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Vol. LIX. No. 3

CONTENTS

February 20, 1921

The Dude Wrangler. A Two-Part Story—Part I. Caroline Lockhart 3	
Until Helene Spenceley called him "Gentle Annie," Wallie MacPherson was entirely satisfied with himself. But that epithet sent him to Wyoming to start something.	
The Shore Birds. A Short Story, John Fleming Wilson 52	
Ashore, Tom Hardy didn't fit into the Esterleys' scheme of things, but circumstances alter cases.	
"It Is Paris!" A Short Story, H. de Vere Stacpoole 65	
A story of the French Foreign Legion.	
The Yellow Planet. A Complete Novel, Francis Perry Elliott 71	
Carteret believed that the planet Saturn cast a baleful influence over every act of his life. But Zaliel, the astrologer, helped him beat down his fear, and, incidentally, a murder mystery was solved.	
Idols of Clay. A Short Story, Hamish McLaurin 114	
Martello's idol was an idol of clay indeed.	
Providence Takes Charge. A Short Story, J. Frank Davis 123	
Mayor Kendall turns a clever trick, but has to credit Providence with an assist.	
Caught in the Net. Editorials, The Editor 133	
Our Shipping Situation. The Rising Cost of War. A New Belief. A Joyful Noise. Workmanship. Popular Topics.	
In Bonanza. A Five-Part Story—Part III, William MacLeod Raine 138	
Hugh McClintock and Dutch have a showdown, Vicky grows up, Hugh gets a job as Old Dog Tray.	
Ways of the Orient. A Short Story, Roy Norton 158	
David and Goliath have a turn-up with highbinders.	
Number Fifteen and Jonah. A Short Story, Hugh Kennedy 166	
Pindar knew one thing—that some one aboard the <i>Valdes</i> had done murder. And that knowledge was enough.	
The Filial Piety of Wong Kee Lim. A Short Story, Lemuel L. de Bra 180	
Filial piety may lead to strange results.	
Closed for the Night. Verse, Henry Herbert Knibbs 184	
The Blue One. A Short Story, Earl Wayland Bowman 185	
A master sheep dog was The Blue One—until Swift Foot came.	
A Chat With You 191	

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LIX.

FEBRUARY 20, 1921.

No. 3

The Dude Wrangler

By Caroline Lockhart

Author of "Me, Smith," "The Man From the Bitter Roots," Etc.

The upbringing that Wallie MacPherson had from the aunt whose heir he was to be had not exactly fitted him to bite nails in two. He was a favorite with the elderly ladies at that exclusive summer hotel, the Colonial. But Helene was far from elderly—and she was from Wyoming. She didn't think much of young fellows who didn't pay their own way. When his own aunt intimated that he wouldn't know how to do that same thing, something came to life in Wallie. The young man went West—to get himself made into a regular fellow, and he sure succeeded. "Pinkey" Fripp, "of Wyomin'," helped some. You will enjoy Pinkey to the limit. His name didn't fit at all. No one knows the West which she writes of with such humor better than Miss Lockhart. You will feel like thanking her for this story.

(A Two-Part Story—Part 1.)

CHAPTER I.

THE GIRL FROM WYOMING.

CONSCIOUS that something had disturbed him, Wallie MacPherson raised himself on his elbow in bed to listen. For a full minute he heard nothing unusual: the Atlantic breaking against the sea wall at the foot of the sloping lawn of the Colonial, the clock striking the hour in the tower of the courthouse, and the ripping, tearing, slashing noises like those of a sash-and-blind factory, produced through the long, thin nose of old Mr. Penrose, multimillionaire, two doors down the hotel corridor, all were sounds to which he was too accustomed to be awakened by them.

While Wallie remained in this posture conjecturing, the door between the room next to him and that of Mr. Penrose was struck smartly, several times, and with a vigor to denote that there was temper behind the blows which fell upon it. He had not known that the room was occupied, it being con-

sidered undesirable on account of the audible slumbers of the old gentleman.

The raps finally awakened even Mr. Penrose, who demanded sharply:

"What are you doing?"

"Hammering with the heel of my slipper," a feminine voice answered.

"What do you want?"

"A chance to sleep."

"Who's stopping you?"

"You're snoring." Indignation gave an edge to the accusation.

"You're impertinent!"

"You're a nuisance!"

There was a moment's silence while Mr. Penrose seemed to be thinking of a suitable answer. Then:

"It's my privilege to snore if I want to. This is my room—I pay for it!"

"Then this side of the door is mine, and I can pound on it."

"I suppose you're some sour old maid—you sound like it," sneered Mr. Penrose.

"And I've no doubt you're a Methuselah with dyspepsia!"

Wallie smote the pillow gleefully—old Mr. Penrose's collection of bottles and boxes and tablets for indigestion were a byword.

"We will see about this in the morning," said Mr. Penrose significantly. "I have been coming to this hotel for twenty-eight years, and——"

"It's nothing to boast of," the voice interrupted. "I shouldn't, if I had so little originality."

Mr. Penrose, seeming to realize that the woman would have the last word if the dialogue lasted until morning, ended it with a loud snort of derision.

Dropping back upon his pillow, Wallie MacPherson mildly wondered about the woman next door to him. She must have come in on the evening train while he was at the moving pictures, and retired immediately.

A second time the ripping sound of yard after yard of calico being viciously torn, broke the night's stillness and, grinning, Wallie waited to hear what the woman next door was going to do about it. But only a stranger would have hoped to do anything about it, since to prevent Mr. Penrose from snoring was a task only a little less hopeless than that of stopping the roar of the ocean. The woman next door, of course, could not know this, so no doubt she had a mistaken notion that she might either break the old gentleman of his habit or have him banished to an isolated quarter.

Wallie had not long to wait, for shortly after Mr. Penrose started again, the tattoo on the door was repeated.

In response to a snarl that might have come from a menagerie, she advised him curtly:

"You're at it again!"

Another angry colloquy followed, and once more Mr. Penrose was forced to subside for the want of an adequate answer.

All the rest of the night the battle continued at intervals, and by morning not only Wallie, but the entire corridor was interested in the occupant of the room adjoining his. Wallie was in the office when the door of the elevator opened with a clang and Mr. Penrose sprang out of it toward Mr. Cone, the proprietor, like a starved lion about to hurl himself upon a Christian martyr.

"I've been coming here for twenty-eight years, haven't I?" he demanded.

"Twenty-eight this summer," Mr. Cone replied soothingly.

"In that time I never have put in such a night as last night!"

"Dear me!" The proprietor seemed genuinely disturbed by the information.

"I could not sleep—I have not closed my eyes—for the battering on my door of the female in the room adjoining!"

"You astonish me! Let me see——" Mr. Cone whirled the register around and looked at it. He read aloud:

"Helene Spenceley—Prouty, Wyoming." Mr. Cone lowered his voice discreetly: "What was her explanation?"

"She accused me of snoring!" declared Mr. Penrose furiously. "I heard the clock strike every hour until morning! Not a wink have I slept—not a *wink*, Mr. Cone!"

"We can arrange this satisfactorily, Mr. Penrose," Mr. Cone smiled conciliatingly. "I have no doubt that Miss—er—Spenceley will gladly change her room if I ask her. I shall place one equally good at her disposal. Ah, I presume this is she! Let me introduce you."

Although he would not admit it, Mr. Penrose was quite as astonished as Wallie at the appearance of the person who stepped from the elevator and walked to the desk briskly. She was young and good looking and wore suitable clothes that fitted her; also, while not aggressive she had a self-reliant manner which proclaimed the fact that she was accustomed to looking after her own interests. While she was as far removed as possible from the person Mr. Penrose had expected to see, still she was the "female" who had "sassed" him as he had not been "sassed" since he could remember, and he eyed her belligerently as he curtly acknowledged the introduction.

"Mr. Penrose, one of our oldest guests in point of residence, tells me that you have had some little—er—difference——" began Mr. Cone affably.

"I had a hellish night!" Mr. Penrose interrupted savagely. "I hope never to put in such another."

"I join you in that," replied Miss Spenceley calmly, "I've never heard any one snore so horribly—I'd know your snore among a thousand."

"Never mind—we can adjust this matter amicably. I will change your room to-day, Miss Spenceley," Mr. Cone interposed hastily. "It hasn't *quite* the view, but the furnishings are more luxurious."

"But I don't want to change," Miss Spenceley coolly replied. "It suits me perfectly."

"I came for quiet, and I can't stand that hammering," declared Mr. Penrose, glaring at her.

"So did I. My nerves. Your snoring bothers me. But perhaps, with aggravating sweetness, "I can break you of the habit."

The millionaire turned to the proprietor, "Either this person goes or I do—that's my ultimatum!"

"I will not be bullied in any such fashion, and I can't very well be put out forcibly, can I?" and Miss Spenceley smiled at both of them. Mr. Cone looked from one to the other, helplessly.

"Then," Mr. Penrose retorted, "I shall leave *immediately* Mr. Cone"—dramatically—"the room I have occupied for twenty-eight summers is at your disposal." His voice rose in a crescendo movement so that even in the farthest corner of the dining room they heard it: "I have a peach orchard down in Delaware, and I shall go there, where I can snore as much as I damn please!"

CHAPTER II.

"THE HAPPY FAMILY."

The guests of the Colonial Hotel arose briskly each morning to nothing. After a night of refreshing and untroubled sleep, they dressed and hurried to breakfast after the manner of travelers making close connections. Then each repaired to his favorite chair, placed in the same spot on the wide veranda, to wait for luncheon. The more energetic sometimes took a wheel-chair for an hour and were pushed on the Boardwalk or attended an auction sale of antiques and curios.

The greater number of the male guests of the Colonial had retired from something—banking, wholesale drugs, the manufacture of woollens. The families were all perfectly familiar with each other's financial rating and histories, and, although they came from diverse sections of the country, they were for two months or more like one large, supremely contented family. In truth, they called themselves facetiously "The Happy Family," and in this way Mr. Cone, who took an immense pride in them and in the fact that they returned to his hospitable roof summer after summer, always referred to them.

Strictly speaking, there were two branches of the "Family;" those whose first season antedated 1900, and the "newcomers," who had spent only eight or ten or twelve summers at the Colonial. They were all on the most friendly terms imaginable, yet each tacitly recognized the distinction. The original "Happy Family" occupied the rocking-chairs on the right-hand side of the wide veranda, while the "newcomers" took the left, where the view was not quite so good and there was a trifle less breeze than on the other.

The less said of the "transients" the better. The few who stumbled in did not stay unless by chance they were favorably known to one of the "permanents." Of course there was no rudeness, ever—merely the polite surprise of the regular occupants when they find a stranger in the pew on Sunday morning. Sometimes the transient stayed out his or her vacation, but usually he confided to the chambermaid, and sometimes Mr. Cone, that the guests were "doddledums" and "fossils" and found another hotel where the patrons, if less solid financially, were more interesting and sociable.

Wallace MacPherson belonged in the group of older patrons, as his aunt, Miss Mary MacPherson, had been coming since 1897, and he himself from the time he wore curls and ruffled collars, or after his aunt had taken him upon the death of his parents.

"Wallie," as he was called by everybody, was, in his way, the one eligible man under sixty, as much of an asset to the hotel as the notoriously wealthy Mr. Penrose. Of an amiable and obliging disposition, he could always be relied upon to escort married women with mutinous husbands, and ladies who had none, mutinous or otherwise. He was twenty-four, and, in appearance, a credit to any woman he was seen with, to say nothing of the two hundred thousand it was known he would inherit from aunt Mary, who now supported him.

Wallie's appearance upon the veranda was invariably in the nature of a triumphal entry. And this morning the veranda promised to be a lively one, since, in addition to the departure of old Mr. Penrose, who had sounded as if he was wrecking the furniture while packing his boxes, the return from the war of Will Smith, the gardener's son, was anticipated, and the guests, as an act of patriotism, meant to give him a rousing welcome. There was bunting over the door-

way and around the pillars, with red, white, and blue ice cream for luncheon, and flags on the menu, not to mention a purse of seventeen dollars and twenty-three cents collected among the guests that was to be presented in appreciation of the valor which, it was understood from letters to his father, Will had shown on the field of battle.

The guests were in their usual places when Wallie came from breakfast and stood for a moment in the spacious double doorway. A cheerful chorus welcomed him as soon as he was discovered, and Mrs. C. D. Budlong put out her plump hand and held his. He did not speak instantly, for his eye was roving over the veranda as if in search of somebody, and when it rested upon Miss Spenceley, sitting alone at the far end, he seemed satisfied and inquired solicitously of Mrs. Budlong: "Did you sleep well? You are looking splendid!"

There were some points of resemblance between Mrs. Budlong and the oleander in the green tub beside which she was sitting. Her round, fat face had the pink of the blossoms, and she was nearly as motionless as if she had been potted. She often sat for hours with nothing save her black, sloelike eyes that saw everything, to show that she was not in a state of suspended animation. Her husband called her "Honey-dumplin'," and they were a most affectionate and congenial couple, although she was as silent as he was voluble.

"My rest was broken," Mrs. Budlong turned her eyes significantly toward the far end of the veranda.

"Did you hear that terrible racket?" demanded Mr. Budlong of Wallie.

"Not so loud, 'C. D.," admonished Mrs. Budlong. Mrs. Budlong ran the letters together so that strangers often had the impression she was calling her husband "Seedy," though the name was as unsuitable as well could be.

"She's driven away our oldest guest." Mr. Budlong lowered his indignant voice a little. "He was a nuisance with his snoring," Wallie defended.

"She could have changed her room," said Mrs. Budlong, taking her hand away from him. "She need not have been so obstinate."

"He was very rude to her," Wallie maintained stoutly. "Sleeping next door, I heard it all—and this morning in the office."

"Anyway, I think Mr. Cone made a mis-

take in not insisting upon her changing her room, and so I shall tell him." Mr. Budlong—who had made "his" in white lead and paint and kept a chauffeur and a limousine—felt that his disapproval would mean something to the proprietor.

Wallie felt relieved when he saw Mrs. Henry Appel beckoning him. As he was on his way to Mrs. Appel, Miss Mattie Gaskett clutched at his arm and detained him.

"Did you see the robins this morning, Wallie?"

"Are they here?"

"Yes, a dozen of them. They do remind me so of my dear Southland." Miss Gaskett was from Maryland.

"The summer wouldn't be the same without either of you," he replied gallantly, as he passed on to Mrs. Appel.

The Appels were among the important families of the Colonial, being the richest next to Mr. Penrose. They were from Mauch Chunk, Pennsylvania. Mr. Appel owned anthracite coal land, and street railways, so if Mr. Appel squeezed pennies and Mrs. Appel dressed in remnants from the bargain counter their economies were regarded merely as eccentricities.

Mrs. Appel held up a sweater: "Won't you tell me how to turn this shoulder? I've forgotten. Do you purl four and knit six, or purl six and knit four, Wallie?"

Wallie laughed immoderately.

"Eight, Mrs. Appel! Purl eight and knit four—I told you yesterday. That's a lovely piece of Battenburg, Mrs. Stott. When did you start it?"

"Last month, but I've been so busy with teas and parties—so many, many things going on."

Strictly, Mrs. Stott did not belong in the group in which she was seated. She had been coming to the Colonial only eleven years, so, really, she should have been on the other side of the veranda, but Mrs. Stott had such an insidious way of getting where and what she wanted that she was "one of them" almost before they knew it. Mr. Stott was a rising young attorney of forty-eight, and it was anticipated that he would one day wear the mantle of "the leading trial lawyer in the city."

Wallie, moving on, stopped in front of a chair where a very thin young lady was reclining languidly.

"How's the bad heart to-day, Miss Eye-ster?"

"About as usual, Wallie, thank you," she replied gratefully.

"Your lips have more color."

Miss Eyester opened a hand bag and, taking out a small, round mirror which she carried for the purpose, inspected her lips critically.

"It does seem so," she admitted. "If I can just keep from getting excited."

"I can't imagine a better place than the Colonial." The reply contained a grain of irony.

"Wallie!"

It was his aunt's voice calling and he went instantly to a tall, austere lady in a linen collar who was knitting wash rags with the feverish haste of a pieceworker in a factory. He stood before her obediently.

"Don't go in to-day."

"Why, auntie?" In his voice there was a world of disappointment.

"It's too rough—there must have been a storm at sea."

"But, auntie," he protested, "I missed yesterday, taking Mrs. Appel to the auction. It isn't very rough—"

"Look at the white caps," she interrupted curtly. "I don't want you to go, Wallie."

"Oh, very well." He turned away abruptly, wondering if she realized how keenly he was disappointed—a disappointment that was not made less by the fact that her fears were groundless, since not only was it not "rough," but he was an excellent swimmer.

"The girl from Wyoming," as he called Miss Spenceley to himself, had overheard and was looking at him with an expression in her eyes which made him redder. He sauntered past her, humming, to let her know that he did not care what she thought about him. When he turned around she had vanished and a few minutes after he saw her with her suit over her arm on the way to the bathhouse on the exclusive beach in front of the Colonial.

CHAPTER III.

"PINKEY."

The train upon which Will Smith was expected was not due until twelve-thirty, so, since he could not go swimming and still felt rebellious over being forbidden, Wallie went upstairs to put the finishing touches on a lemonade tray of japanned tin which he had

planned and intended presenting to Mr. Cone.

The design was his own, and very excellent it seemed to Wallie as he stopped at intervals and held it from him. On a moss-green background of rolling clouds a most artistic cluster of old-fashioned cabbage roses was tossed carelessly, with a brown slug on a leaf, as a touch of realism.

The gods have a way of apportioning their gifts unevenly, for not only did Wallie paint but he wrote poetry—free verse mostly; free chiefly in the sense that his contributions to the smaller magazines were, perforce, gratuitous. Also he sang—if not divinely, at least so acceptably that his services were constantly asked for charity concerts.

In addition to these he had manlier accomplishments, playing good games of tennis and golf. Besides, Mr. Appel was his only dangerous opponent on the bowling alley, and he had learned to ride at the riding academy.

Now, as he worked, he speculated as to whether he had imagined it or "The girl from Wyoming" really had laughed at him. He could not dismiss her from his mind, and the incident rankled. He told himself that she had not been there long enough to appreciate him; she knew nothing of his talents or of his popularity. She would learn that to be singled out by him for special attention meant something, and he did not consider himself a conceited man, either.

Yet Wallie continued to tingle each time that he thought of the laughter in her eyes—actual derision he feared it was. Then he had an idea. By this time she would have returned from bathing and he would go down and exhibit the cabbage roses. They would be praised and she would hear it.

Bearing the lemonade tray carefully in order not to smudge it, Wallie stepped out of the elevator and stood in the wide doorway, agreeably aware that he was a pleasing figure in his artist's smock and the flowing scarf which he always put on when he painted. No one noticed him, however, for every one was discussing the return of the "Smith boy," and the five dollars which the railway magnate had unexpectedly contributed to the purse that he was going to present to him on behalf of the guests.

Miss Spenceley was on the veranda as he had surmised she would be, and Wallie debated as to whether he should wait until

discovered and urged to show his roses, or frankly offer his work for criticism.

He hesitated—the clatter of hoofs and what appeared to be a serious runaway on the side avenue brought every one up standing. The swaying vehicle was a laundry wagon, and when it turned in at the entrance to the grounds of the Colonial, the astonished guests saw that not only had the horse a driver, but a rider!

It was not a runaway. On the contrary, the person on the horse's back was using his heels and his hat at every jump to get more speed out of the amazed animal. The wagon stopped in front of the hotel with the driver grinning uncertainly, while a soldierly figure sprang over the wheel to wring the hand of Smith, the gardener. Another on the horse's back replaced his service cap at an extraordinary angle and waited nonchalantly for the greetings to be over.

Before he went to the army, Willie Smith had been a bashful boy who blushed when the guests spoke to him, but he faced them now with the assurance of a vaudeville entertainer as he introduced his "buddy:"

"Pinkey' Fripp, of Wyoming—a hero, ladies and gentlemen! The grittiest little soldier in the A. E. F., with a medal to prove it!"

The subject of the eulogy that followed stared back unabashed at the guests, who stared at him in admiration and curiosity. Unflattered, unmoved, he sagged to one side of the bare-backed horse with the easy grace of one accustomed to the saddle.

Pinkey Fripp was about five feet four and square as a bulldog. "Hard-boiled" is a word which might have been coined specially to describe him. The cropped hair on his round head was sandy, his skin a sun-blistered red, and his lips had deep cracks in them. His nose did not add to his beauty any more than the knife scar around his neck, which looked as if some one had barely failed in an attempt to cut his head off. The feature that saved the young fellow's face from a look of unmitigated "toughness" was his pale-gray eyes, whose steady, fearless look seemed to contend with a whimsical gleam of humor.

Pinkey listened to the recital of the exploit that had won the war cross for him, with the disciplined patience of the army, but there was a peculiar glint in his light eyes. As Smith drew to a conclusion, Pinkey slowly lifted his leg, stiffened by a machine-

gun bullet, over the horse's neck and sat sideways.

The applause was so vociferous, so spontaneous, and hearty, that nothing approaching it ever had been heard at the Colonial. But it stopped as suddenly, for, in the middle of it, Pinkey gathered himself and sprang through the air like a flying squirrel, to bowl the Smith boy over. "You said you wouldn't tell about that 'Craw de gare,' ner call me a hero, and you've gone and done it!" he said accusingly as he sat astride of him. "I got feelin's jest like grown-up folks, and I don't like to be laughed at. Sorry, Big Boy, but you got this comin'!" Thereupon, with a grin, Pinkey banged his host's head on the gravel.

The two were surrounded when this astonishing incident was over and it was found that not only was the Smith boy not injured, but seemed to be used to it and bore no malice. The guests shook hands with the boys, examined the war cross that Pinkey produced reluctantly from the bottom of the flour sack in which he carried his clothing, and finally Mr. Appel presented the purse in a speech to which nobody listened—and the Smith boy shocked everybody by his extravagance when he gave five of it to the driver of the laundry wagon.

"I was shore pinin' to set in the middle of a horse," was Pinkey's explanation of their eccentric arrival. "It kinda rests me."

While all this was happening, Wallie stood holding his lemonade tray. When he could get close, he welcomed the Smith boy and was introduced to Pinkey, and stood around long enough to learn that the latter and Helene Spenceley knew each other.

Nobody, however, was interested in seeing his roses. Even Miss Mattie Gaskett, who always clung to him like a bur to woolen clothing with the least encouragement, said carelessly when he showed her the lemonade tray:

"As good as your best, Wallie," and edged over to hear what Pinkey was saying.

There was nothing to do but withdraw unobtrusively, though Wallie realized with chagrin that he could have gone upstairs on his hands and knees without attracting the least attention. For the first time he regretted deeply that his eyesight had kept him out of the army, for he, too, might have been winning war crosses in the trenches instead of rolling bandages and knitting socks and sweaters.

Wallie almost hated the lemonade tray as he slammed it on the table, for in his utter disgust with everything and everybody the design seemed to look more like cabbages than roses.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BRAND OF CAIN.

There never was a nose so completely out of joint as Wallie's nor an owner more thoroughly humiliated and embittered by the fickleness and ingratitude of human nature. The sacrifices he had made in escorting dull ladies to duller movies were wasted. The un-failing courtesy with which he had retrieved their yarn and handkerchiefs, the sympathy and attention with which he had listened to their symptoms, his solicitude when they were ailing—all were forgotten now that Pinkey was in the vicinity.

The ladies swarmed around that person, quoted his sayings delightedly, and declared a million times in Wallie's hearing that "He was a character!" And the worst of it was that Helene Spenceley did not seem sufficiently aware of Wallie's existence even to laugh at him.

As the displaced cynosure sat brooding in his room the third morning after Pinkey's arrival he wished that he could think of some perfectly well-bred way to attract attention!

He believed in the psychology of clothes. Perhaps if he appeared on the veranda in something to emphasize his personality, something suggesting strength and virility, like tennis flannels, he could regain his hold on his audience? With this thought in mind Wallie opened his capacious closet filled with wearing apparel, and the moment his eye fell upon his riding breeches he had his inspiration. If "the girl from Wyoming" thought her friend Pinkey was the only person who could ride a horse, he would show her!

It took Wallie only so long to order a horse as it required to get the riding academy on the telephone.

"I want a good-looking mount—something spirited," he instructed the person who answered.

"We've just bought some new horses," the voice replied. "I'll send you the pick of them."

Although Wallie actually broke his record he seemed to himself an unconscionable time in dressing, but when he gave himself a final survey in the mirror, he had every reason

to feel satisfied with the result. He was correct in every detail, and he thought complacently that he could not but contrast favorably with the appearance of that "roughneck" from Montana—or was it Wyoming?

"What you taking such a hot day to ride for?" Mrs. Appel called when she caught sight of Wallie.

The question jarred on him, and he replied coolly: "I had not observed that it was warmer than usual, Mrs. Appel."

Without seeming to look, Wallie could see that both Miss Spenceley and Pinkey were on the veranda and regarding him with interest. His pose became a little theatrical while he waited for his mount, striking his riding boot smartly with his crop as he stood in full view of them.

Every one was interested when they saw the horse coming, and a few sauntered over to have a look at him, Miss Spenceley and Pinkey among the others.

"Is that the horse you always ride, Wallie?" inquired Miss Gaskett.

"No; it's a new one I'm going to try out for them," Wallie replied indifferently.

"Wallie, do be careful!" his aunt admonished him. "I don't like you to ride strange horses."

Wallie laughed lightly, and as he went down to meet the groom, who was now at the foot of the steps with the horses, he assured her that there was not the least cause for anxiety.

"Why, that's a Western horse!" Miss Spenceley exclaimed. "Isn't that a brand on the shoulder?"

"It looks like it," Pinkey answered, ruffing the hair, then smoothing it. "Shore it's a brand." He stepped off a pace to look at it.

"Pardon me, but I think you're mistaken," Wallie said politely but positively. "The academy buys only thoroughbreds."

"If that ain't a bronc, I'll eat it," Pinkey declared bluntly.

"Can you make out the brand?" asked Miss Spenceley.

Pinkey ruffed the hair again and stepped back and squinted. Then his cracked lips stretched in a grin that threatened to start them bleeding:

"Eighty-eight is the way I read it."

She nodded. "The brand of Cain."

They both laughed immoderately.

Wallie could see no occasion for merriment, and it nettled him.

"Nevertheless, I maintain that you are in error," he declared obstinately.

"I doubt if I could set one of them hen-skin saddles," observed Pinkey, changing the subject.

"Oh, it's very easy if you've been taught properly," Wallie replied airily.

"Taught? You mean"—wonderingly—"that somebody *learned* you to ride horse-back?"

Wallie smiled patronizingly.

"How else would I know?"

"I was jest thrown on a horse and told to stay there."

"Which accounts for the fact that you Western riders have no 'form,' if you'll excuse my frankness."

"Don't mention it," replied Pinkey, not to be outdone in politeness. "Maybe, before I go, you'll give me some p'inters?"

"I shall be most happy," Wallie responded, putting his foot in the stirrup. He mounted creditably and settled himself in the saddle.

"Thumb him," said Miss Spenceley, "and we'll soon settle the argument."

"How—thumb him? The term is not familiar."

"Show him, Pinkey." Her eyes were sparkling, for Wallie's tone implied that the expression was slang and also rather vulgar.

"He'll unload his pack as shore as shoot-in." Pinkey hesitated.

"No time like the present to learn a lesson," she replied ambiguously.

"Certainly—if there's anything you can teach me." Wallie's smile said as plain as words that he doubted it. "Mr. Fripp—er—'thumb' him."

"You're the doctor," said Pinkey grimly—and "thumbed" him.

The effect was instantaneous. The old horse ducked his head, arched his back, and went at it.

It was over in less time than it requires to tell and Wallie was convinced beyond the question of a doubt that the horse had not been bred in Kentucky. As he described an aerial circle, Wallie had a whimsical notion that his teeth had bitten into his brain and his spine was projected through the crown of his derby hat. Darkness and oblivion came upon him for a moment, and then he found himself being lifted tenderly

from a bed of petunias and dusted off by the groom from the riding academy.

The ladies were screaming, but a swift glance showed Wallie not only Mr. Appel, but Mr. Cone and Mr. Budlong with their hands over their mouths and their teeth gleaming between their spreading fingers.

"Coward!" he cried to Pinkey. "You don't dare get on him!"

"Can you ride him 'slick,' Pinkey?" asked Miss Spenceley.

"I'll do it er bust somethin'." Pinkey's mouth had a funny quirk at the corners. "Maybe it'll take the kinks out of me from travelin'."

He looked at Mr. Cone doubtfully: "I'm liable to rip up the sod in your front yard a little."

"Go to it!" cried Mr. Cone, whose sporting blood was up. "There's nothin' here that won't grow again!"

Everybody was trembling, and when Miss Eyester looked at her lips they were white as alabaster, but she meant to see the riding, if she had one of her sinking spells immediately it was over.

When Pinkey swung into the saddle, the horse turned its head around slowly and looked at the leg that gripped him. Pinkey leaned down, unbuckled the throat latch, and slipped off the bridle. Then, as he touched the horse in the flank with his heels, he took off his cap and slapped him over the head with it.

The horse recognized the familiar challenge and accepted it. What he had done to Wallie was only the gamboling of a frisky colt as compared with his efforts to rid his back of Pinkey. Even Helene Spenceley sobered as she watched the battle that followed.

The horse sprang into the air, twisted, and came down stiff-legged—squealing. Now, with his head between his forelegs he shot up his hind hoofs, and at an angle that made all the grip in his rider's knees necessary to his staying in the saddle. Then he brought down his heels again, violently, to bite at Pinkey—who kicked him.

He "weaved," he "sunfished." With every trick known to an old outlaw he tried to throw his rider, rearing finally to fall backward and mash to a pulp a bed of Mr. Cone's choicest tulips. But when the horse rose Pinkey was with him, while the spectators, choking with excitement, forgetting themselves and each other, yelled like Apaches.

With nostrils blood-red and distended, his eyes the eyes of a wild animal, now writhing, now crouching, now lying back on his haunches and springing forward with a violence to snap any ordinary vertebra, the horse pitched as if there was no limit to its ingenuity and endurance.

Pinkey's breath was coming in gasps and his color had faded with the terrible jar of it all. Even the uninitiated could see that Pinkey was weakening, and the result was doubtful, when, suddenly, the horse gave up and stampeded. He crashed through the trellis over which Mr. Cone had carefully trained his crimson ramblers, tore through a neat border of mignonette and sweet alyssum that edged the driveway, jumped through "snowballs," lilacs, syringas, and rhododendrons to come to a halt finally conquered and chastened.

The "88" brand has produced a strain famous throughout Wyoming for its buckers, and this venerable outlaw lived up to every tradition of his youth and breeding.

Mrs. C. D. Budlong was shedding tears like a crocodile, without moving a feature. Mr. Budlong put the lighted end of a cigar in his mouth and burned his tongue to a blister, while Miss Eyester dropped into a chair and had her sinking spell and recovered without any one remarking it. In an abandonment that was like the delirium of madness, Mr. Cone went in and lifted Miss Gaskett's cat Cutie out of the plush rocker, where she was leaving hairs on the cushion, and surreptitiously kicked her.

Altogether it was an unforgettable occasion, and only Pinkey seemed unthrilled by it—he dismounted in a businesslike, matter-of-fact manner that had in it neither malice toward the horse nor elation at having ridden him. He felt admiration, if anything, for he said as he rubbed the horse's forehead:

"You shore made me ride, old-timer! You got all the old curves and some new ones. If I had a hat I'd take it off to you. I ain't had such a churnin' sence I set 'Steamboat' fer fifteen seconds. Oh, hullo!" as Wallie advanced with his hand out.

"I congratulate you," said Wallie, feeling himself magnanimous in view of the way his neck was hurting.

"You needn't," replied Pinkey good-naturally. "He durned near 'got' me."

"It was a very creditable ride indeed," insisted Wallie, in his most patronizing and

priggish manner. He found it very hard to be generous, with Helene Spenceley listening.

"It seemed so, after *your* performance, Gentle Annie!" snapped Miss Spenceley.

Actually the woman seemed to spit like a cat at him! She had the tongue of a serpent and a vicious temper. He hated her! Wallie removed his hat with exaggerated politeness and decided never to have anything more to say to Miss Spenceley.

CHAPTER V.

"GENTLE ANNIE" BURNS HIS BRIDGES.

Wallie had told himself emphatically that he would never speak again to Helene Spenceley. That would be an easy matter since she had glared at him, when they had passed as she was going in for breakfast, in a way that would have made him afraid to speak even if he had intended to. To refrain from thinking of her was something different.

He sat on a rustic bench on the Colonial lawn watching the silly robins and wondering why she had called him "Gentle Annie." It was clear enough that nothing flattering was intended, but what did she mean by it? There was no reason that he could see for her to fly at him—quite the contrary. He had been very generous and gentlemanly, it seemed to him, in congratulating Pinkey when it was due to them that he, Wallie, was thrown into the petunias. The women were making perfect *fools* of themselves over that Pinkey—they were at it now—he could hear them cackling on the veranda.

He wished the undertow would catch that Spenceley girl. If he should reach her when she was going down for the third time she would *have* to thank him for saving her and that would about kill her. He decided that he would make a point of bathing when she did, on the very remote chance that it might happen.

"Gentle Annie! Gentle Annie! Gentle Annie!" The name rankled.

Pinkey was crossing the lawn with the obvious intention of joining him.

"Gee!" he exclaimed, sinking down beside Wallie, "I've nearly sprained my tongue answerin' questions. 'Is it true that snakes shed their skin, and do the hot pools in the Yellowstone Park freeze in winter?' I'm goin' to drift pretty pronto. I can't stand visitin'."

"Do you like the East, Mr. Fripp?" inquired Wallie formally.

"I'm glad they's a West," Pinkey replied cryptically.

"You and Miss Spenceley are from the same section, I take it?"

"Yep—Wyomin'."

"Er—by the way"—Wallie's tone was elaborately casual—"what did she mean yesterday when she called me Gentle Annie?"

Pinkey moved uneasily.

"Could you give me the precise significance?" persisted Wallie.

"I could, but I wouldn't like to," Pinkey replied dryly.

"Oh, don't spare my feelings," said Wallie loftily, "there's nothing *she* could say would hurt them."

"If that's the way you feel—she meant you were 'harmless.'"

"I trust so," Wallie responded with dignity.

"I'd ruther be called a—er—a Mormon," Pinkey observed.

Shocked at the language, Wallie demanded:

"It is, then, an epithet of opprobrium?"

"I can't say as to that," replied Pinkey judicially, "but she meant you were a 'perfect lady.'"

"It's more than I can say of her!" Wallie retorted, reddening.

Pinkey merely grinned and shrugged a shoulder. He arose a moment later as if the conversation and company alike bored him.

"Well—I'm goin' to pack my war bag and ramble. Why don't you come West and git civilized? With your figger you ought to be good fer somethin'. S'long, feller!"

Naturally, Wallie was not comforted by his conversation with Pinkey. Now he knew himself to have been insulted, and resented it, but along with his indignation was such a feeling of dissatisfaction with his life as he had never known. His brow contracted while he thought of the monotony of it. Just as this summer would be a duplicate of every other summer, so the winter would be a repetition of the many winters he had spent in Florida with aunt Mary. After a few months at home they would migrate with the robins. Discontent grew within him as he reviewed it. Why couldn't he and aunt Mary do something different for the

winter? By George! he would suggest it to her!

He got up with alacrity, cheerful immediately.

She was not on the veranda and Miss Eyester was of the opinion that she had gone to her room to take her tonic.

"I have turned the shoulder, Wallie." Mrs. Appel held up the sweater triumphantly.

"That's good," said Wallie, feeling uncomfortable with Miss Spenceley within hearing.

"Wallie," Mrs. Stott called to him, "will you give me the address of that milliner whose hats you said you liked particularly? Somewhere on Walnut, wasn't it?"

"Sixteenth and Walnut," Wallie replied shortly.

Miss Gaskett beckoned him.

"Have you seen Cutie, Wallie?"

"No," curtly.

"When I called her this morning she looked at me with eyes like saucers and simply *to*re into the bushes. Do you suppose anybody has abused her?"

Mr. Cone, who was standing in the doorway, went back to his desk hastily.

"I'm not in her confidence," said Wallie with so much sarcasm that they all looked at him.

Miss Spenceley was talking to Mr. Appel, who was listening so attentively that Wallie wondered what she was saying. They were sitting close to the window of the reception room and it occurred to Wallie that there would be no harm in stepping inside and gratifying his curiosity. The conversation was not of a private nature, and in other circumstances he would have joined them, so, on his way to the elevator to find his aunt, he paused a moment to hear what the girl was saying.

Since she was speaking emphatically and a lace curtain was the only barrier, Wallie found out without difficulty:

"I have no use for a squaw man."

"You mean," Mr. Appel interrogated, "a white man who marries an Indian woman?"

"Not necessarily. I mean a man who permits a woman to support him without making any effort on his part to do a man's work. He may be an Adonis and gifted to the point of genius, but I have no respect for him. He——"

Wallie remembered the ancient adage, and while he did not consider himself an eaves-

dropper or believe that Miss Spenceley meant anything personal, nevertheless the shoe fit to such a nicety that he hurried to the elevator. "Squaw man;" the term was as new to him as "Gentle Annie." His ears flamed as he thought that when Miss Spenceley learned a certain fact about him she would despise him more than ever.

As Miss Eyester had opined, Miss MacPherson was taking her tonic, or about to.

"I've come to make a suggestion, auntie," Wallie began, with a little diffidence.

"What is it?" Miss MacPherson was shaking the bottle.

"Let's not go South this winter."

"Where then?" She smiled indulgently as she measured out the medicine.

"Why not California or Arizona?" he suggested.

"I don't believe this tonic helps me a particle." She made a wry face as she swallowed it.

"That's it," he declared eagerly. "You need a change. We both do."

"I'm too set in my ways to enjoy new experiences, and I don't like strangers. No," she shook her head kindly but firmly; "we will go South as usual."

"Oh—*sugar!*" The vehemence with which Wallie uttered the expletive showed the extent of his disappointment. "I'm tired of going to the same places year after year, going to the same thing, seeing the same old fossils!"

"Wallie, you are speaking of my friends, and yours," she reminded him.

"They're all right, but I like to make new ones. I don't want to go, aunt Mary."

"Don't you think you are a little ungrateful—in the circumstances." It was the first time she had ever reminded him of his dependency.

"If you mean I am an ingrate, that is an unpleasant word, aunt Mary."

"Place your own interpretation upon it, Wallace."

"Perhaps you think I am not capable of earning my own living?"

"I have not *said* so."

"But you mean it!" he cried hotly.

Miss MacPherson was nearly as amazed as Wallie to hear herself saying: "Possibly you had better try it."

She had taken two cups of strong coffee that morning and her nerves were overstimulated, and perhaps with the intuition of a jealous woman she half suspected that "the

girl from Wyoming" had something to do with his restlessness and desire to go West.

Wallie's eyes were blazing when he answered.

"I shall! I shall never be beholden to you for another penny. When I wanted to do something for myself you wouldn't let me. You're not fair, aunt Mary!"

Pale and breathing heavily in their emotion, they looked at each other with hard, angry eyes—eyes in which there was not a trace of the affection which for years had existed between them.

"Suit yourself," she said finally, and turned her back on him.

Wallie went to his room in a daze, too bewildered to realize immediately what had happened. That he had quarreled with his aunt, permanently, irrevocably, seemed incredible. But he would never eat of her bread of charity again—he had said it. He was sure the break was final.

A sense of freedom came to him gradually as it grew upon him that he was loose from the apron strings that had led him since childhood. He need never again eat food he did not like because it was "good for him." He could sit in drafts if he wanted to and sneeze his head off. He could put on his woolen underwear when he got darned good and ready. He could swim when there were white caps in the harbor and choose his own clothing.

A fine feeling of exultation swept over Wallie as he strode up and down with an eye to the way he looked in the mirror. He was free of petticoat domination. He was no longer a "squaw man," and he would not be one again for a million dollars! He would "show" aunt Mary—he would "show" Helene Spenceley—he would "show" *everybody!*

Wallie opened his eyes one morning with the subconscious feeling that something portentous was impending though he was still too drowsy to remember it. He yawned and stretched languidly and luxuriously on a bed which was the last word in comfort, since Mr. Cone's pride in the Colonial beds was second only to that of his pride in the hotel's reputation for exclusiveness.

A bit of yellow paper on the chiffonier brought Wallie to his full senses as his eyes fell upon it. It was the answer to a telegram he had sent Pinkey Frupp, in Prouty,

Wyoming, making inquiries as to the possibility of taking up a homestead.

It read:

They's a good piece of ground you can file on if you got the guts to hold it. PINKEY.

Wallie grew warm every time he thought of such a message addressed to him coming over the wire. Though worse than inelegant, and partially unintelligible, it was plain enough that what he wanted was there, if he went for it, and he had replied that Pinkey might look for him shortly in Prouty.

And to-day he was leaving! He was saying good-by forever to the hotel that was like home to him and the friends that were as his own relatives! He had twenty-one hundred dollars in real money—a legacy—and his clothing. In his newborn spirit of independence he wished that he might even leave his clothes behind him, but he had changed his mind when he had figured the cost of buying others.

His aunt had taken no notice of Wallie's preparations for departure. The news of the rupture had spread quickly and the sympathies of the guests were equally divided. All were agreed, however, that if Wallie went West he would soon have enough of it and be back in time to go South for the winter.

Helene Spenceley had left unexpectedly upon the receipt of a telegram, and it was one of Wallie's favorite speculations as to what she would say when she heard he was a neighbor—something disagreeable, probably.

With the solemnity which a person might feel who is planning his own funeral, Wallie arose and made a careful toilet. It would be the last in the luxurious quarters that he had occupied for so many summers. As he took his shower, he wondered what the hotel accommodations would be like in Prouty, Wyoming? Not up to much, he imagined, but he decided that he would duplicate this bathroom in his own residence as soon as he got his homestead going. Wallie's knowledge of Wyoming was gathered chiefly from an atlas he had borrowed from Mr. Cone.

The atlas stated briefly that it contained ninety-seven thousand eight hundred and ninety square miles, mostly arid, and a population of ninety-two thousand five hundred and thirty-one. It gave the impression that the editors themselves were hazy on Wyoming, which very likely was the truth,

since it had been published in Mr. Cone's childhood when the State was a territory.

What the atlas omitted, however, was supplied by Wallie's imagination. When he closed his eyes he could see great herds of cattle—his—with their broad backs glistening in the sunshine, and vast tracts—his also—planted in clover, oats, barley, or whatever it was they grew in that country. For diversion, he saw himself scampering over the country on horseback on visits to the friendly neighbors, entertaining frequently himself and entertained everywhere. As for Helene Spenceley—she would soon learn the manner of man she had belittled!

It was a wrench after all—the going—and the fact that his aunt did not relent, made it the harder. She sat erect and unyielding at the far end of the veranda while he was in the midst of a sympathetic leave-taking from the guests of the Colonial.

"Aw—you'll be back when it gets cold weather," said Mr. Appel.

"I shall succeed or leave my bones in Wyoming!" Wallie declared.

Mr. Appel snickered:

"They'll help fertilize the soil, which I'm told needs it." His early struggles had made Mr. Appel callous.

Miss MacPherson, looking straight ahead, gave no indication that she saw her nephew coming.

"Will you say good-by to me, aunt Mary?"

She appeared not to see the hand he put out to her.

"I trust you will have a safe journey, Wallace." Her voice was a breath from the arctic.

The motor bus had arrived and the chauffeur was piling his luggage on top of it, so, with a final handshake around, Wallie said good-by, perhaps forever, to his friends of the Colonial.

They were all standing with their arms about each other's waists, or with their hands placed affectionately upon each other's shoulders as the bus started, calling good-by and good luck with much waving of handkerchiefs. Only his aunt sat grim-visaged and motionless, refusing to concede so much as a glance in her nephew's direction.

Wallie in turn took off his hat and swung it through the bus window and wafted kisses at the dear, amiable folk of the Colonial until the motor had passed between the stately pillars of the entrance. Then he leaned back with a sigh and the feeling de-

scribed by all writers worthy the name, of having "burned his bridges behind him."

CHAPTER VI.

HIS "GAT."

"How much 'jack' did you say you got?" Pinkey, an early caller at the Prouty House, sitting on his heel with his back against the wall, awaited with evident interest an answer to this pointed question. He explained further in response to Wallie's puzzled look: "Kale—dinero—the long green—money."

"Oh," Wallie replied enlightened, "about eighteen hundred dollars." He was in his blue silk pajamas, sitting on the iron rail of his bed.

There was no resemblance between this room and the one he had last occupied. The robins'-egg-blue alabastine had scaled, exposing large patches of plaster, and the same thing had happened to the enamel of the washbowl and pitcher. A former occupant, who must have learned his art in the penitentiary, had knotted the lace curtains in such a fashion that no one ever had attempted to untie them; while the prisonlike effect of the iron bed with its dingy pillows and counterpane, and sagging middle, was such as to throw a chill over the spirits of the cheeriest traveler.

It had required all Wallie's will power when he had arrived at midnight, to rise above the depression superinduced by these surroundings. Pinkey's arrival had cheered him wonderfully. Now, when that person observed tentatively that eighteen hundred dollars was "a good little stake," Wallie blithely offered to count it.

"You got it with you?" Pinkey asked.

Wallie nodded.

"That's chancy," Pinkey commented. "They's people in the country would stick you up, if they knowed you carried it."

"I should resist if any one attempted to rob me," Wallie declared as he sat down on the rail gingerly with his bulging wallet. "What with?" Pinkey inquired humorously.

Wallie reached under his pillow and produced a pearl-handled revolver of thirty-two caliber.

"Before leaving, I purchased this pistol."

Pinkey regarded him with a pained expression.

"Don't use that dude word, feller. Say

'gun,' 'gat,' 'six-shooter,' anything, but don't ever say 'pistol' above a whisper."

A little crestfallen, Wallie laid it aside and commenced to count his money. Pinkey, he could see, was not impressed by the weapon.

"Yes, eighteen hundred exactly. I spent two hundred and fifty dollars purchasing a camping outfit."

Pinkey looked at him incredulously. He was thinking of the frying pan, coffeepot, and lard kettle of which his own consisted. He made no comment, however, until Wallie mentioned his portable bathtub, which, while expensive, he declared he considered indispensable.

"Yes," Pinkey agreed dryly, "you'll be needin' a portable bathtub something desperate. I wisht I had one. The last good wash I took was in Crystal Lake the other side of the Bear Tooth Mountain. When I was done I stood out till the sun dried me, then brushed the mud off with a whisk broom."

"That must have been uncomfortable," Wallie observed politely. "I hope you will feel at liberty to use my tub whenever you wish."

"That won't be often enough to wear it out," said Pinkey candidly. "But you'd better jump into your pants and git over to the land office. We want to nail that one hundred and sixty before some other 'scissorsbill' beats you to it."

Under Pinkey's guidance, Wallie went to the land office which was in the rear of a secondhand store kept by Mr. Alvin Tucker, who was also the land commissioner.

The office was in the rear and there were two routes by which it was possible to get in touch with Mr. Tucker. One might gain admittance by walking over the bureaus, center tables, and stoves that blocked the front entrance, or he could crawl on his hands and knees through a large roll of chicken wire wedged into the side door of the establishment.

The main-traveled road, however, was over the tables and bureaus, and this was chosen by Pinkey and Wallie, who found Mr. Tucker at his desk attending to the State's business. Mr. Tucker had been blacking a stove and had not yet removed the traces of his previous occupation, so when Pinkey introduced him, his hand was of a color to make Wallie hesitate for the fraction of a second before taking it.

Mr. Tucker being a man of great good nature took no offense, although he could scarcely fail to notice Wallie's hesitation; on the contrary, he inquired with the utmost cordiality:

"Well, gents, what can I do for you this morning?" His tone implied that he had the universe at his disposal.

"He wants to file on the one hundred and sixty on Skull Crick that Boice Bill abandoned," said Pinkey.

Tucker's gaze shifted.

"I'm not sure it's open to entry," he replied hesitatingly.

"Yes, it is. His time was up a month ago, and he ain't even fenced it."

"You know he's quarrelsome," Tucker suggested. "Perhaps it would be better to ask his intentions."

"He ain't none," Pinkey declared bluntly. "He only took it up to hold for Canby, and he's never done a lick of work on it."

"Of course it's right in the middle of one of Canby's leases," Tucker argued, "and you can scarcely blame him for not wanting it homesteaded. Why don't you select a place that won't conflict with his interests?"

"Why should we consider his interests? He don't think of anybody else's when he wants anything," Pinkey demanded.

"Your friend bein' a newcomer, I thought he wouldn't want to locate in the middle of trouble."

"He can take care of himself," Pinkey declared confidently though, as they both glanced at Wallie, there seemed nothing in his appearance to justify his friend's optimism.

