"

"I mean to say I saw 'em in your safe, at three o'clock this morning. Don't you think I know that bag? Well, open up your safe, and *look!*"

"Yes, and be dad-burned quick about it!" yelled Shorty threateningly. "Before I go git my gun and kill ye!"

"A-ah—youse!" sneered Bullfrog, thrusting out his chin at Tucker; and then he went

back to his safe. He spun the disk, pausing to muse now and then as if the combination had escaped him, until at last with a jerk he snatched the door open and Shorty's bag of nuggets fell out.

"That's all right!" broke in Shorty, as Bullfrog began to explain. "I always knowed you was a thief, Bullfrog Smith. And after all the money that I've spent over your bar for you to——"

"I did naht!" protested Smith, and stood sweating.

TO BE CONCLUDED.



A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

YOUNG Mr. Fielding Jones, who had begun his business career with the hope and intention of rising rapidly to the top of the heap, developed a grouch. It was an expansive, deep, and all-pervasive grouch which respected neither persons nor things. Nothing suited young Mr. Fielding Jones. The boss was a mossback; the "system" was all wrong; the records were kept in a way that prevented the meritorious employees, of whom Mr. Jones was conspicuously one, from being suitably rewarded; and, if you wanted the truth, there was no future in this game anyway.

The inevitable result resulted swiftly. The other employees developed a hearty and upstanding dislike of young Mr. Fielding Jones. The boss perceived that a grouch was neither a speeder-up nor a self-improver for the person who carried it about. And more than one client of the firm, after coming in contact with young Jones, said things which made the grouch even bigger and gloomier than it had been.

Finally, the boss called young Fielding Jones into a quiet little room one day and said:

"Mr. Jones, you're cheating this company. When we take a man in with us, we expect him to give us, in return for the money and opportunities we give him, all the energy and brain work of which he is capable. You're not doing that. You're using up a lot of your energy and mental power on a grouch. That is, you're wasting your time trying to indict, try, convict, and sentence other people to the blame of your shortcomings.

"Subconsciously, or consciously perhaps, you realize that you don't know as much about this business as you once thought you did. You feel that you're not making good. Usually, when a man feels that way, he goes to work to study the men who are better workers than he, thereby learning how to excel and win promotion. But you took another tack. You thought you could fool me by simply saying you were not to blame for your lack of ability. Mr. Jones, that won't work. That never has worked. A chronic grouch is always a self-confessed dub who's mad with himself because he's a failure but tries to 'take it out' on his surroundings. Suppose you turn over a new leaf now and use your energies studying, instead of raging."

Mr. Fielding Jones took that advice. Mr. Fielding Jones is now first vice president of his company.

The Broken Bottle

By John van Bibber

There is more than one way of breaking into the movie game, but we doubt if any one else ever did it the way Grainger did. He made good, too

A LITTLE leaden pellet propelled from the barrel of a revolver into his brain—and then oblivion. What a blessing life could be disposed of so easily! And his departure would be nothing more than another rolling stone cast into the pool of eternity, with scarcely a ripple across the surface of society, to dignify his act.

Nevertheless, out of a motive of self-respect, Grainger had removed, from his clothing, all marks which might establish his identity, and had carefully destroyed all papers, with the exception of a note which he placed in his inside coat pocket, reading as follows:

At twelve o'clock noon, April 26, I intend to take my life. There is no one to notify. I prefer to die as I have lived, in obscurity.

Why he had chosen the station as the scene of his deed, he could not have told, unless it was that the irony of snuffing out the spark of life, in the midst of the bustle of commuting throngs, appealed to his sense of humor. Or, perhaps, he had just drifted there. He was sitting on a bench in the waiting room, reading a paper abandoned by a hurried traveler. As he shifted the paper, his eye fell on a page occupied by row upon row of short, finely printed paragraphs, headed, at the top, "Help Wanted" and "Situations Wanted." Prosaic paragraphs, but ones that have been known to lead sometimes to fame, but more often to despair.

Grainger had long ago lost faith in the printed word "Wanted." It had served him, at best, to draw a week's salary from some gullible employer, persuaded, against his better judgment, by a gift of plausible geniality which overshadowed Grainger's ability to concentrate upon the task at hand. But even if this happened, as it did infrequently, he could always look forward, with annoying regularity, to a discharge slip or a personal dismissal the following week. He had not only lost faith in the want advertisements.

He had also lost faith in himself. It was the combination of the yellow envelope and the corner café that dashed his hopes of ever remaining long enough, in one position, to be recognized at the paying booth.

Grainger had returned from the war with all the symptoms of a well-defined case of virulent wanderlust. His father, a minister in a hopeful town in Ohio, had so assiduously inoculated his children with large chunks of the gospel, catching them at an early age, when protestations were valueless, that when Grainger arrived on the Continent, he learned the meaning of the word "reaction," and forthwith gained the envy of his company by his persistent efforts to reduce the vin and cognac production of the French republic to a minimum. Arriving in America after a convalescence from shell shock, Grainger viewed the continuance of his law studies, in Mapesville, with abhorrence, and started in pursuit of that intangible entity known as congenial employment. He soon found that it existed, for him at least, only as a mythical phrase in the mouths of professional up-lifters and the pages of Y. M. C. A. booklets. The more futile became his search, the more frequent grew his recourse to the solacing cup.

But there came a time when the corner saloon and all of its kin ceased to exist, and Grainger, curiously enough, found himself in worse straits than before. The world had reformed overnight, it seemed, and he awoke, one day, to find himself apparently the sole representative of the once populous army of unemployed. There were no more temporary vacancies to be filled, no more substitutions for men like himself who were, now and then, relegated to the disabled lists. He had never found any one who could be inveigled into giving him a reference, and one look at his slender form and sensitive face brought forth the inevitable headshake from a loutish foreman, or a wave of the hand in the direc-

tion of the factory gate. Grainger drew the line at office work, and one night, in his dingy room on the East Side, he made a vow that he would rather admit defeat than accept the dullness of a clerkship.