Tucker brought his feet down with the air of a man who had done his duty and washed his hands of consequences; he prepared to make out the necessary papers. As he handled the documents he left finger prints of such perfection on the borders that they resembled identification marks for classification under the Bertillon system, and Wallie was far more interested in watching him than in his intimation that there was trouble in the offing if he made this filing.

He paid his fees and filled out his application, leaving Tucker's office with a new feeling of importance and responsibility. One hundred and sixty acres was not much of a ranch as ranches go in Wyoming, but it was a beginning. As soon as they were out of the building, Wallie inquired casually:

"Does Miss Spenceley live in my neighborhood?"

"Across the mounting!" Which reply conveyed nothing to Wallie. Pinkey added: "I punch cows for their outfit."

"What did she say when she heard I was coming?"

"She laughed to kill herself."

In the meantime Tucker, in guarded language, was informing Canby of the entry by telephone. From the sounds which came through the receiver he had the impression that the land baron was pulling the telephone out by the roots in his exasperation at the negligence of his hireling who he had supposed had done sufficient work to hold it.

"I'll attend to it!" he answered.

Tucker thought there was no doubt about that, and he had a worthy feeling of having earned the yearly stipend which he received from Canby for these small services.

"We'd better sift along and git out there," Pinkey advised when they were back at the Prouty House.

"To-day?"

"You bet you! That's no dream about Boise Bill bein' ugly, and he might try to hold the one hundred and sixty if he got wind of your filing."

"In that event?"

"In that event," Pinkey mimicked, "he's more'n likely to run you off, unless you got the sand to fight fer it. That's what I meant in my telegram."

"Oh," said Wallie, enlightened. "'Sand' and—er—intestines are synonymous terms in your vernacular?"

Pinkey stared at him.

"Say, feller, you'll have to learn to sling the buckskin before we can understand each other. Anyhow, as I was sayin', you got a good proposition in this one hundred and sixty if you can hold it."

"If I am within my rights I shall adhere to them at all hazards," said Wallie. "At first, however, I shall use moral suasion."

"Can't you say things plainer?" Pinkey demanded crossly. "Why don't you talk United States? You sound like a fifth reader. If you mean you aim to argue with him, he'll knock you down with a neck yoke while you're gittin' started."

"In that event, if he attempted violence, I should use my pistol—my 'gat'—and stop him."

"In that event," Pinkey relished the ex-

pression, "in that event I shall carry a shovel along to bury you."

Riding a horse from the livery stable and accompanied by Pinkey driving two pack horses ahead of him, Wallie left the Prouty House shortly after noon, followed by comments of a jocular nature from the bystanders.

"How far is it?" inquired Wallie, who was riding his English saddle and "posting."

"Twenty for me and forty for you, if you aim to ride that way," said Pinkey. "Why don't you let out them sturrops and shove your feet in 'em?"

Wallie preferred his own style of riding, but observed that he hoped never to have another such fall as he had had at the Colonial.

"A feller that's never been throwed has never rid," said Pinkey sagely, and added: "You'll git used to it."

Once they left the town they turned toward the mountains and conversation ceased shortly, for not only were they obliged to ride single file through the sagebrush and cacti but the trot of the livery horse soon left Wallie with no breath nor desire to continue it.

The vast tract they were traversing belonged to Canby, so Pinkey informed him, and as mile after mile slipped by he was amazed at the extent of it. Through illegal fencing, leasing, and driving small stockmen from the country by various methods, Canby had obtained control of a range of astonishing circumference, and Wallie's homestead was nearly in the middle of it.

Although they had eaten before leaving Prouty, it was not more than two o'clock before Wallie began to wonder what they would have for supper. They were not making fast time, for his horse stumbled badly and the pack horses, both old and stiff, traveled slowly, so at three o'clock the elusive mountains seemed as far away as when they had started. Unable to refrain any longer, Wallie called to ask how much farther.

"Twelve miles, or some such matter," Pinkey added: "I'm so hungry I don't know where I'm goin' to sleep to-night. That restaurant is reg'lar stummick robbers."

By four o'clock every muscle in Wallie's body was aching, but his fatigue was nothing as compared with his hunger. He tried to admire the scenery, to think of his magnificent prospects, of Helene Spenceley, but

his thoughts always came back quickly to the subject of food and a wonder as to how soon he could get it. In his regular, well-fed life he never had imagined, much less known, such a gnawing, all-consuming hunger. His destination represented only something to eat, and it seemed to him they never would get there.

"What will we have for supper, Pinkey?" he shouted finally.

Pinkey replied promptly:

"I was thinkin' we'd have ham and gravy and cow-puncher perta-toes; and maybe I'll build some biscuit, if we kin wait fer 'em."

"Let's not have biscuit—let's have crackers."

Ham and gravy and cow-puncher potatoes! Wallie rode along with his mouth watering and visualizing the menu until Pinkey came to a halt and said with a dramatic gesture:

"There's your future home, Mr. MacPherson! That's what I call a reg'lar paradise."

As Mr. MacPherson stared at the Elysium indicated, endeavoring to discover the resemblance, surprise kept him silent. So far as he could see, it in nowise differed from the arid plain across which they had ridden. It was a pebbly tract, covered with sagebrush and cacti, which dropped abruptly to a creek bed that had no water in it. Filled with sudden misgivings, he asked feebly:

"What's it good for?"

"Look at the view!" said Pinkey impatiently.

"I can't eat scenery."

"It'll be a great place for dry farmin'."

Wallie looked at a crack big enough to swallow him and observed humorously:

"I should judge so."

"You see," Pinkey explained enthusiastically, "bein' clost to the mountings, the snow lays late in the spring and all the moisture they is you git it."

"I see." Wallie nodded comprehensively. "Why didn't you take it up yourself, Pinkey?"

"Oh, I got to make a livin'."

There was food for thought in the answer and Wallie pondered it as he got stiffly out of the saddle.

"Can I be of any assistance?" he asked politely.

"You can git the squaw ax and hack out a place for a bed ground and you can hunt up some firewood and take a bucket out

of the pack and go to the crick and locate some water while I'm finding a place to picket these horses."

Because it would hasten supper, it seemed to Wallie that wood and water were of more importance than clearing a place to sleep, so he collected a small pile of twigs and dead sagebrush, then took an aluminum kettle from his camping utensils and walked along the bank of Skull Creek, looking for a pool which contained enough water to fill the kettle. He finally saw one, and planting his heels in a dirt slide, shot like a toboggan some twenty feet to the bottom. Filling his kettle, he walked back over the bowlders looking for a more convenient place to get up than the one he had descended.

He was abreast of the camp before he knew it.

"Whur you goin'?" Pinkey, who had returned, was hanging over the edge watching him stumbling along with his kettle of water.

"I'm hunting a place to get up," said Wallie tartly.

"How did you git down?"

"Way back there."

"Why didn't you git up the same way?"

"Couldn't—without spilling the water."

"I'll git a rope and snake you."

"This doesn't seem like a very convenient location," said Wallie querulously.

"You can cut out some toe holts to-morrow," Pinkey suggested cheerfully. "The ground has got such a good slope to drain the corrals is the reason I picked it to build on."

This explanation reconciled Wallie to the difficulty of getting water. To build a fire and make the coffee was the work of a moment, but it seemed twenty-four hours to Wallie, sitting on a saddle blanket watching every move like a hungry bird dog. He thought he never had smelled anything so savory as the odor of potatoes and onions cooking, and when the aroma of boiling coffee was added to it!

Pinkey stopped slicing ham to point at the sunset.

"Ain't that a great picture?"

"Gorgeous," Wallie agreed without looking.

"If I could paint——"

"Does it take long to make gravy?" Wallie demanded impatiently.

"Not so very. I'll git things goin' and let you watch 'em while I go and take a look at

them buzzard heads. If a horse ain't use to bein' on picket he's liable to go scratchin' his ear and git caught and choke hisself."

"Couldn't we eat first?" Wallie asked plaintively.

"No, I'll feel easier if I know they ain't tangled. Keep stirrin' the gravy so it won't burn on you," he called back. "And set the coffee off in a couple of minutes."

Wallie was on his knees absorbed in his task of keeping the gravy from scorching when a sound made him turn quickly and look behind him.

A large man on a small, white pony was riding toward him. He looked unprepossessing, even at a distance, and he did not improve as he came closer. His nose was long, his jaw was long, his hair needed cutting and was greasy, while his close-set blue eyes had a decidedly mean expression. There was a rifle slung under his stirrup leather and a six-shooter in its holster on his hip was a conspicuous feature of his costume.

He sat for a moment, looking, then dropped the bride reins as he dismounted and sauntered up to the camp fire. Wallie was sure that it was Boise Bill, from a description Pinkey had given him, and his voice was slightly tremulous as he said:

"Good evening."

The stranger paid no attention to his greeting. He was surveying Wallie in his riding breeches and puttees with an expression that was at once amused and insolent.

"Looks like you aimed to camp a spell, from your layout," he observed finally.

"Yes, I am here permanently." Wallie wondered if the stranger could see that his hand was trembling as he stirred the gravy.

"Indeed! How you got that figgered?" asked the man mockingly.

Wallie replied with dignity:

"This is my homestead; I filed on it this morning."

"Looks like you'd 'a' found out if it was open to entry, before you went to all that trouble." Boise Bill shuffled his feet so that a cloud of the light wood ashes rose and settled in the gravy. Wallie frowned but picked them out patiently.

"I did," he answered, moving the pan.

"Then somebody's lied to you, fer I filed on this ground and I ain't abandoned it."

"You've never done any work on it, and Mr. Tucker has my filing fees and applica-

tion, so I cannot see that there is any argument about it."

Wallie was very polite and conciliatory.

"You'll find that filin' is one thing and holdin' is another in this man's country." Quite deliberately he scuffled up another cloud of cinders.

"I will appreciate it," said Wallie sharply, "if you won't kick ashes in my gravy!"

"And I will appreciate it," Boise Bill mocked him, "if you'll git your junk together and move off my land in about twenty minutes."

"I refuse to be intimidated," said Wallie, paling. "I shall begin a contest suit if necessary."

"I allus fight first and contest afterward."

Boise Bill lifted his huge foot and kicked over first the pan of ham and then the gravy. Wallie stood for a second staring at the tragedy. Then his nerves jumped and he shook in a passion which seemed to blind and choke him.

Boise Bill had drawn his six-shooter and Wallie was looking into the barrel of it. His homestead, his life, was in jeopardy, but this seemed nothing at all compared to the fact that this ruffian, with deliberate malice had kicked over his supper!

"Have I got to try a chunk o' lead on you?" Boise Bill snarled at him.

For answer, Wallie stooped swiftly and gripped the long handle of the frying pan. He swung it with all his strength as he would have swung a tennis racket. Knocking the six-shooter from Boise Bill's hand he jumped across the fire at him. Scarcely conscious of what he was doing in the frenzy of rage that consumed him, Wallie whipped his little pearl-handled pistol from his breeches pocket and as Boise Bill opened his mouth in an exclamation of astonishment, Wallie shoved it down his throat, yelling shrilly that if he moved an eyelash he would pull the trigger!

This was the amazing sight that stopped Pinkey in his tracks as effectively as a bullet.

Wallie heard his step and asked plaintively but without turning:

"What'll I do with him?"

"As you are, until I pull his fangs!"

Pinkey threw the shells from Boise Bill's rifle and removed the cartridges from his six-shooter. Handing the latter back to him, he said laconically:

"Drift! And don't you take the beef-herd gait, neither."

The malevolent look Boise Bill sent over his shoulder was wasted on Wallie who was picking out of the ashes the ham for which he had stood ready to shed his blood.

CHAPTER VII.

NEIGHBORS.

The modest herring had been the foundation of the great Canby fortune. Small and unpretentious, the herring had swum in the icy waters of the Maine coast until transformed into a French sardine by Canby, senior. It had brought wealth and renown to the shrewd old Yankee, who was alleged to have smelled of herring even in his coffin, but the Canby family were not given to boasting of the source of their income to strangers, and by the time Canby, junior, was graduated from Harvard they were fairly well deodorized.

In the East, many things had conspired to make the young Canby the misanthrope and recluse he had come to be in Wyoming, where he was fully aided and abetted in his desire for seclusion by his neighbors, who disliked him so thoroughly that they went out of their way to avoid speaking to him.

Having been graduated without distinction, he concentrated his efforts upon an attempt to become one of a New England coterie that politely but firmly refused to do more than admit his existence. In pursuance of his ambition he built a castlelike residence and specialized in orchards and roses, purchased a yacht, and became an exhibitor at the horse show. Society praised his roses, but their admiration did not extend to Canby; he went on solitary cruises in his floating palace, and the horse show, which had provided an open sesame to others, in his case was a failure.

Finally he married a girl who had the entrée to the circle he coveted, but his wife received invitations which did not include her husband. The divorce court ended the arrangement and Canby had the privilege of paying a king's ransom in alimony into one of Boston's first families.

Petty, unscrupulous, overbearing, Canby never attributed his failure to the proper cause, which was his unpleasant personality, but regarded it as a conspiracy on the part of "society" to defeat him in his ambition and accordingly he came to hate it.

When he was not traveling he spent his time on the feudal estate he had created in

Wyoming, where he had no visitors except Helene Spenceley and her brother, who came occasionally when invited. Protecting himself from invasion from the smaller cattlemen and homesteaders was in the nature of a recreation to Canby who had various methods of ridding himself of their presence.

Boise Bill was one of those whom he kept for the purpose of intimidating prospective settlers and was considered by him his ablest lieutenant. Therefore when that person returned and stated that the job of running off the newcomer was one he did not care to tackle further, Canby could not fail to be impressed by the declaration.

Among traits less agreeable, Boise Bill had a strong sense of humor, albeit of a somewhat ghoulish brand, usually. As he rode back to report to Canby, the ludicrous side of the encounter grew on him until it outweighed the chagrin he first had felt at getting the worst of it.

Thinking of Wallie in his "dude" clothes, his face pale and his eyes gleaming, swinging the frying pan in his rage at the loss of his supper, when a more experienced man would have thrown up his hands promptly, Boise Bill slapped his leg and rocked in the saddle.

"That's the closest squeak I ever had; he might 'a' trembled his gun off and killed me!" he chuckled.

To Canby he declared with a face that was unsmiling and solemn:

"I 'low I got my share of nerve when it comes to a show-down, and I ain' no skim-milk runt, neither, but that nester—he's a giant—and hos-tile as they make 'em! He had me lookin' at my hole card from the outset."

"Are you afraid of him?" Canby demanded incredulously.

"I wouldn't say I'm actually *afraid* of him, but I got an old mother in southern Idyho that's dependin' on me, and I can't afford to take chances."

"I'll go myself," said Canby curtly.

"Don't let him git the drop on you," Boise Bill warned him. "I never *see* anybody so quick as he is. He had out his weepion and was over the fire at me before I knew what was happenin'," with conviction. "He gits 'ringy'—that feller."

Canby's cold, gray eyes glittered, though he said nothing of his intentions.

Pinkey put up Wallie's silk tent and staked it, showed him how to hobble and

picket his horse and to make baking-powder biscuit, and left him.

"It'll be lonesome at first, and the work'll come hard on you, but you'll be jest as happy as if you was in your right mind, onct you git used to it," he had assured Wallie.

"If only I had a congenial neighbor," sighed Wallie, "it would make a great difference."

"There's Canby—you might call on him," Pinkey suggested, grinning. "Or if you ketch yourself pickin' at the bedclothes you can saddle up and scamper over and see me. 'Tain't fur—forty miles across the mounting. Jest below that notch—you can't miss it."

Wallie had looked at the notch often since then. He was staring at it the evening Canby rode down on him—staring and thinking so hard of Helene Spenceley that Canby had checked his horse and was looking at him before he saw him. It would be impossible to say which was the more astonished.

Instead of the fearsome person Canby had anticipated, he saw one so different and at the same time so extraordinary that he could not immediately collect himself.

Wallie's trunks had followed him, together with a supply of provisions, and now, his day's work done, he was sitting in front of his tent on a patent camp chair garbed in whatsoever had come handiest. Canby's eyes rested upon a mild-looking young man in a purple silk lounging robe, hob-nailed mountain boots, and a yachting cap with a black, patent-leather visor. He was smoking a cigarette with a gold tip and a monogram, held in a hand that was white and carefully manicured.

In his surprise, Canby said: "Good evening" almost amiably.

Wallie in turn saw a visitor who looked as if he might just have returned from a canter through Central Park or the Wissahickon. His appearance was so homelike and familiar that Wallie went forward with a radiant smile of welcome. Before he knew it Canby found himself shaking hands vigorously with the person he had come to quarrel with.

Wallie was sure that it was Canby, but it flashed through his mind that, perhaps, he was not so black as he was painted and that Pinkey was given to exaggeration, and that very likely Boise Bill had acted upon

his own initiative. At any rate, after four days of solitude Wallie would have been delighted to see his Satanic Majesty. So, with his most engaging smile, he invited Canby to dismount and stated that his name was "MacPherson."

Canby could do nothing less than give his name also, though he refused the invitation. Whereupon Wallie declared heartily:

"I take this as very nice and neighborly of you, Mr. Canby, and please believe I appreciate it!"

Canby bowed, but said nothing.

"You see, I'm a newcomer," Wallie babbled, "and I have so many things to learn that you can teach me. I consider myself fortunate in having a neighbor of your experience, and if you will let me I shall come to you for advice often."

"Don't hesitate to call on me." In Canby's eyes there was something like a glint of amusement.

Wallie went on guilelessly, finding it an extreme relief after his enforced silence, to have an ear to talk into.

"The fact is," confidentially, "I may not look it but I am a good deal of a tenderfoot."

"Indeed?" Canby raised a politely surprised eyebrow.

"Yes," he prattled on, "I am totally ignorant of agricultural matters; but I hope to learn and make a good thing, ultimately, out of this dry-farming proposition. By mixing brains with industry I hope by next fall to get an ample return upon my money and labor. I trust I am not too optimistic?"

"It would not seem so," Mr. Canby replied guardedly. "How are you fixed for horses?"

"I was just going to ask you about that," Wallie exclaimed. "I want to plow and haul some fence posts and I shall need horses. Can you recommend a team that would suit me?"

"Next Thursday at two o'clock there will be a stock sale at my place, and I have no doubt that you will be able to pick up something there for your purpose."

"That's splendid!" Wallie cried delightfully. "I shall seek you out, Mr. Canby, and ask you to assist me in making a selection. I've been thinking of buying a cow, too. This is rare good luck, isn't it, to be able to purchase what I need, without going so far for it!"

"I shall be present—hunt me up—two o'clock, Thursday."

With a smile and a nod Canby gathered

up his reins and departed, while Wallie with a glowing face looked after him and declared aloud:

"That's what I call real Western sociality!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CUTTING HIS EYETEETH.

A widely advertised stock sale was an event in the country, for the two-fold reason that it furnished the opportunity for neighbors, with fifty and more miles between them, to exchange personal news and experiences and also to purchase blooded animals for considerably less than they could have been imported.

This was particularly true of the Canby sale, where the "culls" both in horses and cattle, were better than the best animals of the majority of the small stockmen and ranchers. It was the custom, also, for such persons as had a few head of horses or cattle to dispose of, but not enough for a sale of their own, to bring them to be auctioned off with Canby's. So it had come to pass that the stock sale at Canby's ranch was second only in importance to the county fair.

Therefore Wallie, whose notion of a stock sale was of the vaguest, was much surprised when after riding in the direction his visitor had indicated and spending hours hunting for gates in wire fences, he came upon an assembly of a size he would not have believed possible in that sparsely populated district.

There were Ford cars which might have been duplicates of Henry's first model—with trailers containing the overflow of children—together with the larger cars of the more prosperous or more extravagant. Top buggies were in evidence, relics of the Victorian period, shipped out from Iowa and Nebraska—serviceable vehicles that had done duty when their owners were "keeping company." Lumber wagons were plentiful, with straw and quilts in the bottom to serve as shock absorbers, while saddle horses were tied to every hitching post and cottonwood.

When Wallie arrived in his riding boots and breeches, he immediately shared attention with a large, venerable-looking Durham that was being auctioned. The Durham, however, returned the stare of the crowd with blasé eyes which said that he had seen all of life he wanted to and did not care what further happened, while Wallie felt dis-

tinctly uncomfortable at the attention he attracted, and wished he might find Canby.

As he stood speculating as to whether the folds of skin around the Durham's neck might be an indication of his age—a year for a fold, after the manner of snakes' rattles—his attention was diverted to a group that was interested in the efforts of one of its members to pry a horse's mouth open. It seemed to Wallie an excellent opportunity to learn something which might be of future use to him, so he joined it.

A man who looked capable of selling a runaway horse to his grandmother was saying emphatically:

"Eight, next spring, I tell you. We raised her a pet on the ranch, so I ought to know what I'm talkin' about."

The person who had managed to separate the horse's jaws laughed uproariously:

"If she ever sees sixteen again——"

A piping voice from the group interjected itself into the conversation. It came from under the limp brim of a hat that drooped to the speaker's shoulders.

"Why, I knowed that harse when I first come to the country. She was runnin' with her mother over in the Bighorns, and Bear George at Tensleep owned her. Some said that Frank McMannigle's runnin' harse, Left Hand, was her father, and others said she was jest a ketch colt, but I dunno. Her mother was a sorrel with a star in her forehead and the Two-pole-punkin' brand on her left shoulder. If I ain't mistaken, she had one white hind stockin', and they was a wire cut above her hock that was kind of a blemish.

"She got a ringbone, and they had to kill her, but Bear George sold the colt, this mare here, to a feller at Kaysee over on Powder River and he win quite considerable money on her. It was about thirteen years ago that I last seen her, but I knowed her the minute I laid eyes on her. She et musty hay one winter and got the tizic, but you never would know it unless you run her. One of her stiffler j'int's——"

The mare's owner interrupted at this juncture:

"You jest turn your mouth on, don't you, Tex, and go off and leave it?"

"I happened to know a little somethin' about this harse," apologetically began Tex, whose other name was McGonnigle, "so I thought——"

"So you thought you'd butt in and queer

the sale of it. I suppose you'd suffer somethin' horrible if there was a horse deal on and you had to keep your mouth shut?"

Mr. McGonnigle protested feebly that he had no such idea when he gave the horse's history, and Wallie was much interested in the wrangle, but he thought he caught a glimpse of Canby through one of the doorways of a stable, so he hurried across the yard and found him in conversation with Boise Bill, who was grooming a work horse which quite evidently was to be auctioned.

Boise Bill grinned when he saw Wallie and nodded. Canby stepped out and greeted Wallie with some affability.

"I've been watching for you. Have you bid on anything?"

"Not yet. But I saw a fine-looking cow that I mean to buy, if she is all she ought to be," Wallie replied with a touch of importance. "It seems to me that a good cow will help out wonderfully. I am very fond of milk, and it will be useful in cooking. With a cow and a hen or two——"

Canby and Wallie crossed the yard to where a mild-eyed Jersey was being dressed in a halter preparatory to being led forward and put up at auction.

"Will you be good enough to permit me to examine this animal?" Wallie asked of her caretaker.

"Shore," he replied heartily, though he looked puzzled.

Wallie drew off his riding gloves and stepped up briskly in a professional manner and pried open the mouth of the protesting cow.

He exclaimed as he let go abruptly:

"Why—she's old! I don't want her. She hasn't a single tooth left in her upper jaw. It's a fortunate thing I looked at her."

A small boy roosting on the corral snickered. The cow's guardian smiled broadly and openly and deliberately winked at Canby.

Offended, Wallie demanded:

"Am I in error as to her age?"

"Well—if a cow ever had a set of teeth in her upper jaw she'd be in a side show. They don't have 'em. This cow is only three—a young animal."

"That's true," Canby assented.

"I declare! It seems very curious!" Wallie exclaimed, astounded. "I fear I have much to learn."

"This is a good place to learn it," observed the cow's valet.

Wallie bought the Jersey at private sale and, needless to say, paid its full value.

"She'll be fresh in January," the man said to him.

Wallie looked bewildered, so the other explained further:

"She'll have a calf." He said it in such a confidential manner that Wallie thought it was a secret and lowered his voice to answer:

"I'm glad of it." He had a notion that he had gotten the best of Canby and wished that Miss Spenceley and the Colonial folk knew he had made a shrewd bargain and gotten a herd started. To Canby, who accompanied him on his tour of inspection, he said eagerly: "Where I wish your assistance is in the selection of my work horses. What would you advise?"

"That was a good horse Boise Bill was currying," he suggested.

"Yes, I noticed him. Is there another like him?"

"I believe he is one of a team."

Canby was correct in his surmise. The pair were well matched and, impressed by their looks and strength, Wallie was delighted and determined to have them, if possible.

"Fourteen hundred is a good weight for your purpose—above that they are apt to be clumsy," said Canby.

Wallie agreed enthusiastically.

"My own idea exactly. You see, I'll have to use them for driving as well as working, until I can afford a motor."

The gathering was composed mostly of good, honest folk but plain ones. They did, however, seem to know exactly what they were buying and why they wanted it, and Wallie was fearful that a pair of such exceptional horses would be run up to a figure beyond his resources. He wished they would bring them out and end the suspense which was momentarily growing greater as he thought of losing them.

Boise Bill drove the pair from the stable finally, just as a powerful machine arrived and took a place in the outer circle. New arrivals had no interest at the moment for Wallie, who was as nervous as a young opera singer. As Boise Bill walked behind the team slapping them with a rope end to drive them forward, it occurred to Wallie that it would have been much simpler to have led them, but as every one had his own way of doing things in this country, he gave no further thought to the matter.

If he had not been so anxious and intent upon what was about to happen, he might also have observed an interchange of knowing looks among the gentlemen whose clothes were secured mostly with shingle nails and baling wire.

The team looked all the auctioneer declared them to be as they stood head to head—*young, strong, perfectly matched*—and he defied all Wyoming to find a blemish on them. The gentlemen in patched overalls seemed willing to take his word for it, since no one stepped forward to examine the team, and they listened with such attention while he extolled their virtues that it sickened Wallie, who already felt the thrill of ownership as he looked at them.

"The greatest pullers in the State!" The auctioneer made a point of it, repeating it several times for emphasis.

Wallie scanned the faces of the crowd to see if he could detect any special interest that would denote a rival bidder, and he wished the auctioneer would stop harping on their good qualities. It surprised him a little that he saw none of his own eagerness reflected in the varied expressions, also it relieved him somewhat.

"How high do you think I should go?" he asked of his friend and adviser.

"That depends on how badly you want them."

"They suit me exactly."

"Horses of that class are selling around five hundred dollars, but you might venture a little more, since you like them."

"That's just about what I am able to pay. My goodness, but I hope I'm not outbid!"

"How much am I offered for this pair of magnificent young horses?" asked the auctioneer ingratiatingly.

Wallie, who had not had such a case of stage fright since he first sang in public—"Oh, That We Two were Maying," bid instantly:

"Two hundred dollars!" His voice sounded like the squeak in a telephone receiver.

The auctioneer cupped his hand behind his ear and leaned forward:

"What?"

The incredulity in his tone prompted Wallie to raise the bid to two hundred and twenty-five when he repeated it.

The auctioneer struck his forehead with his clenched fist and staggered back dramatically, demanding: "Am I insulted?"

"That ain't possible," croaked a voice among the spectators.

"Two hundred and fifty!" The bid came from a ministerial-looking person who was known as a kind of veterinary occasionally employed by Canby.

"Three hundred!" Wallie challenged him.

"That's more like it, but still an insult to these noble brutes I'm selling. Who says three and a quarter?"

"And a quarter!" came from the veterinary.

"And a quarter—and a quarter—gentlemen, what ails you?" He looked at "the bone and sinew of the nation," who prodded each other.

"Three hundred and fifty," Wallie responded.

"Three-fifty! Boost her faster, gentlemen! Boost her right along! Am I offered four hundred?"

"Four hundred!" The bid was the veterinary's.

Wallie quavered:

"Four hundred and fifty!"

"Five hundred!" his opponent came back at him.

Wallie hesitated.

"Think of it! Going for five hundred!"

The auctioneer looked at Wallie, who could not have been paler in his coffin.

"Five twenty-five!"

"Good! Now, sir," to the veterinary.

"Five-fifty!"

He turned to Wallie:

"Am I done, gentlemen?"

Wallie stared at him, his throat too dry to answer.

"Must I give away the best pullin' team in the State for a puny, piddlin' five hundred and fifty dollars?" he pleaded.

"Six hundred!" Wallie cried in desperation.

With the bid Canby raised his hat and ran his fingers through his hair casually and the veterinary stopped bidding.

"Done!" cried the auctioneer. "Sold to Mr.—the name, please—ah, MacPherson, for six hundred dollars. A bargain!"

While Wallie stood trying to realize his good fortune and that he was the owner of as good a pair of work horses as ever looked through a halter, a figure that made his heart jump came swiftly forward, and with her hands in the pockets of her long motor coat, stopped in front of his team and scrutinized them closely.

Helene Spenceley looked from one of the horses to the other. She saw the dilated pupils, the abnormally full forehead, the few coarse hairs growing just above the eyelid, and they told her what she had suspected.

"I am sorry I did not know it was you who was bidding on these horses," she said, turning to Wallie.

"Did you want them, Miss Spenceley? I am sorry——"

"Want them? You couldn't give them to me. They are locoed!"

"Locoed!" He could only stare at her, hoping never again to feel such dismay as filled him at that moment.

He had only the vaguest notion as to what "locoed" meant, but it was very clear that it was something highly undesirable. And he had been cheated by Canby, who had known of it and advised him to buy them! Such duplicity was without his experience, and sickened him nearly as much as the thought of the six hundred dollars he had invested in horses so radically wrong that Helene Spenceley would not take them as a gift.

The single thought which came to solace him as he stood humiliated and panic-stricken was that she resented the dishonest trick that had been played upon him.

Canby came forward to greet her, with his hand out. She ignored it and said indignantly:

"I should have spoiled this sale for you, Mr. Canby, if I had seen who was bidding on these locoed horses."

Though Canby flushed, he shrugged a shoulder and replied callously:

"We all had to get our eyeteeth cut when we came to the country."

CHAPTER IX.

THE BEST PULLING TEAM IN THE STATE.

Leading the cow, and aided by "Tex" McGonnigle, who boasted that he had a heart as big as the country he lived in and was willing to prove it by helping him with the locoed horses, Wallie made fair progress as far as the gate in the last wire fence, where Tex had to leave him.

"Tain't fur now," said that person, passing over the rope with a knot in the end with which he had belabored the horses he had driven ahead of him. "Mog along stiddy and you'd ought to make it by sundown."

"I think I'll lead 'em," Wallie remarked.

"Locoed horses won't lead—you've got to drive 'em."

Nevertheless, on the chance that Tex might not know everything, Wallie tried it after his helper had galloped in another direction.

"The best pulling team in the State!" the auctioneer had declared, and truthfully. Wallie had a notion they could have moved the capitol building if they had laid back on it as they did their halters when he tried to lead them.

There was nothing for it but to tie their heads together and drive them as Tex had done, but with even less success. They missed either Tex's voluble and spicy encouragement or the experienced hand which laid on the rope end, but the chief difficulty seemed to be that they were of different minds as to the direction which they should take, and since the cow was of still another, Wallie was confronted with a difficult situation.

Dragging the mild-eyed Jersey, which had developed an incredible obstinacy with the cessation of Tex's Comanche yells behind her, Wallie applied the rope he had inherited, with the best imitation he could give of the performance, but futilely.

The cow, and the horses pulling in opposite directions, went around and around in a circle until the trampled earth looked as if it had been the site of a cider press or a circus. After they had milled for twenty minutes without advancing a step, Wallie lost patience.

"Oh, sugar!" he cried. "This is certainly very, very annoying!"

The cow was as much an obstacle to the continuance of their journey as the horses, since, bawling at intervals, she planted her feet and allowed her neck to be stretched until Wallie was fearful that it would separate, leaving only her gory head in the halter.

With this unpleasant possibility confronting him, Wallie shrank from putting too much strain upon it, with the result that the cow learned that if she bawled loud enough and laid back hard enough, he would ease up on the rope by which he was dragging her.

Wallie had been taught from infancy that kindness was the proper method of conquering animals, therefore he addressed the cow in tones of saccharine sweetness and with a persuasive manner that would have charmed a bird off a tree.

"Bossy! Bossy! Good bossy!" he chafed her.

Immune to flattery, she looked at him with an expression which reminded him of a servant girl who knows she is giving notice at an inopportune time. Then she planted her feet still deeper in the sand and bawled at him.

"Darn it!" he cried finally in his exasperation.

As he sat helpless in his dilemma, wondering what to do next, an idea occurred to him which was so clever and feasible that he lost no time in executing it.

If he tied the cow to the stirrup of his saddle and she showed no disposition to escape, then he could walk and drive the work horses ahead, returning for his saddle horse and the cow! This, to be sure, was a slow process, but it was an improvement over spending the night going around in a circle.

Wallie tied the cow's rope to the stirrup and both animals stood as if they were nailed to the spot while he ran after the work horses, who had wandered in another direction. His boots, he noted, were not adapted to walking as they pinched in the toes and instep. He could not stop for such a small matter at this critical moment, however, so he continued to run until he overtook the horses and started them homeward.

Turning to look at the cow and his saddle horse, he saw them walking briskly, side by side, like soulmates who understood each other perfectly, in the opposite direction from which he wanted them to go. He left the horses and ran after the cow, shouting:

"Whoa—can't you?"

He reasoned swiftly that the Jersey was the nucleus of a herd which would one day run up into the thousands, and he must get her at all hazards.

"Whoa! Bossy—wait for me!" he pleaded as at top speed he went after her. "Good bossy! Good bossy!"

At the sound of his voice the horse stopped, turned its head, and looked at him. The cow stopped also.

Intensely relieved, Wallie dropped to a walk, congratulating himself that the livery horse chanced to be so well trained and obedient. As he approached, the cow stepped forward that she might look under the horse's neck and watch her pursuer. Both animals stood like statues, regarding him intently. When within fifty feet Wallie said in a conciliatory tone, to show them that he

stood ready to forgive them in spite of the inconvenience to which they had put him:

"Nice horsey! Good bossy!"

Quite as if it were a signal, "Nice horsey and good bossy" started at a trot which quickly left Wallie far behind them.

Wallie ran until he felt that his overtaxed lungs were bursting. His boots were killing him, his shin bones ached, and his feet at every step sank to the ankles in the loose sand. He pursued until he was bent double with the effort and his legs grew numb as if a hypodermic of cocaine had turned them leaden. The perspiration streamed from under his stylish derby.

When his legs would carry him not one step farther, he stopped and looked after the cow and horse—who were still doing perfect teamwork, trotting side by side as evenly as if they had been harnessed together. They stopped instantly when he stopped, and, as before, the horse turned its head to look back at him while the cow peered under its neck at him.

Hope revived again when they showed no disposition to move, and after he had panted a while, Wallie thought that by feigning indifference and concealing his real purpose he might approach them. To this end, he whistled with so much breath as his chase had left him, tossed pebbles inconsequently, and sauntered toward the pair as if he had all the day before him.

The subterfuge seemed to be succeeding, and he was once more within fifty feet of them when they whirled about simultaneously and started at the same lively trot, leaving Wallie far behind them.

Exhausted, Wallie stopped at last because he had to. Immediately the horse and cow stopped also. While he gasped, a fresh maneuver occurred to Wallie. Perhaps if he made a circle, gradually getting closer, by a quick dash he could catch the bride reins.

As he circled, the gaze of the horse and cow followed him with the keenest interest. Finally he was close enough to see the placid look of benevolence with which his cow was regarding him and success seemed about to reward his efforts. The horse, too, had half closed its eyes by the time he was ready for his coup, as if it had lost all interest in eluding him.

"Nice horsey! Good bossy!" Wallie murmured reassuringly.

For the third time he was within fifty feet of them and, while he was debating as

to whether to make his dash or try to get a little closer, the pair, seeming to recognize fifty as the danger zone, threw up their heads and tails and went off at a gallop.

Grinding his teeth in a way that could not but have been detrimental to the enamel, Wallie stood looking after them. A profane word never had passed his lips since he had had his mouth washed out with castile soap for saying "devil." But now with the emphasis of a man who had cursed from his cradle, he yelled after the fleeing fiends incarnate:

"Go to hell—damn you!"

Instantly shocked and ashamed of himself, Wallie instinctively looked skyward, half expecting to see an outraged Jehovah ready to heave a thunderbolt down on him, though he felt that the Almighty in justice should recognize the provocation, and forgive him.

Weary, with blistered heels and drooping shoulders, Wallie plodded after them while time and again they repeated the performance until it would have worn down a bloodhound to have followed the tracks made by Wallie and the renegades. The sun set and the colors faded, yet Wallie with a dogged tenacity he had not known was in him trudged back and forth, around and around, in pursuit of the runaways, buoyed up chiefly by the hope that if he could catch them he might soon be wealthy enough to afford to kill them.

It was nearly dusk, and a night in the open seemed before him when the pair stopped and commenced feeding toward him. Whether they had become hungry or the sport had palled on them were questions Wallie could not answer. It was enough that they waited like two lambs for him to walk up and catch them. He was so tired that when he got himself in the saddle, with the cow ambling along meekly at his stirrup, that he found himself feeling grateful to them instead of vindictive. The locoed horses he decided to leave until morning.

By the time he had reached his homestead and fallen out of the saddle, he had forgotten that he had sworn to tie them up and "whale" them. On the contrary, he was wondering if milking were a difficult process and if he could accomplish it, for he could not find it in his heart to let a dumb brute suffer. He remembered hearing that cows should be milked regularly, and while his Jersey had goaded him to blasphemy he

knew that he would not be able to sleep if she was in pain through his negligence.

Picketing the horse as Pinkey had taught him, he put the cow on a rope also. Then he set about the performance which had looked so simple when he had seen others engage in it.

Among his accouterments was a flash light, and with this and a lard can Wallie stood for a moment speculating as to whether the cow had any preference as to the side she was milked on. He could not see that it would make any material difference, so he sat down on his heel on the side nearest and turned his flash light on the spot where he wished to operate. Placing his lard can on the ground where he could throw a stream into it conveniently, he used his free hand for that purpose.

To his surprise, nothing happened—except that the cow stopped chewing her cud and looked at him inquiringly. He persisted, but uselessly. Was anything wrong with his system, he wondered? He thought so, since he was milking exactly as he had seen the hired man milk on a farm where he had once spent a month in his childhood.

He varied his method, making gentle experiments, but at the end of ten minutes the lard can was still empty and the cow was growing restless. For that he could not blame her. His hand ached and his foot seemed about to break off at the ankle from sitting on it. It occurred to him that perhaps there was some trick about it—perhaps it *did* make a difference which side a cow was milked on. Wallie walked around and turned the spotlight on the other side of his Jersey.

The outlook, he fancied, seemed more promising. He sat down on his heel and started in energetically.

It did make a difference which side one milked on—there was no doubt about it. The instant he touched her she lifted her foot and with an aim which was not only deadly and unerring, but remarkable, considering that she could not see her target, planted it in the pit of Wallie's stomach with such force that the muffled thud of it sounded like some one beating a carpet. As he lay on his back on a clump of cactus he was sure that he was bleeding internally and probably dying. Wallie finally got to his feet painfully and, with both hands on his stomach, looked at the cow, who was again

chewing tranquilly. There was murder in Wallie's eyes.

"Damn you! I could cut your heart out!"

Then he crept up the path to his tent and dropped down on his pneumatic mattress, doubting if he ever would rise from it. As he lay there supperless, with his clothes on, every muscle in his body aching, to say nothing of the sensation in his stomach, it seemed incredible that he could be the same person who had started off so blithely in the morning.

The series of misfortunes which had befallen him overwhelmed him. He had purchased a cow which not only gave no milk but had a vicious disposition. He had paid two prices for a pair of locoed horses that did their pulling backward. He had made himself a laughingstock to the entire country and seemed destined to play the clown somehow whenever Helene Spenceley was in the vicinity. His ears grew red to the rims as he thought of it.

But she *had* resented Canby's dishonesty for him—that was something; and Wallie was in a mood to be grateful for anything.

The cow grunted as she lay down to her slumbers. Wallie ground his teeth as he heard her. A coyote yapped on a ridge forlornly, and the horse on picket coughed and snorted while Wallie, staring at the stars through the entrance, massaged his injury, and ruminated.

Suddenly he sat up on his patent air mattress and shook his fist at the universe.

"Canby nor nobody else shall down me! I'm going to make good somehow, or fertilize Wyoming as old Appel told me. I'll show 'em!"

CHAPTER X.

MERRY CHRISTMAS.

Wallie shivered in his sleep and pulled the soogans higher. The act exposed his feet instead of his shoulders, so it did not add to his comfort. He felt sleepily for the flour sack which he wore on his head as protection against the dust that blew in through the crack in the logs, and his fingers sank into a small snow bank that had accumulated on his pillow.

The chill of it completely awakened him. He found that there was frost on the end of his nose and he was in a miniature blizzard as far as his shoulders. The wind was howling around the corners and driving the

first snow of the season through the many large cracks in his log residence.

The day was Christmas and there was no reason to believe that it would be a merry one. Wallie lay for a time considering the prospect and comparing it with other Christmases. He had a kettle of boiled beans, cold soda biscuit, coffee, and a prairie dog which he intended cooking as an experiment, for his Christmas dinner.

Growing more and more frugal as his bank account shrank with alarming rapidity, Wallie reasoned that if he could eat prairie dog it would serve a double purpose. While ridding his land of the pests it would save him much in such high-priced commodities as ham and bacon. He reasoned that since prairie dogs subsisted mainly upon roots, they were of cleanly habits and quite as apt to be nourishing and appetizing, if properly cooked, as rabbit.

Having the courage of his convictions, Wallie skinned and dressed two prairie dogs he had caught out of their holes one sunny morning, and meant to eat them for his Christmas dinner, if it was humanly possible.

He had purchased an expensive cookbook, but as his larder seldom contained any of the ingredients it called for, he considered the price of it wasted. He had found that the recipes imparted by Tex McGonnigle, who had built his ten-by-twelve log cabin for him, were far more practical. Under his tuition Wallie had learned to make "sweat pads," "dough gods," "mulligan," and other dishes with names deemed unsuitable for publication.

After considering his dinner menu for a time, Wallie drew his knees to his chin, which enabled him to get his entire body under the soogan, and contrasted his present surroundings with those of the previous Christmas. In the spacious Florida hotel last year, he had only to touch a button to bring a uniformed menial who served him coffee and lighted a grate fire for him, while the furnishings of his room and bath were quite as luxurious as those of the Colonial.

Now, as the light strengthened, Wallie could see his third-handed stove purchased from the secondhand man, Tucker, standing in the corner with its list to starboard. The wind blowing through the baling wire which anchored the stovepipe to the wall sounded like an æolian harp played by a maniac. His patent camp chair had long since given way

beneath him, and when he had found at the Prouty Emporium two starch boxes of the right height, he had been as elated when they were given to him as if he had been the recipient of a valuable present. They now served as chairs on either side of his plank table.

His pneumatic mattress had collapsed from punctures and Wallie's bones were uncomfortably close to the boards in the bottom of the bunk McGonnigle had built against one end of the cabin. His pillow was a flour sack filled with straw and of a doubtful color, as was also the hand towel hanging on a nail beside a shocking wash-basin.

There was a dirt roof on the cabin, from which clods of earth fell rather frequently and bounced on Wallie's head or dropped in the food, or on his bed to startle him when sleeping. The floor contained knot holes through which the field mice and chipmunks came up to share his provisions, and the door, being a trifle larger than the frame, could not be closed entirely.

When Wallie had called McGonnigle's attention to the fact that he could stand in the middle of his cabin and view the scenery through the cracks in any direction, McGonnigle had assured him that "fresh air never hurt nobody," and while he cheerfully admitted that he was not a carpenter, declared that he had made allowances for this fact in his charges. Though Wallie could not notice it when he paid them, he said nothing, for by now he was accustomed to having everything cost more than he had anticipated, however liberal he might be in his estimate.

Boise Bill rode by occasionally and inquired humorously if he thought he would "winter." To which Wallie always replied that he intended to, though there were moments of depression when he doubted it.

It was upon Wallie's inability to "winter" that Canby was counting. He had hung on longer than Canby had thought he would, but the cattleman felt fairly sure that the first big snowstorm would see the last of Wallie. The hardships and loneliness would "get" him as it did most tenderfeet, Canby reasoned, and some morning he would saddle up in disgust, leaving another homestead open to entry. Canby had no personal feeling against Wallie and, after meeting him, decided he would merely let him become starved out, and Wallie's bank balance indi-

cated that Canby was in a fair way to see this happen.

Several happenings had made Wallie suspect something of Canby's purpose, and the same latent quality which had made Wallie trudge doggedly after his cow and horse until he had worn out their perversity, always made him tell himself grimly that he was going to stick until he had his crop in and harvested, if he laid down a skeleton, and died beside one of his own haystacks.

Mostly, however, he was so busy with his cooking, feeding his live stock, getting wood and water, to say nothing of piling rocks and grubbing sagebrush, that he had no time to brood over Canby and the wrongs he had done him. He had learned from McGonnigle that his locoed horses would grow worse instead of better and eventually would have to be shot, and that person had imparted the discouraging information also that not only could he expect no milk from his cow until her calf arrived in January, but Jerseys were not a breed commonly selected for beef cattle.

Wallie had thought that his aunt would surely relent to the extent of writing him a Christmas letter but, yesterday, after riding eight miles to look in the bluing box nailed to a post by the roadside, he had found that it contained only a circular urging him to raise mushrooms in his cellar. Helene Spenceley, too, might have sent him a Christmas card or something. He had seen her only twice since the sale, and each time she had whizzed past him in Canby's machine on the way to Prouty.

Altogether Wallie felt very lonely and forlorn and forgotten this Christmas morning as he lay in a knot under the soogan, listening to the wind twanging the stovepipe wire and contemplating his present and future.

He had discovered that by craning his neck slightly when in a certain position he could look through a crack and see the notch in the mountain below, which was the Spenceley ranch, according to Pinkey. He was prompted to do so now, but an eyeful of snow discouraged his observation, so he decided that he would get up, feed his animals, and, after breakfast, wash his shirt and a few towels by way of recreation.

The cabin was not only as cold as it looked but colder, and as Wallie hopped over the floor barefooted and shivering, he reflected that very likely his potatoes and onions were frozen and wished he had taken them

to bed with him. They were, unmistakably, for they rattled like glass balls when he picked up several onions and examined them with a pained expression.

Wallie was still wearing much of the wardrobe he had brought with him, and when dressed to go outside he was warm but unique in a green velour hat, his riding breeches, brilliant golf stockings that were all but footless thrust in arctics, a blue flannel shirt from the emporium in Prouty, and a long, tight-fitting tan coat which had been very smart, indeed, at the time he purchased it.

The snow had stopped falling by the time he had done his chores and breakfasted. The only benefit the storm had brought him was that it did away with the necessity of carrying water for his washing. He had acquired the agility of a cliff dweller from scaling the embankment by means of the "toe holts" yet, at that, it was no easy matter to transport a bucket of water without spilling it.

While the snow water was melting, Wallie considered the manner in which he should prepare the prairie dog. He presumed that it was too much to expect that the cookbook would have anything to say on the subject, but it surely would recognize rabbit, and a recipe suitable for one would do for the other.

Wallie got out his cookbook and turned eagerly to the index, looking for "rabbit," as the nearest likely thing to prairie dog. There was no mention of rabbit. A thought struck him—rabbit was hare and hare was rabbit, wasn't it? If so, the cookbook would not admit it, for there was no such word under the H's. He read on aloud disgustingly:

"Caviar toast, garnished. Crab, scalloped, in shell. Aspic in jelly. Fondou of cheese. Floating Island. Meringue glacé and whipped cream."

The mere mention of the dishes made his mouth water, while his anger against the dame who had compiled it mounted higher. For half a cent he would write and inquire of the culinary oracle why she had ignored hare and rabbit. Continuing to scan the index, his eye caught a word which held possibilities. Game! If rabbit was not game, what was it?

Ah! Wallie looked at a picture of a rabbit lying on a platter, with its legs in the air and artistically decorated with parsley,

until he felt more hungry than ever. Then he read aloud with gusto:

"Barbecued rabbit. Roast rabbit. Caserole of rabbit. Smothered rabbit. Stewed rabbit."

Roast rabbit seemed to make the strongest appeal to him. He read the recipe aloud twice that he might the better comprehend it:

"Dress and wash the wily coureur de bois, but leave the heads on in cleaning them. Stuff the bodies with a forcemeat of fat, salt pork, minced onions, and fine bread crumbs well seasoned with salt and pepper. Sew them up with fine thread and lay upon thin slices of pork, covering the grating of the roaster. Lay other slices of pork over them, pour over all a cupful of stock and roast one hour. Remove the pork, then wash with butter and dredge with flour and brown. Drain off the gravy, lay the bits of bacon about the rabbit in the dish: thicken the gravy with browned flour. Boil up, add a tablespoonful of tomato catsup and a glass of claret, then take from the fire."

Wallie reflected as he sat with his feet on the stove hearth overflowing with ashes, that when it came to the "forcemeat" he was "there with the crumbs," since he had an accumulation of ancient biscuit too hard to eat. Also, he had salt pork and onions. The butter, tomato catsup, stock, claret, he must dispense with. After all, the prairie dogs were the main thing and he had them.

He congratulated himself that he had decided to leave on the heads when skinning them. The recipe so enthused him that he decided to prepare them before starting in with his washing.

Obviously the first thing to do was to thaw the onions, so he put them in the oven, after which he went to a box in the corner and selected a few biscuits. Crumbs were crumbs, as he viewed it, and biscuit crumbs were quite as good as bread crumbs for his purpose.

There were certain marks on these biscuit that were made unmistakably by the teeth of mice and chipmunks, but these traces he removed painstakingly. As he reduced the biscuit to crumbs with a hammer, he recalled that he had been awakened several times by the sound of these pestiferous animals frisking in the box in the corner. He did not allow his mind to dwell upon this, however, lest it prejudice him when it came to the eating of the "forcemeat."

Onions, he found, were not improved by freezing. Those he removed from the oven were distinctly pulpy, but since they smelled like onion and tasted like it, he mushed them in with the biscuit crumbs, and seasoned. Then he crammed the prairie dogs with the mixture and looked for a thread among his sewing articles. Since he could find nothing but black linen, Wallie threaded a darning needle and did a fancy "feather" stitch down the middle of each of them.

This accomplished, he stood off and viewed his handiwork with eminent pride and satisfaction, though it occurred to him that, owing to his generous use of "forcemeat," they had a bloated appearance as if they had died of strychnine poisoning. The heads, too, were decidedly ratlike, and as the long, sharp teeth of the pair of them grinned up at Wallie he covered them hastily and set about his washing.

He had come to begrudge every stick of firewood, and it took an incredible amount to heat wash water. A man could very well fill his time if he did nothing but collect wood and carry water. As he set his tub and washboard on a box and rubbed vigorously on his undergarments, he smiled to himself and wondered what his friends of the Colonial would say if they could see him at the moment. He was desperately lonely. He wished some one would come along to talk to.

He was so far from the road that there were no passers-by, and no one wanted to see him anyhow, but his loneliness became so great, as he dwelt upon it, that on the remote chance that he might see some one, even in the distance, he stopped washing and walked to the window, where with his elbow he rubbed a spot clear of frost.

As he squinted out, he suddenly pressed his eye harder against the window. Did he see a speck that moved over the white, trackless world he gazed upon, or did he imagine it? He enlarged the lookout hole and strained his eyes until they watered. Surely it moved—surely. It would be too disappointing for words if it were only a delusion.

It did! It did! Some one was coming toward the cabin. Wallie shook with excitement at the prospect of a visitor. Whoever it might be, Wallie would make him stay for dinner if he had to pay him by the hour for his company. To-day, even Boise Bill would be welcome.

Wallie shoved his Christmas dinner in the oven and slammed the door upon it, stoked the fire lavishly, then fell upon the washboard and rubbed furiously that he might be done the sooner. At intervals he dashed to the window, half afraid to look lest the rider had changed his mind and gone in another direction. But he kept coming, and there was something in the way he sat his horse which made him think it was Pinkey.

And Pinkey it was, brilliant as a rainbow in orange chaps, red flannel shirt, and a buckskin waistcoat. His coat tied behind the cattle suggested that he either had become overheated or at only twelve below had not yet felt the need of it. His horse was snorting steam like a locomotive, and icicles of frozen breath were pendent from its nostrils.

Wallie stood in the door, suds to the elbow and his hands steaming, waiting to receive him. His voice trembled:

"I never was so glad to see anybody in my life, Pinkey."

"This is onct I know you ain't lyin'. Got anything to eat? I'm starvin'. I been comin' sence daylight."

"I got something special," Wallie replied mysteriously. "Tie your horse to the haystack. I'll hurry things up a little."

Pinkey returned shortly and sniffed as he entered:

"It smells good, anyhow. There's something homelike about onions. What you cookin'?"

"It's a secret, but you'll like 'em. I made 'em out of the cookbook."

Pinkey threw his coat on the table, and the thud sounded as if it had a brick rolled in it.

"Here's something Helene sent—she made it—it's angel food or somethin', I reckon."

"Now, wasn't that good of her!" Wallie exclaimed gratefully.

"I can't tell till I taste it. I wouldn't call her much of a cook generally." He prodded the cake as he unrolled it and commented:

"Gosh, it's hard! I turned my thumb nail back on it."

"It's frozen—that's what's the matter," Wallie defended promptly.

"I think it's a bum cake," declared Pinkey callously.

"I think you don't know what you're talking about until you try it."

Pinkey looked at him thoughtfully and changed the subject.

"I see you're playin' a tune on the washboard."

Wallie replied stiffly:

"Yes, I'm doing a little laundry." Pinkey's criticism of the cake still rankled.

"You ain't washin' that blue shirt a'ready?" Pinkey demanded incredulously. "You only bought it Thanksgivin'."

"The front of it bent like rubber glass, and I couldn't stand it any longer." He added reminiscently: "There was a time when I wore a fresh shirt daily."

"I wouldn't think changin' as often as that would be healthy."

The clothes in the dish pan on the stove boiled over, and as Wallie jumped for the broom handle to poke them under, Pinkey added:

"Are you b'ilin' your fiannens?"

"Certainly."

"A ten-year-ol' boy can't git in that suit of underwear onct you're done cookin' it," Pinkey explained.

Wallie looked his consternation.

"I'll know better next time," he said humbly.

Pinkey consulted his watch and hinted:

"Don't you want me to make the bread?"

"No, I have some biscuit to warm over. We'll boil potatoes, thaw the cake out, open some pineapple, and with what I have in the oven we will have a dinner that's nothing short of a banquet."

"Great! I'm so hungry I could eat with a Digger Injun."

Wallie opened the oven door.

"They're browning beautifully!" he reported.

"Chickens?"

Wallie shook his head:

"I'm not telling you until you've passed upon them."

"If you've got enough of whatever it is—that's all that's worryin' me," declared Pinkey hungrily. "You'd ought to build you a root cellar next winter—if you're livin'," he remarked, as the potatoes rattled when Wallie dropped them in the kettle.

"Do you suppose I could grow potatoes? Is it too dry?"

"This is a great country for potatoes. There's somethin' in the soil that gits in the potatoes' eyes and makes 'em water so they irrigate themselves."

"I want to make a good many improvements here before next winter," announced

Wallie hopefully. "I wish you could come over for a while and help me."

"That mightn't be a bad idea," said Pinkey thoughtfully. "Sence the country went dry I don't much care whether I draw wages or not. Nothin' to spend money for, so what's the use of workin'? If I was over here I might add a few feet to my rope and git me a good little start off Canby."

"Do you see much of him?" Wallie asked indifferently.

"Too much," said Pinkey shortly.

Wallie dropped the pan he was turning in the oven.

"They're browning beautifully," he exclaimed hastily.

"You said that before. Ain't it gittin' time to work on 'em?"

"Remove your feet and I'll set the table."

"Can't you spread a paper fer a tablecloth? I always git splinters in my elbows when I eat off rough lumber."

Wallie laughed good-humoredly as he obliged him.

"That's shore a great smell comin' from the oven! Let's eat, feller."

"Sit down while I put things on the table. I trust everything is going to be to your liking," Wallie declared cordially as he drew the prairie dogs from the oven and laid them on an agate-ware platter.

Busy with a potato, Pinkey did not see them until they were before him. Then he stopped and stared hard as they lay on their backs, grining up at him with the "force-meats" oozing through the stitching.

"*What are they?*" His emphasis was not flattering.

"I shan't tell you yet," declared Wallie. Pinkey continued to eye them suspiciously.

Wallie looked offended.

"I intend to eat some myself," he replied with dignity.

"Are they some kind of a varmint?"

"Varmint?"

"Pack rat or weasel?"

"Scarcely!"

"I was jest cur'ous. Is that stuffin' or in'ards coming through the sewin' down the front of 'em?"

"Force-meats. I made it according to a recipe."

"Indeed?" Politely. "Don't go shy yourself jest because I'm here," he protested as Wallie attempted to cut one in two with the butcher knife. "I ain't feelin' so hungry—somethin' has took my appetite."

As the table swayed under Wallie's efforts to carve a prairie dog, he suggested: "Perhaps if you took hold of one leg——"

"Ye-ah," said Pinkey, "and you take holt of the other and put your foot on my chest so you kin git a purchase, then we'll both pull."

"If I could only find a joint——"

"Worry one of them legs off and we'll see how we like it before you play yourself out on it."

Wallie acted upon the suggestion and presented the severed member. "Try it," he urged persuasively.

Pinkey sunk his grinders into the leg and laid back on it.

"Does it seem tough?" Wallie asked, watching him anxiously.

"Tough! I'm scairt it's goin' to snap back and knock me over. Wait till I git a fresh holt on it."

"Do you get the flavor at all?"

"I can't pull enough off to taste it," Pinkey replied.

"Try the dressing and tell me what you think of it." Wallie scooped out a generous spoonful and placed it on his plate, waiting confidently for the verdict. Pinkey conveyed his knife to his mouth while Wallie stood regarding him with an expression of pleased expectancy as he tasted.

A startled look was succeeded by one that was unmistakably horror. Pinkey knocked over the box upon which he was sitting as he jumped from the table and tore the kitchen door open.

"Tell you what I think of it!" he declared, returning. "I ain't got words—they ain't none in the dictionary. My Gawd! What is it made of?"

"Just biscuit crumbs and onions," said Wallie, coloring.

Pinkey made a hideous grimace.

"Gimme a drink of water! Gimme a chew of tobacco! Gimme anything to take the taste of *mouse* out'n my mouth. Wallie"—solemnly—"men have died fer less'n that in this country!"

"I thought I was very particular and cut off everything that looked suspicious," said Wallie meekly. "I must have missed something."

"You shore did! And," Pinkey demanded, "what might them horrors be on the platter? Them teeth are mighty familiar."

"Prairie dog—I was experimenting to see if they were edible."

"Leave me out in the air again!" Pinkey groaned as he swallowed a drink of water: "And I passed up a turkey dinner to come and eat with you!"

"Shan't I cook you some bacon?" asked Wallie contritely.

"I doubt if I ever feel like eatin' ag'in, but if the cake's thawed out I'll try a chunk of it to take my mind off that stuffin'."

Wallie opened the can of pineapple he had been treasuring and Pinkey helped himself freely to the Christmas cake.

"They must be about four meals in one of them slices, the way it feels inside of me," the latter commented, nibbling delicately on a ring of pineapple he held in his fingers.

"It's fruit cake, and rich; you're not supposed to eat so much of it," Wallie said sharply.

Pinkey raised his eyebrows and regarded Wallie attentively as he continued to nibble.

"Looks like you're terrible touchy about her cookin', and swelled up over gittin' a Christmas present," he remarked finally. "You needn't be, because she made eight other cement bricks jest like this one and sent 'em around to fellers she's sorry for."

"Oh, did she!" Wallie ejaculated, crest-fallen.

"Yes, indeed," Pinkey went on complacently, feeling a glow of satisfaction at Wallie's lengthened countenance. "She does it every Christmas. She's kind to the pore and sufferin', but it don't mean nothin' more than a dollar she'd drop in a hat somebody was passin'."

Noting the deep gloom which immediately settled upon Wallie, Pinkey could think of the prairie dogs with more equanimity.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WATER WITCH.

In former days, Wallie had wished intermittently for a yacht, his own stables, and such luxuries, but now he wanted a well, with far greater intensity than he had desired those extravagances.

The all-important question had been as to whether he could at present afford it, with his money vanishing like a belated snow bank. Then, while he had been debating, Rufus Reed appeared at such a timely moment that it had seemed providential.

Mr. Reed, lately arrived from Illinois, was now sitting with his feet on the stove hearth and so close to the coals that the cabin was

strong with the odor of frying rubber, and declaring modestly:

"I may say, without braggin', that I have made an enormous success since I gave up my flour and feed store and took to well diggin' as a profession. By accident I discovered that I was peculiarly gifted."

"In what way, may I ask?" Wallie inquired politely.

Mr. Reed's tone became impressive:

"I am—a water witch."

Wallie looked puzzled.

"Some call it magic, but the fact is, I am able to locate water with a forked willer, and you can call it anything you want to."

Wallie regarded the worker of miracles with fresh attention. His belief in his own powers was evidently so sincere that even a skeptic could not fail to be impressed by him.

He continued:

"With my divin' rod I have flew in the faces of the biggest geologists in the country and found water where they said there wasn't any."

"Will the divin' rod tell you how far you must dig for it?"

"Pretty close to it. I count a foot to every bob of the willer."

"In a State like Illinois where there is a great deal of moisture I presume it would be possible to get water anywhere if one went deep enough, but in Wyoming, frankly, I should not like to rely on the divin' rod in Wyoming, Mr. Reed."

Mr. Reed looked somewhat offended.

"I'll tell you what I'll do! I'll make you a sportin' proposition. I'll test the ground with the willer and if it says we'll get water at a certain depth and we don't strike it, I'll dig till we do, for nothin', if we have to go till we hear the Chinamen gibber. That's fair, ain't it?"

Wallie could not gainsay it.

"I got a willer on my saddle, and it won't cost nothin' for a demonstration. Say the word," persuasively, "and you've good as got a fine, flowing well of water."

It would do no harm to let the water witch make his test, Wallie decided, so he followed sheepishly in the wake of Rufus and his willow as he walked over the greater part of the one hundred and sixty acres.

"Tain't nowise plentiful," the latter admitted, as with each hand gripping a prong of the willow he kept his eyes fixed upon

it. "But if it's here I'm bound to find it, so don't get discouraged."

At the top of a draw some hundred and fifty yards from the cabin, Rufus suddenly halted.

"I felt somethin'," he said hopefully.

"Where?" Wallie asked, interested.

"In my arm—like pins and needles—it's a symptom. She's goin' to bob!" Excitedly. "You watch and count along of me."

The willow bobbed unmistakably.

"Sixty-eight!" They finished together.

Impressed in spite of himself, Wallie endeavored to be conservative.

"Could it have been your subconscious mind?" he asked doubtfully.

"I ain't any. Rufus Reed is right out in the open. I'll stake my reputation there's plenty of water right here, if you'll go after it."

"It's rather far from the house for convenience," he objected.

"Water in Wyoming is like whisky, you have to take it where you can get it and not be particular."

It was a temptation, and the cost at three dollars a foot was not excessive. Wallie pondered it and said finally:

"You will agree in writing to dig without remuneration until you get water if you do not strike it at sixty-eight feet?"

"An iron-clad contract will suit yours truly," Mr. Reed declared emphatically. He added: "I'll bring two men to work the h'ist and empty the bucket. Of course you'd aim to board us?"

"Why, yes, I can," Wallie said a little uncertainly.

He had figured that with strict economy he had provisions enough to last him well toward summer. Three men eating three meals daily might make some difference in his calculations, but nothing serious probably. So the contract was drawn up and signed and Rufus departed, eminently satisfied, as was Wallie, who was so eager to see his well start that he could hardly wait until the following Monday.

There was something permanent looking about a well, and he chuckled as he speculated as to what Canby would say when he heard of it, and he wished with all his heart that he might be around when Helene Spenceley learned that he was sinking a well on his place for household and stock purposes.

He had taken advantage of the oppor-

tunity which the gift of the cake presented, to send her a note of thanks and appreciation. In reply he had received an invitation which had stung him worse than if she had written that she never wanted to see him across the threshold. His eyes gleamed every time he read it, which was so often that it was worn through the creases from being folded and unfolded:

DEAR "GENTLE ANNIE": Won't you stop on the ranch on your way out and pay us a visit? I presume the middle of the summer at latest will see the last of you, as I have no idea that you will be able to go through the discouragements and hardships attendant upon proving up on a homestead.

My brother also will enjoy meeting you, as he has heard so much of you.

Looking for you soon, I am, sincerely,

HELENE SPENCELEY.

P. S.—I have a new sweater pattern that I am sure will please you.

Every word had a nettle in it, a taunt that made him tingle. He was tempted to send her word, on a postal, anonymously, of the well he was digging if he had not feared she would suspect him. It seemed so long to wait for Pinkey to convey the tidings.

Rufus arrived on Monday morning and the "crew" to which he had referred proved to-be members of his own family—John and Will—whales as to size and lubberly.

It came to Wallie's mind that if they did not move any faster when they worked than when they were at leisure, the well digging would be a long process, and his heart sank when he saw them feeding their horses so liberally from the hay which had cost twenty dollars a ton, delivered.

The first intimation Wallie had of what he had let himself in for was when Rufus asked in a confidential tone, as if he were imparting something for Wallie's ear only:

"I wonder if we could get a bite to eat before we start in? We eat so early this morning that I don't feel as if I had had anything."

Wallie had a pan of biscuit which he had intended for dinner, but he concealed his reluctance and managed to say with a show of hospitality:

"Come right in; I'll get you something."

"First-rate!" declared Mr. Reed with disheartening enthusiasm as Wallie placed the biscuit, butter, and molasses before him and his helpers.

Wallie hoped never again to see food—his, at least—disappear with such rapidity and in such quantities. Rufus added to Wallie's

feeling of apprehension by declaring gayly as he polished his mouth on the bandanna which he drew from his hip pocket with a flourish:

"Us Reeds are all hearty eaters. We can eat a sheep at a settin', when we're all together."

Biscuit making was Wallie's special antipathy, and he now solaced himself with the thought that since they had eaten so many, they would eat less for dinner and he would have plenty of the fresh ones left for supper. But disappointment was again his portion. The manner in which they vanished was nothing less than appalling. In addition to which, he fried ham twice for them when they hinted that they were still hungry after devouring everything before them.

Any hope that he might have cherished that, once they were well filled up, their appetites would diminish, was dissipated by their performance at supper which surpassed that of dinner. As they all sprawled on his bunk in a torpor, while he washed their dishes, he felt not only consternation but a dislike for the Reed family growing within him. He laid awake a long time, that night, calculating how long his provisions would last at such a rate of depletion if he continued to cater to the bottomless caverns through courtesy called stomachs?

It did not sound so much of a "sporting proposition" as when Rufus had made his proposal, and Wallie sighed in the darkness as he thought that there seemed a million ways of making mistakes in Wyoming, and this already had the earmarks of being another of them.

If they found water at the depth indicated by the divining rod, it might not so much matter, but there was the other contingency confronting him—feeding the Reeds indefinitely! There was nothing to do in the circumstances but await developments.

The developments, however, were not of an encouraging nature. In addition to a capacity for food which placed them among the world's marvels, they were of a slowness of movement Wallie never had seen equaled. The well deepened by inches rather than feet, while Wallie's suspicion gradually became a conviction, as he watched them, that they were prolonging the work purposely. It seemed to be in the nature of a vacation for them with just enough exercise to keep them in condition.

His antipathy had become aversion, and Wallie sometimes caught himself with his fork poised in mid-air, stopping to hate John, who munched and smacked beside him, or Will who gobbled at the end of the table, or Rufus shoveling opposite him. Again, as they came at a trot in response to his dinner call, he visualized himself braining them with the ax as they entered, and found pleasure in the picture. If hatred generated a poison in the system as asserted, Wallie had a notion that his bite would have been as fatal as a cobra's.

Yet as the hole deepened he could not help a certain feeling of pride in it. The sense of possession was a strong trait in him, and this was *his* well, and *his* homestead. He always felt the same pleasant glow of ownership when he looked at his cabin and his fence, even at his dry cow and his loosed horses. He made frequent pilgrimages to the well, and as he hung over the edge and called down, Rufus always replied to his inquiry:

"I don't see any indications yet, but I look for it to come with a gush when we do strike it."

When they reached sixty-eight feet and there was still no sign of moisture, Wallie told Reed that he was willing to abrogate the contract.

"No, sir!" Rufus declared vigorously. "I've staked my reputation on this well, and I'm goin' to keep on diggin'."

At seventy-two feet Wallie was desperate. The hole was still as dry as punk and boarding the Reed's was nothing less than ruinous. A solution of his problem came in the night with such force and suddenness that he rolled to and fro in his bunk, hugging himself in ecstasy. He longed for morning to put his idea into execution and, when it came, for the first time since their arrival, he was delighted to see the Reeds seating themselves at the table.

There were potatoes, bacon, and pancakes, with coffee, for breakfast. John dubiously eyed the transparent fluid in his cup which might as easily have been tea, and commented:

"You musta left out somethin'."

Will made a wry face after filling it with half a pancake:

"Gosh! But you throwed in the sody. They ain't fit for a dog to eat. I can't go 'em."

With the intention of taking the taste of

soda out of his mouth he filled it with potato, and immediately afterward he and John jammed in the doorway as they tried to get through it simultaneously.

Wiping their streaming eyes and gulping water, they said accusingly: "There's a can of cayenne if there's a pinch in them pertaters!"

"And the bacon's burned to a cracklin'," observed Rufus.

"Perhaps you're getting tired of my cooking?" Wallie suggested artlessly.

"I'm tired now if this is a spec'min of what you aim to feed us," John declared suspiciously.

"I'm holler to the toes and I can't work on an empty stummick," said Will disgustedly.

Only Rufus went on eating as if it took more than a can of soda and a box of pepper to spoil his food for him, and he explained as they wondered at it:

"I ain't no taste sence I had scarlet fever so it don't bother me."

"Ain't you goin' to git us somethin'?" John demanded finally, seeing Wallie made no move to cook fresh food for them.

"No," Wallie answered bluntly, "there's nothing in the contract which specifies the manner in which I shall prepare your food for you or the amount of it. Dinner will be worse than breakfast if you want the truth in me."

"I'm quittin'!" the two declared together.

"Now, look here, boys!" the old man expostulated. "We got to finish this job, and you know the reason."

"Reason or no reason, I ain't starvin' myself to oblige nobody," John declared vigorously, "and he's got the drop on us about the eatin'."

"Then go—the two of you!" Reed cried angrily. "I'm goin' to stay—I ain't nothin' to complain of. Him and me," he nodded at Wallie, "can dig that well without ye."

Surly and without speaking, the boys took their departure.

"They got bad dispositions—they take after their mother," Rufus remarked, looking after them. "With you to work the windlass and empty the bucket we'll make out without them till I pick up another crew somewhere."

"I am willing to accept my loss and quit," Wallie pleaded.

"Well, I ain't!" declared Rufus, unneces-

sarily bellicose. "A contract is a contract, and I got you in writin'."

Wallie could not deny it and subsided meekly, putting a ham on to boil with a cabbage while Rufus smoked until he was ready to assist him.

"If they's anything I like it's a good mess of ham and cabbage," he observed.

"I am glad to have found something to stimulate your appetite—it's worried me."

Later, turning the windlass according to instructions, Wallie deposited Rufus in the bottom. Then at intervals he hoisted the bucket, which Rufus filled in leisurely fashion, and emptied it, performing the two men's work easily.

Wallie went occasionally to stoke the fire, and upon his return reported so favorably upon the ham and cabbage that Rufus took to consulting his watch rather frequently after ten-thirty.

"I'll quit at 'leven," he informed Wallie, "and that'll give you plenty of time to make a batch of biscuit and get dinner."

Wallie agreed with him that it was an excellent idea, and promptly at eleven pulled up the bucket of dirt which was to be the last one. When it did not come down immediately, Rufus called to him:

"Hi! I'm ready! Get a move on, for I'm starvin'."

Only the echo of his own voice answered him. Slightly alarmed, he called louder:

"MacPherson! What's happened to ye?"

Still no answer. Distinctly nervous, Rufus shouted at the top of his lungs for Wallie and the bucket, breaking into a perspiration at the continued silence. Was he sick? Fainted? Dead? Many things that could occur came to Reed as he halloed futilely.

When one o'clock came he was hoarse from yelling and sick with fear at his predicament. His imagination painted gruesome pictures as he sweated. He saw himself weak and emaciated, dying slowly of starvation, collapsing, finally, to lie undiscovered for days, weeks maybe. His suffering would be horrible, for he had the intelligence to know that it was useless to struggle, that there was no hope for him unless some one came to his assistance. And, merciful heavens, how hungry he was at only an hour past his dinner time. What would his sensations be at an hour past his supper time or at one o'clock to-morrow? He made a sound like some one groaning in

a rain barrel as he thought of the ham and cabbage boiling dry in the cabin.

It made the back of his neck ache to watch the opening of his prison and the patch of blue sky, from which he prayed vaguely, that a rope ladder might descend to rescue him. So he sat down finally with his back against the side of the well, his knees to his chin, and his head bowed, to await the inevitable.

When three o'clock came he could no longer doubt but that some accident had befallen Wallie. He had given up hope and endeavored to resign himself to the fate awaiting him. Remorse mingled with the pangs of hunger and the cold fear of dying which was upon him. If by some miracle he got out—if the Lord saw fit to save him—he would be a different man. The Almighty had his word for it. Still sitting with his back against the wall and his cramped legs extended in front of him, Rufus rolled his eyes in supplication to the circular blue space above him and registered this vow with all the fervor and sincerity of which he was capable.

He moved uneasily. He was vaguely conscious of a dampness. He felt mechanically of that section of his overalls upon which he was sitting. He sprang to his feet with an exclamation and looked at the spot he had occupied. Moisture! A seepage! Water! His eyes grew big with horror. Even as he looked with dilating pupils he could see the earth darken with the spreading moisture.

He had sunk too many wells not to know what it portended. Not only his days but his hours, perhaps, were numbered. If it was alkali, it would seep in slowly and prolong his agony; if it were not, it would come faster. He would die literally in a grave of his own digging.

As he leaned there, nauseated, he caught a sound, or thought so, which increased the sinking sensation, the feeling of collapse that overwhelmed him. He took off his hat and laid his ear against the wall to be sure of it. He had not been mistaken. His time on earth was shorter even than he had imagined. The sound he had heard was the rumble of a subterranean current that would soon break through, flowing faster and faster as the opening enlarged until it finally came with a gush.

Rufus got on his knees in an attitude of prayer and supplication. The cracked remnants of his stentorian voice he used to the

utmost advantage. No Methodist exhorter ever prayed with more passionate fervor.

"Lord, it was wrong for me to take that one hundred and fifty dollars, but Canby tempted me. I needed the money or I don't know as I would have done it. If you'll just get me out of this, Lord, all the rest of my life I'll do what I can for you! I'll go to church—I'll give to the heathen—I'll stop takin' your name in vain and say my prayers reglar!"

"Oh, Lord! Once I stole a halter and I ask your forgiveness. And I left a neighbor's gate open on purpose so the stock got into his cornfield, but I ain't a bad man naturally, and this is the first real crookedness I ever done intentionally, Lord!" he pleaded, "hear my humble prayer and send somebody!"

At the top of the well, Wallie had his suspicions verified. So Canby had laid one more straw on the camel's back to break it! Leaning over the edge of the well, he called down cheerily:

"How you making it?"

"In mercy's name let me out of here, MacPherson!"

"You're all right where you are, Rufus," Wallie answered. "When you're down there you are out of mischief."

"I'm hungry—I'm starvin'—"

"I don't know when I've eaten such a ham—tender, a delicious flavor and just enough fat on it. I thought of you all through dinner, Rufus."

"We've struck water—a big flow—I can hear it—it'll break through any minute!"

"That's fine! Splendid!"

"You don't understand!" Rufus cried desperately. "I'm liable to be drowned before you can h'ist me out of here."

"Tell me about that deal between you and Canby," Wallie suggested.

"I'll make a clean breast of it."

"I don't want to pollute my well unless I have to, but that's the only way you'll get out of there," Wallie told him grimly.

"Canby's out to break you, in one way and another. He thought there was no water over here and he paid me to talk you into diggin' for it. He seen me and my boys eat one day in the mess house and he said 'twould break the Bank of England to board us. So he wanted that clause in the contract, and after sixty-eight feet he paid us a hundred and fifty dollars bonus. I done wrong, Mr. MacPherson, and I freely admit it!"

"And you like my cooking, Rufus? You like your food highly seasoned with plenty of soda in the pancakes and dough gods?"

"Yes, Mr. MacPherson," whined Rufus, "I never complained about your cookin', I've nothin' against you personal, and I'll knock off somethin' on the bill for bringin' in water if you'll jest let down that——" A screech finished the sentence. Then: "C-r-rr-ripes! She's busted through! She's comin' like a river!"

He jumped and clawed at the sides in his frenzy and Wallie could see that Rufus well might do so, for even as Wallie looked the water rushed in and rose to Rufus' ankles. It was indeed time for action, and Wallie himself felt relief when the windlass span and he heard the splash of the bucket in the bottom.

Rufus' shrieks urged haste as he began to wind laboriously, and with reason, for Rufus was heavy, and though Wallie put forth all his strength it was no easy task, single-handed. Rufus rose so slowly that the water gained rapidly. It became a race between Wallie and the subterranean stream that had been tapped, and he was panting and all but exhausted when Rufus rose to the surface. As he stepped from the bucket the water reached the top, poured over the edge, and rushed down the "draw" to Skull Creek.

Wallie looked with bulging eyes for a moment and, when he had recovered from his astonishment, he turned joyfully, his grudge forgotten, and shook Rufus' hand in mutual congratulation.

A moment later his enthusiasm was tempered somewhat by the discovery that he had brought to the surface the strongest flow of salt water in the country!

CHAPTER XII.

WIPED OUT.

"It's shore wicked the way you curse, old-timer," said Pinkey reprovingly, as Wallie came up from the corral carrying an empty milk bucket in one hand and testing the other for broken bones. "I could hear you talkin' to Rastus from whur I'm settin'."

Wallie exhibited a row of bruised knuckles and replied fiercely:

"If ever I had an immortal soul, I've lost it since that calf came! Between his bunting on one side and me milking on the other, the cow kicked the pail over."

"Quirl you a brownie and blow it through

your hackamore and forgit it," said Pinkey soothingly, as he handed him a book of cigarette papers, with a sack of tobacco and made room for him on the doorsill. "I ain't used to cow milk, anyhow; air tight is better."

Wallie took the offering but remained standing, rolling it dexterously as he looked off at his eighty acres of spring wheat showing emerald green in the light of a July sunset.

Pinkey eyed him critically—the tufts of hair which stood out like brushes through the cracks in what had once been a fine Panama, his ragged shirt, the faded overalls, the riding boots with heels so run over that he walked on the side of them.

Unconscious of the scrutiny, Wallie continued to gaze in a kind of holy ecstasy at his wheat field until Pinkey ejaculated:

"My! but you've changed horrible!"

"How—changed?" Wallie asked absently.

"You're so danged dirty! I should think you'd have to sand that shirt before you could hold it to git into it."

"I hardly ever take it off," said Wallie.

"I've been so busy I haven't had time to think how I looked, but I hope now to have more leisure. Pinkey"—impressively—"I believe my troubles are about over."

"Don't you think it!" replied Pinkey bluntly. "A dry farmer kin have six months of hard luck three times a year for four and five years, hand runnin'. In fact, they ain't no limit to the time, and the kind of things that kin happen to a dry farmer."

"But what *could* happen now?" Wallie asked, startled.

"It's too clost to bedtime fer me to start in tellin' you," said Pinkey dryly.

"You're too pessimistic, Pinkey. I've prepared the soil and seed according to the instructions in the farmers' bulletins from Washington, and, as a result, I've got the finest stand of wheat around here—even Boise Bill said so when he rode by yesterday."

"Rave on!" Pinkey looked at him mockingly. "It's pitiful to hear you. You read them bulletins a while and you won't know nothin'. I seen a feller plant some corn his congressman sent him, and the ears was so hard the pigs used to stand and squeal in front of 'em. But, of course, I'm glad you're feelin' so lucky; I'm scairt of the feelin' myself, for it makes me take chances, and I always git a jolt for it."

Wallie's face was sober as he confided: "If anything went wrong, I'd be done for. I'm so near broke that I count my nickels like some old woman with her butter-and-egg money."

"I guessed it," said Pinkey calmly, "from the rabbit fur I see layin' around the doorway."

"Nearly everything has cost double what I thought it would, but if I get a good crop and the price of wheat holds up, I'll come out a-flying."

"If nothin' happens," Pinkey supplemented.

"I want to show you one of those bulletins."

"I've seen plenty of 'em. You can't stop 'em once you git 'em started. Them, and pamphlets tellin' us why we went to war, has killed off many a mail carrier that had to fight his way through blizzards, or be fined fer not deliverin' 'em on schedule. I ain't strong fer gover'mint literature."

Wallie stepped inside the cabin and brought out a pamphlet with an illustration of twelve horses hitched to a combined harvester and thrasher, standing in a wheat field of boundless acreage.

"There," he said proudly, "you see my ambition"

Pinkey regarded it unexcited.

"That's a real nice picture," he said finally, "but I thought you aimed to go in for cattle?"

"I did. But I've soured on them since that calf came and I've been milking."

Pinkey agreed heartily:

"I'd ruther 'swamp' 'er a livin' than do low-down work like milkin'."

"When I come in at night, dog tired and discouraged, I get out this picture and look at it and tell myself that some day I'll be driving twelve horses on a thrasher. A chap thinks and does curious things when he has nobody but himself for company."

"That's me, too," said Pinkey understandingly. "When I'm off alone, huntin' stock, I ride fer hours wonderin' if it's so that you kin make booze out of a raisin."

"Let's walk out and look at the wheat," Wallie suggested.

Pinkey complied obligingly, though farming was an industry in which he took no interest.

Wallie's pride in his wheat was inordinate. He never could get over a feeling of astonishment that the bright, green grain

had come from seeds of his planting—that it was his—and he would reap the benefit. Nature was more wonderful than he had realized, and he never before had appreciated her. He always forgot the heartbreaking and backbreaking labor when he stood as now, surveying with glowing face the even, green carpet stretching out before him. In such moments he found his compensation for all he had gone through since he arrived in Wyoming, and he smiled pityingly as he thought of the people at the Colonial, rocking placidly on the veranda.

"Did you ever see anything prettier?" Wallie demanded, his eyes shining.

"It's all right," Pinkey murmured absently.

"You're not looking," Wallie said sharply.

"I was watchin' them cattle."

"I don't see any."

Pinkey pointed, but Wallie could see nothing.

"If they got cows on Mars, I'll bet I could read the bran's," Pinkey boasted. "Can't you see them specks movin' off yonder?"

Wallie admitted he could not.

"It's cattle, and they act like somebody's drivin' 'em," Pinkey declared positively. "Looks like it's early to be movin' 'em to the mountain." His curiosity satisfied, he gave the wheat his attention. "It looks fine, Wallie," he said with sincerity.

Wallie could not resist crowing:

"You didn't think I'd last, did you? Miss Spenceley didn't, either. She'll be disappointed very likely when she hears I've succeeded."

"Don't cackle till you've laid your aig, Gentle Annie. When you've thrashed and sold your grain and got your money in the bank, then I'll help you. We'll git drunk, if I have to rob a drug store."

"You're always putting a damper on me. It was you who advised me to go in for dry farming," Wallie reminded him.

"I figured that if you lived through a year of it," Pinkey replied candidly, "then almost anything else would look like a snap to you."

It was plain that in spite of his prospects Pinkey was not sanguine, but in this moment of his exultation, failure seemed impossible to Wallie.

In various small ways Canby had tried to break him and had not succeeded. Boise Bill had prophesied that he would not "winter"—yet here he was with every reason to

believe that he would also "summer." Wallie felt rather invincible as he reflected upon it, and the aurora borealis did not exceed in color the outlook his fancy painted that evening.

"It's eight-thirty," Pinkey hinted. "When I set up till all hours I oversleep in the morning."

Wallie came to earth reluctantly, and as he returned to the cabin he again permitted himself the luxury of pitying the folk of the Colonial who knew nothing of such rapturous moments in that stale, uneventful world, which was so remote and different from the present that it was beginning to seem like a dream to him.

They had been asleep for an hour, more possibly, when Pinkey nudged Wallie violently.

"What's that huffin', do you reckon?"

Wallie awoke with a start and listened.

"Huffing" was the right word. Lying next to the logs, some large animal was breathing so heavily in Wallie's ear that it sounded like a bellows. He looked through a crack and saw something that looked like a mastadon in the darkness, tugging at a sack he had used for chinking. It was not a horse and was too large for his Jersey. It flashed through his mind that it might be a roaming silver tip from the mountain.

Pinkey was out of the bunk at a bound and around the corner of the cabin, where his suspicions were instantly verified.

"It's a bull!" he shouted. "I thought it. Looks like a thousand head of cattle trampin' down your wheat field!"

Wallie turned sick. He could not move for a moment. His air castles fell so hard he could almost hear them.

"Do you think they've been in long?" he asked weakly.

"Can't tell till daylight." Pinkey was getting into his clothes hurriedly.

Wallie was now in the doorway, and he could make out innumerable dark shapes browsing contentedly in his grain field. "What'll we do?" he asked despairingly.

"Do?" replied Pinkey savagely, tugging at his boot straps. "I'll send one whur the dogs won't bite him with every ca'tridge. We'll run a thousand dollars' worth of taller off the rest of 'em. Git into your clothes, Gentle Annie, and we'll smoke 'em up proper."

"I don't see how it could happen," said

Wallie, his voice trembling. "The fence was good, and—"

"If it had been twenty feet high 'twould 'a' been all the same," Pinkey answered. "Them cattle was *drove* in."

"You mean——" Wallie's mouth opened. "Shore—Canby! It come to my mind last night when I seen that bunch movin': Pretty coarse work I call it, but he thought you was alone and wouldn't ketch on to it."

"He'll pay for this!" cried Wallie chokingly.

"You can't do nothin' with him but deal him misery. He's got too much money and pull fer you. Do you know what I think's gnawin' on him?"

"My taking up a homestead?"

"That, too, but mostly because Helene dressed him down for sellin' that locoed team to you. He's jealous."

Even in his despair Wallie felt pleased that any one, especially Canby, should be jealous of him because of Helene Spenceley.

"He aims to marry her," Pinkey added. "I wisht you could beat his time and win yerself a home somehow. I don't think you got any show, but if I was you I'd take another turn around my saddle horn and hang on. Whenever I kin"—kindly—"I'll speak a good word for you. Throw your saddle on your horse and step, young feller. I'm gone!"

The faint hope which Wallie had nursed that the damage might not be so great as he had feared vanished with daylight. Not only was the grain trampled so the field looked like a race course, but panel after panel of the fence was down where the quaking asp posts had snapped like lead pencils. As Pinkey and Wallie surveyed it in the early dawn, Wallie's voice had a catch in it when he said finally:

"I guess I'm done farming. They made a good job of it."

"I'm no 'sharp,' but it looks to me like some of that wheat would straighten up, if it got a good wettin'."

Wallie said grimly: "The only thing I forgot to buy when I was outfitting in Philadelphia was a rain-making apparatus."

"On the level," Pinkey declared earnestly, "I b'leve we're goin' to have a shower—the clouds bankin' up over there in the north-west is what made me think of it."

Wallie's short laugh was cynical.

"It might drown somebody half a mile

from me, but it wouldn't settle the dust in my dooryard."

"I see you're gittin' homesteadin'," Pinkey commented, "but jest the same them clouds look like they meant business."

Wallie felt a glimmer of hope in spite of himself, and he scrutinized the clouds closely.

"They do look black," he admitted. "But since it hasn't rained for two months it seems too much to expect that it will rain when I need it so desperately."

"It's liable to do anything—I've seen it snow here in August. A fur-lined linen duster is the only coat fer this country. I'll gamble it's goin' to do *somethin'*, but only the Big Boss knows what."

During breakfast, they got up at intervals to look through the doorway and, while they washed dishes and tidied the cabin, they watched the northwest anxiously.

"She's movin' right along," Pinkey reported. "It might be a stiddy rain, and then ag'in it might be a thunder shower, though you don't often look for 'em in the mornin'."

The light grew subdued with the approaching storm, and Wallie commented upon the coolness. Then he went out in the dooryard and stood a moment.

"The clouds are black as ink, and how still it is," he said wonderingly. "There isn't a breath of air stirrin'."

Pinkey was sitting on the floor oiling his saddle when he tilted his head suddenly, and listened. He got up abruptly and stood in the doorway, concentrating all his faculties upon some sound of which he alone was cognizant, for Wallie was aware of nothing unusual save the uncanny stillness.

"Hear that?" The sharp note in Pinkey's voice filled Wallie with a nameless fear.

"No—what?"

"That roar—can't you hear it?"

Wallie listened intently.

"Yes—like a crashing—what is it?"

"Hail! And a terror! We've got to run the stock in."

He was off with Wallie following and together they got the cow and horses under shelter with all the speed possible. The sound preceded the storm by some little time, but each moment the roar and the crash of it grew louder, and when it finally reached them Wallie gazed open-mouthed.

Accustomed to hail like tapioca, he never had seen anything like the big, jagged chunks of ice which struck the ground with such

force that they bounded into the air again. Any one of them would have knocked a man unconscious. It seemed as if they would batter his roof in, and they came so thick that the stable and corral could be seen only indistinctly. They both stood in the doorway fascinated and awe-stricken.

"Hear it pound! This is the worst I've seen anywhere. You're licked, Gentle Annie."

"Yes," said Wallie with a white face. "This finishes me."

"You'll have to kiss your wheat good-by. It'll be beat into the ground too hard ever to straighten." He laid an arm about Wallie's shoulder, and there was a sympathy in his voice few had heard there:

"You've put up a good fight, old pardner, and even if you are counted out, it's no shame to you. You've done good, fer a scissorbill, Gentle Annie."

Wallie clenched his hands and shook himself free of Pinkey's arm while his tense voice rang out above the clatter and crash of the storm:

"I'm not licked! I *won't* be licked! I'm going to stick, somehow! And, what's more," he turned to Pinkey fiercely, "if you don't stop calling me 'Gentle Annie,' I'll knock your block off!"

Pinkey looked at him with his pale, humorous eyes and beamed approvingly.

CHAPTER XIII.

LIFTING A CACHE.

The Prouty barber lathering the face of a customer after the manner of a man white-washing a chicken coop, paused on an upward stroke to listen. Then he stepped to the door, looked down the street, and nodded in confirmation. After which he returned, laid down his brush, and pinned on a nickel badge, which act transformed him into the town constable. The patron in the chair, a traveling salesman, watched the pantomime with interest.

"One moment, please." The barber-officer excused himself and stepped out to the edge of the sidewalk where he awaited the approach of a pair on horseback who were making the welkin ring with a time-honored ballad of the country:

"I'm a howler from the prairies of the West. If you want to die with terror, look at me. I'm chain lightnin'—"

As they came abreast the constable held out his hand and the pair automatically laid

six-shooters in it and went on without stopping in their song:

"—if I ain't, may I be blessed.
I'm a snorter of the boundless, lone prairie."

Other citizens than the barber recognized the voices, and frowned or smiled as happened, among whom was Mr. Tucker repairing a sofa in the rear of his "secondhand store."

Returning, the constable laid the six-shooters on the shelf among the shaving mugs and removed his badge.

"Who's that?" inquired the patron, since the barber offered no explanation.

"Oh, them toughs—'Gentle Annie' MacPherson and Pinkey Fripp," was the answer in a wearied tone. "I hate to see 'em come to town."

The pair continued to warble on their way to the livery barn on a side street:

"I'm the double-jawed hyena from the East.
I'm the blazing, bloody blizzard of the States.
I'm the celebrated slugger—"

The song stopped as Pinkey said:

"Shall we work together or separate?"

— To this mysterious question, Wallie replied:

"Let's try it together first."

After attending personally to the matter of feeding their horses oats, the two set forth with the air of having a definite purpose.

Their subsequent actions confirmed it, for they approached divers persons of their acquaintance as if they had business of a confidential nature. The invariable result of these mysterious negotiations, however, was a negative shake of the head.

After another obvious failure, Pinkey said gloomily:

"If I put in half the time and thought trying to be a senator that I do figgerin' how to git a bottle, I'd be elected."

Wallie replied hopefully:

"Something may turn up yet."

"I'd lift a cache from a preacher! I'd steal booze off my blind aunt! I'd—"

"We'll try some more 'prospects' before we give up. It's two years since I've gone out of town sober, and I don't like to establish a precedent. I'm superstitious about things like that," said Wallie.

At this unquestionably psychological moment Mr. Tucker beckoned them from his doorway. They responded with such alacrity that their gait approached a trot, although they had no particular reason to be-

lieve that it was his intention to offer them a drink. It was merely a hope born of their thirst.

Their reputation was such, however, that any one who wished to demonstrate his friendship invariably evidenced it in this way, taking care, in violation of the ethics of bygone days, to do the pouring himself. Mr. Tucker winked elaborately when he invited them in and Wallie and Pinkey exchanged eloquent looks as they followed him to his Land Office in the rear of the store.

Inside, he locked the door and lowered the shade of the single window which looked out on an areaway. No explanation was necessary as he took a hatchet and pried up a plank. This accomplished, he reached under the floor and produced a tin cup and a two-gallon jug. He filled it with a fluid of an unfamiliar shade and passed it to Pinkey, who smelled it and declared that he could drink anything that was wet. Wallie watched him eagerly as it gurgled down his throat.

"Well?" Mr. Tucker waited expectantly for the verdict.

Pinkey wiped his mouth.

"Another like that and I could watch my mother go down for the third time, and laugh!"

"Where did you get it?" Wallie in turn emptied the cup and passed it back.

"S-ss-sh!" Tucker looked warningly at the door. "I made it myself—brown sugar and raisins. You like it, then?"

"If I had about 'four fingers' in a wash tub every half hour— What would you hold a quart of that at?" Pinkey leaned over the opening in the floor and sniffed.

Mr. Tucker hastily replaced the plank and declared:

"Oh, I wouldn't dast! I jest keep a little on hand for my particular friends that I can trust. By the way, Mr. MacPherson, what are you goin' to do with that homestead you took up?"

"Hold it. Why?"

"I thought I might run across a buyer some time and I wondered what you asked."

A hardness came into Wallie's face, and Tucker added:

"I wasn't goin' to charge you any commission—you've had bad luck and—"

"You're the seventh philanthropist that's wanted to sell that place in my behalf for about four hundred dollars, because he was sorry for me," Wallie interrupted dryly.

"You tell Canby that when he makes me a decent offer, I'll consider it."

"No offense—no offense, I hope?" Tucker protested.

"Oh, no," Wallie shrugged his shoulder. "Only don't keep getting me mixed with the chap that took up that homestead. I've had my eyeteeth cut."

Extending an invitation to call and quench their thirsts with his raisinate when next they came to town, Tucker unlocked the door. After the two had wormed their way through the bureaus and stoves and were once more in the street, they turned and gave each other a long, inquiring look.

"Pink," demanded Wallie solemnly, "did you smell anything when he raised that plank?"

"Did I smell anything? Didn't you see me sniff? That joker has got a cache of the real stuff, and he gave us raisinate! I couldn't git an answer from a barrel of that. He couldn't have insulted us worse if he'd slapped our face."

"A man ought to be punished that would do a wicked thing like that."

"You've said somethin', Gentle Annie."

The two looked at each other in an understanding that was beautiful and complete.

The behavior of the visitors was nearly too good to be true—it was so exemplary, in fact, as to be suspicious, and acting upon this theory, the barber closed his shop early, pinned on his badge of office, and followed them about. But when at ten o'clock they had broken nothing, quarreled with nobody, and drunk only an incredible quantity of soda pop, he commenced to think he had been wrong.

At eleven when they were still in a pool hall playing "solo" for a cent a chip, he decided to go home. There he confided to his wife that no more striking example of the benefits of prohibition had come under his observation than the conduct of this notorious pair, who, when sober, were well mannered and docile as lambs.

It was twelve or thereabouts when two figures crept stealthily up the alley behind Mr. Tucker's secondhand store and raised the window looking out on the areaway. As noiselessly as trained burglars they pried up the plank and investigated by the light of a match.

"Well, what do you think of that?"

"I feel like somebody had died and left me a million dollars!" said Pinkey in an

awed tone, reaching for a tin cup. "I didn't think they was anybody in the world as mean as Tucker."

"You mustn't get too much," Wallie admonished, noting the size of the drink Pinkey was pouring for himself.

"I've never had too much. I may have had enough, but never too much." Pinkey grinned. "I don't take no int'rest in startin' less'n a quart."

"I hope he'll have the decency to be ashamed of himself when he finds out we know what he did to us. I shouldn't think he'd want to look us in the face," Wallie declared virtuously.

"He won't git a chanst to look in my face for some time to come if we kin lift this cache."