Had he been able to walk into his father's library, on Hyatt Street, and explain glibly his necessity for temporary financial aid, without being compelled to listen to a "Christian sermon," it is quite probable that Grainger would not have spent his last remaining dollars on the automatic revolver that rested in his hip pocket. He did not believe his father would care. Possibly he would secretly rejoice in being relieved of the responsibility of an ungrateful son; and, as for his brothers and sisters, he was no nearer to them than a stranger.

Wanted—By a wealthy bachelor, with varied interests, a secretary who is capable—

Bah! He knew those kind. He threw the paper on the bench and glanced about the station. Across the aisle, a matronly woman, with a ruddy face that bespoke of a life in the country, was arranging neatly wrapped packages of eatables in a picnic basket, the while keeping a maternal eye on a trio of children, who threatened to bolt the jurisdiction of the parental lap the moment interest was allowed to wane. At the left of the woman, an elderly man was sitting, quietly reading from a pile of books on the bench, from which he would now and then select a volume with the tender care of a bibliophile. To the right, were a group of foreigners, smoking native pipes and staring stolidly ahead.

"No. This isn't the right place after all," thought Grainger. "Not at all as I pictured it. It wouldn't be nice to disturb that quiet couple, and those horny-handed sons of toil might gain an erroneous impression of their adopted land. We must seek death in some other quarter."

An inventory of his finances disclosed eighty-six cents, his entire fortune, and there was still time to go a little way into the country. Some quiet spot along a roadside, shielded by a friendly hedge, or underneath a tree, in an out-of-the-way orchard, he decided, was the proper place for the consummation of his deed. He pushed sixty-five cents across the ledge of the ticket booth, and received in exchange a suspicious look from the agent, and a ticket labeled "New Badmington." The name brought back pleasant memories of a week spent on leave among

the green hills of rural England, and he felt a sense of gratitude, toward the agent, for not having chosen a grimy factory town for his death. A glance at his fellow travelers assured him that his destination was a quiet, suburban village.

When the passengers had been seated, Grainger took a place at the rear of the car, and gazed out of the window. It was not until the train reached open country, and the green fields receded from the tracks, like waves from the prow of a ship, melting into the dim blue of the horizon, that Grainger felt the first pang of uneasiness. Always susceptible to beauty, although making a brave attempt not only to conceal but to master his emotions, he saw, nevertheless, in the slowly evolving landscape, if not the proof of the existence of a divine power, at least a testimonial to the magnitude and importance of earthly life. He was suffering, perhaps, from a natural reaction from the blithe and nonchalant manner in which he first approached his deed.

What if he should weaken at the last moment? A shudder of disgust passed over him at the thought of his cowardice. He felt in his coat pocket, passing his hand caressingly over the note, and with the other hand he removed the revolver to his coat pocket, where it would be more easily accessible. The touch of the cool steel had a reassuring effect, and he could turn once more to a contemplation of the vivid landscape with serenity.

It looked prosaic now, only so many patches of green, so many splotches of yellow, where the grain was ripening, and so many crude barn buildings, nestling under the protection of scattered clumps of trees. The frown passed from his face, and he relaxed into repose, but he was aware that there had arisen, for the first time since he contemplated his act, the specter of defeat.

He alighted from the train and passed through the main street of the town, until he reached a dingy lunch room, at the corner of a crossroad that appeared to lead to open country. It seemed grotesque to be eating at such a time, and he longed to tell the waiter that this would be the last meal he would ever take, but a look at the watery eyes and unresponsive lips of the server deterred him. All he said was: "A sandwich, and a cup of coffee—and make it strong."

On leaving the restaurant, Grainger

turned west, along the street running at right angles to the one leading from the station. After a walk of about half a mile, he could see the country opening out, beyond a bend in the road. The clock on the church tower marked the hour, eleven-forty-five. He would have to hurry, if there was to be any time left to choose the sort of a place he had in mind. On the other hand, he reflected, haste was no longer so important an element, now that he had left the station behind. His body would probably lie several hours on the roadside, or perhaps several days, before it was discovered. Nevertheless, he would like to live up to the letter of his contract.

He increased his gait, and arrived rapidly at the bottom of the steep slope. In a square at the left, which constituted one of the approaches to a park, he saw a little knot of spectators grouped about a stone fountain. They stood, in a semicircle, facing several individuals who were walking to and fro in front of a tripod, on which was mounted a camera, and against which, in idle abandon, leaned a young man clad in a pale-blue silk shirt and white flannel trousers. His peaked cap was reversed. Grainger had never seen a motion picture in the making, and had, indeed, rarely seen the finished product in the theater. And yet, he was interested, principally because there was a group of people near by, and he was lonely.

As he came closer, he made out the figure of a man, in the uniform of a foreign officer, in the act of attempting to make love to a rather plain young woman, who appeared to be masquerading in the guise of a milkmaid. In a vague way he had always believed the actor's profession to be an idle and pleasant one, but as he watched the awkward couple striving to do the director's bidding he felt a growing sympathy, while the man with the megaphone continued to rage, and obviously refrained from blasphemy only out of deference to the spectators. Grainger had taken a place at one end of the semicircle, and with one eye on the clock and the other on the actors, he stood fascinated by the strange scene. He heard himself addressing a question to a person, of whose presence he was hardly aware. He had asked what the picture was intended to portray.

"Oh, we never know. That is, except the principals. But it doesn't really make any difference, the picture comes out just as well. It's a case of where ignorance is—well, not entirely blissful, but expedient."

She ended her reply with a laugh, and Grainger noticed that it was a friendly voice, companionable, and unconstrained. He had a habit of liking people, and there was usually a reciprocity of feeling. Moreover, he hadn't spoken to any one, all morning, except a waiter and a ticket agent.

"Purely an idle question on my part," he continued. "I probably won't see it. I rarely go to the theater, but there is another better reason."