Together they filled the grain sack they had brought and carefully replaced the plank, then, staggering under the weight of the load, made their way to a gulch, buried the sack, and marked the hiding place with a stone. With a righteous sense of having acted as instruments of Providence in punishing selfishness, they returned to town to follow such whims as seized them under the stimulus of a bottle of Mr. Tucker's excellent Bourbon.

The constable had been asleep for hours when a yell—a series of yells—made him sit up. He listened a moment, then with a sign of resignation got up, dressed, and took the key of the calaboose from its nail by the kitchen sink.

"I'll lock 'em up and be right back," he said to his sleepy wife, who seemed to know whom he meant too well to ask. Under the arc light in front of the Prouty House he found them doing the Indian "stomp" dance to the delight of the guests who were leaning from their windows to applaud.

"Ain't you two ashamed of yourselves?" the constable demanded, scandalized—referring to the fact that Pinkey and Wallie had divested themselves of their trousers and boots and were dancing in their stocking feet.

"Ashamed?" Wallie asked impudently. "Where have I heard that word?"

"Who sold liquor to you two?"

"I ate a raisin and it fermented," replied Wallie.

"Where's your clothes?" to Pinkey.

"How'sh I show?"

"You two ought to be ordered to keep out of town. You're pests. Come along!"

"Jus' waitin' fer you t'put us t'bed," said Pinkey cheerfully.

The two lurched beside the constable to the calaboose, where they dropped down on the hard pads and temporarily passed out.

The sun was shining in Wallie's face when he awoke and realized where he was. He and Pinkey had been there too many times before not to know. As he lay reading the penciled messages and criticisms of the accommodation left on the walls by other occupants, he subconsciously marveled at himself that he should have no particular feeling of shame at finding himself in a cell.

He was aware that it was accepted as a fact that, in a way, he had gone to the bad. He had been penurious as a miser until he had saved enough from his wages as a common cow hand to buy his homestead outright from the State. After that he had never saved a cent; on the contrary, he was usually overdrawn. He gambled and lost no opportunity to get drunk, since he calculated that he got more entertainment for his money out of that than anything else, even at the "bootlegging" price of twenty dollars per quart which prevailed.

So he had drifted, learning in the meantime under Pinkey's tutelage to ride and shoot and handle a rope with the best of them. Pinkey had left the Spenceley ranch and they were both employed now by the same cattleman.

He rarely saw Helene, in consequence, but upon the few occasions they had met in Prouty she had made him realize that she knew his reputation and disapproved of it. In the East she had mocked him for his inoffensiveness, now she criticized him for the opposite. It was plain, he thought disconsolately, that he could not please her, yet it seemed to make no difference in his own feelings for her.

His face reddened as he recalled the boasts he had made upon several occasions and how far he had fallen short of fulfilling them. He was going to "show" them, and now all he had to offer in evidence was one hundred and sixty acres gone to weeds and grasshoppers, his saddle, and the clothes he stood in.

It was not often that Wallie stopped to take stock, for it was an uncomfortable process, but his failure seemed to thrust itself upon him this morning. He was glad when

Pinkey's heavy breathing ceased in the cell adjoining and he began to grumble.

"Looks like a town the size of Prouty would have a decent jail in it," he said crossly. "They go and throw every Tom, Dick, and Harry in this here cell, and some slob has half tore up the mattress."

"You can't have your private cell, you know," Wallie suggested.

"I've paid enough in fines to build a cooler the size of this one, and looks like I got a little somethin' comin' to me."

"I suppose they don't take that view of it," said Wallie, "but you might mention it to the judge this morning."

After a time Pinkey asked, yawning: "What did we do last night? Was we fightin'?"

"I don't know—I haven't thought about it."

"I guess the constable will mention it," Pinkey observed dryly. "He does, generally."

"Let's make a circle and go and have a look at my place," Wallie suggested.

Pinkey agreed amiably, and added:

"You'll prob'ly have the blues for a week after."

The key turning in the lock interrupted the conversation.

"You two birds get up. Court is goin' to set in about twenty minutes." The constable eyed them coldly through the grating.

"Where's my clothes?" Pinkey demanded, looking at the law accusingly.

"How should I know?"

"I ain't no more pants than a rabbit!" Pinkey declared astonished.

"Nor I!" said Wallie.

"You got all the clothes you had on when I put you here."

"How kin we go to court?"

"Tain't fur."

"Everybody'll look at us," Pinkey protested.

The constable retorted callously: "Won't many more see you than saw you last night doin' the stomp dance in Main Street."

"Did we do that?" Pinkey asked, startled.

"Sure—right in front of the Prouty House, and Helene Spenceley and a lot of folks was lookin' out of the windows."

Wallie sat down on the edge of his cot weakly. That settled it! He doubted if she would ever speak to him.

"I've got customers waitin'," urged the

constable impatiently. "Wrap a soogan around you and step lively."

There was nothing to do but obey, in the circumstances, so the shame-faced pair walked the short block to a hardware store in the rear of which the justice of the peace was at his desk to receive them.

"Ten dollars apiece," he said, without looking up from his writing. "And half an hour to get out of town."

Pinkey and Wallie looked at each other.

"The fact is, your honor," said the latter ingratiatingly, "we have mislaid our trousers and left our money in the pockets. If you would be so kind, as to loan us each a ten-spot until we have wages coming we shall feel greatly indebted to you."

The court vouchsafed a glance at them. Showing no surprise at their unusual costume, he said as he fumbled in the pocket of his waistcoat:

"Such gall as yours should not go unrewarded. You pay your debts, and that's all the good I know of either of you. Now, clear out—and if you show up for a month the officer here is to arrest you."

He transferred two bank notes to the desk drawer and went on with his scratching.

"Gosh!" Pinkey lamented, as they stood outside clutching their quilts, "I wisht I knowed whur to locate them Mackinaws. I got 'em in Lethbridge before I went to the army, and I think the world of 'em. I don't like 'poor-boys serge,' but I guess I'll have to come to it, since I'm busted."

"What's that?" Wallie asked curiously.

"Denim," Pinkey explained. "Overalls. That makes me think of a song a feller wrote up:

"A Texas boy in a northern clime,
With a pair of brown hands and a thin, little dime.
The southeast side of his overalls out—
By damn, I'm freezin' to death!"

"That's a swell song," Pinkey went on enthusiastically. "I wish I could think of the rest of it."

"Don't overtax your brain—I've heard plenty. Let's cut down the alley and in the back way of the emporium. Oh!" He gripped his quilt in sudden panic and looked for a hiding place. Nothing better than a telegraph pole offered. He stepped behind it as Helene Spenceley passed in Canby's roadster.

"Did she see me?"

"Shore she saw you. You'd oughta seen the way she looked at you."

Wallie, who was mortified and miserable over the incident, declared he meant never again to come to town and make a fool of himself.

"I know how you feel, but you'll git over it," said Pinkey sympathetically. "It's nothin' to worry about, for I doubt if you ever had any show anyhow."

Canby laughed disagreeably after they had passed the two on the sidewalk. "That Montgomery-Ward cow-puncher has been drunk again evidently," he commented.

"I wouldn't call him that. I'm told he can rope and ride with any of them."

He looked at her quickly. "You seem to keep track of him."

She replied bluntly: "He interests me."

"Why?" curtly. Canby looked malicious as he added: "He's a fizzle."

"He'll get his second wind some day and surprise you."

"He would!" Canby replied curtly. "What makes you think it?"

"His aunt is a rich woman, and he could go limping back if he wanted to; besides, he has what I call the 'makings.'"

"He should feel flattered by your confidence in him," he answered uncomfortably.

"He doesn't know it."

Canby said no more, but it passed through his mind that Wallie would not, either, if there was a way for him to prevent it.

CHAPTER XIV.

COLLECTING A BAD DEBT.

Wallie and Pinkey picked up a few stray cattle on their way to the homestead on Skull Creek. It was late in the afternoon when they reached it, so they decided to spend the night there. The corral was down in places, but with a little work it was repaired sufficiently to hold the cattle they put in it.

As Pinkey had prophesied, it gave Wallie the "blues" to look at the place where he had worked so hard and from which he had hoped so much. He felt heartsick as he saw the broken fence posts and down wire, the weeds growing in his wheat field, the broken windowpanes and the wreckage inside his cabin. The door had been left open and the range stock had gone in for shelter, while the rats and mice and chipmunks had taken possession. Such of his cooking utensils as re-

mained had been used and left unwashed and the stove was partially demolished.

The only thing which remained as he had left it was the stream of salt water that had cut a deeper channel for itself but had not diminished in volume.

"I'll go over to the Canby's and hit the cook for some grub and be back pronto," said Pinkey.

Wallie nodded. He was in no mood for conversation, for the realization of his failure was strong upon him, and he could not rid himself of the mortification he felt at having made a spectacle of himself before Helene Spenceley.

The future looked utterly hopeless. Without capital, there seemed nothing to do but go on indefinitely working for wages. His aunt had sent word in a roundabout way that if he wished to come back she would receive him, but this he did not even consider. Sitting on what was left of his doorstep, he awaited Pinkey's return, in an attitude of such dejection that that person commented upon it jocosely when he rode up finally with a banana in each hip pocket that he had pilfered from the cook, together with four doughnuts in the crown of his hat and a cake in his shirt front.

"I tried to git away with a pie, but it was too soft to carry, so I put a handful of salt under the crust and set it back," he said as he disgorged his plunder. "He charged me for the bread and meat, and wouldn't let me have no butter! It's fellers like the Canby outfit that spoil a country."

When they had eaten, they spread their saddle blankets in the dooryard and with their saddles for pillows covered themselves with the slickers they carried and so slept soundly until morning. After breakfast, as they were leading their horses up the weed-grown path to the cabin to saddle them, Pinkey commented as a grasshopper flew up and hit him in the face:

"Did you ever see anything to beat the size of 'em. They look like biplanes flyin'. They say everything has some reason for bein'; but I never could figger what the Lord had in his head when he made grasshoppers and ticks and chiggers. Of course, they make good bait fer dudes to fish with and——"

Wallie stopped in the path and looked at the friend of his bosom.

"Pink," he said solemnly, "why wouldn't this make a dude ranch?"

Pinkey stared back at him.

"Gentle Annie," he replied finally, "I told you long ago you was good for somethin' if we could jest hit on it. You're a born duder! You got the looks and the figger and a way about you that I've noticed takes with women. You'd make a great dude wrangler. B'leeve me, you've thought of somethin'!"

"I wasn't thinking of myself, but of the place here—the scenery—the climate—fishing in the mountains—hunting in season and——"

"And," Pinkey interrupted, "the strongest stream of salt water in the State fer mineral baths, with the Yellowstone Park in your front dooryard!" In his enthusiasm he pounded Wallie on the back.

"It would be an asset, having the park so close," the latter agreed, his eyes shining.

Pinkey went on:

"You kin run dudes whur you can't run sheep or cattle. What you need is room—and we're there with the room. Fresh air, grasshoppers, views any way you look—why, man, you got everything!"

"Except money," said Wallie suddenly.

For an instant they both felt crushed. It was such a precipitous descent to earth after their flight. They walked to the cabin and saddled in a silence which was broken finally by Pinkey, who said vindictively:

"I'd rob a train to git money enough to turn fifty head of dudes loose on Canby. He'd be mad enough to bite himself. If he could help it he wouldn't have a neighbor within a hundred miles."

Wallie's thoughts were bitter as he remembered the many injuries he had suffered at Canby's hands. It was a subject upon which he dared not trust himself to talk—it stirred him too much, although he had long ago decided that since he was powerless to retaliate there was nothing to do but take his medicine. Since he made no response, Pinkey continued while he tightened the cinch:

"If you could make a dude ranch out o' this and worry him enough, he'd give you about any price you asked, to quit."

"I'd ask plenty," Wallie replied grimly, "but it's no use to talk."

"It wouldn't trouble my conscience none if I hazed a bunch of his horses over the line, but horses are so cheap now that it wouldn't pay to take the chance."

"There's the Prouty Bank," Wallie suggested ironically.

"Them bulletproof screens have made

cashiers too hard to git at." Pinkey spoke in an authoritative tone.

"We might as well let it drop. We haven't the money, so we're wasting our breath. We'll lose the jobs we've got if we don't get about our business. Let's leave the cattle in the corral and scout a little through the hills—it'll save us another trip. I don't want to come here again soon—it hurts too much."

Pinkey agreed, and they rode gloomily along the creek bank looking for a ford. A few hot days had taken off the heavy snows in the mountains so quickly that the stream was running swift and deep.

"That's treach'rous water," Pinkey observed. "They's bowlders in there as big as a house where it looks all smooth on top. I know a place about a mile or so along, where I think it'll be safe."

They had ridden nearly that distance when, simultaneously, they pulled their horses up."

"Look at that crazy fool!" Pinkey ejaculated, aghast.

"It's Canby!"

"Nobody else! Watch him"—incredulously—"trying to quirt his horse across the crick!"

"Isn't it the ford?"

"I should say not! It looks like the place, but it ain't—he's mixed—he'll be in a jack pot quick if he don't back out. Onct his horse stumbles it'll never git its feet, in there."

They rode close enough to hear Canby cursing as he whipped.

"Look at him punish the poor brute! See him use that quirt and cut him with his spurs! Say, that makes me sick to see a good horse abused!" Pinkey cried indignantly.

Wallie said nothing but watched with hard, narrowed eyes.

"I s'pose I'd oughta yell and warn him," finally Pinkey said reluctantly.

"You let out a yip and I'll slat you across the face!"

Pinkey stared at the words—at Wallie's voice—at an expression he never had seen before.

"I know how you feel, but it's pure murder to let him git into that crick."

"Will you shut up?" Wallie looked at him with steely eyes, and there was a glint in them that silenced Pink.

He waited wonderingly to see what it all

meant. The battle between man and horse continued while they watched from the high bank. In terrified protest, the animal snorted, reared, whirled, while the rider plied the quirt mercilessly and spurred. Finally the sting of leather, the pain of sharp steel, and the stronger will won out and the trembling horse commenced to take the water.

Pinkey muttered, as, fascinated, he looked on:

"I've no idea that he knows enough to quirt his horse on the downstream side. He'll wash under, tangle up, and be drowned before we get a chanst to snake him out. He's a gone goslin' right now."

Cautiously, a few inches to a step, the horse advanced.

"There! He's in the bowlders! Watch him flounder! Look at him slip—he's hit the current! Good night—he's down—no, he's goin' to ketch himself! Watch him fight! Good ol' horse—good ol' horse!" Pinkey was beside himself with excitement now. "He's lost his feet—he's swimmin'—strikin' out for the shore—too swift, and the fool don't know enough to give him his head!"

They followed along the bank as the current swept horse and rider down.

"He swims too high—he's playin' out—there's so much mud he'll choke up quick. It'll soon be over now." Pinkey's face wore a queer, half-frightened grin. "Fifty yards more and—"

Wallie commenced to uncoil his saddle rope.

"You goin' to drag him out?"

Wallie made no answer but touched his horse and galloped until he was ahead of Canby and the drowning horse. Making a megaphone of his hands, he yelled.

Canby lifted his wild eyes to the bank. "Throw me a rope!" he shrieked.

A slow, tantalizing smile came to Wallie's face. Very distinctly he called back:

"How much damages will you give me for driving your cattle into my wheat?"

"Not a damn cent!"

The rope Wallie had been swinging about his head to test the loop promptly dropped. The horse was swimming lower at every stroke.

"Five hundred!" Fear and rage was in Canby's choking voice.

"Put another cipher on that to cover my mental anguish!" Wallie mocked.

The horse was exhausting itself rapidly

with its efforts merely to keep its nose out, making no further attempt to swim toward the bank. Canby slapped water in its face with the hope of turning it, but it was too late. Its breathing could be heard plainly and its distended nostrils were blood-red.

Many things passed swiftly through Canby's calculating mind in the few seconds that remained for him to decide. His boots had filled and he was soaked to the waist; he knew that if he left the horse and swam for it he had small chance of success. He was not a strong swimmer at best, and even if he managed to get to the bank its sides were too high and steep for him to climb out without assistance. He looked at Wallie's implacable face, but he saw no weakening there; it was a matter of a moment more when the horse would go under and come up feet first.

"Throw me the rope!" His voice vibrating with chagrin and rage admitted his defeat.

Wallie measured the distance with his eye, adjusted the loop, and as it cut the air above his head Canby held up his hands to catch it when it dropped.

"Good work!" Pinkey cried as it shot out and hit its mark. "You never made a better throw than that, old kid!"

Canby slipped the loop under his arm and, as he took his feet from the stirrups, shouted for them to tighten up. The horse, relieved of his weight, took heart and struck out for the opposite bank, where a little dirt slide enabled it to scramble out. Shaking and dripping, at last it stood still at the top, while Canby, a dead weight, was dragged over the edge to dry land.

There was as much fury as relief in his face when he stood up and started to loosen the rope around his chest.

Wallie stopped him with a gesture.

"No, you don't! I take no chances when I play with crooks. You make out that check."

"Isn't my word good?" Canby demanded.

"Not so far as I can throw my horse."

"I haven't a check book," he lied.

"Get it, Pink."

The check book and indelible pencil which every sheep and cattleman carries was in the inside pocket of his coat.

"Fill it out." Wallie passed the pencil to him. "And don't leave off a cipher by mistake."

"I refuse to be coerced!" Canby declared

defiantly. "I'll keep my word, but I didn't say when."

"I'm setting the date," Wallie replied coolly, "and that's just four minutes and a half from now," taking out his watch. "If I haven't got the check by then you'll pay for those locoed horses, too, or I'll throw you back."

"You don't dare!"

"When you haven't anything to lose you'll dare considerable to get 'hunks,' and that's my fix! Besides, I need the money. Two minutes left—think fast."

"You'll sweat blood for this before I'm through with you!"

"Time's up—yes or no?"

Canby shut his teeth. Silently Wallie passed the end of the rope to Pinkey, who understood and took a turn around his saddle horn.

Before he could resist, Wallie gave Canby a shove and pushed him over the bank. He struck the water with a splash and went out of sight. Immediately that the well-trained cow horse felt the strain it backed up and held the rope taut. Canby came to the surface, then dangled as the horse continued to hold off. As he struggled with the water he had taken in his lungs and struggled frantically in the air, it seemed beyond human belief that it was he—Canby—Canby the all powerful—in such a plight!

"Pay out a little rope, Pinkey. Give the fish more line."

Once again Canby dropped back and came up gasping, coughing, fighting for his breath.

A little anxiously, Pinkey asked: "Don't you b'leve he's had enough?"

"Too much scrap left in him yet," Wallace replied, unmoved.

Canby shrieked at last: "I'll pay! Let me up!"

"You mean that?"

"Good God—yes!"

Pinkey led the horse back and in no gentle fashion Canby was pulled over the edge for the second time, where he lay limp. When his breath and strength returned he struggled to his feet.

"If you go in again you won't come up."

Wallie's voice was metallic and, searching his face, Canby saw that he meant exactly what he said. His hand was shaking as he filled out the check, using the saddle for a desk. Wallie looked at it and handed it back.

"You forgot the horses—six hundred is what they cost."

Canby started to protest, then, with a crafty look which, fleeting as it was, Wallie caught, he made out a new check for fifty-six hundred.

Turning to Pinkey: "I'll give you a hundred and fifty for your horse."

Pinkey hesitated. It was a hundred more than it was worth.

"I guess not." Wallie's voice was curt. "I'm a clairvoyant, Canby, and I've read your thought. You can't stop payment by telephone, because Pink is going to close-herd you right here until I ride to Prouty and get this cashed."

Pinkey's jaw dropped. "By the long-horn toads of Texas! I wouldn't 'a' thought of that in a month!"

As Wallie put his foot into the stirrup, for the first time his face relaxed. He looked over his shoulder and grinned:

"If you listen, maybe you'll hear something making a noise like a dude ranch, Pink."

CHAPTER XV.

THE EXODUS.

Never had Mr. Cone put in such a summer! The lines in his forehead looked as if they had been made with a harrow and there were times when his eyes had the expression of a hunted animal. Pacifying disgruntled guests was now as much a part of the daily routine as making out the menus.

In the halcyon days when a guest had a complaint, he made it aside, delicately, as a suggestion. Now he made a point of dressing Mr. Cone down publicly. In truth, baiting the landlord seemed to be in the nature of a recreation with the guests of the Colonial. Threats to leave were of common occurrence, and Mr. Cone longed to be once more in a position to tell them calmly to use their own pleasure in the matter. But what with high taxes, excessive wages, extensive improvements still to be paid for, prudence kept him silent.

The only way in which he could explain the metamorphosis was that the guests were imbued with the spirit of discontent that prevailed throughout the world in the years following the war. The theory did not make his position easier, however, nor alter the fact that he all but fell to trembling when a patron approached to leave his key or get a drink of ice water at the cooler.

As he lay awake wondering what next they would find to complain of, he framed splendid answers, dignified yet stinging, but when the time came to use them he remembered his expenses and his courage always failed him.

In his heart, he felt that this could not go on forever—some day some one would speak just the right word and he would surprise them. He had come to listen with comparative equanimity to the statement that his hotel was badly managed, the service poor, and the food the worst served on the beach front, but there was the very strong possibility that some one would inadvertently touch a sensitive nerve and he would 'fly off the handle.' When that happened, Mr. Cone dreaded the outcome.

Such were conditions at the Colonial when the folders arrived announcing the opening of the Lolabama Ranch to tourists. Messrs. MacPherson and Fripp, it stated, were booking guests for the remainder of the season and urged those who had a taste for the Great Outdoors to consider what they had to offer. The folders created a sensation. They came in the morning after a night of excessive heat and humidity. The guests found them in their mail when, fishy-eyed and irritable, they went in to breakfast.

While they fanned themselves and prophesied a day that was going to be a "scorcher," they read of a country where the nights were so cool that blankets were necessary, where the air was so invigorating that languor was unheard of, with such a variety of scenery that the eye never wearied.

There were salt baths that made the old young again; big game in the mountains for the adventurous; fishing with bait in untold quantities; saddle horses for equestrians; innumerable walks for pedestrians; an excellent table provided with the best the market offered; and, finally, a tour of the Yellowstone Park under the personal guidance of the hosts of the Lolabama in a stagecoach drawn by four horses, by motor, or on horseback as suited their pleasure.

Small wonder that life on the Colonial veranda suddenly looked tame after reading the folder and studying the pictures! Their discontent took the form of an increasing desire to nag Mr. Cone. Vaguely they held him responsible for the heat, the humidity, the monotony of the ocean, and their loss of appetite due to lack of exercise.

On an impulse, Mr. Henry Appel and his

wife, after consulting, got up abruptly and went inside for the purpose of having a plain talk with Mr. Cone. Mr. Cone, who was making out the weekly bills, pretended not to see them until Mr. Appel cleared his throat and said very distinctly:

"May I have your attention, Mr. Cone?"

Quaking, Mr. Cone stepped forward briskly and apologized. Ignoring the apology, Mr. Appel began impressively:

"You cannot have failed to see, Mr. Cone, that my wife and I have been thoroughly dissatisfied this summer, as we have been at no great pains to conceal it. We have been coming here for twenty-two seasons, but we feel that we cannot put up with things any longer and are hereby giving you notice that next Thursday our room will be at your disposal."

"Is it anything in particular—anything which I can remedy? Perhaps you will reconsider?" Mr. Cone pleaded, looking from one to the other.

"Last night—at dinner"—Mrs. Appel eyed him accusingly—"I found—an eyewinker—in the hard sauce."

"I'm v-very sorry—it was not my eyewinker—such things will happen—I will speak to the pastry cook and ask him to be careful."

Mr. Budlong, who had come in to lay his grievance before Mr. Cone, spoke up:

"For two mornings, Mrs. Budlong and myself have been awakened by the man with the vacuum cleaner who has wanted to work in our room before we were out of it. I should judge," he said acidly, "that you recruit your servants from the Home for the Feeble-minded, and, personally, I am sick of it!"

"It is almost impossible to get competent help," Mr. Cone protested. "The man shall be discharged, and I promise you no further annoyance."

Mr. Budlong, nudged by his wife, was not to be placated.

"Our week is up Monday, and we are leaving," he said. Miss Mattie Gaskett, encouraged by the conversation to which she had listened, declared with asperity:

"There has been fuzz under my bed for exactly one week, Mr. Cone, and I have not called the maid's attention to it because I wished to see how long it would remain there. I have no reason to believe that it will be removed this summer. I am sure it is not necessary to tell you that such filth is unsani-

tary. I have decided that you can make out my bill at your earliest convenience."

She ignored the protesting hand which Mr. Cone, panic-stricken, extended, and and made way for a widow from Baltimore who informed him that her faucet dripped and her rocking-chair squeaked, and since no attention had been paid to her complaints she was making other arrangements.

It was useless for Mr. Cone to explain that with the plumbers striking for living wages and the furniture repairers behind with their work, it had been impossible to attend immediately to these matters. Ruin confronted Mr. Cone as he argued, and begged them not to act hastily. But something of the mob spirit had taken possession of the guests in front of the desk who stood and glowered at him, and his conciliatory attitude, his obsequiousness, only added to it.

If nothing else had happened to strain Mr. Cone's self-control further, he and his guests might have separated with at least a semblance of good feeling, but the fatal word which he had feared in his forebodings, came from Mrs. J. Harry Stott, who majestically descended the broad staircase carrying before her a small, reddish-brown insect impaled on a darning needle. She walked to the desk and presented it for Mr. Cone's consideration. It was a most indelicate action, but the knowledge that it was such did not lessen the horror with which the guests regarded it.

Aghast, speechless, Mr. Cone, one of whose proudest boasts had been of the hotel's cleanliness, could not have been more shocked if he had learned that he was a leper.

"Where did you find it?" Mr. Cone finally managed to ask hoarsely.

"Walking on my pillow!" replied Mrs. Scott dramatically. "*And I think there are others!* If you will see that my trunks get off on the four-seventeen I shall be obliged to you."

Mr. Cone knew it was coming. He felt the symptoms which warned him that he was going to "fly off the handle." He leaned over the counter. Mrs. Stott's eyes were so close together that, like Cyclops, she seemed to have but one, and they had the appearance of growing even closer as Mr. Cone looked into them.

"Do not give yourself any concern on that score, madam. Your trunks will be at the

station as soon as they are ready, and it will please me if you will follow them. For twelve years I have been pretending not to know that you used the hotel soap to do your washing in the bathtub, and it is a relief to mention it to you.

"And Miss Gaskett," the deadly coldness of his voice made her shiver, "I doubt if the fuzz under your bed has troubled you as much as the fact that for three summers your cat has had kittens in the linen closet has annoyed me."

The Baltimore widow had his attention next:

"It is possible that the drip from your faucet and the squeak in your rocking-chair gets on your nerves, my dear lady, but so does your daily caterwauling on the hotel piano.

"I shall miss your check, certainly, Mr. Appel, but not nearly so much as I shall enjoy the relief from listening to the story

of the way you got your start as a 'breaker boy' in the coal region."

He bowed with the irony of Mephistopheles to Mrs. Budlong:

"Instead of discharging the man with the vacuum cleaner, I shall give him for his large family—the cake and fruit you would have carried away from the table in your capacious pocket if you had been here."

His eyes swept them all. He would have given Mr. Budlong his attention, but that person's vanishing back was all he could see of him, so he turned to the others and shouted:

"Go! The sooner the better! Get out of my sight—the whole lot of you! *I'm going to a rest cure!*"

His hand traveled toward the potato he used as a pen wiper, and there was something so significant in the action when taken in connection with his menacing expression that, without a word, they obeyed him.

TO BE CONCLUDED.



ANOTHER "WAR OF THE ROSES"

WHEN Alfred Alexander Taylor, seventy-two years of age, won the governorship of Tennessee last fall on the Republican ticket, it was not the first time that he had been a candidate for that high office. He tried it once before as far back as 1885, when he and his brother, "Fiddling Bob" Taylor, both were candidates, Alf as a Republican, Fiddling Bob, who later became a United States senator, as a Democrat.

The brothers made a hot, old-fashioned Southern campaign, ridiculing the opposition platforms and poking fun at each other. They even staged joint debates and made the fur fly with sarcasm, wit, and invective. But they were always affectionate and brotherly when the speaking was over.

One evening they both put up for the night at the home of an old widow who had heard them speak earlier in the day. The next morning, when they went to tell her good-by, she was waiting for them with two bouquets of roses in her hands. To Fiddling Bob she gave the white and to Alf the red roses, saying:

"I want you to accept these flowers, gentlemen, for the sake of your mother. I know that she must be proud of her boys who can be politicians and still be brothers, I know that her heart is with you and that her blessings follow you."

And after that the campaign, which was won by Fiddling Bob, was known throughout the State as the "war of the roses."

The Shore Birds

By John Fleming Wilson

Author of "The Index of Error," "His Splendid Enemy," Etc.

When her father proposed a South Sea yachting cruise Margaret Esterley insisted upon visiting barren Makepeace Island. Of course she had a reason

YOUNG Tom Hardy looked Robert Falconer in the eyes and smiled mockingly.

"You and Wallie Reynolds and Jim Charlton will never belong," he said in his full, melodious voice. "Wallie is a lawyer and does things for a fee in a courtroom that no man would dare attempt on the street or in a club. Jim and you are both bankers, and you have the nerve to sit here in your office between plate glasses and talk to me as you wouldn't venture to whisper anywhere else. Business is business, you tell me, with your blasted simper. You're a pack of poor shore birds."

A slight pallor showed on Falconer's smooth cheek. But he spoke as crisply and coldly as before.

"Your father had a certain kind of credit in the old rough and ready days of California," he remarked. "You inherited some of it, but you've lost it by paying no attention to the commonest details. You've spent money like water on whims. You've always told yourself there was more money to be had when you wanted it and——"

"So there is," Hardy interrupted.

"Not here," Falconer said softly.

Hardy laughed easily. He bent his powerful frame over the banker's polished desk with a smooth grace that made many an absorbed patron look up from his figuring or his check writing to dream an instant. Falconer glanced into the bright, clear, steady eyes and hated Hardy.

"I've no time to discuss the matter of a loan further," he said. "But for old-time's sake I'll give you a bit of advice; don't mix with the wrong crowd."

Hardy straightened up. "Oh, all right!" he answered. "I should have known better than to try to stay friends with such a lot as you and Wallie and Jim have got to be. Shore birds! When I'm carrion I'll call."

That evening Falconer took occasion to stop Simon Esterley and say, in a club murmur, "Did Tom Hardy come to you today?"

Simon smoothed down his waistcoat slowly. "No. I fancy Hardy would hardly care to—er—ask a favor of me."

"It was a favor he was after, too," Falconer returned. "Wanted sixty thousand on the *Sesostris* as security."

"It's a fine yacht," Esterley suggested.

"But a yacht for all that," Robert replied.

"Hardy got nasty, you know. After all, one must draw the line somewhere. Some private individual might take a risk with his money on the yacht; but not the bank."

Simon nodded comfortably. His shrewd eyes twinkled. "I shouldn't wonder if Hardy's pet didn't fall to some wiser man before long," he remarked. Then he grew grave. "Like you I've tried to give Tom good advice. But he's fatally weak! He could have been wealthier than old Ben was in his palmy days if he had stuck to business." Mr. Esterley bowed slightly as he spoke the name of his divinity.

Falconer sighed. "What's bred in the blood, you know! We've all had our troubles with Tom!"

Mr. Esterley winced and changed the subject. His manner, while serene, was faintly deferential to his youthful companion. He backed a murmured statement with a quiet, "You know Mrs. Esterley relies on your judgment, Robert."

A couple cannot live in any community, large or small, without soon being assigned to one or another of the infinitely numerous gradations into which a democratic people divide their society. The Simon Esterleys were estimable folks with some money, practicable ideals and a complete knowledge of what they called the world. Simon would have been rich at thirty-five if he had risked

anything in particular. As it was he achieved the five-hundred-thousand-dollar level at forty-two. Edith, his wife, was pretty, engaging, and clear-headed. But like Simon she refused the allurements of imagination, remained conservative, and was well liked and favored as a splendid assistant by women of more initiative.

San Francisco had long since marked them as reliable, common-sense people who were "nice." Consequently Simon was a director in several first-class corporations, a vice president of a solid institution and occasionally spoken of for minor dignities. Edith went everywhere, made no pretensions, and enjoyed a mild popularity.

That so steady and practical a pair should have a daughter with their virtues accorded with the usual belief in heredity. Margaret impressed strangers with her rather exotic loveliness. She was slender, lithe, soft-lipped, brilliant-eyed; her hair was an unruly, generous bronze. But those who knew her confessed that her parents took a just pride in so discreet, well-bred, and sensible a girl. She was a credit to her education and training. She remained, society purred, undazzled by the raw splendors of unduly rich youngsters, lucky speculators, and crude pioneers.

When Simon arrived at his goal, a half million dollars, he and Edith celebrated mildly in their own sitting room in the modest house on the skirts of Nob Hill. It was only a couple of days after Robert Falconer had mentioned Tom Hardy's financial difficulties.

"We have a little over five hundred thousand," Simon said gravely. "Safe as if it were in a bank. You've done wonders, Edie. I think I may say that another ten years will see our capital doubled. But the time has come to settle about Marge. We must consider her future. I believe I can safely assert that she can marry pretty much any man she chooses."

"She's so young!" Edith murmured formally, not in protest.

"Of course she is!" Simon said with a grin. "A thoroughbred, too! No nonsense about her! I'm proud of her! She'll make some steady, rising chap a bully wife. None of your fly-away dolls with the habits of a humming bird, either."

Mrs. Esterley picked her way across a slight, perfectly perceptible rift in the solid level of their contentment.

"She has ripened wonderfully," she remarked. "You know—she had girlish fancies. I was a little in dread of her showing—showing moods."

"With her training she couldn't help seeing the folly of letting herself be bewitched by such scamps as Tom Hardy," Simon returned with manlike indifference to his wife's nicety of expression.

"Tom is invariably charming," Edith said primly.

Her husband made a movement of impatience. "You women think so? Robert Falconer and I could tell another story. Hardy is a ruffian at heart. He has insulted every one of us who has delicately reminded him that business is no longer done as it used to be. He actually affects to despise men like Robert and myself—the very backbone of the community!" Simon's usually placid eyes sparkled angrily. "He calls us 'shore birds.'"

"And what is he, I'd like to know?" Edith flamed.

"A gull—pure and simple," Simon answered, softened by the aptness of his retort. "But like a good many gulls, he thinks he's a flamingo, or—er—a bird of paradise. He's thrown away more money than you and I will ever have, handing it out right and left to his father's worthless old friends, buying worthless stock from some waster, throwing it into a hole some smooth promoter has dug."

"You know he's made several lucky hits," Edith reminded Simon.

"Maybe he has. But no man ever made a lasting fortune except by steady, conservative work and industry. Tom Hardy has thrown fifty thousand dollars clean away just to satisfy a whim! Then he comes to Robert and wants to borrow!"

Edith Esterley tried to be just. "But the *Sesostris* is worth double what Tom wanted Robert to loan him; you said so yourself!"

Simon smiled slightly. "Robert is no fool. Hardy will accept two-thirds of the amount from a—er—private lender. He'll never be able to pay the loan and some one will—er—get the yacht for a song. You can't blame Robert for making an honest dollar. Tom would throw the money away, anyway."

"I think Marge likes Robert," Mrs. Esterley murmured.

Her husband raised a warning finger. "Now let's not hurry matters, my dear! You

know, youth will be served, and all that. I have an idea."

Edith waited.

Simon pulled down his waistcoat and walked about the well but plainly furnished library. His wife saw that he was going to say something which he had carefully considered and was proud to have schemed. A slight flush ruddied her smooth cheeks. Simon was so satisfactory!

"I'm no fool, Edie, and I've always had an eye out for the chap who might make Marge a good husband. There are several in our set—Jim Charlton, Wallie Reynolds, and Robert Falconer come to mind this minute. They are all modern young men, right up to the mark. There is no nonsense about any of them. Jim is going to make the Pajaro Trust a power. Wallie already is spoken of by the biggest corporations as legal director. Robert has his finger on the business pulse of California.

Mrs. Esterley clasped her silk-clad knees with modestly ringed fingers, displaying an ankle of which Simon approved.

"I think Robert will be the most distinguished," she remarked. "He has such a manner! And one can see he is very fond of Marge."

"Robert is a mighty careful fellow, Edie," Simon replied. "He's independently wealthy and he can pretty much pick and choose. I want to warn you that he has a—er—difficult streak in his make-up. He's all business—on the surface. And it's the surface that counts with young girls. They don't always appreciate a man's being sound."

"He's good looking."

"True. And I've noticed that Marge is interested in him. But we've had our little experience of how girls are dazzled by romance. That's my idea. I see no reason why, if you and I are agreed, we shouldn't quietly make it possible for Robert, without his knowledge, of course, to appear in a more romantic light than he naturally would in the city."

Mrs. Esterley understood instantly what her husband meant. She nodded and fell into a deep study from which she roused at bedtime to murmur, "It's providential!"

Simon was too sleepy to inquire the nature of "it" and Edith did not refer to their conversation again for some days. Meanwhile, in a way which only experienced matrons would understand, she made it perfectly plain that the Simon Esterleys, from among

a round score of good suitors, had picked three: Wallie Reynolds, Jim Charlton, and Robert Falconer. Each was devoted to Margaret, each was ambitious; Simon was in a position to help any young man enormously.

It set at rest half-forgotten but frequently revived gossip that Tom Hardy had been a little more than hard smitten by Marge. That dutiful, discreet, and capable young woman closed the affair for good by coolly staring into young Tom's ardent eyes one evening at a dance and turning away with Robert.

Simon discussed this incident with his wife.

"I really don't like it," he murmured. "We oughtn't to take sides so definitely against Tom. It's not good business. Tom has lots of friends, among a certain class. Even Robert sees that. In spite of Tom's rudeness Robert went so far as to see him and make that loan he wanted, personally, of course."

Edith refused to be disturbed. "Girls have their own way of settling an affair," she told her husband calmly. "I'm glad it's off my mind."

"Tom will eliminate himself pretty soon," Simon went on. "Robert tells me that he has some wild scheme on hand to take the yacht to China on some speculation or other. Of course it will come to nothing. Then Robert will have the *Sesostri*. I suggested to him that maybe some day you and I would consider a yachting trip for Marge's sake. He seemed to take kindly to the scheme."

Edith's fine eyes lit with maternal fire. She kissed her husband warmly and went to sleep smiling. The next morning she stopped Simon on his way out and said briefly, "I've thought about a cruise on a yacht. It just fits in with your idea about giving Marge a chance to see the romantic side of things. Would it cost too much—now?"

Simon refused to be hurried. He almost scowled on his wife; murmured something about "dickens of a lot of money—hardly good business—looks like a splurge—wouldn't help anybody anywhere—expensive!"

Mrs. Esterley kissed him good-by and let him go. But she had played the game too shrewdly on other fields not to win at home.

"Remember, Marge is still showing a little temper at times," she told Mr. Esterley that night. "I agree with you that cutting

Tom Hardy that way was scarcely good form. The dear girl needs a change. After all, Simon, darling, Marge ought to have her own voice in such a matter, just as you remarked. A yachting cruise would give her a chance to let her heart speak!"

"I see, my dear," Simon yielded. "Young folks must do things their own way—and quite right. Cupid is a queer little god!"

"He can be managed," Edith replied practically.

"I see! Romance! South Seas and the Southern Cross! Music under the awnings! Moonlight at sea!" Mr. Esterley was jovial.

A week later Simon presented his wife with the facts. She listened with absorbed face to his description of the four vessels that had been offered him.

"And the brokers I went to made me a surprising offer," he concluded. "After I had considered the *Cyprian*, the *Gadfly*, and the *Summer Girl* they came and informed me that the *Sesostris* was open to charter."

Edith's eyes glinted.

"At just three times the price of the *Summer Girl*," Simon went on quietly. "I listened, of course. I even went so far as to consult Robert, who is much interested. Robert put me on the right track. Tom's China venture doesn't promise well. He thought, hearing I was in the market for a charter, that he would lure me into paying an enormous sum of the *Sesostris*—and make one of the party himself. You know, he always acts as captain of his own yacht."

Edith's eyes lost their brilliance. But she was composed. "The *Sesostris* is the biggest and best yacht on the Pacific, to be sure," she murmured. "But which one have you chartered?"

"The *Summer Girl*," Simon replied. "While she's not exactly a fine craft in every way, we can afford her. Quite casually I broached the matter to Robert and Wallie. They both say the *Summer Girl* is excellent for the purpose. I've taken her for three months. Now you can go ahead and ask your guests and set a date for sailing."

"Who owns the *Summer Girl*?"

"A firm of brokers—Gow & Co.," Simon responded. "And that makes it so much the better. I have dealings with Gow & Co. which made it an object to both of us to be mutually pleasant. It is much nicer than dealing with some lordly youngster who insists on knowing who is to have the best cabin and that you keep on his own em-

ployees. Gow will supply everything—stores, crew, and coal. We have nothing to do but pay the bill—and that will be settled before we go, to a penny. I told Gow plainly I didn't intend to let myself in for extra expenses."

"It would have been so fine to have had the *Sesostris*."

"It would have cost us fifteen thousand dollars more," Simon said curtly. "And Hardy is insufferable!"

"Did you see him?"

Mr. Esterley flushed as he recalled his interview with the big, keen-eyed owner of the yacht. He thought it best not to be explicit, though Hardy's contemptuous words still stung his ears:

"I've gone over your itinerary and the *Summer Girl* is utterly unfit to make a trip to the Columbia River. For God's sake, Esterley, wake up! You're planning your first yachting cruise for your daughter and you're taking the advice of a set of blasted shore birds who think a penny saved is a penny earned. I'll make the *Sesostris* as cheap as possible to you and throw in my own services as sailing master and not bother you with my company—just to save Margaret a dreary time on an old scow that nobody but those thrice-condemned shylocks, the Gows, would dream of calling a yacht. Man, wake up, and do a thing in style once in your life!"

Simon had bitterly resented this attack and sent Hardy away with a warning. But the young man's final glance of complete contempt had burned deeply. Simon felt that, after all, he might have been hasty in choosing the *Summer Girl* for business reasons when the cruise was really not business at all. Only Falconer's discreet sympathy had soothed him.

"I shouldn't worry about Hardy," Robert had concluded. "I have a notion he will soon cease to own the *Sesostris* and to swagger among his betters."

To Edith, Mr. Esterley merely said that Tom Hardy had tried to bully him into taking the big yacht, but that he had put Hardy in his place. Then he changed the subject:

"How does Marge like our idea?"

"She's tremendously interested," his wife reported. "She and I have gone over the list and sent the invitations. We've arranged to sail a week from to-day."

Esterley nodded. This was in exact accord with Edith's compact with him, even

to the date. But in his slow-moving and still irritated mind there remained a vague suspicion that some detail had been overlooked. He went and sounded his daughter.

Margaret smiled her usual friendly, cool smile on him. "I think you are quite wonderful, dad. Mamma told me you had planned all this for me, I've always longed to take a voyage to the South Seas!"

Simon glanced at her inscrutable face and went on: "Your mother and I have tried to choose a congenial crowd, Marge; suit you all right?"

"Oh, quite! I like Nell Reynolds tremendously, and that nice aunt of Jim Charlton's is a dear. Robert's mother is coming, too. The only thing is——"

Simon's heart missed a beat. What was there in this demure girl's voice that betokened mystery? He tried to fathom her eyes.

"Yes," he said in a repressed tone.

"Just where are we going?"

"Papeite—Honolulu—Hilo—maybe Midway," he replied.

"I wish we could arrange to go just one place where no one else ever goes," she murmured. "Then it would be perfect."

Mr. Esterley beamed. "We shall have two months and a half to do what we like," he told her. "Of course, I shall have to make the needful arrangements before sailing. But that is easy. Now where does my little girl want us to stop where nobody ever goes?"

Margaret seemed about to speak, changed her mind, and went to a shelf and brought a huge atlas. Opened at the page marked "Oceania," it offered to Simon's rather bewildered eyes a vast expanse of blue dotted with colored specks and traversed by sinuous lines.

"That's a pretty big map, my dear!"

"Here is a place," Margaret responded, laying a pink finger tip on a small dot far south of the Hawaiian group. Her father put on his glasses and studied the fine script.

"Makepeace Island," he muttered. "Why Makepeace?"

Margaret turned away languidly. "Oh, it doesn't really matter. I just picked out Makepeace Island because nobody had ever spoken of it, and I thought probably nobody ever went there."

"I see. You want for once in your life to go to a place nobody knows anything about—just to feel romantic. Like Crusoe. Well, what's a yacht for unless you can go

where you please? Makepeace is on the itinerary from this hour, Marge."

She kissed him with what he thought unusual warmth and said no more. But next morning when facing Gow & Co., Mr. Esterley felt rather a fool. Makepeace Island was evidently not in favor with the owners of the *Summer Girl*. One of them consulted the "Directory" and showed Mr. Esterley the entry:

Makepeace Island: Lat. 7 deg 45 sec north; long. 167 west. A small flat islet of 4 miles by 2 lying SE and NW with a bad reef on the north and a very poor harbor on the south. Water and a few palms. No inhabitants. Rarely visited.

"You understand, Mr. Esterley," said the firm, "that we should have to make an extraordinary charge for sending our vessel to such a remote spot, even within the limit of our charter."

For fifteen minutes Simon bargained and left the office with a mingled feeling of satisfaction in having gratified a whim of Marge's and chagrin at having squandered two thousand dollars.

He confided in his wife and they agreed to say nothing of the additional port to any of their guests.

"It was Marge's notion," Simon said. "Probably she'll be ashamed of it later, and we needn't go down there after all. Don't make a point of it—but I'll save a couple of thousand by sticking to the original schedule."

"I don't care where we go and what we see," Edith replied in a burst of loyalty. "Just so Marge and Robert have time to make their plans."

"You may rely on it that Robert would not approve of spending two thousand dollars on a whim like that," Simon said. Then he laughed. "Probably the youngsters will have other notions in their heads than visiting out-of-the-way islands." He laughed again when he thought of the regular and calculable workings of Providence, which a wise man banks on. "Just throw them together a couple of weeks and Cupid will do the rest." He allowed himself a slight cynicism: "Propinquity is the matchmaker, after all." To atone for such a harsh saying he kissed his wife warmly.

On the eve of the departure of the *Summer Girl*—the society columns of the papers had advertised it discreetly—Simon came home to dinner in high good humor. Edith de-

tected the signs of peculiar satisfaction and bided her time. Before he went to bed Mr. Esterley told his news.

"You needn't worry about Tom Hardy hanging around much longer, Edie. I heard to-day the boy has reached the end of his resources—mortgaged the *Sesostris* from keel to truck. That ends him. His last cent is gone."

Mrs. Esterley murmured a few perfunctory words of regret. Even to her common-sense eyes the Hardys, father and son, had been brilliant and entrancing figures. They had lived dashing and splendidly. At times she had secretly envied them. Though she was maternally opposed to Tom, she acknowledged his charm of manner, his venturesomeness, his ability. Once or twice she had almost winked at what appeared to be growing intimacy between handsome Tom and the demure Marge. That danger was forever gone; so she murmured civil things and sighed and turned to the important affairs of to-day.

In spite of the warm recommendations of Gow & Co. and the outspoken approval of Robert Falconer, the yacht *Summer Girl* disappointed its passengers. Simon himself vaguely regretted that he had chosen so carefully. The vessel was small and slow. Her captain appeared to be a hesitant man without enthusiasm. He referred constantly and irritatingly during his necessary conversations with Mr. Esterley to the typewritten schedule pasted in the log book.

Mrs. Esterley, on the other hand, cared nothing for the sailing master nor the yacht's speed. But she was aware that the silver and china on the saloon table were not of the best. The cook seemed hardly up to the mark. The steward was fussy and inclined to resent orders for fresh napery and linen.

"I think," Edith told her husband the third night out from the Golden Gate, "that we might have done better to pay a little more and have things of the best. The butter to-night—"

Simon pooh-poohed her. "What do people expect at sea?" he demanded. "I bargained for the standard luxuries, and I guess we're getting them."

Mrs. Esterley knew when to change a subject. "Robert seems quite content and Marge is really looking tremendously fit," she said. "I can see she looks up to him awfully."

Koko Head appeared in due time, and

the party spent a frolicsome three days in Honolulu and at the beaches. Edith found herself almost displaced as chaperon by the elderly Miss Charlton and quietly resigned the place. She and Simon agreed that Marge was, as they put it, "coming out."

"It's surprising the way she manages things," Edith remarked. "She has a kind of pretty way of making Robert approve just what she suggests. He's frightfully in love!"

"That's all Marge needs," Simon responded cheerfully. "Just to let herself out a little and take the lead. It's all right for a girl to stand back and be modest and shy while she's still in her teens. But with a man like Robert at her feet a girl ought to show herself capable and with a mind of her own. This cruise is going to be a success!"

But the next morning as the *Summer Girl* steamed slowly out of the pass and into the great Pacific swell the Esterleys had a single slightly unpleasant moment.

"We just missed having another guest on board!" Miss Charlton said as Simon and Edith appeared in the saloon for breakfast. "The *Sesostris* is just rounding Koko Head."

Edith understood perfectly that she would have had to ask Tom to a meal had the big yacht arrived while the *Summer Girl* was in port and thanked God silently that matters had been otherwise planned by fate. But later she and Simon stood on the cramped quarter-deck of the old-fashioned *Summer Girl* and watched the distant *Sesostris* drive for the pass, a fairy fabric of tall spars, white hull, and winking brass. Their feelings were hardly soothed by the remark of the sailing master at their side.

"There's the neatest craft afloat, sir," said Captain Marks. "Look at her soar! I'll bet Hardy himself is on the bridge."

"We thought of chartering the *Sesostris*," Simon answered, against his better judgment. "But the *Summer Girl* seemed more suitable."

Captain Marks, who had long since sized the situation up and had his own notions about it, stared politely and stalked away. An hour later he addressed the Esterleys and informed them that he had laid a direct course for Makepeace Island. His manner was that of a man telling a child that he can play in the street and be run over by a truck if he likes.

Simon drew down his waistcoat and looked important.

"How soon shall we make this island, captain?"

Marks appeared to reckon it and replied that he thought a matter of seven days would see the island right aboard.

From her chair by the mainmast Marge turned a clear eye on the mariner.

"Seven days?" she inquired gravely.

Captain Marks rolled a gloomy eye on her. A lid flickered almost imperceptibly.

"If you'll have the kindness to step forward to the chart room I'll show you the course, Miss Esterley," he said respectfully.

Margaret turned and smiled on Robert Falconer, who was sprawled in a long chair by her side. "I know you hate moving, Robert," she murmured. "I'll be back presently and finish that talk about those interesting experiences in politics. I simply must be civil to Captain Marks."

"Of course," Falconer returned. "But what the deuce you see interesting in old maps and figures I can't understand!"

Margaret allowed this to go unanswered and joined Marks.

She examined the chart carefully, and then glanced up at her companion.

"I see you are going a long ways around, captain."

"I am," Marks replied. He indicated a large space in the chart with a heavy thumb. "That's dangerous water in there. No place for the *Summer Girl*, ma'am. Specially in this season of the year."

Margaret continued to study the chart pinned on the table and presently remarked, "Have you ever been at Makepeace, captain?"

"Never," he answered gloomily. "The fact is, if I'd known the owners meant to send this yacht down there, they'd ha' sent her without me. She's not up to it, begging your pardon, ma'am."

She turned clear eyes on the elderly seaman and exchanged a look that would have given her parents cause for astonishment.

"You can rely on my saying nothing," she remarked. "Now tell me just why you go about acting like a skeleton who's lost his closet."

"The fact is, ma'am, the *Summer Girl* is all right for coasting and easy cruises. But she's built on the cheap."

Margaret nodded. "And manned on the cheap, too, captain?"

Marks flushed. "I guess you understand, ma'am. Gow & Co. picked her up at a sale

of some would-be rich chap who wanted a yacht and wouldn't go the expense of having a real one. They've chartered her cheap, too. But I've got to bring her home or I and the other officers are out."

"A question," Margaret said curtly. "How much percentage do you and the steward make out of the meals you serve—or pretend to serve?"

Marks threw up his hands. "What do you expect, ma'am? We have to live!"

The girl smiled coldly and brilliantly. She drew out a netted purse and extracted a roll of large bills.

"Do me the favor," she said distinctly, "to take your percentage out of this and give our guests something to eat and drink and smoke."

"Your father has settled all the business," Marks returned desperately.

"He has, or thinks he has," was the reply in an inexorable tone. "You will say nothing to him, of course. But I know you and that steward have decent cigars on board and decent wine and respectable food. Let's see it on the saloon table, please."

Without demur Marks pocketed the bills. He lost none of his moroseness.

"I saw from the first you didn't like shoddy," he said. "I took the liberty to hint as much to you. I don't like shoddy. I expect your father did his best according to his judgment. But the *Summer Girl* is dear at any price for such a cruise."

Margaret's eyes shone dangerously on the skipper's. She laid her slender, strong white hand on his gold-laced arm.

"Are you a shoddy captain?"

Marks straightened briskly. "Not I!" he said in a changed voice. He waved a hand toward the loom of Oahu astern. "I've handled packets like the *Sesostris*, ma'am. And everybody knows it takes a seaman born and bred to satisfy Tom Hardy." Marks gave her a frank glance. "There's a man who knows the best and has it," he added.

"I hear he is bankrupt," Margaret answered icily.

Marks' humor turned sour again. "I'd gladly sail with him again, bankrupt or not," he growled, and retired. The girl looked after him with an odd expression of doubt.

That night dinner proved a success and Simon and Edith enjoyed the quiet plaudits of their guests in entire unconsciousness that their demure daughter had had a heart-to-heart interview with the obsequious steward

after her talk with Marks. What they did observe was that Marge had suddenly repented of her neglect of Wallie Reynolds and was assiduously making up to that rather languid youth for the hours he had had to spend with Miss Charlton and his sister.

Simon viewed this with some alarm. Edith reassured him. "It's one of the signs," she told him in the privacy of their own cramped cabin. "No self-respecting girl is going to allow any man to think too soon that she is his slave. Robert has permitted himself to assume too much."

With such womanly wisdom, and much marginal comment, Simon was content. He was satisfied to remark on the excellence of the cigars just opened.

Having completely turned Wallie Reynolds' head by an unexpected and ravishing flirtation for two days, Margaret proceeded to reenslave Jim Charlton, a dark and rather saturnine young man with a propensity to talking of what he called "big business" in small hours. She listened to him gravely and replied sweetly. He did not know that all the while she was actually bending all her attention on other matters which were apparently insignificant compared with the subjects under discussion.

Robert Falconer, whose wits were sharper and now at their keenest under stress of a rising passion for this altogether altered girl, saw Margaret's abstraction and took a secret gratification out of it. Edith had whispered a nothing in his ear and he understood that the mother was assuring him that the daughter was merely playing the game as it is played the world over. But Reynolds perceived the truth. In his way he was imaginative and this time he boldly tasked Margaret with treason to her guests.

"You ought to be enjoying yourself," he told her. "And you're watching every move Marks makes and listening to every sound below and scanning the sea. You've got something on your mind, Margaret."

"To tell the truth, this is the season when storms infest this region," she answered. "I've been talking to Captain Marks and he thinks the yacht would have difficulty making a port if it came on to storm hard."

"That brings up a question that I've wanted an answer to," Wallie said. "When we started on this cruise—and a bully time we are having!—I never heard a word about Makepeace Island. Now, why Makepeace?"

I understand it is clear out of the way of everything, a kind of desert isle down in the hot tropics."

"I thought it would be nice," she murmured.

Reynolds thought this over. He made nothing of it and said so. Thus he passed out of Margaret's life, like a shadow that had never materialized into actuality.

Because he had missed the whole point, Wallie publicly repeated his question before the rest of the party. Simon himself was put on the defensive. It seemed so futile to assert again and again that it was a whim of Marge's. That answered nothing, merely raised a further question which reflected sharply on the girl's good sense. But when Edith suggested to Margaret that they had best abandon the proposed trip to Makepeace, the girl was obdurate.

"Captain Marks says it is the most dangerous place to venture to and that even the trading vessels never go near it if they can help it," Edith said, in desperation. "Dear girl, name some other place! Your father will see that the *Summer Girl* calls there."

But Margaret was stubborn. She refused to consider any other stop but Makepeace and laughed at her parents' fears.

Yet as the next two days passed under a hazy, hot sky, she missed no sound of all that rose on the yacht. And at sundown of the day before the *Summer Girl* was due to raise Makepeace she went to the bridge and accosted Marks without preface.

"There is a storm coming," she said briefly.

The captain turned his smoldering eyes on his visitor. "There is—if it's any satisfaction to you, ma'am."

"Will we make the island in time?" she pursued.

Marks laughed harshly. "That island has no harbor worthy the name, ma'am. It's only a flat islet set among cruel reefs and in betwixt tides and currents that would drive a man dizzy. And this old yacht is not fit to buck a northwester on the California coast!"

Margaret considered this, her smooth brow unperplexed. "What kind of a crew have you, captain?"

He chuckled. "That's the first time that question has been asked," he told her. "And I answer that I don't know. How should I? I never sailed with any of 'em before."

She laid a hand on his sleeve. "Why did you take this chance?" she murmured. "An unseaworthy vessel, an untrustworthy crew—and nobody aboard to help?"

Marks glowered at the stars glowing like coals in the horizon haze and shook his head.

"I suppose I could hardly tell," he muttered. "I guess when it comes to the fact I shook hands with old Pap Destiny and said, 'Shoot 'em again.' Such is life, ma'am."

"Have you often—shot 'em with old Pap Destiny?" she asked humorously.

"I've had a day's sport that way pretty often, ma'am," he replied seriously. "Somehow I can't always be sensible. After all——" he allowed his sentence to die in the stillness.

Presently the girl musing beside him repeated melodiously, "After all——"

"You never can tell what you'll meet up with out here," Marks responded gravely. "A girl—a ship—a pearl—a man to cotton to—a partner—a man to fight with—something to think of by yourself, and dream of. Now, on shore there's always a way to do things. People are free with advice. There's money that counts—pretty women in fine gowns—banks on the corner—policemen on the pavements. You can't go wrong if you want to! So I looked over the *Summer Girl* and took the job. If we get her back it'll be pure luck."

Marks leaped into activity as the yacht dipped her bows deeply into a huge surge that rose unberalded out of the sea, and bellowed for his crew. Margaret stayed a moment on the bridge and watched the hands struggle up to lash the boats and take down the awnings. Then she made her way slowly aft and to the saloon where Simon and Edith were listening to Robert Falconer on his favorite subject—conservatism in business. She stood like a gently poised, shy shadow while he finished his awkward sentence:

"Of course, Tom Hardy is one of my good friends, and I've tried to do my best for him; but one must think of oneself."

The steward stumbled through with a tray and Edith frowned faintly as he lurched to the tilt of the yacht's deck. A glass clinked down and was shattered.

"It strikes me we are going to have a wild night of it," Charlton put in.

"Yes, sir," gasped the poor steward, exe-

cuting another one-step with another glass in bits.

The great polished door slid back and Captain Marks appeared before his employer. Simon gaped at him fishily.

"I shall ask you all to stop below," Marks said in a cold, composed voice. "I can allow no one on deck to-night."

"But——" Mrs. Esterley began.

"I shan't allow it," the captain repeated sternly.

"Is it going to blow?" Falconer demanded. Marks glanced at him and then lowered his eyes. "I'm afraid so," he murmured. "Necessary precautions, sir."

"I think in that case we might as well excuse Captain Marks from calling at Makepeace Island, mightn't we?" Falconer went on.

"Of course!" Simon agreed hastily, delighted at the opportunity of settling so disagreeable a matter with such authority.

"Of course not!" Margaret said firmly. "We'll make the island to-morrow, shan't we, Captain Marks?"

The skipper turned and nodded respectfully. "By noon to-morrow, ma'am."

They heard him turn the key in the door when he had gone out. Charlton tried the lock. It was immovable. The yacht heeled far over and hung there a moment while glassware cascaded in remote pantries.

Falconer rose hastily. "I say!" he cried. "This won't do!"

Margaret laughed. "I'm off to bed," she announced, and vanished, leaving the rest of the party to discuss in a sickly way the high-handed actions of the sailing master. At last Simon agreed that he would speak to Captain Marks in the morning. By this time there was a shrill note in the gale that swept over the careering *Summer Girl* and every now and again a great thunder of falling water shook the laboring hull.

The party went to bed with the feeling that their hostess' daughter had played a trick in poor taste on them.

At four in the morning Captain Marks peered at the figure that had suddenly appeared by his side on the drenched bridge. The yacht was hove to, making nasty weather of it, and Marks was debating whether to run for it or hang on as he was on a chance that the gale would break. All the ill humor in his breast sounded in his voice:

"You! How the devil did you get out?"

I locked that damned door! locked it to keep you fools down below where you belong."

"I didn't come out that damned door," Margaret replied calmly. "I went down to the galley, through the engine room and up the crew's steps."

Marks glared at her. "By gad, haven't you sense enough to know that a passenger can only come on deck by the main saloon door, ma'am? Have you no sense of dignity at all?"

Margaret laughed. "Don't be so cross," she said cheerfully. "When are we going to sink?"

Marks put one powerful arm around her and held her close while a crested sea roared to their waists. Then he released her and grinned down at her. By the light of the moon showing through the scudding clouds she saw he was secretly pleased. But he spoke gravely.

"I figure on riding this gale out all right," he told her. "The trouble is, these regions grow hurricanes that sometimes follow a gale. The yacht is making heavy weather of it, as you see."

"How far is Makepeace Island?" she demanded.

"That's a question I wish you'd answer," Marks returned. "It's to leeward of us this minute."

"We're being blown down toward it?"

"If we don't crack on one of the reefs first," Marks replied.

"And there's no harbor on Makepeace?" she insisted.

"I never was there," he answered. "But the charts and the 'Directory' don't show one. However——"

Margaret smiled up at him fearlessly. "So we'll just shoot 'em again with old Pap Destiny?"

"You and me, ma'am." He patted her hand on the rail.

Dawn found the *Summer Girl* in the midst of an angry and tumultuous sea that afforded no glimpse of anything but leaping crests, huge hollows where the scud drifted like snow and a sky dark with ominous cloud banks. At breakfast Simon sat alone at table, a little pallid, but grimly determined to stick the affair out. To him Captain Marks put the question bluntly: remain here to on a chance that the yacht would finally fall off and founder, or make a race for it while there was still time.

Simon balked sullenly. He asserted he

knew nothing of the situation and reminded Marks that the charter provided for all contingencies. During this, Margaret entered, flushed and bright-eyed. She listened a moment and then nodded to the sailing master.

"Better run for it," she said briefly.

"What do you know about it?" her father cried.

She laughed and swung into a seat and called for tea. Marks met her glance and responded with a decisive wave of his hand. He vanished silently. A moment later the *Summer Girl* was released from the torturing strain of helm and propeller, swung valiantly round and began her rush for life.

"You are mixing up in matters you know nothing about," Simon told her.

"If that is so, I'm doing no more than everybody else around me," she replied coolly.

"I hope Makepeace Island satisfies you when you reach it," he added; with this he gave up the task of making his daughter comprehend and retired to his bunk. Margaret finished an ample breakfast, rebuked the steward for his slovenliness and presently retraced her devious and undignified way to the bridge. Marks received her grimly and pointed to a mere blob of shadow on the sea line dead ahead.

"That's Makepeace Island, ma'am."

Margaret nodded. An hour later the *Summer Girl* drove past the westerly promontory of the islet and wallowed in the low lee. Marks jockeyed his command a while, trying to induce her to creep farther up into the scant shelter afforded by the low coast. At last he turned to Margaret.

"Old Pap Destiny is going to clear the table," he remarked. "Look over your shoulder, ma'am!"

She turned and stared out over the yacht and astern. Not a mile away another blob of shadow was veiled in dashing spume and hurtling seas.

"That's the reef," Marks told her. "We're between island and reef with no holding for the anchors. The machines can't work her up and keep her in a position. So we'll shoot old Pap Destiny another round, ma'am."

Margaret comprehended instantly. Ahead lay the low, almost treeless island, elevated a few feet above the sea, displaying a short, steep beach almost bare to the lowest shale.

"The gale is driving the sea down from the leeward beach," Marks explained. "Out here we get the full force of the wind, but

not of the sea. I can do only one thing: run the yacht right up on that beach. We can get most of the stores ashore and stick it out there."

"Then when the wind goes down we can haul the *Summer Girl* into the water again and proceed," Margaret murmured.

"I wouldn't count too much on that, ma'am. The fact is, these storms usually blow from one quarter a day or so and then whip around into the opposite one. In case this follows the precedent, the yacht will be smashed to atoms as she lies. You understand?"

Margaret nodded.

Presently the party were gathered in the saloon and informed that the yacht would shortly be run ashore and that speed would be needful in gaining dry land and securing the needful stores.

Simon roused himself to violent protest. He referred to the indubitable fact that the motion of the yacht was much easier.

"You are steaming in practically smooth water, captain!"

"And losing ground, sir," Marks responded. "In such a case I must use my own best judgment."

"You have shown poor judgment so far."

"I have had a poor vessel to show any judgment on at all, sir," the captain replied. "The *Summer Girl* was cheaply built and cheaply fitted out. Cheap yachts have no business in these waters. You tried to save money and still make a showing. The *Summer Girl* wasn't up to the demands."

Simon recalled a paragraph in the charter anent damage incurred while making harbors and islands where no pilot was obtainable and groaned.

"I paid enough," he muttered.

Falconer came to his host's aid. "I see no reason why Marks should be in such a hurry to wreck his vessel," he said. "If I were he, I should think of what explanation I should have to give to the authorities. This yacht was chartered under an assurance that it was capably and skillfully manned."

Marks flushed angrily. Margaret spoke up quietly and decisively:

"We'll all be ready in fifteen minutes, captain."

Marks smiled his relief. To the engineer two minutes later he confided his ignorance of the young woman's source of confidence. "I try to show her we'll likely all lose our

precious lives and she says, 'Shoot 'em again with old Pap Destiny!'"

The experienced mechanic extracted a word of wisdom from a capacious memory:

"Unlucky at sea, lucky in love."

"She's in love with nobody on this packet," Marks said firmly.

"There's certainly nobody on Makepeace Island," the chief responded. "And I expect we'll be pretty well acquainted with Makepeace before anybody comes along to take us off."

"You're correct in every particular, chief," was the answer. "Now you get this clearly into your head—" They discussed their plan for beaching the yacht.

The actual operation was, as Margaret said, ridiculously easy. The *Summer Girl* simply steamed up to within fifty yards of the beach, touched, ground along ten yards farther, and came to full stop, listing gently to starboard. Within an hour her passengers were ashore, huddled in the slender lee of the low crest, and the crew was engaged in breaking out and taking to safety all available stores.

Mr. and Mrs. Esterley watched the proceedings with unseeing eyes. Somehow matters had all gone wrong. As hosts, they were responsible to the unhappy guests who crouched out of reach of the howling wind and stared miserably at the toiling seamen and the wreck of the *Summer Girl*. As parents, they realized that whatever happened, Margaret's future was hopeless. Robert Falconer had openly stated that he thought the whole affair ridiculous and Marge's part in it "unmaidenly." Wallie Reynolds had tried to be civil and succeeded in being so disagreeable that Margaret snubbed him mercilessly. Miss Charlton lamented her fate on Jim's shoulder and Miss Reynolds alone of all the guests showed a sporting spirit.

"My dear," she told Margaret, "I always wanted to be able to despise a man. My heart's desire is satisfied. After all, you and I have known but one man—"

Margaret blushed for the first time.

"I know!" Miss Reynolds went on cheerfully. "We'll never see him again, poor chap! But he was a good sport while he had the means."

The other girl suddenly grew grave. "Anybody has the means to be a good sport," she said quietly.

"They were always warning me against

him," Miss Reynolds went on vaguely and regretfully, ignoring Margaret's expression. "And still—well, he's broke now and it's probably just as well!"

"So far as I see we are pretty much on an even footing," Margaret murmured. "Makepeace Island isn't inhabited and has nothing to sell."

The next day the gale continued bitterly. Their refuge proved poor indeed. The spray of the seas thundering on the windward coast began to blow over the shipwrecked party and Marks predicted dire things.

The third day, as he prophesied, the wind died, the seas rose to incredible heights during the lull, and then a strong and terrifying tide began to rise about the *Summer Girl*.

Marks explained to Margaret. "The water driven back by the wind is released, and the gale is going to blow from the opposite quarter, too, which will pile the seas up here mountain high. Ma'am, I fear me Makepeace Island will prove a poor refuge."

That night the crew joined their superiors in the shelter of a clump of palms which writhed and twisted and tore at their hard-biting roots while the hurricane shrilled across the islet. All trace of the yacht was long gone amid whirling crests and Captain Marks cursed freely while he toiled to restore his party to reasonable activity.

"You've got to dig pits in the ground for shelter," he urged. "Else we'll all be blown off and into the sea."

At last the instinct for self-protection drove the men of the party to follow the crew's example. Simon prepared a place for Edith and himself, while the other men labored viciously likewise. Margaret found herself uncared for in the wild turmoil and laughed when Marks offered his own little cave.

"Do you think anybody could possibly reach Makepeace in this weather?" she asked.

Marks stared in astonishment, then drew her aside. "I don't go so far as to say it's utterly impossible," he said earnestly. "The only practicable approach is dead down the wind, and in this hurricane I doubt whether any but the very powerfulest vessel could make even steerageway. For Heaven's sake, ma'am, what's on your mind?"

"And you think that this island may be swept by the sea before long?" she insisted.

"Any one acquainted with these waters knows it's a possibility to be reckoned with,"

he answered gravely, searching her eyes with his.

"Then," she said simply, "sit tight and shoot 'em again with old Pap Destiny."

Marks surveyed their poor refuge grimly. "Your shot, ma'am."

"Tie me some way to a tree so I can sit and watch the sea," she said simply.

Marks did so, spite of the remonstrances of Simon and Robert, both of whom seemed to think themselves personally aggrieved because Margaret acted without consulting them. But the force of the gale soon silenced them and Simon contented himself with taking one end of the lashing and fastening it to his own arm.

"If Margaret slips or is blown away I'll go with her," he told Edith.

At dawn, opening blistered eyes, Simon saw no sign of his daughter. He pulled on the lashing and a free end came into his hands, frayed and unstranded. He raised up in anguish and peered into the driving spray. The tree where she had been fastened was only a stump, thrusting a feathered clump of splinters up from the swirling sand.

Simon carefully crawled out on hands and knees and began to make his way up the slope, spite of the grit that hailed on his face and the spindrift that burned his raw and bleeding cheeks. But halfway to that crest which was his goal he paused and cleared his eyes. Through the spume and drift he saw a dark and almost shapeless smudge just off the shore. He peered long and earnestly. Then he rose, was caught and upset by the wind, rolled a few feet, got to hands and knees, and hurried to Edith.

"Edie!" he sobbed. "A ship—steamer—right close."

Edith looked up with weary eyes. "Who?" she murmured.

Another voice answered Margaret's. She smiled cheerfully on them.

"It's the *Sesostris*," she cried. "Tom Hardy!"

At noon Captain Marks glanced back from the lofty bridge of the *Sesostris* at the almost invisible island, now overrun by arching seas clear to its crest. He turned to the young man beside him.

"I didn't have a hope you could make it!"

Hardy watched his vessel swing slowly as she yielded to the terrific force of the wind, gave a low-voiced order, and then turned to his companion.

"I had an appointment," he said simply.

"I suspected as much," Marks replied soberly. "Your young lady——"

Margaret appeared, tattered as to frock, torn skirts whipping about her slender limbs, heavy hair creaming like surf over her head. She nodded to Marks and joined Hardy. With the simplicity of a child she raised her lips to his.

"I intended to put a cross in the letter I left for you in Honolulu," she whispered. "I was in *such* a hurry!"

"You were only fifteen the last time," Hardy responded. "Four long years! Until I got your note telling me to meet you at Makepeace I was in despair. Now, why in the name of tunket, Makepeace, darlingest?"

"I just picked out the name—and it was deserted—and the rest were such a bore!" she answered. She tucked a little hand under his great arm and gave gracefully as the *Sesostris* heeled far over. Marks studied the seas boiling to the rail in an abstracted manner.

Presently Simon and Edith appeared, escorted by two stewards and followed by Robert Falconer. Simon was evidently bewildered and puzzled, but conscious of a duty to perform.

"We ought to thank you right away, Hardy," he began. The human motives took charge and curiosity spoke: "How did you ever know where to find us?"

"I didn't," Hardy replied briefly. "That is, I wasn't specially interested in anybody but Margaret. I came for her."

Simon digested this and glanced at Edith. She was looking at her demure, blushing daughter whose hand still clung in the crook of Hardy's arm. The situation was too much for Mr. Esterley.

"I never supposed——" he stammered.

Falconer lounged forward insolently, his bright eyes fixed on his old friend.

"I say, Tom, you've been taking a pretty heavy risk with other people's money, haven't you? You might have lost the *Sesostris*."

Hardy grinned.

"But Esterley and I will see that you don't lose your present outlay," Robert went on magnificently. "We can do nothing less."

"Lose? Who? Me?" Hardy demanded

indignantly. "You damned fool, I've nothing to lose! I've got it!"

Margaret pressed his arm silently.

Simon recovered himself partially. "Madness!" he said briskly. "Hardy, I appreciate all your kindness, of course—repay you, too. But you're in no position to support my daughter and you should be man enough not to take advantage of a girl's childish impulse of gratitude."

Hardy smiled down on Margaret. "As a matter of fact, she invited me to call," he murmured.

"But you haven't a cent in the world!" Falconer snapped. "I loaned you the full value of the *Sesostris*—the last penny you could give security for."

"Oh, I say now!" Simon said, shocked.

Margaret drew apart and confronted her lover with serious eyes.

"It is true that you spent every cent you could raise to bring the *Sesostris* and get me on Makepeace Island?"

"It is," Hardy answered composedly.

"And you went to Robert when you needed the money, and he will own the *Sesostris*?"

"It looks that way, darlingest."

"And when we get home we'll be utterly and entirely and smashingly broke, Tom?"

"I'm afraid so, dearest of my heart."

Margaret drew closer again and cuddled her wet cheek against his shoulder.

"All right, Tom! We'll just shoot 'em again with old Pap Destiny!"

It took Simon and Edith Esterley a long time to understand the moral of this story, which is: you can't depend on Cupid when it's a matter of a day's good sport. The little god hates pot hunting. And even after Tom Hardy had made a fortune afresh and bought the *Sesostris* from his creditors and renamed her the *Margaret Hardy*, Simon used to glance at Edith and say plaintively, "You know these youngsters trust too much to luck; they don't seem to understand that a day of reckoning always comes."

And when she heard this Margaret Hardy looked up and smiled over the head of her small, tumbled son and murmured, "Get on your feet, son o' mine, and shoot 'em again with old Pap Destiny!"

Which may be another moral.



"It Is Paris!"

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Monster," "Picaroons," Etc.

Here is the story of a soldier of France's Foreign Legion
—one of the finest things we ever have published

SOME time ago I met one of those men who have been everywhere and done everything. We talked from ten at night till two the next morning, and he told me a lot of interesting things; of the mirage of the city of Bristol which occurs periodically above a mountain somewhere in North America, and the mirage of some Eastern city that shimmers into life every now and then at a certain spot on the sands of the Frisian coast. Mirage called up the Sahara, and the Sahara made him think of the Foreign Legion.

"I don't know how the Legion works now," said he. "I'm talking of it as it was before the war. It had its good points and it had its bad points. Nothing could have been better for a chap who had committed murder, for instance. If he could once get into the Legion he was safe, forgery the same—it was a sure bolt hole for the criminal, but for the ordinary down-and-outer, it seemed a trap.

"A halfpenny a day and his grub and uniform, on a five years' contract, fifty kilograms weight of rifle and equipment, everlasting drill and marching under a blazing sun, that's all he got in exchange for his liberty.

"I joined at Havre. I was down and out in a manner of speaking, though I had over five hundred francs in my pocket. I wanted a change, anyway, from the ordinary humdrum of life, and I had heard all sorts of stories about the jolly life in the Legion.

"They gave me a franc and a loaf of bread and a ticket for Marseilles where I had to wait to join the first batch of recruits. Fort St. Jean was the assembly place and a mixed lot we were. There was a Spaniard and a Russian, a negro and an Englishman, to say nothing of the German contingent, seven Germans there were and a Swiss. Only three Frenchmen.

"There aren't many French in the Legion, not more than five per cent, I should think. I chummed up with one of these Frenchmen right off. He was quite a young chap, not more than twenty-five; Latour was his name, and he looked somehow as if he never had had enough to eat. A sort of overgrown gamin with a bad face but a good heart. Paris alone could have produced him.

"We reached Oran where we stayed a few days, and the next place we found ourselves in was the big barracks of the Legion at Sidi-bel-Abbès.

"Lord! what a penitentiary that was! Bare, spick and span, clean as a hospital, and with not one thing to rest your eyes on that was not of use, the beds arranged in dormitories with every man's name and number on a card above his bed, just as in a hospital—and what a day for a man to live through over and over again for five long, weary years.

"Up at daybreak, drill, soupe, drill, or corvée, clothes washing, a stroll into the town, bed—

"All the same, the time passed quickly and the strange thing was that for the first month or so I didn't kick against the monotony or hard work, everything was so new, the skies were so bright, and the situation so strange that there was no time or space for grumbling. Then one felt oneself growing—growing into a légionnaire, that is to say, a chap that can march forty kilometers a day with fifty kilograms of equipment, shoot a hole in an Arab at a thousand yards, cook his own food, mend his own clothes, light his own camp fire, and dig his own grave if need be.

"After two months, however, the fasciata of the Legion began to pall.

"Latour, who was in the same company with me, was different. The thing had palled on him from the first and every night as

we took our walk through the town or sat and smoked on the old wall he'd tell me of how he was going to escape next day and how he was going to do it.

"A hundred volumes wouldn't give you a picture of the Legion better than the fact that this sewer rat of a Latour and myself became friends and equals. There was nothing in the least extraordinary to me in strolling round the band stand in the Place Sadi-Carnot of an evening with Latour as a companion; we were both légionnaires and damned. People did not look at us. People never look at légionnaires twice; we were objects that struck the retinas of the better-class townsmen and fashionable visitors to Sidi, but nothing more.

"Sometimes we would go for strolls through the native streets and buy coffee and cigarettes and sit in little holes of cafés drinking filthy dope without any pinch in it, but colored up to tickle the eye. A légionnaire will drink anything from Samsbur to Valley Tan; he gets the best wine in the world dirt cheap, but he will go poking after native drinks, Parfait Amour such as they sell in Doyens Café off Maskara Street or the drugged lemonade they give you at the Café Tlemcen.

"Sometimes on these walks Latour would speak of Paris, always cursing it. Paris had been a hard mother to him, hatched him, and then flung him out of the nest into the Legion, that was how he put it.

"One evening, sitting on the outer wall with the desert in front of us, he began to talk about himself.

"I was born in Montmartre," said he, 'somewhere or another—I forget the name of the street if I ever knew it. I remember a woman who said she was my mother, and she used to whack me when she was drunk. I'd be in the streets all day playing and running about and stealing things, selling newspapers, too. I was pretty busy and the old woman would always grab the coin I made at night. Always went home at night. Funny, wasn't it? for I'd have been a lot better off and more comfortable sleeping in a barrel or in some hole or corner, but I always went home and got robbed of what I hadn't spent, with a whacking to warm me if the money wasn't enough or the booze had hold of her.

"I used to get robbed by the fences, too.

"I remember only getting five francs for a purse made of gold chains—chap said it

was brass, but I'd nailed it out of a carriage with a crown on the panel, and I knew it was gold—but he swore it was brass and only gave me five francs—that's Paris all over.

"Then, one day, the old woman died, and I had no one to whack me, only Paris. Make a living honest? Paris jolly well takes care no man does that; not one of them, from the chaps that roll up to the Bourse in their carriages to the chaps like me in the mud and the rain ready to run a message for a *cocotte* or pick her pocket.

"I'd hang round the opera at nights when the big, white shirt fronts would come out smoking cigars and their women with them, all off to supper; there were good pickings to be had sometimes then, but what's the good of pickings when you come to cash them with the fences? Then there's the risk. Montmartre was the better place, for up there you'd get guys drunk or doped. You could get the coin off straight. Coin's the only thing worth taking, you don't want a fence to change it.

"But even up there the chaps you work with rob you in turn—that's Paris. It beats the Legion.

"There's one thing about the Legion, you're sure of your grub. I'm not a big eater, neither. I've never learned to be. I've never had enough to eat since I was born, not regular. Paris took care of that—course her."

"That's all very well," said I, 'but you are always talking of running away from the Legion. Well, if you did and if you got away from Algeria, you'd go back to Paris—sure.'

"Me!" said Latour, 'not likely. What makes you say that?'

"I told him he was a Parisian and every Parisian goes back to Paris, just as every Londoner goes back to London, even though he curses it. I was just talking idly and half in joke, but he seemed to take me seriously, and broke out swearing in a way that would have made any old légionnaire envious.

"After that evening he talked less about running away from the Legion. I reckon our talk had helped him to visualize more fully the hell he had left behind him, for Paris is hell to a chap like him or to the poor, however honest they may be. I expect the streets and the rain and the cold of winter and the blistering heat of summer and the cops rose up against him. If he'd left the Legion, anyhow, what would he have done, leaving Paris

aside? There's no room in the world for a chap like Latour, that's the fact. Though he'd lived, as you may say, the life of a thief and a waster, he had the makings of a good citizen in him, but the world cares nothing for that, it cares nothing for hearts; if the hands aren't clean—nix good.

"Well, as I was saying, he dropped off the running-away business and began to take an interest in his life; the recollections of Paris our talk had scored up in his mind, had maybe done the business, and the pictures of the rain and the streets had helped to abolish the ugliness of the barrack yard. He took an interest in his work, and then he fell on the discovery that he was a good shot. Almost his first turn at the rifle butts told him that, and the instructor wasn't behindhand in telling him, too, for they prize shooting in the Legion more than the world prizes virtue. It was his first bit of good work and his first bit of praise, and it made a new man of him. It put a new polish on his accouterments and made him hold himself straighter.

"Fancy, all his miserable life he had carried that talent about with him knowing no more of it than he knew of his pineal gland.

"Then again he was a good marcher. The first forty kilometers route march showed that. Now, marching in the Legion is placed even above shooting. The Legion must be able to hurl itself two hundred kilometers in five days, and arrive fit for fighting; there are no railroads south, and trouble always blows up to the south—the posts get attacked and there would be no holding the country if the Arabs did not know that the Legion was swift to pounce.

"So between his marching capabilities and his shooting, Latour wasn't long in getting his lift to corporal. They said there had never been such quick promotion in the Legion, and some of the old légionnaires were inclined to grouse, but there was no real bad blood; the chap was liked.

"He was liked for the way he'd taken his rise and for the fact that he'd earned it and for something in himself that was likable, the something that had drawn me to him first, despite his appearance.

"Then as time went on I noticed something else, his pinched gamin face was altering. It seemed to have got broader and the chin more decided, but it was the eyes that showed the alteration most. They had always wanted decision, they had seemed the

eyes of a perplexed creature, not exactly shifty, but uncertain—that's the word, better than perplexed—and now they looked out of his head steady and straight.

"I'd come into that circus a long sight better man than Latour, but before a year was out he was the better man. He fitted there; I didn't.

"If soldiering was all fighting, I reckon I'd make as good a soldier as any one else, but route marching and Swedish drill and cleaning accouterments and rifle practice aren't in my line. However, I stuck it out mainly because of my friendship for him and partly because I couldn't find a fairly sure way of escaping. Then a girl came along. Girls in Sidi never look at légionnaires, not even the uniform attracts them. It's the five centimes a day that heads them off, maybe, but there was a girl in a little bar close to the Tlemcen Gate that looked at Latour. She may have been thirty, she wasn't a beauty, either, but she was a girl, anyhow. More than that, the bar belonged to her.

"Mimi was her name.

"We would go up there of an evening and sit and smoke, neither of us cared much for drinking, and we'd just sit and smoke over a cup of coffee and talk to Mimi while she served her other customers.

"Then it came out that she had promised to marry Latour when he got his discharge and start a café with him in Oran. He had three years and nine months still to run—but he got his discharge before that.

II.

"One day I was coming back to the barracks. I had been sent into the town on a message and had nearly got back to the barrack gate when I heard the bugle. It was sounding 'Aux armes!'

"When I got through the gates it was like a lunatic asylum gone drunk. Légionnaires running this way and that, chaps yelling from the windows and, over all, the bugles braying away 'Aux armes!'

"News had come of a big Arab rising down south and the order had come for the Legion to mobilize and get out; that was all, yet to look at those chaps you'd have fancied Rockefeller had cabled every mother's son of them a draft for a million and Mary Pickford an offer of marriage.

"It takes the Legion fifteen minutes to mobilize and another five minutes to clear the barrack gates.

"In twenty minutes from the start it was on the move, four thousand five hundred men, marching four deep, headed by the band; provisions, ammunition carts, everything complete.

"Then we cleared the Tlemcen Gate and struck the great military road south.

III.

"Oh, Lord! that road, with its kilometer posts and the blazing sky overhead.

"That's all you know of the scenery when you're marching with the Legion.

"One kilometer, two kilometers, three kilometers, four kilometers, five kilometers, up to ten kilometers. Halt, five minutes rest, on again at the rate of four kilometers an hour, with a fifty-kilogram equipment.

"The sun blazes, it doesn't matter, you swear, your back is breaking, your feet are sore, the whole world spins round you—it doesn't matter, the march goes on. If you fall out they tie you to an ammunition cart, and if you fall down they drag you along the ground. You are part of a great centipede crawling across the desert, part of a movement that never stops, for you march in your dreams by night as well as on the road by day.

"A real big three-hundred-mile march of the Legion on active service alters a man's life like a surgical operation. You recover from it, but it's there. An old légionnaire recovers from many of them, but they are there, making him an old légionnaire, that's to say something that isn't exactly a man and isn't exactly a devil. Some people seem to think that the Algerian desert is sand, but it isn't, it's rock and desolation with an occasional well and an occasional tree. You get sand, but not much till you get south.

"Nothing changes much along the great military road, but the sky. The farther you go the more like blazing brass it gets.

"We had mules for the ammunition carts and one of them died and we left his body by the way, and we hadn't more than left it when the sky began dropping birds on it. They fell like black stones from nowhere, and the quarreling of them followed us on the wind for a mile and more.

"Then we struck a Post. A couple of stone houses with a protecting wall, a palm tree and a well. It had been rushed by the Arabs only a few days before, and there were bits of dead men lying about, men of the Penal Battalion cut up by the Arabs.

"We halted to bury them.

"There was sand here, lots of it, sand and rock baking in the sun, not a tree, only the palm, nothing to break the sky line or tell us that every tribe was up and out and that, somewhere round, maybe twenty thousand men were waiting for us. But the officers knew. The scouts were always going and coming and the news passed through the ranks that a big battle was only waiting for us.

"The columns halted a couple of hours, then they went on, leaving ten men under Latour to keep the Post, cut off stragglers and report should any enemy show up from the north. I was one of the ten men. How they expected us to report, I don't know, for we had no horses and when the Legion had passed away beyond the sky line to the south, I said so—but there it was.

"Latour did not bother. 'It is none of our affair,' said he. 'We have just to obey orders. Shoot any stragglers coming from the south or take them prisoners, that's easy enough. If any niggers show up to the north and they are in force I will send a runner south—those are the orders I received from our colonel; they are simple enough.'

"Then he set to, to make the place comfortable. There was some Esparto grass growing near. He set half a dozen of the chaps cutting it with their knives and bayonets to make bedding; the fool Arabs had cut the well rope out of spite. We could see the bucket floating on the water some ten feet down below, and there was six feet of rope lying on the ground. Latour set himself to think how to get that bucket up and he did it in an hour, twisting some rags we found into an extra length of rope and making a hook out of an old bit of iron.

"So he had obtained for us beds to lie on and water to drink. Then we made our soupe, coming along for sundown, and after that we sat smoking our cigarettes outside the wall with our greatcoats on, for the night was chilly. There was no moon, only the stars.

"I've never seen the stars brighter than down there in the south; you could have read a book by the light of them.

"Half a dozen of the chaps had turned in and were snoring; the rest of us, a couple of Germans, a Swiss, myself, and Latour just sat there smoking. We weren't tired. I don't know how the others felt, but, for my-

self, I wasn't easy. Perhaps it was the dead silence of the desert and the little whispering wind that came up now and then and crept round us, but I wasn't easy. The stars didn't help any, either, they kept flashing away, signaling one another, talking—yes, the stars talk down there, the sky's uproarious on a night like that—you can see the noise of it all, but you can hear nothing but the fizz of the sand now and again when the wind licks it.

"Then one of the Germans began talking of Frankfort, wishing he was there.

"Why did you leave it?" asks Latour, sharp.

"Hadn't enough to eat," says the German. "Got in trouble, then I went to Alsace, then France—now I'm here."

"And a damned good place for you," answered Latour. "Boots on your feet, food in your belly, and a cigarette in your mouth."

"Corporal," says the other German, "why are you here?"

"Because I'm not there," says Latour. I heard him grit his teeth, and I guessed that the question had called up his beastly life in Paris, all the cold and misery and dishonor and dirt he had known from childhood, all the misery of the underdog of civilization.

"The Legion had given him life and food and self-respect, shown him his qualities, made him a man and given him a woman who cared for him.

"He was silent for a moment, then he spoke.

"You and your Frankfort, stuff you full of sausage and beer and you'd still be grouching. Haven't you got any sense in your thick head to know when you're well off? What's the good of you, anyway, except to carry a gun?"

"It's a hard life all the same," grumbled the other German.

"Latour was about to go for that chap like he'd gone for the other when suddenly the night was ripped by the sound of musketry.

IV.

"It was a tremendous long way off, yet loud. I don't know what it is that gives one the measure and distance of a sound, but we knew that a great battle was going on under the stars down south, that the whole Legion was involved and four thousand rifles speaking.

"Now it was louder, now lower, seeming to

roll from west to east and east to west, then it died down and rose just as a fire dies down and flames up.

"Then it stopped dead for a minute or two and broke out again.

"Then it ceased.

"We stood listening to the sand sizzling in the wind, but we heard nothing more.

"The stars twinkled on as if nothing had happened and we turned in, having posted one of the Germans as sentry.

V.

"Next morning the desert lay round us just the same, the sun blazing on rock and sand under a cloudless sky.

"After the morning coffee and while the others were lounging about smoking and talking, Latour took me aside. We sat down in the shadow of the girdling wall. 'You can write,' said he. 'I saw you scribbling a letter yesterday with that pencil and paper you carry in your knapsack; I want you to write me a letter—as for me, I cannot write.'

"Who to?' I asked when I had fetched the paper.

"That girl, Mimi."

"But you will be returning with me to Sidi and reach her as soon as I can."

"Who knows?" said Latour. "I dreamed last night of the wine barrels of Bercy where I have slept many a night, and it's always a bad dream. I wish to tell Mimi the truth since I may see her no more."

"He was quite melancholy all of a sudden, so I told him to fire away and took down what he had to tell the girl.

"It wasn't much, only that he had been in prison, that he had been a thief and that she wasn't to bother about him if he did not come back. He made no excuses as he had done to me, never explained that the cause of his sins was really the filthy environment that had surrounded him from childhood, and the wretchedness of his life in Paris. It was a fine letter, a far lot finer than if he had tried to excuse himself, but I determined if anything happened to him and I got back alive, to tell Mimi what he had left unsaid, that the fault was the fault of Paris, not of Latour; the fault of the streets, the cold and misery and starvation of the cellars of civilization.

"I had scarcely finished the thing and put it in my pocket when a cry from the sentry brought us to our feet.

VI.

"Away south in the air all shaking with the heat, things were moving on the sky line.

"The Swiss, an old légionnaire who had been through half a dozen battles and mix-ups, shaded his eyes and stared across the sands. Then he said, 'Arabs!'

"Latour called out and the chaps fell in. Each man carried the full campaign supply of cartridges, that is to say four hundred. The wall was breast-high, and Latour posted us two feet apart, not standing, but sitting with our backs to the wall. There was a spy hole about three feet from the ground, and half kneeling, half sitting, he took his place at this. Then after a few moments he began to talk to us.

"They'll think the place deserted,' said he, 'so they won't surround us but come straight on. That's my idea. They are leftovers from the battle of last night, else they wouldn't be coming from the south. They are beaten already, so they won't give much trouble.'

"How do you know that the Legion is not beaten?" asked one of the Germans.

"The Legion is never beaten,' said Latour. 'Shut your head and be ready for the word. When I say "go" be on your feet; when I give the order to fire, keep cool and aim steady. Put your sights to five hundred meters.'

"A long time passed.

"Then came a faint murmur on the wind that was blowing up from the south, and I saw Latour's left hand twitching. We could hear the voices now sharp and loud, and the neigh of a horse.

"Go!" cried Latour.

"Then we were on our feet.

"A big clump of Arabs, a hundred at least, were coming toward us. I could see their faces and their long-stocked guns. There was a chap on horseback with an old green flag and there were women.

"They had scarcely sighted us when the rifles rung out like one.

"Have you ever seen a ball of glass burst by a pistol bullet? Well, that clump of Arabs went like that every way, leaving ten dead men on the ground. Only one stood firm. A tall chap—I can see him still as he stood aiming at us with his long gun. He fired just before the Swiss put a bullet

through his heart, but he had got Latour, got him through the shoulder.

VII.

"It's nothing,' said Latour. Then he coughed, turned, and walked a few paces along the wall. He stood looking at the last of the Arabs going like smoke east and west. Then he came outside the wall and lay down.

"When I reached him, he was trying to roll a cigarette, but he gave that up and the tobacco and paper fell on the ground and the wind blew the paper about.

"He pointed with his thumb to his chest. The bullet had struck down from the shoulder and got at the lung somehow, for when he coughed now and then he spat blood.

"I called the Swiss to bring him water, and he drank a little and then settled himself on his left side with his eyes fixed over the desert. He couldn't talk, and I fixed up a bit of shade for him. He was going to die, and I felt it bad. He was my best friend. Not only that, he had only just made good after all those years of rottenness, and it seemed bitter cruel for him to be cut off like that.

"The day wore on, but I kept by him as much as I could, notwithstanding the heat. He wouldn't be moved. He wanted to die there in the open, and I could do nothing but let him.

"Now came the thing I wanted to tell you about, and which came into my head when I was talking of that mirage on the Frisian coast.

"I was sitting beside him near three o'clock, when he suddenly moved and raised himself on his elbow. He was looking at something in the east and there, sure enough, the mirage was at work just as I had often seen it in the desert, but this time it was building a city, away far in the east, but you could see the houses, white, and I'd swear the flash of sunlight from windows, and, above the houses, heights with more houses on them.

"I turned to Latour. He'd forgotten Mimi, forgotten everything. His face was lit up as I'd never seen it before, laughing and lit up as if he saw the New Jerusalem.

"Then he spoke just before he fell back dead, only three words:

"It is Paris!"

The Yellow Planet

By Francis Perry Elliott

Author of "The Haunted Pajamas," "Pals First," Etc.

How would you like to be told that in order to overcome your ruling weakness you must face the electric chair? This was what Carteret was told—and his ruling weakness was fear. Mr. Elliott's tale is an intense study in the psychology of the subject. About his theme he has woven an unusually fascinating detective story. You won't lay it down until you have finished it. In Zaliel the author has created one of the most arresting figures of recent fiction.

CHAPTER I.

THE RETURN OF ZALIEL.

ZALIEL was back again! Zaliel, the astrologer, who predicted the Great War! Newsboys screamed it before the emptying theaters; people repeated it curiously as they went their way.

Zaliel back—the man of mystery from the Far East and who claimed strange wisdom from the stars. Zaliel, the picturesque figure that the newspapers loved; who was always good copy when other news failed and who was variously held to be charlatan, seer, scientist, Tibetan monk, philosopher, and crook.

This last the estimate of the police rank and file, who frankly viewed Zaliel askance, having more than one alleged proof of his touch with the underworld.

With the public, interest was piqued because of the curious building atop of which he lived and lectured—and held his court. Probably there wasn't just another like it in all New York—a great, crazy-winged rookery that oozed mystery in every pore; just the sort of place of which you'd have said at once that anything might happen there. A straggling, human ant hill that was at once a tenement, a studio nest, an office, and "parlor" colony, a theater, and a mart of trade.

Truly an all in all, a pulsing cellular hive, and hive-like, with one common entrance for all. This a wide central artery that midway branched into stairways that led upward to floor after floor of dim, ghostly corridors

that darted and doubled and climbed again like frightened things that had lost their way, till at length, high up, the last of these thoroughfares leaped a slender bridge against the sky.

A bridge between two wings, two segments of the crazy pile; an aerie height, spanning a gulf between walls. A gulf that at night was a mystic workshop for the moon's delight. For then it came slipping over chimneytops, dredged the blackened depths, spun clotheslines into silver cords, and made of the bridge itself a frosted fairy figment—a far-up cobweb thing.

A very real cobweb it looked this night with the motionless black figure blurred thereon. A somber figure, because of its enveloping black robe and the sinister touch contributed by hair that was white as snow. It might have been some hoary man-spider biding to trap its hapless prey.