He reached in his pocket and drew forth the note, acting impulsively under the momentum of his desire to share his secret with some one. As he passed her the little slip of paper, he noticed, for the first time, the halo of golden hair framing a broad forehead and deep blue eyes. "Read it," he said rather gruffly.

She looked at him with surprise. "Are you really going to do that?"

He smiled and watched her follow his eyes to the edge of his coat pocket, where the dark outline of the revolver magazine, partly shielded by his hand, stood out against the dull gray of his suit. He let the revolver slip back again into his pocket.

"Not here," he replied. "There's nothing to be frightened about."

"It's getting on toward noon," she said, glancing toward the tower.

"Yes, I know, but a few moments won't make any difference." He felt rather abashed before her eagerness. There was a slight stir among the actors, and before she could reply, the sharp voice of the director had called "camera!"

The pair before the camera went through their scene, with perfect precision. The simple act of turning the camera handle had transformed the players from automatons to flesh-and-blood individuals. The girl laid aside her awkwardness, the man forgot the crowd and his gesturings, and acted with an inspired sincerity. Grainger watched them with interest.

"Is this the end of it?" he asked, when the director had cut short the scene by a wave of his hand to the camera man.

"That's the finish of that one," replied the golden-haired girl. "But there's another one scheduled here for this morning. Perhaps you'd like to see it."

"I can't wait," said Grainger. "It's getting on."

The crowd began moving away and Grainger stood undecided. He turned to

speak to the girl again, but she had gone. He thought he caught a glimpse of her among the people who were following two men carrying a bench to a spot, under a tree, on the farther side of the park entrance. Grainger followed reluctantly. The crowd had increased, and he had to stand on tiptoe now to get a view of the director. He saw him take a sheet of paper from his pocket, glance at it quickly, and then clap his hands vigorously.

"All set for the suicide scene," he called. "Where's Lancaster?"

The camera was being set in place at the new point, the helpers were adjusting the bench, with delicate precision, in the center of the tree trunk, and the supers were taking their places along the edge of the spectators, to keep them from overrunning the scene. Grainger felt himself being jostled, and looking down, saw that the girl had returned. He was too interested, now, to resume conversation. A young man, in an atrocious make-up, took his place on the bench. The operator focused the camera with expert negligence, and sat down on a soap box and wearily lighted a cigarette. The girl caught at Grainger's elbow as she noticed him look once more in the direction of the tower.

"Don't go yet," she said. "You'll like this. It won't be long. They're starting now."

The man on the bench had already started his rehearsal. A few mechanical gestures, accompanied by pitifully inadequate grimaces, constituted the sum total of his achievement.

"That's awful, awful, awful!" cried the director in increasing rage. "Damn these extras. Why don't they get a decent troupe here."

Under the lashing tongue of the director, who spared no personal sensitiveness, when his reputation was at stake, the young man became more and more abject in manner, and more startled in expression. He looked as though he might "bolt the scene" at any moment.

"Listen," cried the director, by this time exasperated. "You're not supposed to be an actor. You're one of the starving population of a besieged city. All you've got to do is to register despair. Now, let's see you go through it once more."

The actor sat awkwardly on the edge of the bench, and after staring stupidly at a spot on the path, gripped an imaginary revolver and pressed it to his forehead.

"My God, man. Drag it out a little. A man doesn't shoot himself as calmly as he takes a shave in the morning. Watch this."

Throwing off his coat, the director pushed the man out of the bench. He stepped back a few paces, and approached the bench in a sloping gait, shoulders thrown forward, as though bearing an imponderable weight. His feet dragged at every step. He sat down on the bench heavily; leaned forward and buried his face in his hands. Then he rose slowly, shrugged his shoulders, and glanced about furtively. For a moment, his face was uplifted in whispered prayer, his eyes half closed.

"Admirable actor," thought Grainger. He turned to speak to the girl, and saw that she had again disappeared. She seemed to come and go like a wraith, without any warning of departure or approach. The director had dropped into the bench again, limply. He took the nonexistent revolver from his pocket, handled it for a moment, and then returned it. Then he sat bolt upright, reached hastily for the weapon, and beckoned to the actor.

"That's about what I want," he said. "Now try it once more."

The actor's second attempt was more of a fiasco than the first. The player was plainly flustered, and, with the more complicated instructions, he floundered through the part in a way that caused a titter from the spectators.

"That's hopeless. Hey, Baker," the director cried, "is there anybody on the lot we haven't used before, who could go through with this scene? Anybody!"

"Not that I know of, sir. I could run over in the automobile and bring some one back, if you want."

"Never mind. I'd rather cut the script than take so much trouble about it."

He cast a final look about the lot. The first stroke of twelve sounded from the deep bell in the tower, which stood like a gray sentinel over the scene. The spectators saw a young man in a gray suit, and a faded slouch hat, work his way through the crowd, and step into the center of the semicircle. The director eyed him sharply.

"Are you with this troupe?"

"No, sir."

"Can you act?"

"I've done a little. Enough for this, I guess."

"All right. There's five dollars in it for

you. Go through it quickly once, and then we'll have the camera."

Grainger smiled, at the suggestion of collecting his fee. He felt flattered at the approval of the director, and knew, now, that the chances of his carrying out his promise had grown brighter. Under the driving power of the director, and the stimulus of the crowd, he would not falter. As he turned, he saw the girl standing at the edge of the semicircle, where he had left her. Curious she should smile now. In the rehearsal he forgot her, became oblivious of everything but the task before him. Every gesture, every action of the scene was vivid in his mind. He was letter-perfect in his destined rôle, so that the director did not deem it necessary to go through with the performance to the end.

"All right. We'll shoot this time," he called.

Again the man in the blue shirt rose lazily from his seat on the soap box, switched his cap so that the visor which had been shading his eyes now concealed the back of his collar, and began to squint critically through the sights.

"Just a minute, Baker. Where's that gun?" the director inquired. The assistant director came up. "The property man's gone, I guess."

"Oh, damn!"

At the exclamation Grainger turned. "I've got it," he said, indicating his coat pocket, but being careful not to show the weapon.

"All set, then," cried the director, and stepped out of the scene. "Camera!"

At the drop of his arm, the operator set in motion the mechanism that spun the celluloid reel across the lens.

"Take your time, stranger," called the director, in a kindlier tone, "but don't slip up. It's getting late. Up to the bench now—dejected. You're going to kill yourself, don't forget that. Nothing cheerful about it. A little more slouch, that's it."

There was a pause while the director said nothing, but gazed with evident approval on the action.

"Now off the bench again. The prayer. You're going to die. Take it easy. You're not in a hurry about it. Yes, you can look at your watch, if you want to. Now, down on the bench again. You can hustle the action a bit now."

In only one particular did Grainger diverge from the pantomime suggested by the

director upon his assuming the rôle of actor. It was at the point where the directions called for extracting the revolver from his pocket, fondling it a moment, and then replacing it.

"All right. Now for the weapon," called the director. Grainger's hand slid into his pocket.

"Not too close. That's enough. Never mind the trigger."

The crowd gasped and scattered, and the shrill shrieks of frightened women broke the quiet of the morning. Several men started from the group and ran to the bench, where Grainger's body had fallen.

"What the——" exclaimed the director.

"It must be blanks," replied the perturbed Baker. "I gave orders for an empty chamber."

"It's worse than blanks," grumbled the voice of a man, who was kneeling beside the body, and had slipped his hand underneath the waistcoat.

When Grainger partially recovered consciousness, he wondered if he had suddenly been wafted into heaven. It was curiously light. There was a dome overhead, and he could hear subdued voices near by. Well, it wasn't so bad. He had violated Christian principles, and yet some guardian angel must have inclosed him in a protecting shroud. He wished he might tell the others, down below, how it seemed to die. Maybe he would, later. For the present, though, he felt very tired, and there was a pain in the side of his head. It would be better to sleep again.

"Must have been sort of all in, down and out, poor kid," some one said.

"Pretty good actor, just the same," said a voice Grainger did not remember ever having heard before.

"You said it," returned the familiar voice. "Are there any other bits we could give him, Baker?"

"Make-up parts. But how about Mannheim, the courier?"

"All right. Put him down for that, if he wants it. I guess he won't refuse."

Grainger became conscious of a tingling feeling creeping over his limbs. Funny. He couldn't feel that way and still be dead. He turned over on his side and opened his eyes. A young woman, with blue eyes and golden hair, was smiling down on him.

"I'm awfully sorry," she said. "I hope your head doesn't hurt very badly."

Grainger raised himself on the bench and glanced perplexedly from one face to another. He began to feel a little angry, now that he was recovering some of his strength, and realized that he had been hoaxed. His first thought was of another round of weary job hunting. The man he recognized as the director came forward, leading the young woman, and holding out her hand.

"Here is the young lady to whom you owe your—er—resurrection."

Grainger extended his hand, and bowed mechanically.

"I'm awfully sorry," the girl repeated. "When I took your revolver, I thought the gun I gave you was empty."

"You changed my revolver?"

She reached into the pocket of a capacious ulster, obviously fashioned for a member of the masculine gender, and drew forth the familiar automatic.

"Here's the one that really belongs to you. You'll find it empty this time." He took the weapon, and turned it over in his hand for a moment.

"You took this from me," he asked incredulously. "When did it happen?"

"While we were standing together, after you showed me the note. I got another one from the property man, and I thought it was empty. I'm sorry, but you'll be all right tomorrow, I think."

"Well, I could have sworn I was dead," replied Grainger, a smile creeping over his countenance.

"Physiological effect," commented the studio's first-aid physician, waving a cigarette. "From what I understand you had all the symptoms for a moment. Knew it was coming, and went clean off." As the doctor walked away, the director dug a cumbersome roll of bills from his pocket, stripped off one with a moistened thumb, and handed it to Grainger.

"You can report to Baker in the morning. The patch on your forehead, will be healed by then—won't it, Gloria?"

"It's getting better already," she smiled.

A gong sounded in the studio, and the director turned away abruptly, saying over his shoulder:

"If you're still feeling a little shaky, young

man, you can lie down a while on that vamp divan in the corner. Nobody will disturb you. We're going out on location."

Grainger and I had turned into Broadway. I felt a little conscious of my shabbiness in contrast to the trig cut of his clothes, and the successful air with which he carried himself.

"So that's how you started," I said.

"Just about as well as I can remember. But it isn't really unusual," he added. "Since I've been around the studios I have found that there isn't such a thing as a born actor. They all drift into it one way or another."

After proceeding several blocks we caught sight, simultaneously, of a large, brilliantly hued signboard, announcing Leonard Grainger, in "The Broken Bottle."

"Rather sensational titles they selected for your pictures, aren't they?" I asked, slightly hesitant.

He frowned as he glanced at the sign. "That's one of the things we have to put up with. An actor is the slave of his press agent. But I'm making hay while the arc lights burn. When the people get tired of me, I'll just retire."

I was glad to hear this viewpoint from my old friend. When I heard of his unusual success, I was a little afraid it might have wrought some changes. That he was as considerate as ever was shown by the next remark.

"Some time when you are short on material," he said, "you might write that incident up, if it strikes you as at all out of the ordinary."

"Thanks," I replied. "If you haven't any objection, I'll write it. But, of course, if I do," I laughed, "I'll have to make you marry the girl."

He threw back his head, and gave the hearty chuckle which all of us had always thought so contagious.

"Come out to my place in Glenwood over the next week-end," he suggested. "I'd like to have you meet her. And the boy, too. He's the greatest kid in the world."

With another parting chuckle, and a wave of his malacca cane, he disappeared through the revolving door.

A new Eddsfeld story, by J. Frank Davis, "Making the Populi Vox," in the next number.



A Tale of Two Towns

By Roy W. Hinds

Author of "Breaking and Entering," "Substantial Evidence," Etc.