At least, Mr. Jimmy Farron, ex-dip and gunman, lounging in the shadowy opening giving onto the bridge, was touched by some such fancy. A rather apt fancy, seeing that it was his privilege to know that the black, spiderlike figure there—his chief—was lying in wait for a respected citizen whom he was preparing to "job" for a master crime. A crime that the police, society, the press, and even the underworld were for the nonce unanimous in crediting to the miscreant already safely jugged within the Tombs.

Mr. Farron's thoughts shifted to reflections upon this occasional "rum lay" of his chief's as Zaliel the astrologer, a double life unsuspected by his enemies and known only

to certain superiors at headquarters. Just to these and a few trusted henchmen like Mr. Farron himself.

His bated whisper came: "You think you got him, gov'nor?" then with quick correction: "I mean 'perfesser.' You think he'll come to the lecture?"

A look was the only answer. A grunt from the doorway marked understanding.

"The poor fish!" The short laugh was the measure of profound contempt. "Say, how anybody with sense can be such a mark as to fall for this stars-at-your-birth stuff! Why, I think it——"

A warning hiss checked him like an air brake. Some belated tenants were crossing the bridge—passing to the other wing.

Whereupon the man in the doorway sidled out upon the bridge, his head inclining near, a subdued murmuring pouring from his mouth in some fashion that left the lips immovable and did not carry beyond the other's ear. He was a youngish man, with a slow, shrewd smile, whose head was crowned with a derby pushed rakishly askew.

"I ain't meanin' that the quality of bunk you hand out ain't first-class, gov'nor; for you sure do put it over on 'em—the poor fathead simps!" The hoarse whisper yielded ungrudging admiration. "Yes, sir, I've seen some clever lays in my day, but never anything that could match up beside this work of yours with this astrology and occult dope. Of course, what gets all this over"—with hoarse chuckling—"is that old philosopher make-up that knocks 'em cold. Say, gov'nor"—with sly wistfulness—"good thing you're rich, too—eh? 'Cause I bet it cost you something, that wig outfit—eh?"

The master's smile was indulgent. "Two thousand francs," the low murmur admitted. "It is by Marivaux—the great Marivaux of Paris whose disguises have never yet been penetrated. The beard was a thousand more."

"Great crimini!" gasped the young man of the derby. "No wonder it seems to grow right out of the meat! Well, you'll need it with this bird—this fellow Carteret——"

"Careful, Jimmy!"

For more people were crossing the bridge now. Among them many whose glances and whisperings seemed to take interested concern in the black-robed figure by the rail.

The young man addressed as Jimmy shifted nearer.

"Our 'dopes' are beginning to gather."

The gloom was deepening, burnishing the stars. Window squares glowed brighter: amber jewels bespangling the black walls of the pit below. But there was one window far down on the ground level that remained persistently black. Mr. Farron scowled at it.

"No signal from Slinky, yet, perfesser." He hung over the rail, wistful to see the black square aglow. "Looks like, if our meat was sure comin'——"

"He'll come," said the 'professor' with calm finality. "Is it not so written in the stars?"

Mr. Farron did not say. Perhaps because in his single inelegant utterance and grin there was expression enough. He mumbled some protest against having put off "Zaliel's return" so long.

The astrologer's head shook.

"The stars," he said quietly, "were not in right aspect until now. We had to wait upon his malefic."

"His which, gov'nor?"

"His evil star!"—gravely. He turned about, the black sleeve pointing above their level with the roofs. Mr. Farron, squinting along the arm, saw a lonely gleaming point.

"Evil star!" his mumble repeated thoughtfully. "Gee! I've heard of them things. So that's his! What's its name, perfess'?"

The seer smiled. "You already know it."

"Me? Naw, gov'nor!"

"Wait!" The scientist was persistent.

"After we planted Slinky as an English butler in the house of our dark-visaged friend, he used a word to describe him——" He smiled as the other's face lighted. "You said the word just fitted him."

"I know!"—eagerly. "And yet I don't remember ever hearin' that word before. It was——" He scowled, trying to remember.

"Think of the *man*, and it will come to you instantly."

"Saturnine!" gasped Jimmy.

The white head inclined gravely. "Yes, because of the influence of his planet. Drop the last syllable and you have its name."

"Saturn?"

"Saturn." His voice went on solemnly: "A planet with influence so malevolent in some aspects that it is held to be the cause of the greater portion of human crime and suffering."

CHAPTER II.

A HOODOO STAR—AND SCIENCE.

"Saturn, eh!"

The young man with the derby stared at the steady, unwinking eye. Yes, it *was* different—any guy could see that. There was none of the friendly twinkling seen in the starry company about.

"Geel!"—with uneasy swallowing, "and you say it's after this here guy?"

"The planet he was born under; yes, its influence pursues his whole life."

"Lor', think of havin' a million horse-power hoodoo star humpin' after you!" Mr. Farron tried to laugh, but the effort sounded hollow. "Gov'nor"—in low tone, "ain't it sorter yellow?"

"Yes, that is Saturn's color."

Mr. Farron nodded, muttering: "Funny, but you know it somehow makes me think of this guy's yellow, bilious-lookin' mug."

The white head nodded soberly. "Aye, a bilious yellow—the complexion of all Saturn people. Yellow, too, in character," a mutter added.

"In character, gov'nor?"

"Aye, towards all," in low tone; "all who are born under the yellow planet."

"Geel!"

The ex-gunman shifted disquietedly, staring dubiously at the unwinking yellow point. There was something baleful about its steady, piercing stare—something he did not like. Perhaps it was because the moon was gone. Oh, it was all bug-house, of course it was all——"

Still——

He jerked at the astrologer's grasp upon his arm.

"To-night," his grave tone came, "exactly at midnight that planet is in opposition—that is, at its worst——"

"Lor', gov'nor!"—with an uncomfortable swallow.

"At its worst for him, as I am almost sure our man knows. And that"—significantly—"is why I am sure he'll come to-night—why, for the first time, he will seek a private interview, and why"—with slow impressiveness—"when he gets the interview he will tell Zaliel, in confidence, of all the trouble that has been brought upon him by the stars."

"Great crimini! You mean that this gun, who's safe as a church if he just kept his trap shut——"

"Ah, true enough, Jimmy," sighed the astrologer.

"But because he *thinks* the stars doped out everything at his birth he's going to cough up everything that's happened?"

"That's the idea, Jimmy."

"The poor clam will spill to you all he's done?"

"Precisely; you've got it," smiled the seer. "He is led by science."

"Science my eye!" And Mr. Farron expectorated feelingly. "When you come right down to it this ain't no astrol'gy at all you're usin' to drag this poor gink to the chair with. It's a sort of poker play, that's what it is!"

"Exactly," agreed the seer coolly: "psychology—the greatest science in the world."

The ex-professional grunted, feeling a stir of contemptuous pity for the man they waited for.

"The poor gun!" He turned, noting that the full tide of travel across the bridge was past. "Maybe he ain't comin', gov'nor. I most wish he wouldn't."

The seer smiled, his gaze dropping into the pit again.

"You lose your benevolent wish," his voice came carelessly; "our man is here." The black sleeve pointed. "See?" For the window below was aglow with soft light. A moment, and it winked twice, then went dark again.

"North side elevator," translated Jimmy, craning eagerly above the rail. "We better mizzle, gov'nor. That means about three minutes before he crosses this bridge."

"Now, Jimmy, listen." And the astrologer conferred in low tones, repeating some former instructions. "You understand your part now?"

The other nodded. "I got it all in me bean, gov'nor; don't worry. When you an' the guy is talkin', I'm to ring the bell at eleven sharp."

"And when Slinky answers——"

"I just keep out o' sight. Then when he takes the card in an' you come out—same thing: I just lies low, keeps me trap shut. But say, gov'nor, can't I stick around outside de door an' hear de palaver in de ante-room between Zaliel an' Creighton"—he grinned—"wid you doin' both voices? It'll be great."

A nod gave consent. Then at sound of

steps nearing the bridge, the two separated, the astrologer going toward his lecture room. With derby pushed back, Mr. Farron lingered a moment, frowning up at the myriad stars above—and with a particularly glowering scowl at the yellow eye of Saturn. It gave him uneasy feeling.

"But, of course, it's all bunk, this astrology stuff," he uttered, aloud; "I *know* it's all bunk."

"Do you?"

A laugh brushed his ear. A disagreeable sort of laugh, quietly contemptuous—superior. Even in the instant before his startled turn, Mr. Farron knew both laugh and voice as belonging to the man of Saturn.

"So *you* know astrology is all 'bunk,' eh?"

In the gray, dim light the swarthy face showed more leaden than ever. "Yet wise men in all ages have believed in it. Strange!"

"Rats!"—from Jimmy provocatively—"I don't!"

"I said 'wise' men." The man's teeth glittered in a backward flash.

Jimmy grinned, raking a match to a cigarette.

"Wise?" his voice lifted. "Say, cull, dat's me middle name!"

"You?" contemptuously; "you're a fool!"

With a short laugh, he moved on. Jimmy, swallowing hard, stared after him.

"Lor', old bird," he muttered, "if I had a disposition like yours!" He drew fiercely upon his cigarette and fired the smoke cone heavenward. "Say, *what makes* people be like that? What—"

He broke off. Suddenly his upturned gaze had tripped upon the yellow eye of Saturn. Perhaps it was because it was brighter—higher in the eastern heavens, but to Mr. Farron's sensitive fancy it had suddenly burst upon his vision with a gleam of malevolent intelligence, sending to him across space its exultant answer to the question he had asked.

Zalief was angry.

It showed in the lambent fire of the glance with which he fixed the couple in the fourth row front—a man and woman, both well dressed, who sustained the angry regard with what appeared to be a faintly amused tolerance. The man—a big, blond chap—lounge in his chair indolently.

"This is the first instance this evening of any one's flatly denying the statements I

have made." From the table the astrologer lifted and dropped some of the score of slips already passed and which he had crumpled and tossed aside. "We have had testimony from all parts of this hall to-night supporting the deductions I have made when given the date of birth." His hand lifted a slip of paper. "The gentleman held up his hand when I read out the initials signed here. He claims the birth date given is correct, yet he denies my deductions."

The man referred to looked quizzically at his companion and shrugged lightly as though just the least bit bored by the seer's persistence. The woman's eyebrows lifted delicately, and she looked cold rebuke at Zalief, gathering her wrap as though to go. But neither deigned to make reply.

Women near by were noting her with interest, appraising her gown, her pose—the beauty that was still supernal despite its beginning to require "the borrowed gloss of art."

Zalief spoke again, persistent for reply.

"You know, sir, any error in the date of birth would make every difference." As though to be heard better, the seer stepped down from the platform—drew nearer. "I am going to ask the gentleman again whether he is quite sure about the birth date." The words were smooth as oil.

The man yielded a short laugh, shifting impatiently.

"Oh, there's nothing the matter with the date; it's your guesses that are wrong—ridiculous!"

The tone was carelessly insolent—a contemptuous dismissal of the whole matter. With a nod to his companion he reached for his hat and rose to go. But the tall, robed figure, looking oddly like some bold prophet of ancient days, stood squarely across his way.

"Just a moment, sir." Zalief spoke with dignity. "You have discredited me before our friends here, but that is all right." He smiled. It was an odd smile, as frosty and cold as his own white, glittering stars. "May I grasp your hand before you go?" He extended his own.

The man hesitated an instant, then shrugged.

"No hard feelings, eh—that the idea?" He laughed patronizingly as their hands clasped. "All right, old faker, good night!"

Then abruptly, strangely, the laugh died.

"Here, here!"—sharply—"what are you doing? Ow!"—in gasp—"let go my hand—stop it!" He writhed, throwing his weight violently to one side, but the clasp remained unbroken.

The woman leaned across, whispering, "Do come on, Henri! This is too absurd!"

"Henri" did not answer her. With face congested and cords of his neck swollen, he continued to writhe, but in vain. A big fellow and of unquestionable strength, his own supreme muscular exertion seemed to react, thrashing him into impotency, as is the cold-blooded, calculating principle of the world-old Oriental jujutsu.

"Let me go—you damn mountebank!"

But Zaliel never moved.

By this time, people were buzzing, some rising from their chairs. The seer checked them with his free hand raised.

"My friends"—his calm voice lifted clearly above the snarling fury of the man he so arbitrarily controlled—"I ask you all to resume your seats. Thank you." The white head inclined acknowledgment. "And will you, sir, please resume your seat?" Even as he spoke, the torsion of his wrist was forcing the big fellow slowly, surely back into his chair.

This accomplished, he turned to the woman who was still impatiently demanding of her escort that he "come on."

"And now, madame, will——" The other chair was indicated.

Her answer was a glare of scorn. She faced the hall.

"An officer"—her voice tremulous with anger, betrayed a foreign accent—"is there not then an officer present?"

"I fear not, madame." The suave voice of the astrologer at her shoulder was modulated for her ear alone. "But there is a government agent present." He added, murmurously, "But is madame quite sure she wants him?"

He leaned closer with one whispered sentence.

A little breathless pause, a gasp, and she whirled about sharply, the rouge of her cheeks a hectic glow against a suddenly acquired pallor. The deep eyes of the seer met her gravely, penetratively.

"Perhaps madame would best be seated," his murmur sounded. "A *déportation* back to Vienna for madame——" He shrugged. "A journey long and stupid at this season—is it not?"

A look of panic and she sank dazedly into the chair.

"*Comment diable!*" escaped her wonderingly.

Zaliel shrugged regretfully. "It is a sad affair," he murmured noncommittally.

The spectators, seeing but not hearing, viewed the interchange with relief, as was testified by smiles and murmurs of approval. To all appearances the lady had yielded to the courteous reassurances of the old philosopher.

And now as Zaliel began speaking to his audience—perhaps to give her the opportunity—the woman leaned slightly toward her companion, her gloved finger tapping his imprisoned arm viciously.

"*Imbécile!*" she whispered with eyes of fire.

He sank back, curiously subdued, his eyes fixing Zaliel with a new expression—a look that blended many troubled questionings. As the astrologer went on speaking, to all appearances for the moment oblivious of the two, he twisted his eyes around as though measuring furtively the distance to the door. She shrugged, dismissing him from attention, and studying Zaliel with perplexity and concern. There was need for it.

"And, therefore, my friends," he was concluding, "I am going to prove to you that to give the lie to Zaliel is to give the lie to science, in this day and age. Science, my friends"—grimly—"has a long arm!" His smile glittered down at his pendant captive, and some one's giggle started a ripple of heartless laughter and applause. "No, no"—with gentle, protesting gesture—"I am not thinking of this trifling anatomical trickery that just now gives mastery to an old man's feeble arm." The white head shook gravely. "No, my friends, but I am going to show you how science, when outraged, can manifest its power in a far more subtle way than through vulgar brute force."

His gaze, dropping to the arm he held, seemed to grow thoughtful—absorbed. His eyes closed and for an instant his body swayed as though its control was partly relaxed under some powerful mental abstraction. It was noted that the couple beside him had grown strangely still.

The hall sat breathless, expectant. No one more so than a man immediately across the aisle; a man of saturnine visage, with complexion of curious bilious yellow.

CHAPTER III.
"PSYCHIC STUFF."

"This will be psychic," Zaliel murmured. And at that the people stirred; a little ripple of excited whispering swept the hall. A fat man down front leaned to his neighbor, an actor, who was distributing knowing nods.

"Hypnotism?" he questioned whisperingly. "Naw"—contemptuously—"psychic stuff—mind reading—sort of Anna Eva Fay stunt. Only in Zaliel's act he gets it quicker through the human hand. How? I don't know! Guess it's just kinder like electricity—arm conducts it, you know."

"Silence," crooned the grave voice of the seer, "is necessary, my friends, if we are to have the best results." As silence came, his voice droned murmurously. "Any acoustic vibration, as you doubtless know, disturbs the operator's psychic receptivity." A pause in the even denser silence that this remark induced, and then he added musingly, frowningly, his hand cupping his eyeballs closer: "Even the undulation of strong light—" Abruptly he lifted his hand from his eyes and looked questioningly at the bright, pendant ceiling lights. Then his gaze sought the back of the hall. He smiled wistfully.

"I wonder if we might have just a little less of it," he murmured tentatively. "Is the janitor—the hall attendant—ah, thank you so much!"

And Mr. Jimmy Farron, stealthily closing the switchboard panel in his far back corner of the hall, glanced eagerly about at the dim, weird twilight in which the hall was suddenly immersed.

Yes, they were a success—those new side-wall brackets with the queer, spooky blue globes. The light was creepy. Downright scary it was!

Mr. Farron cocked an ear toward the windows.

Yes, old Giovanni, too, was on the job all right—old Giovanni, the Italian maestro, whom the gov'nor's long arm had plucked from out of "stir." For faint music was stealing through the black windows opening above the blacker air court. Strains tenderly sweet and plaintive—the quivering soul of a violin wandering upon the night.

Thus they sat enthralled. Hushed, expectant and glamour-wrapped—seeing nothing but the dim, spectral figure of the old astrologer, hearing nothing but the subduing witchery of the matchless violin.

Till abruptly, by Zaliel himself, the spell was broken:

"Lights! I have enough!"

Abruptly, without warning, he flung aside the hand he had been clutching, and stepped back. Mr. Farron, at his post, moved too. Simultaneously, the pendant incandescents shone starlike as before; the silvery-blue wall globes became mere glowing ornaments again.

Zaliel's leveled arm fixed the blond man.

"If I were to tell you all I now know about this man!"

And his arm gestured as though it would sweep away some unsavory knowledge gained.

"But, friends, I cannot tell you." His tone betrayed a sullen regret. "There is a certain code of ethics—a seal of silence—that is observed by the physician in his ministry to the human body, by the priest in his ministry to the human soul." He paused during an impressive interval while his eye took time to travel the hall, to come back and brush, as though by accident, the intent face of the man of Saturn. "And that same code, my friends, governs the psychologist who reads the secrets of the human mind. That code Zaliel must obey."

Again the eagle eyes swept the hall, but not before they had noted the fleck of color, the expression of relief that touched the face of the man of the evil star. As for the big blond fellow, he was again in the act of going. Perhaps the assurance about the "code" had given him sense of security.

"You must not go, sir," said Zaliel quietly.

The man glared defiance. "We *are* going," he said shortly, and turned to the woman—still seated. "Come!"

The philosopher bowed smilingly.

"Your privilege, sir," he conceded cheerfully, and turned from them to his audience. "Only, of course, in that case, my friends—" His voice quickened, lifted sonorously, claiming every ear. "In that case Zaliel's lips are unsealed!"

He took a forward step, his robe's sleeve lifted high.

"Listen all!"

They were ready to; were humanly hungry for whatever slanderous titbit the mind reader had to fling.

"Since this man scorns the power of science, we have a right to assume he also scorns any immunity it extends. So, therefore, I feel free to reveal to you that he—*ah!*"

No need to go on. The big fellow, as though suddenly stricken by leaden heaviness, had plumped back into his chair, being conspicuously helped by the pull of a woman's arm.

"*Cochon!*" she hissed behind her milk-white teeth.

Laughter burned their ears; some younger voices jeered.

"The professor's got a can tied to *him* all right!" the fat man chortled in the actor's ear. "Say, what you reckon the old wizard could have pumped out of that hand. Must 'a' been something rank!"

"The dame!"—from behind a hand.

"Eh?"—with freshly galvanized interest—"you think——"

"Think!"—with sapient side leer. "Didn't you see her yank him back to grass? Some wise Jane, that—no chances, no hop-scotching for her. Sh-h! We're missing something!"

For Zaliel was reading from the slip again: "And the birthplace given here is San Francisco." He looked up. "No wonder our horoscope was so far off. Will you indulge me if I ask the gentleman privately why he is ashamed of the little mining town of his birth?"

He stooped to the blond man's ear.

"Clausthal in the Oberharz, *mein Herr!*" A fraction's pause, then hissing: "*Prussia!*"

His piercing gaze met the cold hate that looked out at him and sprayed it—killed it with a blaze of righteous flame.

"Clausthal," the hiss went on, "under the evil shadow of the Brocken's crag. Was this congenial spot then to be ashamed of? A place whose *bürgermeister* was the kaiser's friend and your own honored father—eh, Herr von Gruner?"

The man started. "*Der teufel!*" he gasped.

"*Schweigt!*" the astrologer's hiss silenced warningly. "Does the Herr want all this peaceful laughter changed? So merry and gentle now, so good-natured—is it not? But," he whispered closer, "how easy for you or I to change it with a word—eh? One word, *mein Herr*; one little English word of three letters—*spy!*"

The woman's gasp drew his frosty smile.

"Yes, these Americans, madame; they are so excitable—so impulsive, so violent!" He shrugged. "Madame doubtless read of the distressing experience of her compatriot last

night in a Broadway cabaret—the one who forgot to rise when the Americans sang their national anthem. Frightful, I understand!" His tongue clicked. "And these women here to-night, gracious lady—some of them mothers and sisters of the *Teufel Hunden*——"

"*Donnerwort!*" The woman paled.

"Exactly—I see madame comprehends. But may I suggest that madame's French is safer. For hers is truly almost perfect, due to her long service in the French capital on behalf of the dual monarchy. And now that madame is assisting Herr von Gruner here in America she should speak nothing else. For if a crowd like this once suspected the truth——" He shrugged, a cold smile passing beyond her blanched face. "But I see they are growing impatient."

Still smiling, he stood erect.

"My friends, it is as I thought. The gentleman does *not* wish to be identified with the miserable place where he first saw the light!" Then, as the laughter subsided: "However, the gentleman wishes now to announce publicly that I, and not he, was in the right about his birthplace."

With a little nod to the blond man he stood waiting.

The crowd waited, too, while its whisperings and laughter fluttered into expectant silence. It was all like old Zaliel's well-known arrogance, of course; high-handed to the last degree—no one lost sight of that. Yet, oddly, no one had any sympathy for the victim.

Still waiting, Zaliel's voice came softly, suavely, brushing the stillness like a touch of velvet.

"Bad manners are often explained by one's birthplace. You would understand this, friends, if, after all, I should tell you——" He paused upon a mutter from his man. "What is that, sir? Please speak louder."

"I say it's all right," growled the big fellow.

"What is all right? Speak up!"

Again a pause, a struggle.

A struggle that the philosopher seemed to watch indifferently enough. He stood, with chin upon his hand, his shaggy brows bent upon the man from Prussia, his whole attitude evidencing no more compunction for his victim's inward thrashings than he would have had for any reptile his heel had been set upon.

The woman whispered hissing, setting

her pink nails viciously into her companion's wrist.

"*Ach!*" choked the man. Then his voice lifted: "It was right"—sullenly—"the name of the place you read."

"From your hand you mean?" Covertly the eagle eyes noted the face of the man of Saturn across the aisle.

"Yes, from my hand."

He fell back with a half groan, inwardly cursing the folly that had brought him to this place to hear what the astrologer might have to prophesy about the war. This *teufel* doctor who drew things out of people's hands and eyes!

But Zaliel was not through.

"And the birth date?"—he looked again at the slip he held—"it should be just eight years earlier—should it not?"

An instant's hesitation—a last internal heave and the blond man bobbed his head.

"Yes."

Whereupon, Zaliel bowed, crumpled the slip and tossed it after the others, facing his audience with a smile.

Another bow—a gesture that said good night. Then, pandemonium of applause that is won only by him who quits at the grand climax, the psychological instant when success is at its height.

This time the actor almost beat his hands off.

"Greatest act I ever saw!" he screamed into the fat man's ear as they arose. "Could get bookings at thousand a week—just gets the stuff through his hand, you know!"

"I know." The fat man passed on his own enthusiasm to the man on his right. "Just squeezes it out of a fellow's fist!"

"Sure!" The gentleman with the hard, round face nodded appreciation. "Right out o' de guy's mit, easy's I'd draw a glass o' dark down at my place."

There was one man who said nothing—a man with a bilious yellow countenance; but his eyes were shining like the stars. He lingered, waiting a chance to speak to Zaliel.

In back of the hall Slinky directed Mr. Farron's attention to a thick-cut man following in the blond one's wake.

"That's Langham," he whispered, "one of the secret-service men that's keeping a drag on that tow-headed heinie and the other spies he trains with."

"Spy!" Jimmy gasped. "Say, then that's what the gov'nor must have jolted into just now with this psychic stuff!"

"Psychic stuff!" Contemptuously. "As if there was anything to know about that big cheese that the gov'nor didn't know already clear back to the cradle! Why, they've been giving the pup rope for a year—the dame, too. Sure! I thought you knew that."

Mr. Farron looked foolish. "Then all this play to-night—"

"Was for Carteret, of course. We had a line that Von Gruner and the dame would probably be here, and so the gov'nor just used him. Got his goat first purposely; and after throwing a scare into him, used him as a 'psychic subject' with which to pull off the mind-reading stunt. Simple"—he eyed his colleague with cold-blooded calm—"but mighty convincing, I think—to our man there." His nod led the other's attention up front.

The man of Saturn had just seized his opportunity to speak to Zaliel. They saw the astrologer shake his head, then appear to yield reluctantly—nodding with a word or two, ere he passed out through the door behind the platform.

Slinky struck his fist hard into his palm. "Netted, by thunder!" he breathed exultantly. "The gov'nor'll have it all out of him now within an hour!"

The younger man shifted uncomfortably. "You know, Slinky, I feel sorter sorry for him."

A snort of scorn met this. "Sorry! Was he sorry for the poor girl whose throat he cut—"

"I—I know." The young ex-gangster shivered. He had never stood for "bumping off" women—or anybody, except in a fair fight.

"And how much sorry has he been for the poor guy rotting there in the Tombs? Huh! Why don't you spend some 'sorry' about *him* going to the chair?" the older operative rumbled angrily. "For that's what'll happen to him sure as fate unless the gov'nor's medicine makes this moll-buzzer open up with the truth."

"I know," agreed the other as before; "I know," he repeated murmuringly. And so they moved onward to the bridge that led across to Zaliel's studio. Here the former thief paused, staring up at the star-sprayed arch of the firmament. "I know, but still ——" His gaze, troubled—thoughtful—riveted itself upon a gleaming planet now riding high in the eastern heavens.

Its yellow eye looked malignant, exultant.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

"Yes, sir, I understand." Slinky's head inclined. "May I take your hat and cane, sir?"

The visitor yielded them, along with a little stare. He was surprised.

Just now outside in the dusty, dingy passage he had been fortifying himself for the spectacle of some turbaned, dusky phantasm of the Orient in answer to his ring. To have the door opened by a well-mannered manservant in ordinary livery was the last thing to be expected. A manservant, too, whose homely, rugged features, together with a manner just correctly balanced between dignity and deference, suggested his own highly certificated English butler so recently acquired. The only difference was that Tomkins' voice was deeper and his complexion higher, and that far from being bald he was the possessor of a crown of crisply curly gray hair that gave him the dignity of a baronet.

"Professor Zaliel will see you immediately, sir," said Slinky, as he ushered 'the subject' from the narrow, low-ceilinged anteroom into the noble space and height of the sumptuous studio beyond, an amplitude that seemed enhanced by the soft vignettéd shadows that lay beyond the zone of the single tall pedestaled light—an astral lamp—that gleamed from the center of a richly carved table at one end of the room.

It was beside the table that Slinky placed a chair for the visitor—or rather, seemed to place it, it being already in the position and at the angle he had previously determined upon as best. It was a chair of dignity, one that had once held post of honor in the throne room of a queen, its tarnished splendor still glowing bravely, proudly, despite the ravages of corroding years.

Slinky inclined solicitously over the carved back.

"I think you'll be comfortable here, sir, for the *time*."

He blinked sympathetically down upon the gentleman's head. There would be no cushioning, he knew, in the chair that awaited the gentleman up the river.

Velvet-footed and capable, he placed another chair in position across the table; this for the master's use. Indeed, being capable, he had to see—and did see—that this last was placed so nicely with reference to the

pedestaled table lamp that Zaliel, sitting at ease, would be able to shade his eyes with his hand, leaving the face opposite in full revealing glare. Capable to the last, he effaced himself in the end so silently, so inconspicuously, that he seemed to fade into the shadows beyond the zone of light.

"Professor Zaliel will be right in, sir."

"Thank you." He jerked about nervously, but the speaker was already gone—lost behind the swinging tapestries that walled the chamber's farther end.

Tapestries! Silken tapestries in a rookery like this!

Yes, but he had heard of Zaliel's famous "studio;" had seen it described in the papers; knew, too, that its amazing furnishings only added to the mystery about the man. That is, with the public.

Yes, with the public! A smile, slightly sardonic, accompanied the reflection as he allowed his glance to sweep the room. The public did not know, as he did, that Zaliel's possession of these things presented no mystery in one direction at least—that is, with the police, who had a decidedly cynical theory as to how Zaliel had become possessed of his treasures here and abroad.

It was a private detective who had told him all this, he remembered; the young man who had called upon him by mistake—so it had developed—thinking he was another "Carteret:" some one who had "applied" to him for some advice or service. He recalled the fellow's loquacity, which had dwelt with what seemed jealous contempt upon the practice of some other people in going with their problems to palmists and mediums instead of to a good lawyer or a discreet "dick." He instanced "this guy, Zaliel, the astrologer, that the papers have gone nutty over just because of a lucky fluke or two in hitting it off right with some prophecies: things he says were 'written in the stars.'"

Reviewing the interview now in his mind, he recalled with a chill that it was upon this occasion that he had first heard of Robert Creighton. His informant had dwelt upon this detective's uncanny gift as to "hunches." It was Creighton, he said, who was behind the police hostility to Zaliel, declaring his conviction that the man was not what he seemed to be, but the confidant of criminals and crooks. "Just his hunch, y'understand; but once he gets that hunch, he just somehow lands his man—*always!*"

Always!

An ice-water chill touched him, his thought shifting to this very morning and to the apparently resentful interest displayed by his new butler in something outside the breakfast-room windows.

"It's that party across the street, sir." Tomkins had volunteered apologetically. "He's there ev'ry bloomin' mornin' at this time, just walkin' up and down."

And he had looked and seen—Creighton! Creighton, whom he had been seeing now like his shadow for weeks.

"You wished to see me?"

The visitor started, lifting his chin from his hand. Zaliel's tall figure was standing across the table from him.

"Oh"—and he turned with relief—"yes, I wanted to consult you—er—professionally." The visitor's tone had the confidence of one who could pay for what he wanted.

The figure remained standing. "Yes?"

The inflection was questioning, inviting explanation.

Without a word, but with an air of ending all parley, the man in the chair produced a bill fold from which he stripped a crisp hundred-dollar note and tossed it on the table.

"Consultation fee, professor"—with a dry smile.

"Consultation about what?" The tone, though still smoothly courteous, was slightly stressed with the emphasis of one repeating a preliminary question still unanswered. As for the bank note, it was not touched by even a glance.

"Oh, come now!"—remonstratively—and the saturnine man held the bill fold open, fingering the sheaf it held—"if that's not enough, my friend, just say what you do want." He essayed a placating laugh. "Of course, I know it's late, so I'm willing to be liberal; but—"

He paused as his glance encountered a slowly shaking head.

"I am sorry"—gravely—"I only give horoscopes in public. Your law does not permit private readings."

The visitor's gesture swept aside the refusal as evasion.

"How much?" he chopped, and tentatively tossed several other bills beside the other. "I don't know what you want, man, unless you tell me."

Zaliel took up the bank notes, folded them into a long sheaf, and without looking at it at all, extended it across the table.

"Wha-at!" exploded the dark man. He glared at the astrologer, then at the money. "Oh, I see!" With a sour laugh he accepted the bills; then ripped from an inside pocket a check book and a fountain pen. He began writing.

"Now, then, my friend, do say what in thunder you *do* want," he growled. "Only for Heaven's sake, stop this grand-stand play—this stalling and—"

A table gong, struck lightly by the astrologer, cut short his speech. Almost instantly there followed the soft, silken swish of the tapestried arras. Without turning, the visitor knew that Zaliel's servant was standing there.

"Duncan, the gentleman is going." Zaliel inclined grave adieu to the astonished visitor, then again addressed "Duncan."

"You will inquire for the gentleman, at the elevator, as to what floor the woman is on who tells fortunes. *Good night, sir!*"

Another bow, respectful, courteous, and he grasped the curtain, lifted it slowly—in another moment would have been gone. But it was not to be, it seemed. Not with that trembling, eager arm pulling at his own, with that hoarse voice stammering pleadings, apologies, in his ear.

"Don't send me away," the man gasped. "You mustn't—you don't know what it means!" He clung desperately, agitatedly—all of the old arrogance gone. "Listen, there's something I've got to know—I *must* know! It's a matter of life and death, and only you can tell me what to do. I'm sorry I offered you money; I didn't think—" He panted, breath exhausted. "Help me," he whispered hoarsely; "I am in deadly peril to-night—and with Saturn, my birth star, in opposition at midnight."

"What's that?" One would have thought the astrologer startled. "Saturn your birth star—you are sure?"

"Yes, sir," the man nodded eagerly. "I have a horoscope here—cast by Palabot in Paris—twenty years ago."

His trembling hand produced a frayed document which he opened agitatedly, extending to the astrologer. Even at his distance Slinky recognized the paper he had twice filched from the owner's desk during the past three months and which his master had studied and had him return in each case before the dawn.

"So! Palabot the Great! Yes, it is his

seal." Mumblingly, the astrologer scanned the screeed, pausing once or twice as under some shock or surprise. "Saturn in the fourth house and retrograde. Um! Very bad!" He looked up, his head shaking. "You were born in an evil planetary hour, my friend: Venus, Jupiter, and the Sun all under the earth, the ascendant being afflicted with a hateful square of Mars and Saturn and—um!"

He scrutinized the paper again, muttering to himself. The visitor cleared his throat huskily.

"It wouldn't mean so much to me, only that everything he has said there has come out true, so far."

"Too true!" The words rang sharply, the stern frown shadowing the philosopher's brows again. "That is the trouble, if you want to know. I mean that for twenty years you have submitted your will to this thing." His hand half crushed the paper that it held. "You've been behaving altogether like a blind, stupid fatalist, instead of a being endowed with reason and common sense!"

The client looked staggered. "But the horoscope," he persisted blankly; "I tell you its predictions have all come true!"

"Because," thundered the astrologer, "like a fool, you have not opposed them!" The explosion vented, he pulled himself together. "Listen, friend," he continued with enforced calm; "the planets move in their courses obeying inevitable, physical law that has never changed an iota for them in millions of years, and which will never change till time exists no more. It is true that they have mysterious influences upon our lives, but they, themselves, are but lifeless things—dead, insensate accretions of matter, while you are a living soul to whom God has given a masterful power—the power to draw or oppose good influences or evil influences—the power of the human will!"

The man shrugged dispiritedly. His glance, pathetic and miserable, touched the horoscope in Zaliel's hand.

"I thought it was inevitable," he groaned; "and I feared to go to any one—to talk to them about it."

The grizzled brows still held him sternly. "How did you happen to come to me?"

The man's pale face shaped a wan smile. "Why, I think I might say I owe it to a servant—my English butler." Here Slinky blinked gently. "I heard him telling, soon after he came, of some wonderful predictions

you once made for him. I—I questioned him about them." He stole an embarrassed glance at the astrologer's own servant, but the man was staring at the wall with abstracted wooden visage. "Last night, he thoughtfully brought me one of the extras telling of your return—"

"Ah!" The astrologer eyed him steadily. "And you knew that to-night, at midnight, Saturn, your evil star, would reach opposition—a condition that was certain to bring sorrow, disgrace, or death to you."

An eager nod answered, the man of Saturn moving close.

"It—it is death!" he breathed. His head dropped as he made a gesture toward the paper in Zaliel's hand. "It's all there," he uttered hoarsely, "the third page, second line." His eyes hugged the floor.

Again the astrologer frowningly scanned the paper.

"I know," he said; "I saw that. Uranus in the fourth house, threatening death by lightning." He paused thoughtfully.

"Which, of course, might mean some shock."

"Any violent shock—from electricity," breathed the other. This with a furtive glance at the third person waiting by the door. "Death—and by electrocu—" The word died in his throat.

The grizzled brows probed him through a pause.

"Um!" Zaliel muttered; "I understand." Then, not unkindly, "Tell me this, is it through some act of your own?"

The man swallowed. "That I wish to tell you about."

"Ah, but how much do you wish to tell me?" The question crackled sharply.

"Everything." And this time the hunted eyes looked full at Zaliel. "I want to tell you *everything!*"

"Good!" The exclamation had a new note, a lilt of cheer. "Then doubtless we can do something."

Amazedly the client saw the stern eyes soften—noted that the cold voice was suddenly warm and kind and that his smile glowed friendly. He seemed a different man.

"But it all depends upon you," he warned; "it all depends upon your course between now and midnight when your malefic reaches opposition with the sun. And the time is short." He flashed his watch before the other's face. "Sidereal time set by the stars."

"Only an hour and a half?" The gasp held dismay.

The white head inclined gravely. "That's all—now. What would you! You wait twenty years, yielding without resistance to a malignant planetary influence, and then in the actual eleventh hour you seek the advice of an astrologer." The stern eyes rebuked such folly. "However, we will see." The mumble trailed to a sigh as he moved back to the table and lamp, his sweep of sleeve inviting his client to resume his seat.

"Duncan" silently left the room.

"Now, sir!"

The astrologer lay back in his chair, the hand supporting his snow-crowned head serving also to shadow his eyes from the starlike brilliancy of the lamp.

The visitor cleared his throat, hitching forward to the very edge of the queen's chair. His lips parted, but the effort to speak merely ended in a quickly drawn breath—a swallow.

Whereupon, Zaliel spoke again. "I understand." And the grave voice was kind. "Suppose you let me make it easier." The astrologer extended his arm across the table. "Come; give me your hand!" He smiled. "You remember to-night in the lecture hall—my psychic reading?"

"Oh!" The client looked startled; he shrank backward, looking a little fearfully at the proffered hand, then at Zaliel. The seer's gaze met him gravely.

"You *want* me to know everything—do you not?"

"Why, yes, I——" The man in the queen's chair wiped his forehead, then his palms with the damp, wadded handkerchief he held. "You are right," he muttered; "it would be the easiest way." And he extended his right hand across the table.

Zaliel's head shook. "The other hand, please—the left."

"Oh!" And the change was made, but not without an obvious reluctance. The hesitancy apparently had to do with a ring which the middle finger bore—a ring in the form of an odd, serpentine coil of greenish gold. The hand jerked back slightly as Zaliel took it, peering curiously at the ornament.

"An unusual ring." The comment merely suggested a casually aroused interest. "Ah, astrological, I see!" His thumb brushed the two cut jewels set in the broadened termination of the coil.

The man cleared his throat. "Yes, the Dragon's Head—an omen of good luck. I bought it in Egypt, years ago."

Zaliel's glance lifted suddenly. "Not the Dragon's Head, friend." And he shook his head! "See? the two diamond 'eyes' are set above—not below. It is the Dragon's Tail."

"W-what's that?" Abruptly the hand was snatched away; the man stood up, holding the ring to the lamp, scrutinizing the setting with eyes widening in dismay. An oath escaped him. "Why—why that invites the worst sort of ill luck," he gasped. He fell back, tugging frantically at the ring. With a shiver of aversion he threw it upon the table.

The astrologer picked it up, examining it gravely. The serpentlike coils, though of gold, seemed as strong and resilient as tempered steel. It was the design, however, that Zaliel appeared to examine.

"Yes, the Dragon's Tail," he confirmed with what seemed reluctance. He shook his head over it, then looked up suddenly. "However, perhaps you have not worn this very constantly—have you?" From its inflection, the question seemed to offer some reassurance—a possible mitigation of the ring's baleful influence.

The client made a hopeless gesture. "Oh, yes, constantly." Then, as Zaliel's face fell, he added miserably: "I've never had it off my hand since I bought it—never once."

The astrologer's gaze fixed on him an instant with a queer, vexed intentness. Then he shrugged, taking the hand again. His eyes closed. "Quiet, please!" he admonished sharply as the owner of the ring started to speak. "Just let yourself relax a moment while I——"

The mutter trailed off. Yet almost immediately his eyes opened again. He frowned.

"Why do you tell me that?" He eyed the other accusingly. "For I read here that not only has the ring been off this hand, but for at least a day entirely out of your possession." Still holding the hand, his eyelids dropped again. "Yes, you loaned it to some one—a man——"

"My butler!" It burst in cry from the client. "Yes, yes, I had forgotten! The man I told you was interested in astrology; he wanted to show the design to a jeweler—to have it copied——"

"It is of no importance," and Zaliel's shrug dismissed the matter. "As you say, you forgot. But you see by this that it would be foolish not to be perfectly frank with me." The eagle eyes bored grave warning. "Foolish and quite useless."

The other did see. He shivered a little as the psychic renewed the pressure upon his fingers. His heart pounded when he heard presently the long intake of breath that seemed to accompany some discovery that startled or surprised. Then darkness fell upon the room as Zaliel, with a low mutter, jerked the chain controlling the table lamp; a darkness that was velvet black, unrelieved by the faintest gleam from anywhere. Just darkness and a terrifying, breathless stillness.

Then of sudden out of this a voice:

"So you killed the woman," it said quietly.

A sucked of breath, a pause, then a whisper answered:

"Yes."

Another pause, then Zaliel gently released the hand.

"I find I am very tired," he said with a sigh that seemed to express an old man's utter weariness. "I believe I have it all now, but I think I'll just have you review it—just in your own words tell me how it was."

The Man of Saturn leaned toward him in the gloom.

"I can do that now," he said. "For I won't mind it so much. I mean now that you know—everything."

The darkness beyond masked a sardonic smile.

"Yes, now that I know—everything."

CHAPTER V.

THE SPELL OF THE DARK.

"And that's all," the man whispered presently, his recital done.

Whereupon, in the darkened studio a tense silence fell. It was broken by Zaliel, speaking from the depths of his chair.

"So that's how you did it!"

The seer's tone was as uncritical, as indifferently matter of fact as though he had been listening to the account of some trivial incident and not the strangling of a woman.

The man jerked a nervous nod, forgetting the cloaking gloom. Despite the impenetrable blackness, he felt a gaze upon him that probed and burned like rays of living fire.

"Now let me have the ring," came the quiet voice.

The philosopher took the twist of gold, his fingers searching—testing the elastic coils, stroking gingerly the acute point in which one of these terminated.

"The blood that you say you felt on her neck; this ring must have scored that," he suggested inquiringly.

The man gulped nervously. "Yes, I know," came with effort; "but when I found my hand sticky I thought it was my own blood: that the ring had cut me—it has several times."

"Ah? And yet you had kept on wearing it!"

"Yes, for good luck, you see?"—eagerly; "because I thought it was the Dragon's Head." He groaned and went on: "I didn't see the gash you speak of, for it was dark—as dark as this."

And he told of the table upset—its lamp broken.

"She did it," breathed the man, "during her—her—"

"Her death struggles. Yes—well?"

"The ring must have gashed her throat then; because I—I did not release my hand until she—" Again he hesitated, feeling for words.

"I understand," the darkness answered coolly; "you mean until she had fallen—had ceased her struggles."

"Until she was quite still," the client amended hoarsely. "And then, though it was so dark, I knew that she—that she—" Speech failed in a sound like a click.

But the persistent inquisitor was not through. He leaned across the table and spoke in lower tone.

"And this rare necklace—or collar—whatever it was—of the twelve jewels of the Zodiac—this so-precious talisman"—satirically—"that you were after; this bauble that cost a woman her life—you detached it?"

"Yes, yes; but I didn't—oh, I couldn't take it—not after—that—" The gulping whisper fell, then lifted, yielding a few coherent words: "Fell somewhere—in the dark."

Zaliel's hand slipped away from the other's sleeve.

"And then you just—fled!"

The client nodded—again with forgetfulness of the enveloping dark, shrinking the while with dread of that terrible probing silence that seemed falling once again.

Under the spell of it and his own recital and the terror of the enwrapping gloom his distraught senses summoned again the horror of that other silence and darkness through which he had blindly groped for his hat and

cane and had stumbled from the apartment to the landing outside.

"Go on!" The seer leaned nearer, a slight impatience manifest in his percussive finger snap. "You've told me how you entered, but you haven't yet told how you managed to leave the apartment house without being seen by the boy who runs the elevator."

Whereupon, the client's hoarse voice lifted again, stammering its account of how the elevator had just passed to the floor above—the top floor—at the moment he closed the woman's door behind him. It was his chance and he tore down the stairs—five flights, madly afraid the returning car would get to the bottom before him.

"But it didn't—" with an intake of relief. "Something—I don't know what—detained it at the top."

Again the darkness hid the masquerader's slow nod, his satiric, understanding smile.

So then, at the very moment when Carteret was leaving the woman's apartment, the elevator was discharging Bourke and Delaney, the two patrolmen in pursuit of a roof prowler that a nervous tenant had reported as dodging behind the chimneys and parapets of adjacent buildings. While Carteret was putting floors between him and the apartment where lay a woman whose blood was not yet dry upon his hands, the sleuths of the law, all oblivious to the "big game" escaping literally from under their feet, were slipping out of the roof hatchway intent upon laying by the heels a pitiful sneak thief whose head and shoulders were just sinking behind the top of a fire escape. Indeed, what with their ponderous delay and reconnoitering, Carteret must have been free and clear of the building, and with a good lead when these two, having stalked their own paltry quarry down the fire escape and through the blackness behind an open window, had found him kneeling—blood-dabbled and incoherent—beside a body; a body whose warm glow betrayed that life had been quenched but a few minutes before.

The client stirred nervously, his throat clicking behind a swallow.

"And that's all," he uttered hoarsely.

"All?—" sharply. "What about this man that you say was arrested in your place?"

"I know, I know!" groaned the client. "I can guess what you think of me for allowing that." A pause, and he went on in a stifled voice and with uneasy shifting in his chair:

"Oh, I know I'm a coward. You can't judge me any harsher than I do myself."

"Judge you? This is no court of law, friend." The voice from the dark held mild rebuke. "Listen. In every land I visit, wherever I am, I have men and women who come to me with their burdens, their confidences. Well, they leave them and they go their way; sometimes I can help them; sometimes not. I am just 'The Crooks' Confessor,' as the police here are courteously pleased to call me." And a dry laugh pointed the sarcasm. "A confessor, therefore not a judge; yet because a confessor's lips are sealed, they frown—your unreasonable police—because I will not even discuss with them the secrets of my confessional."

The client leaned nearer, breathing easier.

"But this other man—" He swallowed nervously, in doubt how to frame a question that day and night haunted his soul. "Do you think that they—I mean, in the end, will he be—be—"

"Convicted—executed? Oh, undoubtedly."

A pregnant pause fell.

"Why, the evidence is all damnably against him," Zaliel resumed. "The close-to-heel surveillance by the two policemen that really made them almost actual witnesses to the crime—according to your newspapers, as you tell me. Then the locked doors, front and back, excluding consideration of any intruder other than the one followed through the open window. Oh, a perfect 'police case.' *But*"—here his voice changed—"not a sliver of a clew pointing to *you*—not a suspicion."

"Except from Creighton," escaped the client.

"Creighton? Oh, you mean this detective—" contemptuously. "Well, possibly so; but what of it? He has no evidence—he can have no evidence. He's got his suspicion through just a sort of animal instinct—a 'hunch' as you Americans call it. And, anyhow—the robe seemed to shrug—"now that you have come to me, you have nothing to fear from this man; nothing whatever." The cool, offhand assurance was charged with finality. "He will not touch you now. He cannot."

The other weighed this moodily, but without conviction.

"He has been shadowing me closer today." He hitched nearer. "I think he is closing in."

"Well?"—tersely.

"Suppose he has followed me to-night?"

"Nothing more likely"—carelessly. "But"—the seer's fingers drummed upon the table—"but what of it?"

The man cleared his throat. "He may know where I am."

"May know! Why, of course, he does know. But again I say: What of it?"

"He might arrest me!"

"Here?" It was a stress of scorn. "You forget yourself, sir," came with cold asperity; "you forget where you are!" Indeed, the robe stirred as though the philosopher had straightened in impulsive dudgeon, half-minded, for the moment to end the conference. "Now, listen—you," broke from him abruptly, harshly, "and mark this fact once for all, if you do not know it. No man may cross that threshold save by Zaliel's consent. And no man may molest any client of Zaliel's, *provided*—"

The emphasis left the word suspended—significantly, it seemed. But the man in the queen's chair felt that he understood. The masterful old wizard meant nothing less than this: that any friend or client of his who was under ban of the law shared his own immunity, provided he chose to spread over him the mantle of his protection. Wherefore the man of Saturn gripped his chair arms, sitting forward, his pulses leaping under the daring hope inspired.

"Yes," he prompted breathlessly, "provided—"

"Provided," the voice emphasized earnestly, "that such a man rallies all the power of *his own will* and defies the evil influence of his malignant destiny."

The man heard blankly. The reply was not just what he had expected, and it confused.

"You know," the voice reminded, "that I told you it all depended upon you alone—upon your course between now and midnight."

A groan came from the queen's chair.