As a circus man, Cameron Finlock develops a conscience, and calls in expert help to keep things right

I GAVE up smoking that morning. After lunch I sallied out for a supply of tobacco. A man has a right to change his mind. My quest led me to the cut-rate tobacco store of Cameron Finlock, who used to sell less valuable commodities at a much greater profit. To get him started, I inquired:

"What is the one thing you had rather do? I have read somewhere that all men, deep down in their hearts, would rather live differently than they do. What would you rather do—or are you perfectly contented in your tobacco store?"

Mr. Finlock meditated profoundly for about two seconds, and then replied somewhat irrelevantly:

"Take that chair over there—the other one's broke."

An hour later I returned home with my tobacco habit fully resuscitated, and with a new record for my typewriter, the air of which, from the lips of Mr. Finlock, went about as follows:

The only mortal that has definite ideas as to what he wants to do is a boy. When a boy says he wants to be an outlaw, you can figure that he means it for the time being. But the ambitions of boys skip from one thing to another. Sooner or later, every boy has an ambition to travel with a circus. I had that ambition when I was a boy. I had it when I grew up, and I still got it, though it ain't no soft snap to travel with a circus, no matter what your job is. It's a tough life.

But tell me, is there anything more luxurious to the imagination than the bustle of a circus lot in the forenoon; the glitter of the parade at noon; the roar of the lion, the trumpet of the elephant, the guffaw of the hyena, and the gasp of the spectator, fighting for supremacy over the gentle zephyrs

from the monkey cage; the side-show ballyhoos, and the crash of the band and the crush of humanity in the big top in the afternoon, with horses plunging and trapezes swinging; the perfume of gasoline torches and slaughtered peanuts mixed with the smell of bruised grass and torn earth, when the dew falls on the lot at night and mingles with the red lemonade; the stupendous scurry to get the show onto the train; the outlandish procession of elephants and camels and Missouri mules and giraffes and zebras and press agents, through the dark streets to the railroad yards, and finally the get-away, when all the world is solemn and asleep?

No wonder circus folks have a sneaking pity for the townspeople left behind, to go to the same old shops, the same old stores, and the same old offices! That's the lure of the circus.

Sounds fine, don't it? Well, I traveled with a circus one time, but not in the way I wanted to when I was a boy. I wanted to travel as an animal trainer, or a peanut peddler, or a lemonade ladler, or a bareback rider. When I grew up and found my chance it was nothing so nice as that. I owned the show.

My circus experience happened in the old days when circuses wasn't so big as they are now, and when men drank whisky because they liked it and not because it was prohibited.

One raw winter's day in June I was standing in the depot, in a town out in Indiana, waiting for yesterday's train. It had rained steady for a week, and the air was cold and wet. I finished reading a summer-resort advertisement in a newspaper and was about halfway through a news item predicting a blizzard when a hand was laid on my shoulder.

Now in them days I was mighty tender on the shoulders. I was superstitious, too,

and had an idea that if a man come up behind me and laid his hand on my shoulder it was a sign that I would soon have to hire a lawyer. In the space of a few seconds my immediate past went through my mind. A couple of hours before I had sold the song rights to the Wabash River to one of the townsmen, and, thinks I, my zeal as a salesman might have led me into indiscretions specifically mentioned in the revised statutes of Indiana. However, I turned around.

It was an old friend of mine by the name of Frank Sparkle.

"Thank you for liberating me from jail," says I.

"What do you mean—jail?" he asks, as we shook hands.

"I mean the jail I thought I was going to be in when you laid your hand on my shoulder. You've been roaming over the country for only twenty years now, and I couldn't expect you to know that it's a foolish trick to lay your hand on a friend's shoulder unexpectedly."

"Excuse me, Cam," Frank apologizes. "I should have known better; but I was so glad to see you that I didn't think what I was doing."

"It's all right, Frank. Where're you bound for?"

"What's the destination line on your ticket?" he asks.

"Chicago."

"Let me take three dollars," says he. "I have urgent business in Chicago."

So me and Frank Sparkle got on the Chicago train when it come along a few minutes later. We got into the chair car, because it was easier to talk privately. The train no more than pulled out before Frank's mouth begun to open and shut in a manner which permitted a lot of words to escape. Among other things he mentioned the Wixon Circus.

"That show," says Frank, "is stalled down at Tuller, Indiana. You know the show. It used to be a good one for grafters to follow, until "Old Man" Wixon put the bars up. Out in Missouri one day he run us all off the lot, and said he'd never allow another grafter to make a spread within gunshot of his canvas.

"But times has changed with Old Man Wixon. He's had a terrible year—cold and rainy, and now he's up against it. He's willing to take anybody or anything into camp

providing they turn up money. But he's stalled, and can't move the show."

"What's the matter with him?" I asks.

"He's in arrears. This total eclipse of the sun has about ruined him. I left the show with a few dollars, and skated around over Indiana till I went flat. I didn't even have car fare when I met you." Frank Sparkle was quiet then, for a minute or two, and then sweeps down on me with a pertinent question. "Cam," he asks, "have you got five thousand dollars?"

"Yes," I tells him, "I got a trifle more than that. I've had a good spring and summer."

"Old Man Wixon," he says, "wants to peddle the season's lease on his show."

"I wish him luck, and a Merry Christmas."

"A man can get a lease on the show by paying him out of debt and getting the exhibition rolling from one town to another."

"I wish him a Happy New Year."

"It's a six-car show, all in good shape."

"Many happy returns of the day."

"Roughly speaking, that lease can be acquired for five thousand dollars."

"Speaking roughly, it can't be acquired with *my* five thousand dollars."

Frank studies a minute, and then asks: "Why?"

"Because," I informs him, "I don't know anything about the circus business. It's too long a shot, and—"

"But, listen," he interrupts, "you wouldn't have to know anything about it—if I was along. I know the business. I know every lot in the Middle West, and I know to a penny how much can be taken from every adult man in the four surrounding States."

"I know your capabilities, Frank," I tell him, "but I'm afraid of things that I know nothing about. I'll bet you enough banknotes to paper a room in the poor house that Old Man Wixon sees calamity ahead, and that he's trying to get out from under."

"Wixon," says Frank, "is an old man. He wants a rest. The man who gets his show for the season will have his staff and his performers, and it's a good show, too. It can't rain all summer, Cam."

"It can do anything it's a mind to. That's another thing I won't do—gamble on the weather."

Frank's voice grew soft and coaxing.

"Cam," says he, "your mind is running along one track. I don't mean that you don't know how to think, but you're not thinking straight on this circus proposition.

There's other things to a circus, you know, besides the elephant and the ringmaster, and in the side lines you're no amateur. Tell me, Cam, isn't this little game we call living nothing more or less than a problem in addition and subtraction?"

"That's one way of putting it."

"That's the best way to put it. Every man is trying to add to what he's got and subtract from what the other fellow's got. It's a problem that's never fully solved—we're always working at it. And now I ask you, is there a better classroom than a circus lot for working on that little example in arithmetic?"

"A circus lot is a likely place," I admits.

"A circus lot," Frank goes on, "is the greatest producer in the world for men like you and me. People that have money to lose in our little pastimes are pretty much scattered most of the time. We go fishing for 'em on the farm, in the shops and offices, in hotels, railroad depots, and like places. We have to go to them, and weed 'em out from all the unlikely possibilities.

"But when the circus comes to town, they get together in a bunch. They congregate, thus making things easier for us. They line up, as it were, and we can take 'em one at a time and leisurely. Yes, Cam, they congregate—and they congregate on the circus lot. Think it over!"

The answer: I took the show.

News is about the fastest thing there is in the world. Every grafter in the Middle West and points east knew about my connection with that circus as quick as I did. Here's a chance for a killing, think they. Cameron Finlock will run a wide-open circus lot. Everything goes! That gang descended on me with an idea that they could commit arson, larceny, and grand larceny with perfect impunity on my circus lot.

Now, I never did favor low forms of graft. And neither did I earn every penny I got by the sweat of my brow. I aspired to the gentler arts of getting the wherewithal. I liked to talk for my profits in a soft tone of voice, and I didn't play for the blind widows and crippled orphans, nor for the trusting farmer boy of small means, either. I cashed in on folks who could spare it, and as a general thing I picked the ones that would prick my bubble of wealth, if they got a chance. I was a believer in a lawful system of unlawfulness.

But a man can't live the life I did with-

out accumulating friends and acquaintances that wasn't so particular. They flocked to my show in droves. There was more than one reason, at the time, why I couldn't drive 'em away. That would make sore spots, and I couldn't afford sore spots among that bunch. My life had not been altogether blameless, and that layout knew it. My best bet was to tolerate them and their devices till such time as I could ease 'em away gently—or maybe scare 'em off.

The show stuck in Tuller, Indiana, for two weeks after I took it over. We had to have time to bill the grand and glorious exhibition.

I must tell you about that circus. The menagerie for the most part had been captured in the jungles of the Shetland Islands, or ransomed from those wild-animal hunters of North America commonly known as dog catchers. Yes, the Great Wixon Railroad Shows mainly was a dog and pony outfit, although an effort had been made to inject a little ferocity into the menagerie.

For instance, we had a lion. He was a good-sized beast, with a roar that answered all purposes. His only bad habit was sleeping. He'd paced himself out before the Wixon Shows got him. And we had a couple of black bears in cages. Besides that we had one flea-bitten elephant that suffered some sort of a blight when he was young and hadn't attained any dimensions to speak of. Finally come the camel, a disdainful-looking beast with a flabby hump and an unsociable disposition.

The big animal attraction of that show was the Shetland ponies and the dogs, all of 'em trained. The human exhibits consisted of a crew of second-rate performers, good enough for the general classification of the show.

And we had a wild man, too, along with other side-show exhibits. The wild man used to be a Pullman porter on the Missouri Pacific, and I guess that's what made him wild. He was a ferocious individual when he had his make-up on and his false tusks working good, but the only thing he was wild about outside of exhibition hours was a set of dice. His regular name was Alfred something or other, but on the bills he was "Umpus the Untamable." On duty he lacerated huge chunks of raw meat, but he preferred pork chops fried brown.

Now there wasn't a fortune in that show, but it was good, small-town stuff, if it was

handled right, weather permitting. Frank Sparkle was my right-hand man. The show made good from the start-out. The sun smiled and the moon laughed. The first four days proved to me that we would finish the season way ahead of my investment, and it was a softer job than dodging around the country working first one game and then another.

When the show was loading on the fifth night me and Frank Sparkle had a conference.

"Frank," says I, "I don't object to lawful and merciful lines of graft. We had them things in mind when we took this show over. We estimated that it might give us a chance to work a few deep and profitable stunts on the side. Recollect?"

"Sure," Frank agrees. "But we've been so busy getting started that we haven't had time for anything but circus stuff."

"That's the point I'm coming to. I've about come to the conclusion that we'll run this show on the square. There's money in it for both of us, as a legitimate game. Why should we reach out for anything uncertain, and maybe dangerous, when we got this?"

"That suits me," says Frank.

"That question being settled," I goes on, "the next thing is to clean out the grafters. I doubt if there's a show on rails to-day that's letting 'em get by with such raw stuff."

"They're even picking pockets on the lot," Frank declares, "and it won't be long before they start the strong-arm business."

"Yes," says I, "and they're picking on the show people, too. Ed Spade, who knows more about dice than an Emancipation Day committee on arrangements, has got a mortgage on the wild man's salary for the next sixty days. He says it's borrowed money, but I know Ed Spade. All he needs is two dice and a colored man with money."

"I think there's some crooked poker games going on, too," Frank suggests. "The show people are dipping in and losing their money. I can't figure how a grafter can take a showman—but there's some clever grafters following this layout. They broke the snake charmer. That's the reason she got drunk and now has the delirium tremens."