"I remember." The tone was leaden, despondent. "But what can I do—what can I do?"

"Fight that!" A grasp of steel lunged through the dark and gripped the other's arm. "Fight fear as you would fight the spirit of evil itself; for fear—all fear, invites evil. Man, *man*"—the astrologer allowed his voice to explode passionately—"don't you, a student of astrology, know that your

will—its power—is utterly paralyzed, useless, once your evil star reaches opposition— Ah, you do 'know' that!" A smile satirical, yet holding a certain quality of relief indulged itself an instant behind the beard and darkness. "Then don't you see you must break this thralldom—*now*?"

"Oh, I know"—faintly—"but—"

The despirited mumble died, throttled by a swallow; and the man's head merely drooped the lower.

Something touched him and he started.

"There is still time," said the voice; and before his eyes the client saw gleaming ghostly, phosphorescent hands and dial figures of a watch. "Still time in which to save your life—and *his*."

Slowly the man lifted his head, blinking through the gloom.

"What's that?" sharply. "Say that last again."

"Your life—and his."

"His?" Slowly, unsteadily the client got to his feet, his hands clamping the table edge for support. "You—you mean I could save us both?"

"Aye," the darkness answered. "Make your will conquer *fear*—the evil spell of the yellow planet—and you save your life and his!"

A moment's silence fell.

"I wonder," the man's lips framed whisperingly, "oh, I wonder if I could!"

The astrologer sighed. "You can, friend, if you will shake off this obsession: this craven terror of an evil star—of anything or anybody that might do harm to you."

The client's eyes sought the watch again. Yes, there was still time: an hour—and almost a minute over. No, the odd minute was going; it—

"It's gone!"

A gasp uttered but never heard. For his voice was lost in the sudden strident, summoning scream of an electric doorbell that submerged everything; the sort of long-drawn, imperative alarm that showed a purpose behind it that it be heard.

So much; then silence and the dark again.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BIRTH OF COURAGE.

"What's that?"

The man gripping the table's edge swayed forward, the hinges of his elbows an instant in collapse.

"That? Oh, just the doorbell," answered Zaliel.

"I know—but who——"

He turned fearfully, startled afresh by a new sound from beyond the wall of darkness; the soft silken swish of the tapestried hangings. Then he breathed easier, recognizing what it was; and, though he felt a presence, he knew it must be Zaliel's manservant, waiting silently upon his master's will.

Again the electric scream: two short rings—abrupt, impatient. The client dropped to his chair, clutching the arms tensely. Zaliel sighed resignedly.

"Well, Duncan, you might see what it is." The seer's murmur was unemotional, indifferent. "Probably some one at the wrong door," he added for his visitor.

But the client scarcely heard. He sat frozen, his senses following Duncan as he opened the door leading to the anteroom. The studio glowed softly for an instant with diffused light; then it was snuffed into darkness as the door closed. A moment, and he heard the unlocking of the outer door; then, after a pause, came the low, vibrant murmur of the man's voice apparently in talk with some one. Suddenly came the soft thud of the outer door closing. A moment, and again the shaft of light winked as the inner door opened, then closed again.

There was a silken stir from Zaliel.

"Well?"

"A gentleman, sir," came an answer from the dark. "He wouldn't give his name or state his business."

"Gone?"

"No, sir; he's still in the corridor outside. In point of fact, sir"—the voice seemed to hesitate—"the party is very insistent, sir."

"Oh, is he?" The astrologer's short laugh held ironic rebuke. "Have you forgotten that I am 'insistent' myself—as to the hours people must observe?"

"Beg pardon, sir"—with apologetic cough—"but it's not you that the party wants to see. It's the gentleman, sir."

The client collapsed backward. "I knew it!"

The astrologer leaned toward him. "Steady!" his low voice admonished; "remember——"

His hand jerked the chain of the pedes-taled lamp, and the long, pent-up darkness vanished. Through what was at first an effulgence half blinding, the client could see

the seer smiling at him; the eagle eyes—last seen so stern—now agleam with reassurance, with cheer.

Zaliel turned again to his servitor. "Well," he asked crisply. "What about him—this man; what do you make of him?"

As though but waiting for the question, the man glided swiftly across the intervening floor.

"The party, sir, is a dick."

The astrologer merely grunted.

"Yes, sir." The man nodded. "One of the big flops this time." He inclined above the table, his confidential air respectfully including his master's guest. "Don't you remember, sir"—to Zaliel eagerly—"that highly named Creighton—that last year gave you so much trouble?"

"Never mind." Zaliel's hand fanned it away indifferently. "Well, you say he doesn't want to see me?"

"No, sir. Only the gentleman."

The philosopher turned a slow smile upon his client's pale face. It was a smile unperturbed; one that seemed to say: "I feel slighted. I don't know but a little piqued!"

Involuntarily the man found himself smiling back.

"Ah!" Zaliel's face lighted and he turned animatedly to Duncan. "Say that the gentleman says he is engaged," he directed coolly. "No, wait, that's not all!" He twirled carelessly the ribbon of the pince-nez suspended from his neck. "If he doesn't like it, tell him to——" He shrugged lightly, lifting to Duncan a slow, underlidded smile that had its own significance.

The client gasped. The high-handed effrontery of such a message: its bold, unveiled insolence! Yet it gave him a curious thrill of mental exhilaration, a tingling new and strange.

"Well?" Zaliel's voice addressed Duncan sharply; for the man still lingered, struggling it seemed with some indecision.

"Beg pardon, sir." Duncan coughed a little, blinking apologetically at the visitor. "I don't know whether the gentleman would care for it; but there was also—a message."

"A message?"

"Yes, sir." The servant's look shifted to his master. "I didn't deliver the message, sir, it being in a manner precious raw—I mean what you would call brusque."

Zaliel shrugged. "Oh, well, let's have it!"

"Well, sir, the fly cop outside says to me

—I'll give you exactly his own words, sir"—to the guest—"and just the way he said it—he says: 'You tell that bloody murderer inside there that I know he's here all right, all right; and so let's have no funny business—no stalling.' He says: 'You tell him I say to shake a foot and be mighty damn lively about it, too, unless it's so he wants me to come in there and drag him out by his dirty neck.'"

A coarse, a brutal message; every word like the lash of a bull whip, plying unconscionable contempt and scorn: Lashes, truly, for they drew blood: veritably whipped it into life and sight. It leaped incontinently into the gray face of the man of Saturn, dyeing it to the very ears. It receded as abruptly, leaving a curiously vivid whiteness for one so sallow—whiteness save for the eyes. There the red stayed; a slowly brightening fire that was like the glow of a wakening forge.

"Well, that all?"

Imperceptible to the onlooker, the eyes of master and man flashed an exchange.

"Not quite, sir." The servant cleared his throat under what seemed further reluctance and embarrassment. "I told the party I couldn't deliver such a message as that to the gentleman. 'Why, he'd bash me in the jaw,' I says. With that he laughs and—" Duncan paused, shifting distressfully. "Pardon, sir; but I'd much rather not repeat what he said—" He coughed gently.

Zaliel stole a sly glance at his client's set countenance—at the narrowed eyes riveted upon Duncan's face. He jerked a quick nod at his man.

"Go on!" sharply; and his eyes telegraphed a gleam. "Let's have it—now!"

Duncan inhaled deeply.

"Well, sir"—with seeming resignation—"when I says that, he laughs kind of sneering and answers: 'You needn't be afraid of him doing anything. Why, you could kick that white-livered coward to one end of the room and back, and he wouldn't lift a finger; he hasn't got the sand. Strangling helpless women is his line; he wouldn't ever touch a man!'"

A loud, angry snarl interrupted: an oath blending into an incoherent explosion of words; and the queen's chair, suddenly vacated, rocked drunkenly to a fall. In the foreground a figure that seemed to have been shot from it by a coiled spring balanced

an instant. Then it dived with far-flung arms straight for the corridor outside.

"Stop him, Slinky! Stop him—quick!"

Not an easy thing to do. Very nearly too late was Zaliel's henchman; for even as he tackled, the Man of Saturn had torn open the first door and Slinky had to grapple with plunging weight and battling arms. Promptly he received a businesslike punch that thwacked full upon his windpipe and all but forced relaxing of his clutch.

"Let me go, damn you!" Eyes, red-misted, backed the infuriate snarl. "I want to kill the—"

"Help me, gov'nor!" Slinky gasped.

"Steady! Let me have him!"

The long arms of the astrologer suddenly intervening, applied a muscular dexterity that wrenched the man from the door; that levered the plunging torso back into the room. There Zaliel turned his client about, laughing into his eyes as Slinky discreetly made his exit.

"You don't want to kill me, do you?"

For a moment it looked as if he did; then, as Zaliel applied reasoning and quieting, gradually the storm-swept visage responded to some effort at self-control.

"I beg your pardon, professor," he mumbled as Zaliel released his arms; "but I—you know that ruffian out there—his calling me a coward—I—" He swallowed heavily, eyes agleam at the door. "All right, professor"—sullenly—"I'll wait!" His chin set with a snap. "But I'll get him when he comes in." He stood alert in the middle of the floor, waiting.

Zaliel followed his eyes to the door.

"If he comes in—yes," he said. "But he won't."

The man's short laugh was skeptical. "What! Not after that pointed threat—that message? Oh, yes!"

The philosopher looked at him. "But you do not fear him now?"

"No!" The man almost thundered it.

"Then, my friend, he cannot touch you. For where no fear is, there is nothing ever to fear. It is just a wonderful scientific law—psychic law." He rested his hand upon the other's shoulder. "You are going to see."

The man's eyes were on him with odd fixity. Again that thrill had come to him; that strange new exhalation of confidence and courage.

"I believe I'm beginning to—now," he murmured slowly.

Meanwhile, outside in the dim quiet of the public corridor, the bald-headed man—considerably disheveled—lay back against the outer door and expended a moment's breathing spell in pantingly describing to the grinning Mr. Farron the whirlwind finish of the mysterious séance inside.

"This psychology stuff is something fierce!" He caressed his neck ruefully. "All right, son, for you to laugh"—aggrievedly—"but it wouldn't 'a' been so funny to you if that big fellow had landed out here on your neck. He wouldn't 'a' seen you wasn't Creighton till he'd 'a' seen you all over the place." Then incredulously: "Say, who'd have thought that a thing like a little insult 'a' turned a scared yellow hound-dog into a ramping, fighting lion?" He whipped from his pocket a little engraved card that bore the name "Robert Creighton."

"But I wonder, now," he speculated, his hand upon the doorknob, "if the poor mutt won't crawl again when I take this in to Zaliel."

The other's head shook. "Not him; he's found his nerve again." The ex-gangster spoke with the assurance of one who in course of a turbulent career had seen strange transformations: not the least of them being how undying courage is sometimes born in even the poorest human worm.

CHAPTER VII.

THE YELLOW STAIN.

Zaliel took from its tray the card that Duncan tendered. He frowned as he leveled his pince-nez at it.

"Didn't you give this—er—person Mr. Carteret's message?"

Duncan blinked apologetically. "I did, sir; but it's you he wants to see this time."

The frown deepened.

"I know, sir," the man continued hastily; "I told him you didn't receive except by appointment, but he insisted. Just a minute, he said, was all he wanted."

"Umph!" The philosopher looked none too well pleased, as the client saw; but he extended the card across the table. "You were right about the man," he said.

The client looked at the card, then flung it from him. He stood up, glowering at the door.

"Why doesn't he come in and 'drag me out

by the neck?'" he scoffed with derisive laugh. "Why all this sudden formality?"

His host sighed patiently. "Duncan, you answer the gentleman. I have tried to explain, but——" He shrugged.

Zaliel's man blinked gravely at the visitor. "Those doors there, sir, are not locked," he said with measured deliberation; "and the party outside knows it. Nevertheless, sir, you might sit here for a year and you would never see this Detective Creighton in this room any more than he is now. No, sir"—with emphasis—"not any *more* than he is right at this minute."

The visitor laughed. "Well, he's certainly not in here."

Duncan blinked softly, but without other reply.

The visitor did not require reply. There was the witnessing of his own senses; the evidence that the police would not—indeed, it appeared dared not—violate the astrologer's threshold.

And all because this old man was *un-afraid!* The psychic law to which he had referred——

Impulsively he turned to Zaliel.

"Professor," he said, "if you're willing to see this man, don't stop on my account." He stood before the seer, speaking earnestly. "Believe me, I'm not afraid of him! Why, I see it's as you said, professor; he hasn't got a thing on me—he couldn't have." His eyes flashed a gleam that was crafty, assured. "I was a panic-headed fool to be afraid."

The seer smiled oddly. "Very well, I'll see him." He rose, nodding to Duncan. "Seat Mr. Creighton in the anteroom."

The client interposed. "No, no, professor, let's have him in here." His fists clenched. "He called me a coward——"

"No," Zaliel's head shook. "I'll see him—but you must not. We'll leave the door ajar so you may hear all that's said."

He lifted his hand as the other started protest.

"Are you mad?" His tone suddenly crackled sharp rebuke as Duncan left the room. "You haven't one second to spare upon senseless passion and resentment!" Abruptly he flashed the watch dial before Carteret's face. "True, the hour is young yet; but seconds are flying faster than heart-beats, and with every one of them Saturn mounts closer to midheaven." He leaned nearer, speaking earnestly: "You know that if you would save this man whom you

have entangled with your destiny, you must throw off the thralldom of the yellow planet—its curse of fear, of cowardice—of every kind—and before midnight. After that”—solemnly—“the yellow stain is ineradicable.”

“The yellow stain!” Carteret flushed. “But I tell you I’m not one bit afraid of Creighton!”

“I said fear—cowardice—of every kind.” The seer stressed impressively. “Remember—of every kind!”

The man squared his shoulders confidently. “Oh, I’m all right now, professor. I’ll beat the yellow devil—you’ll see!”

Zaliel smiled.

“Good!” he said heartily, clapping him on the shoulder; “then you will save the other man, too. These are strange things,” he added thoughtfully; “but then everything metaphysical is strange, of course—a borderland into which we are only just beginning dimly to peer; and—”

He turned as the door opened and closed.

“All ready, sir,” announced Duncan.

With hand upon the knob Zaliel looked back at Carteret.

“Whatever happens out here or is said, you are not, on any account, to interrupt or to leave this room.” The low, measured tone had the insistence of imperative command. The next instant he was gone, leaving a half-foot aperture of door before which Duncan’s burly figure bulked screenlike, effectually masking all that lay outside. Simultaneously, from the anteroom, there came a harsh outcry.

“Oh, so your highness is here at last!”

The client, with a thrill, recognized the voice of Creighton, the detective, struggling, it seemed, with pent-up anger. “Well, it’s time! Now, see here, doctor—or ‘professor’—or whatever you call yourself—of course you understand I sent in that card just to humor this fool front you like to keep up. But I can tell you I was getting sore waiting, my friend. Another minute, and I should have gone in.”

“We are wasting time, are we not?” Zaliel’s quiet voice answered. “Monsieur knows, of course—perfectly well—that he would not venture to invade any portion of my premises without invitation.” The tranquil tone had a touch of hauteur. “Monsieur would not dare. He knows it—”

Creighton’s voice burst angrily: “Yes, I know you’ve got some cursed pull that protects you with a blanket police order.”

“Just so monsieur knows, that suffices.”

A growl—then a pause.

“Look here, doctor”—the detective’s voice slid suddenly into a propitiative tone—“let’s see if we can’t get together, you and I. I won’t pretend I don’t think you’re a faker and a crook; for we both know you are—and a darned clever one, too. I’ll even admit that you are one too many for me; and when Bob Creighton admits that, it’s going some. Now, listen, doctor”—the voice shaded placatingly—“I’ve heard a lot of good things about you, and I’m going to make an appeal just to your fairness—your sense of justice—as man to man. Wait—let me finish! Just put the lid on the sarcasm for one minute, can’t you?”

And the controlled tones continued:

“This man you’ve got in there—the cowardly thug!—I want him! Doctor, that man strangled without pity a weak, defenseless woman—murdered her in cold blood!”

“Monsieur has evidence?”

There was a pause. “No, I haven’t, doctor,” came sullen, frank admission; and the listener inside drew a deep breath of triumphant elation; “I haven’t a thing to go in court on, and you know I haven’t. But, doctor, I’ve got my hunch, and I want to tell you it’s never failed me yet. What prompted it I won’t go into now—it would take too long; but I know this man killed Adele Latour—I know it, doctor, as certainly as I know you do. Oh, come off, doctor!”—in derision. “Don’t look so innocent; I know he’s spilled the whole thing to you.”

Zaliel coughed dryly. “Is monsieur counting upon me as his witness?”

“Witness—you—the crooks’ confessor?” The detective’s laugh was mirthless, scornful. “I’m not such a fool! I know you’d have a devilish poor memory, doctor, even under oath.”

“Ah, monsieur is sagacious—is discerning!” And the astrologer’s polished murmur seemed to yield appreciation due a compliment. “But if monsieur has no evidence—no case—against Mr. Carteret, may I ask what he hopes to gain by taking him with him from here—and to-night?”

The listener inside sat forward in his chair, straining for the reply to this.

“Listen, doctor!” The detective’s voice dropped to a growl of slow impressiveness. “It’s true I haven’t got anything to hold this bird on; I wouldn’t have unless he came through clean with a signed confession. All

the same, I want to take him downtown to the Tombs to-night. I want to show him something down there—I want him to see a picture."

"A picture—in a prison? Why, surely!" The tone was satiric. "By all means a picture!" Then with polite irony: "Monsieur's humor is too subtle for an old man's wits!"

"No, no—wait, doctor; you misunderstand. I'm not trying any funny stuff. This picture I'm talking about is real. Very real, doctor—a little prison cell with a living man. No, hardly a man, either, for he's not much more than just an overgrown boy. It's not a pleasant picture, but I just want your friend Carteret to see it. It's not pleasant for one thing, because we will not find this prisoner sleeping. He will be tossing, squirming—torn and tired from a racking cough; just moaning with weakness in between times. He was a T. B. all right when they put him in there—three months ago—and he's been getting worse. He won't be there much longer"—grimly—"and I want your friend Carteret to see him."

The man in the room was already seeing him. He visualized the cramped, confined cell and the pallid figure therein—coughing, fighting for the breath of life, yet with every spasm tearing the ravaged lungs apart. The man must be very weak—

"Yes, he's really—you might say—dying." The detective's voice broke in with an aptness that produced upon the listener a sensation of ice-water chill. "He's being killed a little ahead of time, that's all." Then with stern bitterness: "Only, it's not the law that's killing this poor devil. The one that's doing that is your slick friend inside there."

A pause; and the listener heard the sudden, silken rustle that betrayed some movement of Zaliel's—an impatient gesture he thought. "Oh, well, monsieur, but if this man is going to die, anyhow—"

"But he wouldn't die! That's just it. He wouldn't die—so the prison doc says—if he could get out into the air and sunshine—could get away from here—out into Colorado, for instance, where the dry air does miracles with T. B. And his mother would take him out there, if he were released."

"Ah, his mother!" The astrologer's low tone suggested musing regret—a touch of pity.

"A poor woman who has a small stationery store on the East Side. She has a chance to sell out her little trunkful of stock for

enough to take them to Colorado, where her brother has a small ranch."

A silence fell.

The man inside laved his dry lips with a tongue almost as dry. Dry, too, his throat; so dry that its click, as he swallowed, incited a questioning glance—a soft, contemplative mastiff blink—from the stolid sentinel before the door.

"Of course, doctor"—the detective's voice lifted deprecatingly—"you'll say this pup down there in the Tombs don't amount to much; and I say so, too. But you know how it is with mothers; he's her lamb—her own bone and flesh—her all. So there you are!" A pause and the voice went on musingly. "I guess his mother'd go down into hell after him, if she had to. She'd hunt through it till she found him, if it took a thousand years. Then her prayers would work him out of there some way, and her soul would go on loving him just the same; it wouldn't make a bit of difference what he'd done. So would your mother, doctor; so would mine—so would Carteret's, for that matter. You can bet it ain't her fault he's the whelp he is."

The man inside stiffened sharply, an angry mutter rumbling behind his teeth. The reference had touched him on the raw. His mother! They might leave her out of this! His tired eyes suddenly felt a salty sting, his brain a longing for the peace of that quiet room upstairs in his home that to him was a holy place—a cloistered shrine, kept in every way just as she had left it years ago—the room where she had died.

"Aw, say, doctor, don't study up on me—meet me halfway! Talk with me down on the level now—won't you? Be fair!"

A silence, then Zaliel spoke in changed tone:

"Very well. Monsieur speaks of this young man's release. If I understand him, he is implying that this can be accomplished through—"

The pause was questioning. "That's it, doctor! Through Carteret's coming clean with confession that he, himself, killed the Latour woman in her apartment on the night of April 12th."

The man inside swallowed. His hands, grown damp again, were wadding his handkerchief into a ball once more.

"Um!" The seer's grunt was noncommittal. "Monsieur asks a great deal. Why should Mr. Carteret do this?"

"Why? Why, because of justice!" The

voice rang. "That and to save himself from everlasting remorse—from the guilt of *two* murders instead of one!"

The man inside quivered a little; his eyes closed.

"Yes, two murders, I tell you," he heard emphasized; "for as surely as we stand here, he'll have this boy's blood upon his soul unless he——"

"Just one moment, monsieur," Zaliel's smooth, satiric murmur intervened. "If I understand you, you are asking—in effect—that another man shall voluntarily throw himself to the wolves in order to save this prisoner's life."

"Well, why not? Isn't Carteret throwing Norwood to the wolves, as you call it, to save himself? You know he is! And he knows it, too; he's been cowering with guilty fear because of it. You needn't tell *me* he hasn't; because I've been watching him, day by day. I *know*!"

Even more assuredly might the speaker have trumpeted his certainty could he have looked within upon the figure that hugged shrinkingly the side of the great chair as though it sought utter effacement. Zaliel's voice, lifted in defense, served only to make the figure contract the more.

"I think monsieur is mistaken. However—er—disquieted Mr. Carteret may have been, I have reason to *know* that he isn't afraid now—well, of anything."

"Like fun he isn't!" The derision was an explosive hoot. "Say, doctor"—disgustedly—"you don't mean to tell me that you, a wise man, are kidding yourself with any bunk like that!"

"Like what, sir?"

"Why, that Carteret isn't a living coward from the hair of his head down to the last toe nail. Why, he's *yellow*, doctor; so yellow that it even tinges his very skin."

The voice swept on, giving no opportunity for reply:

"Why, let's look at it, doctor, you and I, just as average men. What can we say—what would any men say—about another who would deliberately let an innocent person die for a crime that he himself committed? Wouldn't every mother's son of them say that such a skunk was a low, contemptible coward? Can you think of him as anything else—*can* you?"

The man inside brushed his forehead—his lips—with the handkerchief. He strained for the astrologer's reply.

None came.

"Got you hipped, have I, doctor?" The detective's tone was taunting. "No come back, eh? You have to admit it!"

"I do not—as yet." The low voice, though troubled, still held dignity. "The stars"—mutteringly—"will show the truth."

The other voice jeered: "I see; going to put it up to the stars, are you? All right, old gentleman"—with a laugh—"go to it! *I'm* willing. If there's anything in that stuff—and I won't say there isn't, from all I've heard—it'll show Carteret up. You can't fool the stars, I've heard 'em say."

An exclamation escaped the astrologer—a gasp of dismay.

"Monsieur will have to excuse me," he said hurriedly. "I see that my watch has traveled fast—I have lost much time, and——"

"Oh, well, I guess we've both been losing time." There was a heavy, resigned sigh—a stir that seemed to precede departure. A doorknob creaked querulously under a turning hand. "All the same, I'm going to stick around a while and watch your door. Oh, no—don't fear! I'm not going to arrest him; no play of that sort. What would be the use? I know you've wised him up to the fact that I've got nothing to stick a charge on. No, I've just got a hunch, doctor, that maybe—just *maybe*—yellow as he is—I can induce this fellow to go down with me to-night and see that poor boy he's killing."

Zaliel's ironic grunt rallied.

"If he's 'killing' this young man, as monsieur says, then, of course, he'll see him. Oh, surely!" His soft laugh mocked.

"'Surely' is right," the retort flashed. "You said something then, doctor. See him? Say, listen: you bet he'll see him; he'll see him through all the rest of his rotten life—the cowardly hound!" Prophetic exultation crackled in the angry fling of words. "He'll see him in his shrinking, guilty soul every hour of the day and night; he'll see him and he'll hear him, too—in the crowded streets by day—in the silences when he'll walk them night after night, night after night, when every shadow will seem a haunting ghost—whispering——"

The voice died away, as though the speaker, retiring, had stepped into the public corridor outside.

But the listener had heard enough—more than enough, and it was all echoed by the frightened clamor of his soul. He *was* afraid,

as this man said: he was in deadly terror of what was to be faced, to be lived through if he permitted the prisoner in the Tombs to die. He could not face the thought of it. No, he must sleep; the strain must end.

It must end through his coming clean, as the detective had said. It would be disagreeable—yes, but that was all; for he would save Norwood and save himself, too. The astrologer had said he could, if only he mastered fear before midnight.

He looked at his watch and breathed relief. Yes, there was still time. Not much: less than a quarter of an hour—but still enough. Yes, he would confess; for it was perfectly safe—the astrologer had said so—*if* he mastered fear.

If!

A cold chill struck through him.

If he mastered fear!

And he had not! He saw it in a flash of self-revelation that made clear the fact that there was nothing fearless in a step that was merely a flight from other horrors dreaded. Why, it was just fear that was whipping him on: Fear, his master, his tyrant still!

So that, if he saved the other man through his confession, then he, himself, was lost. And if he sacrificed him, then he consigned himself to a future that would be a living hell.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST MINUTE.

Mr. Jimmy Farron and his colleague, from their remote covert in the darkest corner of the big, dim observatory, peered speculatively at the two figures poised there on the high platform that lifted their heads to level of the great circular skylight. The two subordinates not only peered with impunity, but by art of which they were masters, exchanged speech freely—labial, mouth-corner whisperings insured not to carry beyond the other's ear.

"As I say," breathed Slinky, "it's one thing to bring a horse to the trough, but another to make him drink."

"Meanin'?" Mr. Farron rubbed a tickling ear.

"Meaning that it's close on to the hour—the dead line the gov'nor fixed, and he ain't scared no signed confession out o' this bird yet. Not even with having him come out here and look up at his hoodoo in the sky there."

Mr. Farron leaned closer in the dark.

"Thought you said," he whispered, "that the gov'nor has already got the confession."

"By word of mouth, and as 'Zalief,' you fool—yes," the older operative's hiss retorted. "But that's no good—not as evidence; because it can't be used. Why? Say"—disgustedly—"use your bean! You know the gov'nor can't bring Zalief into court—he never has. Some nice spill of news that *would* be—eh? 'The Notorious Crooks' Confessor a Masquerading Detective'—can't you see the headlines?"

"Geel!" Mr. Farron indulged a startled swallow. "I never thought of that."

Slinky blinked indulgently. "You'll learn to think, son. You see now why the gov'nor's got to put it over this bird so he'll go down to headquarters on his own."

"Sh-h!" whispered Jimmy, gripping his arm.

"Sh-h!" echoed the colleague, pricking his ears.

"How much time, professor?" they heard Carteret whisper hoarsely. "How much time have I left now? Quick!"

"Seven minutes," Zalief answered; "just thirty seconds less than when you asked me last."

They made spectral grouping there at the top of the circular steps, the astrologer with white head lifted in the sifting starlight, Carteret staring with distended eyes up at the yawning profundity that spread above his head.

Over him a dizzy height, flecked by diamond motes of light: star upon star, world upon world—deep-blue, infinite space. Peering down at him from out it all, a shining yellow point that had no friendly twinkle: a baleful, tiny eye—so he thought of it—that fixed him with gleam of malevolent exultation. For it lay near—oh, how near!—to the thin wire above the skylight that Zalief had told him marked the position of the meridian.

"How far, professor—how far has it yet to go?"

"An arc of but one degree and a half now. Then it reaches midheaven."

"I can't think, professor; my brain seems all in knots!" The hoarse voice held appeal. "I know what I want to do, what I've got to do. I know I've got to reach decision before that yellow devil—" He wiped the dew from his forehead. "Help me, professor; can't you?" he ended whis-

peringly. "You said you would; you promised me a test."

"Steady!" came in low voice. "It's all right. I am waiting—as nearly as I dare—to the last minute."

"The last minute! But *why*?"

"So that you will feel, will know, that the decision you make is irrevocable, final." He looked at his watch. "Stand here," he said, and turned the man to face the east. The black sleeve came up, pointing toward the eastern horizon. "Out of the east cometh light," the seer's voice murmured. "May it come to you, poor prisoner of the dark!"

Carteret looked at the astrologer with nerves dancing on edge. Watch in hand, Zaliel just seemed waiting—listening, looking eastward.

Listening—but what was there to hear?

Absolutely nothing, as Carteret was sure. Nothing, save that borne upon the breeze that drifted through the open skylight, a shrill cry, like a winged thing, lifted above the city's muffled keynote from the sidewalks far below. Just a newsboy's cry, hawking a fresh war extra through the far-flung reaches of the night. That was all, and even it died away.

With the passing, Zaliel began speaking, his voice slow and ruminative, yet as vibrant with feeling as the low hum of a quivering viol.

"It is near midnight here," he said, "but there—across the sea in France—it is somewhere near the dawn."

The man flashed a startled look. Was Zaliel letting his mind be diverted from the crisis confronting? Somewhere near the dawn—in France? Yes, that would be true, of course. But what of it?

"Yes, it is near the dawn there," the low murmur pulsed again. "Throughout the livelong night that battle front of sorrow has been bathed in pain." The voice paused—went on. "Men have been fighting there, dying there, Carteret, for you—for me."

In the starlight the man of Saturn saw the dark eyes turned upon him, a flash of mournful questioning in their depths.

Carteret nodded uneasily. "I know," he muttered. But this time he followed Zaliel's gaze eastward. Yes, it was all going on there right under those low-hanging stars: the Great War, with the manhood of the world at bay—

A feeling, wistful and shamed, touched him as it had done many times before. If only

he could have been young enough, and could have been brave enough to have played his part "over there!" Some feeling of this sort—he remembered—he had confessed this morning to no less a person than his butler as he tried to interest himself in the headlines of the paper the man had placed before him.

"Fighting, as we know," Zaliel's quiet voice broke in, "so that ruthless cruelty and selfishness may not overrun the world."

"I know," Carteret mumbled again.

This time it was his own eyes that flashed. His hands closed, their knuckles tightening. Yes, if he just could have been young enough and man enough to have taken a hand. Oh, yes, if *man* enough—

"But my friend," the seer's grave earnestness went on, "not all the heroes of this night 'over there' have been among the unafraid. No"—as Carteret looked at him quickly—"some of the noble dead now lying there, gray under the creeping dawn, were heroes—aye, the greater heroes, because they were afraid."

The man stared. "Some afraid—yet heroes?"

"Aye, we hear tales of such. Men cold within with deadly physical terror, but who drove themselves onward with grim smiles upon their faces, gallantly engaged, not with just one foe, but two—one without and one within—and going straight over the top headlong into death and glory. Those stars"—he pointed to low on the horizon—"are fading there over No Man's Land; the light is coming there. But a greater light had already come to those who, though afraid, gave up their lives because they hated cruelty and wrong; because they could not endure the sacrifice of the innocent."

The burning eyes held Carteret through a long instant; then the man plucked his gaze away. A dull tide of color flowed to his cheeks, his ears; then it receded, leaving him waxen pale in the gray half light. Presently he spoke, his face averted.

"You mean," he muttered hoarsely, "that if I let him die—if I sacrifice the innocent, then I—I am no better than the bloody Huns." Disgust, shame, and horror succeeded one another in the swift changes of the man's face. He stood, staring wide-eyed, brooding into space. "I—a Carteret—of kinship with the Huns!" he muttered. "And these others—even though *afraid*—yet heroes. Ready to lay down their lives to save the innocent, because—"

The mutter trailed into silence.

Then suddenly the man's head jerked sharply upward. He whirled about, facing Zaliel, illumination growing in his face.

"The light!" It left his lips in a half gasping cry. "I see—I know now what you meant by—the light!" A wonderment glowed in his eyes—the awe of one upon whom an unexpected vision breaks. "The light! My God, I understand—I see!"

Carteret caught the astrologer's sleeve.

"The time, professor! Quick—the time!" Then as Zaliel displayed his watch: "Less than a minute—but enough; for the decision's made!"

He straightened, head up, addressing Zaliel with a smile.

"Will you send for the detective, professor? I want to give myself up."

The observatory chronometer registered midnight as the astrologer drew aside the tapestried hangings for his client to pass from the observatory out through the lighted studio.

"Good-by." The seer extended his hand. It was for the first time, as Carteret remembered. "It is a new day and a new life." The eagle eyes smiled upon him.

"A new life, even if a short one." Carteret shrugged, but the words contained no tinge of bitterness, no regret. "Certainly a better life, professor, than I have ever known."

"You are not afraid?"

"Afraid?" A grin, faint but whimsical, lighted the man's face. "I've never been so scared in all my life! But you needn't worry," he nodded confidently, his eyes reassuring and steadfast, "I'm all right now, professor. I've seen the Yellow Devil pass its midheaven, and I—well, I know I am captain of my will at last."

"Good-by," said Zaliel simply. "You will wait for the detective there in the anteroom till Duncan brings him to you, thus making it clear that it is your voluntary summons. It is far, far the better way than for you to encounter him outside." He smiled questioningly, wistfully, his hand giving a last, warm pressure. "I am sure you will humor an old man's whim in this."

The man nodded agreement. A moment longer he lingered, struggling to voice thanks for which, it seemed, he could find no words. Then he turned, drawing himself up sharply, facing the lighted way. A moment later he

had passed on, straight to the door leading out to the little anteroom.

It opened—closed with a click.

The black-robed figure, still holding the tapestry back, stood under its arch, an ear bent listening—waiting for any other sounds. But there was nothing to hear. The Man of Saturn had not gone beyond the little room that he had elected should be his trysting place with death.

Zaliel's hand let the hangings fall.

CHAPTER IX.

"THE ANSWER IS IN THE STARS."

The two operatives, left alone, were in the lighted studio putting away the discarded cocoon of Zaliel, the astrologer. Slinky chuckled as he folded the seer's robe.

"Can't get over that poor boob coming up here to escape somebody he was scared blue about, and then walking off with him like a tame lamb to the slaughter pen—even wanting to go!" The bald-headed man's hard jaws indulged in a saturnine grin. "Boy, I've seen some clever work of the gov'nors, but I never saw him in anything smoother than with that bunk he handed to this poor simp about the greater heroes being those who were afraid but went over the top just the same. If I hadn't known it was all bull, I'd have thought he meant it. Yes, I would!"

The younger man lifted a half-frowning, under-lidded glance, then bent again to the white wig he was smoothing upon a block: the wig that was by Marivaux—the great Marivaux of Paris—and that had cost two thousand francs.

"It didn't sound like 'bull,'" he muttered.

"Sound like it!" Slinky lifted derisive hoot. "Of course it didn't sound like it, you lollipop. What would be the good of bull if it did?"

The other was silent. The wig disposed of, he addressed himself to brushing the astrologer's beard.

"Lor, boy!" Slinky indulged himself in an enjoyably reminiscent chortle. "You orter been in this room when the guy was sitting there and the gov'nor was holding the dialogue with himself out there in the anteroom. It made me think of the time when I was a screw at the big house up the river. I used to get on the death watch sometimes, and I got so I could follow everything they was thinking about. It was bet-

ter'n the movies, Jimmy; and one of the things I miss the most now." The ex-turnkey sighed. "You could tell when they was thinking of them they hated and when they was thinking of their wives and kids."

The ex-gangster eyed him loweringly.

"Honest, Slinky," burst from him disgustedly, "sometimes I think you ain't more'n half human. You make me think of these science sharps what cut up little dogs and things just to see which way their muscles squirm." And his own task being done, Mr. Farron slumped himself sullenly in the depths of the queen's chair, leaving to his colleague the storing away of Zaliel's vesture in its proper place in an inner room.

His hand shifted to the pocket holding his cigarettes.

"Nix—nit!" The voice of the former prison watchdog lifted admonitively. "I thought that would be coming! No, son"—as he gathered up his burden—"if you want to smoke, you go out in the corridor: The gov'nor don't allow it in this room, and you know it," and he started out.

"Aw, a cig or two won't hurt the old room. If you was human and smoked yourself, you'd know that." Nevertheless, the hand came back from the pocket empty.

Left alone, Mr. Farron shrugged resignedly and disposed himself comfortably. With his back low in the queen's chair and shoes lifted onto the polished table's edge, he settled himself in a position conducive to comfort through a long wait. His derby, perched rakishly forward, shielded his eyes from the lamp. It was not a position likely to commend itself to the owner of the room; and his back being to the outer door, one might think that Mr. Farron was taking chances with the possibility of a sudden surprise. He was; but this very element of sporting hazard had in itself a certain appeal.

Not that Mr. Farron considered it much of a hazard. To one whose wakeful time was night and who shared with the nocturnal rat a sensitive hearing that at times had saved his life, the ex-gangster could have told you that he'd like to see anybody who could come up behind him without his knowing it, especially when they would have to pass through two doors and an uncarpeted outer room in doing it.

And so the hour passed, and then another. Each was marked by the observatory chronometer behind the wall of tapestry. Its low whispering ticking between times kept

Mr. Farron's senses disagreeably alert, it having a certain disquieting resemblance to low whisperings just around the corner in the dark. He had pricked his ears at such things in the old days and he knew the menace.

The night grew stiller as the city's soft noises drowsed down to occasional faint outbursts that were like a sleeper's snore. Near by the illusion of whisperings behind the curtains became more acute, so that more than once Mr. Farron found himself checking an instinctive movement in the direction of a gun. The last time he did this his hand encountered his cigarettes.

"Gee!" He withdrew the package and looked at it hungrily, then at the doors. A moment's alert harkenings, and he gently withdrew one of the magic sticks, the while his other hand mechanically groped for a match.

Just a half-inch, crackling pull now—no more; how good it would be! Sure! and who would ever know? A stroke of fire and he inhaled relishingly, settling himself deeper in the chair with a grunt of pleasure.

Smoker's pleasure. A kind that's good for human eyes to look upon. At least, so it seemed to the tolerantly smiling figure that leaned motionless against the door behind him. The figure of a tall man, lithe and active, whose dark, crisply curling hair and jewellike brightness of eye, belied the forty years to which he stood committed. A moment's appreciative study of the feet basking under the lamp, then he moved—noiseless as a cloud—to behind the queen's chair. He thrust the corner of a cigarette case past Mr. Farron's ear.

"If you must smoke in here, Jimmy, try one of—"

"Lor', gov'nor!" Mr. Farron, from his suddenly achieved lightning crouch behind the chair as a barricade, relaxed with a gasp that was odd blending of confusion and relief. The gun snuggling in his hand disappeared as suddenly as it had been produced. "Gee, gov'nor," he panted, "suppose I had plugged you. Say, don't never do a thing like that!" The tone held aggrieved protest.

"Nerves, Jimmy! I thought you didn't have them. But as I was saying, if you *must* smoke in here, try one of these Egyptians—Zaliel's special import. I find their odor has less affinity for one's clothes and"—the speaker's glance lightly brushed the rich ap-

pointments of the room—"and for delicate silken draperies—and things."

"T'anks." Mr. Farron, abashed, but outwardly preserving languid poise, selected his cigarette from the proffered case. He wasn't going to be let down before Slinky, now scowling blackly at him from under the arch of the tapestried hangings. But, for the moment, his interest was less for the cigarette than for the weariness exhibited by the master as he sank into his own favorite seat—the high-backed cathedral chair at the table's farther side.

He eyed him with something of the wistful speculation of a dog, studying a beloved master's mood. Had the gov'nor had trouble with his man? Had the guy shied at the hurdles at the last minute?

"Well, boys!" The eagle-bright eyes smiled at the two henchmen as they stood expectant, waiting. They looked a breathless question.

The detective jerked his head.

"Yes, he came through clean," he announced in low tone; "he never held out on a thing."

The prison watchdog's teeth gleamed in a grin of satisfaction. His deep, indrawn breath came with the strong hiss of leathern bellows. As for the former gangster's faint sigh, it might have been of relief or regret. Which it was, he could not have told, himself.

"Good work, gov'nor," Slinky blurted admiringly; "I guess that greases the skids to the chair all right."

The detective looked at him; then his eyes shifted thoughtfully into the shadows beyond. They had a far-away look. He shook his head.

"No."

"What's that, gov'nor?" The bald-headed man was sure he had not heard aright.

"It isn't likely Carteret will ever go to the chair."

The two operatives stared at each other, the older man's experience as prison guard suggesting to him a tragic possibility.

"You don't mean"—the ex-turnkey scowled and his voice quickened indignantly—"that they're that careless they've gone and let this bird croak hisself?"

Again the head shook. "On the contrary, I guess life was never so sweet to him as it seems now." The detective spoke musingly, a smile shading into the far-away look. "I don't think I ever saw a man happier than

he was when he was told he could go home; this after they released him at headquarters."

"Released him," gasped Slinky faintly. "You mean—you don't mean they let him go?" His eyes widened appealingly. "Naw, gov'nor!" he uttered strickenly.

Jimmy shot him a taunting laugh. Then under the excess of his own excitement, absently struck a light and pulled a quick inhalation at the Egyptian cigarette.

This time the dark head nodded. "Yes, released on his own recognizance."

Slinky swallowed. "What for? You said he came through about the strangling of the dame."

"Oh, yes."

"And the motive was there all right. He was after the sparks—wasn't he?—this necklace."

"True, Slinky." The detective sighed. "Yes, that was what he was after."

The human watchdog's heavy jowls swelled and his visage became turgid. Through another distressful swallow, he stared out through what seemed beads of fire.

"Well, I'll be—blowed!" he uttered helplessly.

A chuckle met this. Mr. Farron, from his perch upon the arm of the queen's chair, had the air of one listening with a sense of amused detachment.

"Maybe, Slinky," he suggested with pleasant gravity, "they t'ought the dame got what was coming to her because she didn't fork over w'en the gun told her to. It wou'der saved her life, you know," he reasoned unblushingly.

The detective nodded. "Quite right, Jimmy, that part of it," he agreed. "I believe that was the general view."

The ex-turnkey's little eyes shifted from one speaker to the other, blinking defensively.

"Gov'nor," he said faintly, "you ain't serious—you're stringing me, ain't you? You must be." The appeal held incredulity, tinged with real pain. "Course I know that with all this welfaring and uplifting going on they're getting wabby and mushy—the police, I mean. But they ain't got down to *that* yet—have they—I mean turning a bloody moll-croaker foot loose just because the woman wouldn't cough up the loot he wanted?"

The big fellow scowled defiantly at the

smirking youth beside him, then essayed a feeble, deprecatory grin at his master.

"Say that you're pulling my leg, gov'nor," he pleaded, "and it's all right—only, say it quick!"

The master looked down, gravely stroking his chin. He picked a fiber of lint from his sleeve and shrugged.

"Sorry, but it was just that way, Slinky, old man. I'm not pulling your leg at all."

"Sure you ain't!" Mr. Farron interjected agreeably. "I don't see nothin' hard to understand about that, Slinky. It looks like sense to me, even if it *is* from the p'lice. If people don't fork over stuff quick, they got to expect to get it in the neck; and that's where this dame did get it. Why, I r'member once, w'en I was doin' second-story work, I got into a crib where a guy turned stubborn an'—"

"Gov'nor," Slinky blurted in with a sickly smile, "it's gettin' so this ain't no business for a honest dick. A guy might as well be a banner-toter in the Salvation Army or a windjammer with the Willie boys over there at the West Side 'Y.' Say"—explosively—"are they plumb bughouse down there at headquarters? What'll the commissioner say about this, or the D. A.? Don't they think about that?"

"The district attorney was there. And he got the commissioner on the phone at his home. He concurred in the decision reached."

Slinky's shoulders drooped. "You mean the decision to turn this bird foot loose?"

"On his own recognizance—yes."

Again the watchdog showed his teeth, but this time in the glittering mockery of a smile.

"W'at I don't see, gov'nor," he enunciated softly, "is why the D. A. didn't apologize for them detaining him as long as they did."

The detective closed his eyes, leaning back.

"Well"—slowly—"he *did* thank Mr. Carteret for coming down—for clearing up the matter. Yes, he thanked him." Simultaneous with the choked, inarticulate utterance that this evoked from his assistant, the detective laid his handkerchief over his face—perhaps because the light was blinding. "He—he shook hands with him. So did the chief."

"Did—*w'at*?" Slinky breathed it sufferingly.

The handkerchief vibrated gently. "They shook his hand. I—I *think* the D. A. sent

him home in his own car. I didn't wait to see."

"I should think you didn't wait! Gov'nor!" He gave a sniff of sympathy for the covered face. "I understand. I don't blame you for feeling sore to the bone about this. It's a rotten deal they handed you. Kale and pull did it, I suppose, eh?"

"It sure *is* tough, gov'nor," the ex-gangster growled.

"Thank you, boys." The handkerchief dropped as the detective sat forward sweeping them with a smile. He extended a hand to each. "Success or failure—it's all the same to you two. I can always count upon your sympathy and affection." He pressed the hands and dropped them, leaning back restfully in the chair again. "Yes, Slinky, as you say, I had nothing to work with but a psychic impulse—what you call a 'hunch;' a hunch that was against all reason and common sense, but which persistently denied the guilt of the man at whom the evidence directly pointed."

"You mean young Norwood."

"I do *not* mean Norwood. From the first I was satisfied that he knew no more about the murder than you or Jimmy here. The evidence—my own personally acquired evidence—all pointed straight at another intruder—unknown at first, but whom I discovered to be no other than Carteret."

Slinky blinked. "You don't mean to say, gov'nor, that you've had the goods on this bird all this time?"

The dark head against the carved chair back inclined.

"All this time, Slinky. Yes, I've had evidence enough to have indicted Carteret before any jury, weeks and months ago."

The two operatives stared. "And you never used it, gov'nor?"

"I didn't want to use it: I wanted him to escape."

"You wanted—"

The speech of the older operative ended wheezingly; but his eye telegraphed to his chief his reproach, his consternation, at such a violation of professional ethics.

"Naw, gov'nor," he summoned distressful protest; "you don't mean you wanted a gun to escape; not when the evidence—"

A swinging foot touched him.

"Aw, lay off!" his colleague rebuked. "Ain't the gov'nor just said he had a hunch the guy was innocent?"

Slinky blinked. He, too, had respect for

the Creighton "hunch." In police traditions it was said never to have failed.

"But the guy's confession, gov'nor," he demurred. "Didn't you say he came through clean?"

Again the head inclined. "So straight and clean that the facts he gave checked up with the evidence to a line—a perfect tally."

"Well, then——" Slinky paused questioningly.

Again came the detective's far-away smile. "It was just that fact"—softly—"that saved him."

"Saved him! Why, how could it, if the evidence——" Here Slinky threw up his hands helplessly. "I give it up, gov'nor. What's the answer, anyhow?" He flung himself disgustedly into a chair.

The master smiled. "I'm going to tell you both all about it," he said quietly. "The answer is in the stars."

CHAPTER X.

THE DUPLICATE SCRATCHES.

"You will remember, boys," said the detective, "that I was called into this case, not because of a murder, for the homicide squad felt itself able to handle that"—a smile, perceptibly ironic touched his lips—"but because they found among the woman's effects certain correspondence and other incriminating evidences of her connection with the gang of spies and plotters headed by this fellow Von Gruner."

Slinky whistled. "You mean the heinie you put over the bumps to-night with the psychic-reading stuff?"

"The same. There was evidently friction between the woman—this Adele Latour, as she called herself—and Von Gruner, arising out of her jealousy of the Viennese beauty we saw him with to-night. There were letters, seemingly recklessly preserved with purpose by the Latour woman, which betrayed that there had been threats and warnings and counter threats between them."

Jimmy interrupted excitedly. "So then it was this dutchman what bumped her off?"

"He did not. As to that, I'll go a little ahead of the story right here and say that he had nothing whatever to do with it."

The older operative turned upon the younger impatiently.

"Haven't you ears? Didn't you hear him say just now that all the evidence led plain as day to this guy Carteret?"

Jimmy sniffed, head in air. "Well, all I got to say is that if she was a spy and helpin' plots to croak other people that the bird didn't do so worse in puttin' her light out; I don't care if she was a woman." He nodded defiantly. "I don't wonder they let him off for it."

Slinky looked at him sternly, then at the detective, a troubled questioning in his eyes. An understanding headshake answered him.

"No, the release of Carteret had nothing to do with the woman's activities. In fact, I'm satisfied that he knew nothing about these from first to last."

The ex-turnkey's face cleared. "That's all I wanted to know, gov'nor"—and he looked rebuke at the younger man. "Murder's murder, you know, no matter what it's done for."