"It's the rawest bunch that ever followed a show," I declares, "and they're taking advantage of you and me."

"It's a bad layout, Cam. Most of 'em know you and me, and they know too much

about us. That is—well, I suppose they suspect you, too, of various indiscretions, eh?"

"Some of 'em could cause me trouble, all right—and that's what we'll have to dodge. I ain't reforming or getting good or anything like that—but I want a vacation from graft this summer; and I got a right to take it without interference. We've got to shuck these grafters off from the show—and clean 'em out so they won't know the facts. We've got to disgust 'em with the show, Frank. Now, listen——"

And unto him I unfolded a thing or two.

Then I sent Frank Sparkle ahead of the show. We altered our route a trifle, fixing it so that we was scheduled to play several towns on the State line between Indiana and Illinois, jumping back and forth from one town to another, and finally making four or five long jumps and landing in Missouri. That show dodged around like a fugitive from justice. Finally we jumped over the State line into Illinois, and unloaded in a little town called Fairberry.

The show went fine, but the graft kept going finer. The grafters got so they didn't care whether the menfolk went to the show or not. All they wanted 'em to do was come on the lot, send the women and children into the big top, and gather around their devices and games in financial clusters. At night they didn't even bother to spread their games. They pulled snappy confidence stunts, and picked pockets—anything to clean up. The show was getting a bad reputation, and when that reputation gets so it beats a show into town, you might's well close up.

When the show was loading that night Ed Spade, who was the "bell" for the grafters, come down to the train.

"Cam," says he, "this town of Fairberry has about cleaned us up."

"That's tough, Ed," I smiles.

"I just been studying that schedule of yours," he goes on, "and I see this show is routed to dodge back and forth between Indiana and Illinois, like it was a checker crying to get into the king row."

"I didn't make the schedule," I tells him. "I'm just following the route laid out by Old Man Wixon before I took over the show."

"I ain't blaming you, Cam," he assures me, "but it's unfortunate. You know how

superstitious grafters are about State lines, and I don't know as I can hold 'em."

"I'm sorry about that."

"It's a profitable business for me," Ed declares, "and you're getting your rake-off. I know that you want to hold the graft. Now, can't you change that schedule?"

"I can't do that—the time's too short."

"This crossing State lines so much—I don't like it, and the boys don't like it. A State line is always a jinx to a grafter—you know that; and this first stop in Illinois proves it."

"What happened here?" I asks him.

"What happened! Nothing except that we got cleaned out of all the money we made in Indiana. This townful of chumps beat every game we spread. Besides that, some of the boys had their pockets picked, two or three of 'em got hit on the head to-night and robbed, and five of 'em got arrested."

"This seems to be a fast town, eh?"

"No," Ed says, "it ain't a fast town. It's just the jinx of crossing a State line. Well," he adds, "we'll try it a few days longer; but I never did like to buck a jinx."

"I don't believe in that stuff, Ed," I tells him. "It just happened to be a tough spot. Maybe it won't happen again."

"We'll see. Me and the boys would like to stick with you, Cam, but I don't think we can hold 'em if we run across one or two more towns like this one. Good night, Cam!"

"Good night, Ed!"

Well, we zigzagged down that State line, one day in Illinois and the next in Indiana. Our path looked like the trail of a drunken man down Broadway when the saloons was open on both sides of the street. In a few

days we come to a town called Finch, also in Illinois.

It's on account of them two towns, Fairberry and Finch, that my show got rid of the grafters, and went through the season as a profitable and legal enterprise. The crowd in Finch put the finishing touches onto it. They cleaned up what Fairberry left. They took everything away from them grafters but their bad habits. And the grafters was overcome by the jinx, and deserted that show the same as they would a county jail.

Was it a jinx? Well, the grafters thought it was. They hate to cross State lines. It's a superstition of the business, and grew up, I expect, because most of 'em are wanted in the States immediately adjoining, no matter where they are. Didn't you know that?

Maybe it was a jinx, but I got another idea.

I happen to know that the State of Illinois at that time was doing a lot of work on the roads, especially in the neighborhood of Fairberry and Finch. Most of the road gangs was composed of prisoners from the State institutions. The men was trusties and worked under the honor system.

At Fairberry and Finch, Ed Sparkle got the foremen of the road gangs to declare a circus holiday, and give all them prisoners free tickets.

Well, that's all we wanted. We wanted the honor prisoners on our circus lot, and them birds knew as much about grafting and similar arts as the grafters that followed the show. They come to the lot dressed in their overalls, an innocent-looking bunch—and just walked away with the graft. It was a big holiday for them honor men, and good practice.

Other stories by Mr. Hinds will appear soon.



HOW TO BE A PLAYWRIGHT

CURSORY examination of the records of some of the leading writers of plays indicates that, if you yearn to pile up a fortune or two by turning out a handful of dramas, you had better get your start as a newspaper reporter, a detective, or a traveling salesman. Observe: Eugene Walter, Paul Armstrong, Max Marcin, Thompson Buchanan, A. L. Thomas, James Forbes, and Channing Pollock began as newspaper reporters, several of them as police-court reporters; George Scarborough was a detective; Henry Arthur Jones was a drummer; Roi Cooper Megrue was also a salesman—of other authors' plays.

A Chat With You

HERE is an interesting letter from Dane Coolidge, whose serial, "Lost Wagons," is continued in the present number. It is dated from Peking, China. The hotel at which Coolidge is staying has a French name. According to our way of translating, it would be called "The Big Hotel of Sleeping Cars, Limited," in English. Do they park their sleeping cars and call it a hotel in China? Anyway, here is the letter:

"It took me a long time to get the news, but I am glad to hear that 'Lost Wagons' is coming out. This is too interesting a country to just settle down and run a typewriter. A man can do that at home, so we have been visiting palaces and temples, floating around on old canals, and enjoying ourselves generally. Fine, large country over here, and I see lots of things that have gone clear round the world to Arizona and California. They use the same saddles as the Navahos, the same hackamores that the Mexicans and cowboys have, same identical quirts, and I just sent Ed Borein—the cowboy artist—a fancy bridle, crupper, and martingale that some Manchu warrior used to have. All decorated with cloisonné metalwork, but just like ours. Kubla Khan and the rest passed the styles on to the Moors, they passed them to the Spanish, and we got them from the conquistadores after they had completed the circle of the world.

"I am going to-morrow to Tai Yuan Fu, where there are eight American cowboys who have just brought over three hundred head of range horses for breeding purposes, for the Governor of Shansi. They have had one hell of a time getting them over here, and the first time they smelled a camel they

stampeded all over the country, eighty head being rounded up outside the walls of Peking. These boys have been working for Fred Barton, of Montana, who has been manager of the stock farm for two years, and he has invited me out there. Everybody else I see wants to go. I bet I get an earful, especially as Chinese soldiers caught eight stampeded horses, and are keeping them hid for their officers.

"At the American legation reception, last week, I was introduced to two Americans, both of whom knew my name right away, and have been reading POPULAR for years. One is secretary to Ambassador Crane, and the other is building the big breakwater at Chefoo. They said there was a certain kind of story to be found in POPULAR that they couldn't find anywhere else. We have to order our POPULARS ahead, or we would never get them at all. Sorry I can't find something to write about over here, but it's been all color, up to date. Might grab a plot out at Tai Yuan Fu.

"Yours truly,

"DANE COOLIDGE."



WE haven't a doubt that Coolidge will get a great story out there. The Romans used to talk about different places being inhabited by different spirits who gave the places atmosphere and color. The spirit that guards China must mix some mighty strong medicine, for the Celestial Kingdom is about as strong in local color as any place in the world. We shall see how it affects Mr. Coolidge.

Every place has its own spirit, some places stronger than others. The newer and less settled the place, as a rule, the

A CHAT WITH YOU—Continued.

more tenuous is this atmosphere. A place where men have fought and loved and gambled, where they have built and torn down, where women have sighed and been jealous, where fortunes have been won and lost, where more than one civilization and culture has rubbed elbows, has a mighty local spirit. We don't have to go abroad for such places. We have them within our own borders. One of the most notable is New Orleans, with its background and memories—memories of French and Spaniard and Creole, of the old Latin Quarter and the black soil of the ancient parish of St. James, of the great river with the spoils of an empire on its broad expanse; memories of Chalmette and the courtly pirate, Lafitte, of the veterans of Waterloo charging on fortifications made of cotton bales, and behind those cotton bales, darting flame and red death at them, Andrew Jackson and his American rifles. The complete novel which opens the next issue of *THE POPULAR* has New Orleans of yesterday and to-day as its setting, but a lot of the old atmosphere clings to it. "Behind the Gray Wall," by Roman Doubleday, will later on appear in book form. It is a detective story and something more, and distinctive besides. All in the one number.



SPEAKING of atmosphere, there is also a story with the atmosphere of the South Seas in it by one of the greatest writers of our generation, H. de Vere Stacpoole. Then there is another "Casey" Ryan story, with the atmosphere of the new West in it, by B. M. Bower. There is Raymond J.

Brown's wonderful story with the atmosphere of the professional athlete, "Hey, Listen, King!" This is the best short story Brown has ever written. There is also a story, "Goliath and Delilah," by Roy Norton, with the atmosphere of the older West and the mining camp, a tale with the feeling of the modern prize ring in it, by W. R. Hoefer, and a story of politics of to-day by J. Frank Davis. These are only a few things, but enough to show that the New Year's issue of the magazine will take you into the society of all sorts and conditions of interesting men, and give you all the thrill and interest in life that come from travel with the right companionship.



AND so comes the end of the year and the end of our Christmas number of *THE POPULAR*. One might think that all possible has been said about Christmas—but it won't all be said for a long time. Every morning brings a new and wonderful day, every year a new spring and a new Christmas. Nature is never bored, and repeats her amazing feats with the same zest as if the world had just started on its course. Children and young people of all ages are never bored. The earth is still a miracle. We hope that this number of the magazine has added some little touch of zest and enjoyment to your Christmas season. We hope the year has brought us a little ripper knowledge of your tastes and desires, a little better skill in fulfilling them. Here, ladies and gentlemen, are our promises for a still better magazine in the year to come, our kindest wishes and our best regards!



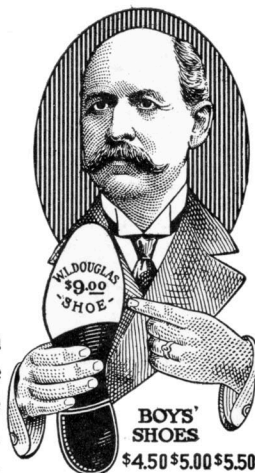
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* * *
WHISTLING LIKE a bird.
* * *
WHICH ALARMED young wife.
* * *
ESPECIALLY WHEN.
* * *
SHE FOUND she'd picked
* * *
THE WRONG package
* * *
AND INSTEAD of oatmeal.
* * *
HAD GIVEN him birdseed.
* * *
BUT DON'T think from this.
* * *
THAT EVERY guy.
* * *
YOU HEAR whistling.
* * *
HAS NECESSARILY.
* * *
BEEN ROBBING the canary.
* * *
OTHER THINGS inspire.
* * *
THE ALMOST human male.
* * *
TO BLOW through his lips.
* * *
AND MAKE shrill noises.
* * *
A RAISE, for example.
* * *
OR A day off when.
* * *
A DOUBLE header is on.
* * *
OR AN everyday thing.
* * *

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* * *
FOR MAKING men.
* * *
TRILL THEIR pipes for joy.
* * *
SO LADIES, if hubby.
* * *
GOES AWAY whistling.
* * *
YOU NEEDN'T worry.
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