"Right, Slinky," the detective agreed.

"Well, as I say, I did not enter the case on account of the murder, which, after all, seemed to be just the brutal strong-arm work of a ruffian determined to possess himself of a woman's jewels. Indeed, I'll admit that when first confronted with the evidence before us that night, there seemed no reason to seek farther than the man in hand to find the guilty party. He had been seen to enter the apartment through a fire-escape window; and the two patrolmen, following on his heels soon after, had found him kneeling beside the body of a woman who could not have been dead more than two or three minutes.

"Moreover, the jeweled collar he held in his hand supplied sufficient motive. Indeed, so plainly evident was it that Norwood had killed the woman that little or no examination was subsequently made for finger marks. It was only habit—or a hunch without reason—that made me go carefully over the jewels with a glass. It was then that I found Carteret's bloody thumb mark, faint, yet fully detailed from the core—as the inner terminus or central point of a finger marking is called—out to the delta, or outer terminus."

"Carteret, eh!" growled Slinky. "And with a line on him as plain as that they let him off!"

"Yes, it was Carteret's thumb print all right; though, of course, I did not know that at the time. It simply meant right then one strange thumb mark that did not tally with those of the suspect or of the woman herself or any others of us who had handled the jeweled collar. It, of course, made me

realize that solution of the murder was more complex than it seemed and did not necessarily lie upon that inner side of the locked door. The problem, of course, was to connect the clew with things outside.

"This proved easy enough. You will remember that in the Kahoka Apartments the stair flights curve around the elevator shaft and are rather steep. It occurred to me that any one going down them in a great hurry would be likely to hug the broader side of the treads on the side manned by the polished brass rail beside the wall and would almost inevitably grasp it somewhere. This would bring the thumb in contact with the under side of the rail.

"Yes, the thumb print was there all right—the exact duplicate of the strange one found upon the necklace. So this, in itself, brought the evidence to the other side of that door with the spring lock. I knew that somebody had gone down the stairs who had handled the necklace only a few minutes before."

"Geel!"—from Jimmy admiringly. "What did they say, gov'nor, when you showed 'em?"

The detective rubbed his chin, smiling retrospectively.

"Well, the fact is, I didn't show them, Jimmy, at all. I didn't tell anybody except the Big Three. The truth is"—he laughed gently, cutting his aids a whimsical look as he clasped his hands behind his head—"I had just found that astrology entered into the case, and, of course, I began to be jealously interested in solving the thing in my own way."

"Astrology?" Slinky grunted, while Jimmy sidled nearer on the chair arm.

"Go on, gov'nor," he urged eagerly. "I bet I know what's comin'. The dame had a what you call it—a horriroscope—an' it told you who was goin' to croak her."

Creighton laughed. "Nothing so easy as that, Jimmy. No, the element of astrology entered into the case through the jeweled collar itself. It was an odd, striking sort of bauble, and the stones—absurdly large—were twelve in number. The first thing that struck me was that they were all different gems and arranged in a curious sequence."

"Curious which?" put in Jimmy.

"Their order in relation to one another. It suggested something oddly familiar to me; yet curiously enough, I could not at first place just what it was. Then of a sudden it

came to me that the sequence of these stones was exactly the order of succession of the twelve signs of the Zodiac."

"I know," Jimmy nodded complacently. "The thing in the front part of a drug-store almanac."

"For these twelve stones were exactly those which the ancients associated with these twelve constellations through which the planets travel. Thus, the diamond stood for Aries; next to it was a sapphire, which stood for Taurus; then came an agate, the stone belonging to Gemini; then an emerald for Cancer and a sardonyx for Leo—and so on. It was one of these stones—the sapphire—that furnished me with the most important clew: the master clew, in fact, that ultimately led straight to Carteret."

"Geel!" interjected Jimmy, his eyes shining. "I don't blame Carteret for tryin' to lift a sparkler like that. I ain't no astrology nut, myself; but I wouldn't have to be none if I saw a ripe chance to cop a string o' rocks like that. Only"—he sighed—"I ain't claimin' I'd go so far as to bump off no woman for to get it."

Slinky stabbed him with a look. "Pity about you! Will you shut your head?" he snapped. "Go on, gov'nor; this clew—what was it?"

"Why, it was a scratch," resumed the detective; "two of them, in fact. Two fine lines on the sapphire that the glass showed were freshly made and which were uniformly the same distance apart—about an eighth of an inch. What gave these scratches importance was that I found them duplicated upon the cuticle of the woman's neck. The police surmised that they had been made there by Norwood's ragged finger nails. There was also a scratch upon the neck of much deeper scoring, but with this I was not so much concerned. It was just these two fine, uniformly parallel lines that were of startling significance."

"Why, gov'nor?"

"Because they occurred also upon the jewels. That eliminated any consideration of them as finger-nail engravings."

"Of course! You understand why, Slinky, don't you? I do." This patronizingly from the irrepressible Jimmy. "Any fool ought to understand that. It's because they would have to be made by somethin' harder than finger nails, eh, gov'nor?"

"Very much harder," came dryly, "to be able to scratch corundum."

"Cor—what, gov'nor?" It was Slinky's turn.

"Corundum—the natural mineral substance of which the sapphire and ruby are composed." He went on: "Now, the only thing that will scratch any gem stone whatever is, of course, something harder than itself. And so high is the hardness of corundum—especially in the sapphire—that there remains only one stone of superior hardness—namely, the diamond. It was therefore a very simple certainty that only a diamond could have produced each of these fresh parallel scratches found on the sapphire."

Here the detective nodded to the older operative.

"Go on, Slinky; what's this question you're bursting with?"

Slinky blinked apologetically. "Nothing—only I was wondering about steel, gov'nor. Ain't that hard enough? How about something like a dagger now or knife, or, say, a woman's nail scissors."

"No, the hardness of the best tool steel is graded at only about six, while that of the sapphire is nine."

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRAIL OF THE SNAKE.

He gave them a moment, then went on: "So I knew for certainty that the parallel scratches were made by the facets of two diamonds because they could have been produced by nothing else. Moreover, a careful, exact caliper measurement of the similar scratches upon the woman's skin showed them to be exactly the same distance apart."

"I get you, gov'nor!" Again it was the older and not the younger man who was guilty of interruption. "The ring that you had me borrow from the guy when I was butlering for him. It had two little diamonds—"

"Say!" Jimmy snapped at him savagely. "Will you let the gov'nor spill this himself an' quit your buttin' in? What did he know about Carteret or the ring, then? Nothin'."

"Right enough, Jimmy," the master smiled. "I did not know anything about a ring beyond forming a rather natural working surmise that it was probably a ring upon some one's hand that must have held the diamond facets. But, of course, I did not positively know. One thing, however, I was able to make sure of, and that was that there was nothing upon the person of Norwood

or even the woman herself that could have produced these jewel scratches. For that matter, there was nothing anywhere in her apartment—even among her own jewels—that could have produced these unvarying, parallel lines. Whatever it was that had made them, ring or something else—well, it was gone. Its absence invited conclusions that fitted in with the thumb mark at the head of the stairs outside."

"Right enough!" from Jimmy approvingly. "Outside job. Where did you find the next finger mark, gov'nor?"

"Nowhere." The detective shrugged, his face falling a little ruefully at memory of his disappointment. "And I examined every inch of the way down every flight to the exit on Park Avenue. For that matter, I had nothing but a hunch to assure me that the murderer had even emerged upon Park Avenue. He might have belonged in one of the intervening apartments.

"What threw a monkey wrench into everything, just here, was the elevator boy's stubborn insistence that no one, other than those he accounted for, had entered or left the building during the evening. Of course, we know now—and to-night have had his admission—that there was a period of a half hour during which he sat with his back to the entrance and stairs. This was during a telephone confab with some girl."

Slinky snorted. "Fresh young limb, that boy! I knew he was lying at the inquest."

"So, as far as finger-print clews are concerned, they ended absolutely with the one at the head of the stairs. Nowhere, from that point on to the end of the trail, did I ever find another finger print left by Carteret."

Slinky perked his head. "Except, gov'nor," he ventured reminder, "when I brought you some from Carteret's house. That was easy"—he grinned—"what with me serving him at table—"

"Yes, but that was after we had found Carteret himself—and through the ring. It was the ring that was the good red herring from first to last: the ring that he wore for good luck, but which brought him nothing but bad luck at every turn, which revealed his connection with the woman's death and all but landed him in the electric chair."

The ex-turnkey grunted. The troubled wonder in the back of his head was why it should not land Carteret in the chair. Here was mystery whose solution he was dying

to know. Since this man was the guilty party, why was the chair to be cheated?

"Go on, gov'nor," he half groaned, distracted by these torturing queries. "You said you didn't know about the ring yet."

"I did not and I might never have known, if it had not been for Jerry McCabe. Your friend, Jimmy—the old fellow who drives his own taxi."

Slinky's snort intervened. "Call it a taxi if you want to! An old coal scuttle that runs ten feet and then goes dead. I know the outfit—and I know Jerry." He pointed the admission with an unflattering grunt. "One of these Times Square night cruisers, Jerry is—picks up anything for anywhere; no questions asked. He's give the force a lot of trouble, he has."

Here Jimmy couched a lance for his friend.

"Just the same he helped us—I mean helped the gov'nor here—on that Palisades counterfeiting job—case, I mean. Didn't he, gov'nor?"

The detective's nod affirmed it. "And it was just because he remembered me in connection with the counterfeiting case that he hailed me a day or two after the Latour woman was killed. He had been watching for me to give me some information—something that seemed to him a valuable tip."

"About the Park Avenue murder?"

Creighton shook his head. "No, a counterfeiting tip; at least, so his good intentions meant it. It seems that a night or two before—the night the woman was killed—Jerry had picked up a rather queer fare."

Slinky sniffed, murmuring something to the effect that a sidewalk comber like old Jerry McCabe might be expected to pick up anything queer.

"Well, this fare at first looked respectable and promising. That is, he was well dressed and hailed Jerry just as he drove across Sixth Avenue going west through Fifty-sixth Street. The man was just coming out of a saloon there. It was about eleven-thirty, as Jerry remembered, because he had just dropped a fare at the Grand Central Station; a party who had only a bare margin in which to make the eleven-twenty-five express to Albany."

The two operatives suddenly displayed freshened interest. They exchanged excited glances.

"Eleven-thirty!" Slinky half lifted himself from his chair. "I get you! Why, that must have been somewhere about the time

Delaney was slipping the bracelets on Norwood over in the Latour woman's apartment in Park Avenue."

"Just three blocks and a half away"—from Jimmy. "Go on, gov'nor—you was sayin' this fare was queer."

"Not at first, except that he seemed excited and hurried. He gave no destination; just told Jerry to keep on 'straight west' till he told him to stop."

"Now, Jerry explained to me that he had made a detour through Fifty-sixth Street because he was running short of gas and he had a flat tire. It seems he has a son-in-law in the block between Sixth and Seventh Avenue who manages a service station—one of some twelve or fifteen that are in that one block—and Jerry likes to give him his trade."

Slinky released a guffaw. "His trade! Grafts on him, you mean. Why, old Jerry never gave Larry Malone a dime in all his—never mind, gov'nor"—and he swallowed—"go on."

"Well, when Jerry stopped a little farther up the length of the block his fare raised objections. He said he couldn't wait—he would have to go on and he would walk. So he got out. The queer thing was that he nervously declined to let Jerry stop another taxi for him—one just going through the street with flag up. He was kind of brusque and impatient, and seemed to realize this, for he suddenly dived into his pocket and brought out a big roll of bills.

"From these he peeled one and gave it to Jerry. They were bills of high and low denominations, as Jerry's hungry eye appears to have accurately noticed. The thing about them that particularly struck him was that they were all of virgin newness. His fare said, 'There's a dollar. We'll call it square.' Then Jerry saw that it wasn't a dollar that had been passed to him but a five, two of them, in fact; for with their crisp newness, they had stuck together."

Slinky leered sidewise. "Did Jerry tell him the mistake?"

The detective smiled. "I'm afraid not. At least, he didn't speak of doing so. But he says he didn't think much about the money at first, because he was noticing the man's hands. These were wet with perspiration and shaking nervously. It was then that he noticed the drop of blood."

Jimmy's tongue clicked. "The darn fool," he muttered, "not to wipe his hands!"

"Jerry said that the way he came to notice the blood was that his eyes were fixed upon a curious ring the man wore. It was a ring like the coils of a little snake and had a head with two tiny diamond eyes."

Slinky grunted, sitting forward. "Go on, gov'nor!"

"Now comes the thing that startled Jerry. As he was looking at these little diamonds, with the man fumbling with bills there under the light of the cab, he was startled at seeing the flashing little stones distinctly change from white to red. It was just as though they had turned into what Jerry knew were rubies. And then he saw that the red was blood. 'Why, you've cut your hand, sir,' Jerry said, and pointed. 'It's got blood on it.'

"The man jerked and scowled at him; then he laughed. 'Oh, it's this plaguey ring,' he said; 'I'm always scratching myself with its point.' And he flashed it in the light just long enough to show Jerry how the little, snaky coils ended in a needlelike point. 'I wouldn't wear the thing,' the man said, 'only it's for good luck.' Then he walked away.

"Jerry watched him go on up the slope that's there, toward Seventh Avenue, thinking, he said, that it would need good luck to get through parts of what lay 'straight west' on foot and alone with that roll of money. Just at the corner, when back of Carnegie Hall, the man crossed the street suddenly and dived into a saloon, this making his second in that block.

"Jerry said that that was the last he saw of the man and the last he thought of him just then; for about that moment his son-in-law called him and whispered some news—good news. In the immediate resulting excitement and joy at finding himself a grandfather, the old man forgot all about his fare with the bleeding ring and only thought of it next morning when he read some headlines about the raiding the night before of a counterfeiting den over on Avenue A."

Slinky smoothed his chin thoughtfully. "Let's see, April the 12th. I remember that; 'Old Mother' Bieler's cellar it was. You remember that, Jimmy?"

"Don't I?" The young gangster grimaced sourly. "Didn't they lay one of my old pals by the heels? Tony the Lug, it was. But it wasn't flimsies they was pullin'. It was phony halves; an' a tinker's job they made of it, too"—contemptuously. "No more 'chink' to 'em, gov'nor, than if they was

mud. I told Tony so when he give me some of 'em to shove in the subway, durin' rush hours."

"That'll do!" The older man eyed him shamefacedly. "Gov'nor, won't this boy never learn which side of the fence he belongs on?" He gloomed disgustedly, yet with apologetic appeal at his chief.

Creighton laughed. "He'll find himself—won't you, Jimmy?"

A kind look answered the younger man's sheepish, grateful grin. Then Creighton went on:

"Well, Jerry was immediately seized with ideas of his own about his fare of the night before. The bills, now that he looked at them, showed suspiciously crisp and new. They were uncreased and had evidently never been passed before. But what helped to feed suspicion was his recollection of the blood on the ring which suggested to his imagination the possibility of a 'scrap' with the police. Then there was the careless liberality, the man's desire to be moving on, to get west—straight west—which meant away from the East Side and particularly from the direction of Avenue A.

"It loomed big to Jerry, and he began to look for me. He knew me personally and felt friendly and—well"—the detective smiled quizzically—"he doesn't feel quite that way toward the police generally.

"The bank notes he showed me were genuine, as I saw; and I wasn't interested very much in the account, until he caught my attention through the mention of the snake-like ring with the diamond eyes—that and its trace of blood. Then, too, the time of his encounter with his fare, the locality with reference to Park Avenue, and the man's strange nervousness, all suddenly lifted the whole thing into magnitude of first importance. Then there was the further suggestion of astrology that I got from Jerry's rather exact description of the ring. He had noted it well, for it had fascinated him—frightened his eye."

"But, gov'nor"—and the younger operative's brow contracted disappointedly—"these clean, new flimsies what the gun gave Jerry. Wasn't there nothin' on 'em—no blood, no marks, I mean?"

The detective shook his head.

"Oddly, not a thing. My opinion is that by this time, the blood trace was confined to the ring, and was only there because the elastic coils had a tendency to hold a little

of it, aided by the perspiration of his hand. None of the bartenders—the night men—who had served the fugitive in his progress among saloons westward said anything about blood; but all of them remembered, and could describe to some extent, the freakish ring that the customer had worn. This and his conspicuous nervousness helped to make him a marked man.

"Yes, he left a charted course behind him," continued the detective, "for he drank everywhere, trying, as we now know, to quench the terror in his soul, the recollection of the stark horror he had left behind there in the darkness on the floor. Twice, I found, he had tacked away from Fifty-sixth Street when he failed to find a bar, but each time he came back to his main course—due west through Fifty-sixth Street, and on toward the river."

"Funny!"

"Yes, it seemed so, and his heavy drinking indicated the possibility of another purpose in seeking the river. His own explanation is that he was trying to reach his home up on the Drive by means of the most circuitous way."

"Well, he picked it," said Slinky grimly.

"As it was, he never reached the river, if that was his real destination. He fell a block this side, just at the edge of the string of freight tracks; and when a flagman got him to his feet, he lurched over into the vacant lot there, at the corner of Eleventh Avenue. It was there that Tom Monahan of the Twenty-sixth Precinct found him, collapsed from drink. He had just sense enough—or lack of sense—if you care to put it that way—to tell his name and where he lived; and Monahan, who has ideas of his own, got a taxi and sent him home.

"It was the simplest thing to do, the most sensible—certainly the kindest. Yes, here as elsewhere, I connected him up through the ring. Monahan"—the detective laughed—"had his experience with it. He scratched his hand on the thing as he lifted Carteret to his feet. That made him look at the man's hand to see what had nicked him.

"The rest you both know. How Jimmy here tailed Carteret day after day; how, soon after, I was able to plant you in the household, Slinky; and how, in a word, we had his number from then right along—had him under surveillance day and night."

Jimmy hugged his knee with self-complacent air.

"It was me got onto him bein' a nut about the stars. Lor', I used to read over his shoulder down at the old bookstores and at the public library—the craziest stuff! He never got wise to me; he never saw me lookin' twice the same. Once he even talked to me," he added with a certain pride.

"Yes, good work, Jimmy. Then presently our butler friend here, besides getting the thumb prints, was able to bring me the ring for a night. That clinched Carteret as the man who had scratched the sapphire in the jeweled collar; the man who had been the last to see Adele Latour alive."

Slinky blinked, his brows holding a troubled frown.

"And the scratches on her throat, gov'nor," his throat rumbled. "You knew his ring made them, too?"

"Oh, yes"—carelessly—"both the parallel scratches and the deeper gash."

His assistant swallowed heavily. "Gov'nor, if I ain't remembering right, correct me, but didn't the medical examiner say she would have bled to death anyhow from that cut even if the strangling hadn't done the trick?"

The detective's head inclined. "No question about his certainty, Slinky." He waited, smiling gravely. "Well?"

The baldheaded man shrugged. "Nothing, gov'nor," he muttered; but his troubled droop of head spoke volumes.

The young man on the chair arm eyed him with sardonic lift of lip.

"You oughter had Slinky by you, gov'nor," his voice lifted in cheerful irony, "to have told you w'at to do. The way old square toes here sees it is, that what with the evidence cinched to a fare-you-well like that, your move was to walk up to this guy Carteret and slip the come-alongs on him at once." He flipped a carelessly swinging foot at his colleague. "Ain't that w'at's eatin' you, old baldy?"

The detective's eyes played from one to the other a moment, his lips smoothing themselves—ironing out a smile. There was never-failing diversion to him in the contrasting attitudes of these two toward the law. The careless, too lightly seated concern of the one; the stern, blind, matter-of-fact justice of the other. He looked down at his fingers as they drummed noiselessly upon the table.

"I expect Slinky's view is justified, Jimmy. With the evidence all as plain as day, the

logical thing was to have apprehended Carteret." The admission came slowly, thoughtfully—almost apologetically. "The only reason I didn't was—" A pause, and he looked up, his shoulder lifting in a scarcely perceptible shrug. "Well, I suppose I'll just have to admit I had no good reason. I just had my hunch, and I played it against the evidence. You see, Slinky"—again he looked down—"that was because astrology had entered into the thing. You remember I told you just now that the answer was in the stars."

Slinky gulped chokingly. "I heard you, gov'nor," gloomily.

"Well, it was when you brought me Carteret's horoscope to look at that I determined to try to save him. Yes"—soberly—"from that moment he had in me a friend. I mean, of course, provided I found my hunch was right—found that he was innocent."

"Innocent!" blurted Slinky. "Him? Why, gov'nor, how—"

"Wait! As I say, provided I found he was innocent."

"But, gov'nor"—Slinky's tone was deprecating, reproachful—"anybody hearing that would think it wasn't Norwood you were trying to save, but Carteret."

"You've got it. It was not Norwood, but Carteret whom I was concerned in saving from that time on."

He nodded and got up, going over to a built writing desk that stood in the far corner of the studio.

"Why, cert'," Jimmy addressed his companion comfortably, "I could've told you that all the time. Who's this bird Norwood, anyhow?"—this with slighting grunt. "There don't none of the gang know anything about him. Just a 'gay cat,' he is, workin' on his own. He ain't even got in him the makin' of a good second-story man." He frowned, lip a-curl. "Gettin' a lot of rep he ain't never earned, that duck is. Sure, that's what!"

The older man, with impatient flirt of hand, got up, pacing through a short stretch restlessly. He walked stoopingly, pulling at his knuckles, his little ratlike eyes opening and shutting rapidly.

Their chief rejoined them, holding an open sheet of paper in his hand.

"I've just made some memoranda from this," he said; "and as I have no further use for it, I'm going to turn it over to you boys

to read at your leisure. It's something, I think, that will interest you." He added smilingly, "though it won't have the importance to you that it had for Mr. Carteret. This is just a copy I kept. He has the original."

Slinky blinked at the paper dubiously, making no move to take it. He guessed what it was—a copy of Carteret's horoscope, the thing that the detective admitted had diverted his sympathies and interest to the murderer's cause.

"Gov'nor," he demurred heavily, "let Jimmy here have it. I don't know nothing about astrol'gy except the patter you taught me to work off on Carteret when I was butlering."

"This is a letter," said the detective, "from Norwood. It came the other day." He held out another sheet of paper.

Jimmy took the letter. "From his coop—the Tombs, eh, gov'nor?"

"Tombs? No, from Colorado—from—"

He fished in his pocket and produced an envelope. "It's postmarked Boulder, which I believe is a little higher altitude than Denver. There! you boys take them and look them over at your leisure. I want you to see what an irrigation farmer Norwood has become and how well and happy—out there on his uncle's ranch."

The two stared at him; Slinky for once without a blink.

"Since when—for how long, gov'nor?" he gasped.

"How long?" Creighton resumed his chair and lay back reflecting. "Why, I think it was a night or two after you brought me the thumb prints and ring that I saw him and his mother off. And that was the second week after the woman was killed, wasn't it?"

Slinky did not answer. He was looking down, avoiding the chance of meeting the cold, level condemning eyes of the youth with the old-young face. He only looked up, when, after a pause, the former gangster—with deliberation but indifferent accuracy—expectorated in the general direction of the shadows that lay beyond the priceless Ghiordes at his feet. The action was one that Slinky subtly felt to be a gesture of forgiveness—a libation to peace.

"Yes, of course, the case against Norwood collapsed," the detective continued in matter-of-fact tones. "I mean with the establishing of the other evidence. After that there was

nothing to hold him on under the restrictions of the penal code. Nothing, that is"—with smile—"except the matter of unlawful entering; and they were content to let that go—tail with the hide, as it were—considering that—er—a friend agreed to see that he left the State."

Jimmy's eyes glowed understandingly. "And you kept it under your hat; and you got all of them to, too! Well, by ginny"—he smote his knee—"that's one on the police reporters. I didn't think they could be kept out of a thing like that."

The master eyed him aslant; then closed his lids.

"It was managed," he uttered softly; "a special favor—to Zaliel. It suited his plans that the thing be not known."

Slinky, wrapped in profitable silence, was wondering what the next revelation would be. It was clear the gov'nor was going to hand it to them in his own way; but he was on nettles to know why Carteret—by his own confession, a bloody moll croaker—was turned out to grass to be as foot loose and free as Norwood.

"Well, boys"—from the man with closed eyes—"I guess I've told you everything, haven't I?" The voice was drowsy, restful, as coming from one whose tale is ended and who is slipping off to sleep. "Yes, I guess I've told you *all*."

Jimmy chuckled, noting with sly, appraising glance Slinky's startled, protesting visage.

"S far as I'm concerned, gov'nor," the ex-thief volunteered, "I ain't int'r'sted partic'larly about nothin' else except to know what's goin' to become of the loot—the swag what this poor mutt went and left behind."

"I see; you mean the jeweled collar."

"Sure. That string of twelve blazing rocks, no two alike; that's the thing to be int'r'sted about. Gee!" Jimmy's eyes blazed themselves with jewel brightness. "Who's goin' to collar *that* is what I want to know. Will the law get it now, or these heinie friends of the dame's?" He lifted the query with poignant anxiety.

"Why, no," came murmurously from the chair; "her friends won't get it nor the State. I take it that there's no thought of its going to any one except—Mr. Carteret. *Oh, yes*"—with gentle, matter-of-fact nod—"Carteret will get that, of course. I think there's no question that they'll give it to *him*."

A blank silence followed the opinion. On the part of Slinky it was induced by a sort

of pained stupefaction, while with the former crook it was from totally opposite emotion; something that might be described as incredulous, frozen admiration.

"Gee!" he breathed at length, and his head lifted brightly at Slinky, awakening the same response that could have been summoned from a block of petrified wood. "Say, now, when you think of it, that ain't no more'n fair; no, sir, it ain't so crazy as it seems when you first look at it. Think of all the guy went through—"

"What's the value, gov'nor—these jewels?" hoarsely from Slinky.

"Roughly appraised at something like a quarter of a million, I believe. When properly cut, much more."

A pause; then: "And you mean to tell me they're going to give them to this—to this—?" Slinky swallowed rumblingly "Going to give them to *him*!"

The brows of the detective lifted delicately.

"Why not?"—gently. "It seems proper that they should. I mean in view of the fact that they happen to belong to him—have been in his family, Slinky, for nearly sixty years."

CHAPTER XII.

THE LENT NECKLACE.

Into the blank silence that followed the detective's announcement there broke the muffled note of a great bronze bowl—an ancient temple bell gong beside the master's chair. His foot, in moving, had struck it, starting deep, quivering vibrations that hung above, about them, like voices whispering strange secrets their dull ears could not understand.

The detective nodded, a whimsical smile shaping in his mouth corner.

"As though the old bell knew and could tell us all about the necklace, isn't it?" Then as the comment evoked merely a blink from one of his aids and an uncertain grin from the other: "Well, they are both from the other side of the world; both from out of far-off times. For the jeweled collar, like the bell gong, comes from out the far, mysterious East."

Jimmy stirred. "Like Zaliel," he ventured slyly.

"Aye, like Zaliel." Involuntarily the speaker let his voice lapse musingly into the deep, resonant tones of the seer. "Except

that Zaliel, who seems real, is but a sham—a counterfeit thing, while the Carteret necklace, which seems a sham—less than counterfeit, is altogether real.”

Jimmy gasped. “You mean it looks phony, gov’nor?”

“Looks it!” An expressive side glance accompanied a grunt. “More than phony, Jimmy—worthless! Why, if your toe struck it in the street you would never pick it up—unless, perhaps, from curiosity.”

He went on: “For curiosity is all it could appeal to. A string of stones, in the first place, of too absurd size ever to be thought jewels, and embraced in blackened settings—certainly secure enough—but crude and of clumsiest fashioning. Nothing like the ‘sparklers’ your covetous mind’s eye sees, Jimmy; not stones cut in facets—surface angles—to bring out their depth and brilliancy as is the case with modern jewels or even paste. No, nothing like that.

“These jewels are cut cabochon—that is, rounded like the familiar stone known as ‘cat’s-eye.’ And time’s chemism, or the imperfect grinding, has left their surfaces lusterless; so lusterless that they haven’t even the tawdry sheen of the glass trumpery any costumer will rent you for the frolic of a night.

“That is the way they looked to me when they showed them to me in the woman’s room. That’s the way they would still seem to me but for my chancing to notice the astrological motive that seemed carried out in their order of arrangement. Held close to the light, they showed a certain quality of gem brilliancy struggling through. It was then that the wild idea leaped that these ridiculous pebbles might be of real value; and a simple test or two showed that they were. It was then—not before—that I found significance in the fresh scratches that the sapphire bore.

“Now, to go back a little. The necklace, it seems, came, as I say, out of the Far East—from Egypt. Summed briefly, its history, so far as Carteret knows it, is this:

“It seems to have been given to Carteret’s uncle—the captain of an American merchantman—in recognition of some vital service done a Bedouin chief somewhere along the Egyptian shores of the Gulf of Suez. Just what the favor was Carteret doesn’t know for certainty. The family tradition merely records that it had to do with saving the chieftain from some rival band

whose javelins were hard pressing him—driving him into the sea.

“Anyhow, at parting, the Bedouin took from his own neck and gave to Carteret’s uncle this bit of Oriental trumpery. At least it seemed such. In fact, this was evidently the donor’s own impression about it; for the uncle’s story made something of a point of the man’s proud disclaimer of there being any intrinsic value in the thing. What he dwelt upon was the greater merit of his gift as a talisman—a talisman, as the uncle remembered, that had something to do with the stars. It would bring good fortune to men.”

“Gee!” broke speculatively from Jimmy, “I wonder where *he* nailed it—this Bedgin guy.”

The master’s head shook. “Who knows! the Bedouin chieftains seldom visit marts or bazaars. Like Ishmael, from whom they claim descent, their life is in the desert wilderness. The necklace may have been the spoil of some desert skirmish—a trade, perhaps. But, of course, at some time, it must have first found the light of day through the despoliation of some ancient tomb, some rifled sarcophagus.”

He lapsed a moment in thought, then resumed.

“Anyhow, in due time the queer bauble was brought home and dumped, along with other curiosities, into the home circle of Carteret’s mother, of whom the old captain was very fond. The funny string of ‘beads’ was appropriated by Carteret’s little sister, then a child of five, who used it to decorate her dolls.”

“Dolls!” It was like a bleat of pain from the former crook. “Think of two or three hundred thousand worth of bucks being rattled around on dolls! Out in the park with a nurse, like as not. Lor’, if a guy could only have been around—an’ could have *known!*”

He paused at the uplifted hand.

“It was not for long, Jimmy, lad”—the voice softened—“for about this time there came the great scourge of diphtheria that swept New York. In those days they knew nothing of antitoxins, and children were whirled away like wind-blown leaves of autumn. Among these went the little sister, leaving behind the most heartbreaking thing on earth—the poignant memories that cling around a dead child’s neglected dolls and toys. In time these were put away and

padlocked in the wooden box that had been her baby play trunk."

Jimmy shifted uncomfortably. He mumbled something about the "poor dog-goned little kid!" and sniffed, finishing with, "Oh, hell!"

"And there, locked up through the passing years, they stayed, forgotten by every one except the mother. It was only after Carteret had grown to manhood that one day she opened the trunk and showed him his sister's dolls. It was then that they came upon the necklace. The handling of it refreshed the mother's memory with the old story of its connection with her brother and the Bedouin chief. They were not real jewels—so Carteret learned from her; she said the thing was just a 'talisman' that brought good luck to men. 'Perhaps that means,' Carteret remembered his mother saying, 'the good luck is only to men; for it certainly brought no good luck to baby.' Whereupon, she gave it to Carteret as a souvenir of his little sister.

"And it was thus he treasured it—a sacred thing he put away. Then the time came, long after, when he began his dabbling in occult matters—especially in astrology. And one day something in his reading about the gems of the Zodiac prompted him to get out the old necklace and look at it. And, just as I had, so he discovered its astrological character.

"Only, knowing little or nothing of jewels, he never for once thought of the possibility of the big, unsightly pebbles being real stones of value. It was absurd to suppose they could be. However, Carteret admits that his interest really did not so much dwell upon the value of the stones as upon their astrological significance. The stones, although seemingly imitations had their symbolism. Then, too, they had come out of Egypt—the home, the very cradle of astrology.

"He had been to Egypt. It was there, at some bazaar that he had picked up the antique ring he wore. The one, Slinky, that you borrowed and brought to me to see."

"You told me to look out for any ring he wore that looked like a snake and had diamonds in it."

"The design isn't really a snake. It indicates a dragon, though with the body drawn thin and fancifully elongated so as to get in the coils. He bought it for good luck, thinking it represented the Dragon's Head,

whereas, the position of the diamond eyes makes it the emblem of the Dragon's Tail, which is supposed to invite bad luck.

"To come back to the necklace. In these days it is nothing unusual to see intelligent men and women taking an interest in occult or psychic matters. To some extent, it is the fashion. But Carteret was singularly secretive and supersensitive about his interest in astrology. He was afraid he might be thought 'queer' or appear ridiculous. With him this was just a phase of the man's natural cowardice about everything," the detective commented; "the weakness that ruled him all the days of his life."

The late Carteret butler grunted feeling indorsement.

"He was! I'm free to say he was the timidest, yellowest thing I ever struck in all my born days—that fellow; and I've seen 'em all kinds."

"So there was no man for him to talk astrology to till you came into his life, Slinky. I say no *man*. But before you, there had been—"

"I know"—Jimmy shot out a hand—"this Jane! The one he had bumped off." He moved nearer to the table's edge.

Creighton resumed:

"This acquaintanceship had been of only a few months' standing. While queer enough, between such a man and such a woman, I am inclined to think that astrology was the only rivet binding it—at least upon his part. As for her motives, it would seem that they were more material—nearer the earth. That is, judging by the canceled check vouchers, Slinky, that you 'borrowed' for me from Carteret's desk. Evidently the woman saw in him a good 'prospect' and worked it for all it was worth, getting various 'war relief' sums from him. This in her assumed rôle as a Frenchwoman, representing units on the other side. What is it you want to say, Slinky?"

The ex-butler mumbled a sullen tribute:

"I was only going to say that he sure did seem to hate the way the boches did. I'll have to say that for him."

The detective's eye lighted oddly and he seemed about to make some eager comment, but checked himself, going on with his story again.

"It's quite clear the woman found him pliable to her hand through her playing up an interest in the science that, with Carteret, had degenerated into a mere obsession of

superstitious terror. This was especially because of his birth star, Saturn, and the fateful horoscope erected for him twenty years before by 'Palebot the Great' of Paris.

"Undoubtedly Von Gruner helped her here, for we found a letter referring to 'our star-crazy friend' and telling her to ask him if he knew that the planet Saturn was nearing opposition with the sun.

"He knew of this, however, and with the nearing of the dread time, had grown more panicky. His distraught mind, clutching at straws, suddenly seized upon the idea that perhaps the Zodiacal necklace might have astral power to head off disaster. The necklace was a talisman and had come out of Egypt, the ancient home of all wisdom about the stars. The Bedouin chief had believed in it; had worn it about his bare neck, even taking curious precautions for its security. This was shown in an ingeniously fashioned backing wrought of stout silk with several threadings through its entire length of fine silver wire. These terminated in the parts of the clasp.

"No, Jimmy"—answering the anticipatory grin of the youth on the table—"our own man did not go so far as to bedeck his own throat with the talisman. Though I don't doubt he would have liked to do so—might even have considered it; but his sensitive fear of detection and ridicule would operate to deter him. But he did determine to carry it, always from that time on, in some pocket about his person.

"And that is how he came to show the collar to Adele Latour, who displayed great enthusiasm over it, and its probable talismanic power. Then, womanlike, she must needs try it on."

Jimmy nodded cynically. "Sure, old stuff! I've lost many a hoop to some moll that way."

"No, I don't think she then saw anything in the collar to covet. My opinion is that it was just her desire to flatter—to please Carteret. But along with the act came an unlooked-for result.

"Ugly and clumsy and tawdry as the string was in itself, it seemed wholly transformed when draping the curve of a woman's neck. In detail it was the same, but there was a curious, weird charm—a barbaric distinction about it—that brought exclamations of surprise from both the man and woman.

"She appeared fascinated by it, studying

the effect from every angle in the numerous mirrors with which her somewhat bizarre sitting room is cluttered. Carteret says that during the whole evening her eyes scarcely left these."

"Though *that ain't nothin'* so unusual"—from the cynic on the table. "I've seen 'em that way, without 'em havin' to have necklaces."

"What with being flattered by her enthusiasm over his treasure and her urgency that he leave it with her so that she could study it by light of day, Carteret, in the end, found himself going home without it.

"The fact was disturbing to him. So disturbing, that the more he thought about it, the less and less he liked it. This not from any distrust of the woman, but because he had allowed the astral talisman to pass—even temporarily—out of his possession. His troubled doubts fanned themselves bigger and bigger till by time he had reached his home uptown, his feeling had multiplied into something like panic. He even tried to get Adele Latour on the phone, but the boy at the switchboard reported that she did not answer—had probably retired.

"Carteret was now worked up to a state of superstitious fright. With servants gone to bed, and himself left alone, the old house soon developed that state of 'silence' that, to the nervous, breeds sounds a thousandfold. Suddenly, with consternation, he bethought him that in all the years of his life since boyhood, this was the first night in which the Egyptian talisman had been away from under the Carteret roof; the first time it had ever been out of the immediate custody of the family."

He paused to sigh. "Poor fellow! Can't you see him, boys? No, I wouldn't call Carteret crazy, though such terrible obsession of superstitious terrors as he lived with might easily lead to that."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PASSING OF THE YELLOW PLANET.

Creighton went on: "Undoubtedly the elements afoot that night contributed to his mood. He tells of the rising, angry wind—the buffeted windowpanes—of voices that seemed about him, whispering reproof and warning."

"Nerves!"—from the big operative contentuously.

"Yes, nerves; taut as violin strings, with fear screwing the keys tighter—tighter——"

"He tells of trying to sleep and failing; of an impression of some overmastering external force that seemed to keep his eyes wide open, staring fearfully into space. And as he lay there, the darkness visualized to him his uncle's face and that of the Bedouin chief. They seemed close together, whispering, nodding together over something about him, their expressions distressed and ominous.

"And ever darting back and forth between these two and himself was the shadowy impression of a female figure, darkly imperious—young and beautiful—that seemed to heap upon him a torrent of reproach and warning.

"Well, no, Jimmy"—he smiled at the uneasy glance the younger man directed into the clotted shadows—"I am sure there was nothing supernatural about it. Just 'nerves,' as Slinky says; subjective retina projections of a frightened neurasthenic. I only dwell upon them because they help us to understand the condition Carteret must have been in when he came to facing another night with the talisman still out of his possession.

"Yes, that is what came about; for in the morning when he got the Latour woman on the phone, she laughed at his apprehension. Indeed, for the time, her raillery, together with the sane, cheerful sunlight, made him feel rationally ashamed. No, she pleaded, he must leave the talisman with her for another day. There had been no opportunity to examine it, as she was hurrying even now to obey an unexpected summons concerned with work for 'her dear France'—duties that would occupy her all day. No, she was sorry, but she could not see him in the evening. It would be late, nearly ten, when she got home; and, besides, she would be so tired. No, her dear friend must be patient, be reasonable. Did he not know—so she reproached—that the talisman, so precious to him, would be locked up safely, be guarded as if it were her very own?

"Then, in her great hurry to meet her appointment, she had only time for a final word of laughing banter over his 'childish uneasiness,' and pleasantly cooing urging of him to call her up first thing in the morning; yes, he must be sure to.

"Carteret felt a little reassured, though far from satisfied. With the gathering of nightfall, therefore, gathered also the old doubts and apprehensions. They thickened

as the evening wore on, and he realized what it was going to mean to pass another night without the family talisman in his charge again. Already on edge from loss of sleep, the thought of going through another such night whipped all the man's devils of terror into frightening cry again.

"He was in this state when the inspiration came to him—a simple enough solution it seemed—to go down to the Kahoka apartment building, wait for Adele Latour's return and get the talisman. He would not intrude; he would just retrieve his property and return.

"It was about ten o'clock, as he remembered, that this decision came to him; and, perhaps, as much as five minutes after when he slipped quietly from the house. He could not find a taxi but made quick time by subway and surface car to Park Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street. Thus it was that he approached the apartment house on foot. As he did, he saw that the Latour woman's apartment was lighted, indicating her return. As he drew nearer, with eyes fixed on the windows, he saw the woman herself for an instant as she moved to a window, throwing up the sash.

"So far, so good. The problem now was how to reach her, how to get the talisman; for 'problem' it seems to have been to Carteret.

"All right to smile, Jimmy. We can all smile over the absurdity of making a problem of what any man of ordinary gumption and resourcefulness would have found a simple enough undertaking. But, you must remember that Carteret, due to his fear, was not a man of normal common sense. A scared rabbit about almost everything, he was especially so when it came to women, and Adele Latour in particular. Now that he stood on the brink of his enterprise, he recalled what was, in effect, her plain command that he was not to disturb her until the morrow.

"He crossed the street uncertainly, hesitation swaying him between whether to have the boy phone up a message and request or go directly up to her floor. By the former course he exposed himself to a possible rebuff through a grinning intermediary; and Carteret, like all self-centered people, was profoundly sensitive to being made ridiculous. As to the other simple course, he doubted not that the night boy would demur about taking him up unannounced to any tenant's floor. As I say, Jimmy"—answering the

other's grin—"we've got to remember that things that would be simple enough obstacles to you or me or Slinky here, would probably loom big in magnitude to a man inexperienced and overly self-conscious."

Jimmy's lip curled. "The poor mutt!" Then with understanding: "So that's why he gumshoed up the stairs when he saw the boy busy with his own gabfest at the switch-board."

A nod agreed. "But when he stood before her door, with finger about to press the disk to her bell, he again hesitated. For she was near the door, talking in French to some one on the telephone—some one whom she addressed as 'Henri.'"

Slinky blinked softly. "Von Gruner."

"Yes; but, of course, Carteret knew nothing of Von Gruner. To him the talk was just the 'Frenchwoman's' exchanges with one of her countrymen; what about did not arouse his concern. Carteret knows French, but the instinct of good breeding that automatically delayed his ring also acted to withhold him from any effort at eavesdropping. That is, it did until suddenly a word pierced his attention; a word that flushed the blood pounding to his head—a word that is the same in French as in English.

"And that word was 'talisman.'"

"Then on the heels of it came his own name with a mocking reference—a slurring comment upon him as a dupe and fool. From that moment every word she said was burned into his memory.

"We must hurry. I cannot hold him off much longer, Henri," the woman was urging. "I had hard work doing it to-day. Yes, I think I can manage it again to-morrow; but you must get hold of Krantz to-night and have him here in New York early in the morning so he can test the stones at once. But I am sure I am right about them. And, if I am, it means a fortune for us, Henri." Then followed what seemed some low, endeavoring exchanges; but her talk ended in one clear sentence: "Yes, I'll bring the necklace to you early—by eight, at latest."

"That was all; but it was enough. Carteret stood there mentally stunned until he heard some one signaling for the elevator; then impulsively he rang the woman's bell.

"He was not angry. Men of Saturn type do not get angry. There is no room for anger where fear, in every crisis, is always the first, the dominating emotion. That was the case now. He was conscious of nothing

except just cold fright over the menace of losing his precious talisman. All he wanted was to get it and get away. This desire far outweighed any resentment against the woman. The hint her talk conveyed of there being intrinsic value in the stones, he dismissed as her illusion.

"When she opened the door the first thing he saw was the woman. The next thing he saw was the talisman itself, lying against the whiteness of her neck.

"At sight of him she involuntarily started back, but her presence of mind was so automatic, that with a quick movement she drew him inside, out of the public landing, away from the danger of others hearing—she knew not what.

"It was her hand that closed the door.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I've come for the talisman," he said.

"A stare, a laugh; and then her face contracted in a petulant, injured frown.

"Was he indeed so foolish—she asked—as to come down here at such an hour, upon such an errand? And after all she had said! Then he deserved to be punished, and he should be. No, he should not have the necklace now, until to-morrow. And she looked daggers of reproach at him and continued to voice them, too. Then as he again asked for the necklace, her tactics changed.

"So he did not trust her—was that it? Did he have so little faith as to think she would be careless with the talisman that meant so much to him? Why, it had been her first thought, when she came home to-night, to look and see if it was still safely under key. She had slipped it about her throat and had been sitting there studying it in the glass, wondering about its past history, and its talismanic power; thinking about how much this meant to her dear, dear friend.

"Let me have it then," he persisted bluntly; "I'll take it now."

"It was then that she looked at him quickly, searchingly; and he caught just the fleeting shadow of a hard look that came and went in an instant like the revelation of a face from the slipping of a mask.

"Well, I can't give it to you to-night." She spoke resentfully. "Why; do you know how long it takes to unfasten this clumsy clasp?" She drew it from back around to front. "I worked with it over an hour last night."

"Carteret did not question this. He knew that the clasp—a flat, dovetail groove affair

—was exceedingly hard to work, though not altogether from the wear, the erosion of the years through which the thing had passed. There was a sort of trick about it, as he knew; one that he had mastered and had, in fact, shown to her. But reminder of this or any controversy had no part in his policy now. All he wanted was to get his property; to get it and get away.

"Will you let me try?" he asked.

"Her answer was a petulant fling of head and the whirling of her back on him. She stood facing the pier glass, her reflected image radiating a protest of hurt resentment and offense. These were tactics that heretofore had always successfully intimidated Carteret—had frightened him to heel. They frightened him now, but the accidental discovery of a plot to trick him out of the astral talisman had filled him with a fright that submerged all other fears.

"He stepped behind the woman.

"Let me try," he repeated; and with that took hold of the jeweled collar to bring the clasp behind.

"That was all; a simple enough thing it would seem. An action to be resented, perhaps; but he distinctly remembers that the abrupt, sharp cry with which she jerked away was pitched in unfeigned terror rather than offense. It was an odd, impulsive movement, shuddering and violent. It dragged the collar through his hands, and one of them—the left—he found to be caught, trapped in some entanglement that for the instant he could not understand.

"Then he saw that it was his ring.

"Its sharp point had penetrated the fabric that backed the jeweled setting—the fabric that was threaded with the minute silver wires. It was these that the coils embraced, holding them in their padlock loop that seemed strong and firm as steel.

"He remembers his cry to her to 'keep still—just keep still a minute,' while, meantime, her struggling grew more frantic, her words to him more incoherent—high-keyed in some strange warning whose meaning was obscure.

"Then suddenly she screamed.

"And as she did, Carteret had a glimpse of her face in the glass. It was ghastly white with her eyes dilated at him in a horror that he says he never will forget.

"Let me go!" she panted. "Oh, you don't understand—"

"The words were her last, ending in a

catch of breath, a violent coughing spasm as she twisted toward him—in under the curve of his arm—turning the band of silk and wire about, as though it were a tourniquet.

"The rest of it——"

The detective paused, shuddering a little. The rest of it was not pleasant to think of.

Into the pool of silence the former prison guard flung one low, muttered word:

"Garroted!"

"Of course he could do nothing," the detective said, after a moment. "The ill-timed coughing spasm, coming with the torsion twist she made—her struggles—the desperate clutch of her hands—all left him powerless to turn her body with the one free arm he had. Otherwise he might have saved her; might have extricated her in time.

"And that is all of that.

"As for the truth of his story, there was no question of it on the part of any of us down at headquarters to-night. We saw him live it all over again in the horror of his own recital. We realized that death tangle there in the darkness following the overturning and the breaking of the lamp; he made us go with him again through the horror of the subsidence of her struggles that still left the tightened grip of her hands upon his arm. He made us hear the terrible sucking wheeze of the thorax as it grew fainter and fainter—at last subsided altogether. He made us know that it was only then that he could get her body to the floor—could release his hand—could find his way through darkness to the door.

"Yes, we believed him," the detective reaffirmed quietly; and his two assistants, without consulting each other by a glance, nodded their grim approval. "They were not scenes which he could have described as he described them, unless they were true.

"Then, too, he had sat with Zaliel here to-night with darkness and terror enwrapping him; with conscience gnawing at his soul, and he had repeated the things that he thought that wizard already had read from out his hand."

Slinky here nodded grimly. "As he thought he saw Zaliel do in the lecture hall before." He looked indulgently at his young colleague. "You see now, son, how much depended on that 'plant.'"

Jimmy's lip curled at this.

"Sure"—brazenly—"I knew what that was for all the time. But what gets *me*——" The old-young face took on a frown of puz-

zlement. "What I don't see—an' I've been around some—is why the dame—sorry as I am for her—should have put up such a holler just because the guy touched the necklace, or because she thought his fingers were goin' to touch her skin. She wasn't no mamma's baby chicken just out of the home coop—she wasn't; not her. And, on the other hand, she knew this poor dub wasn't the kind to want to get gay. And yet here she goes all up in the air the minute he touches the necklace. What scared her so? An' what was it she tried to tell him an' he couldn't understand?"

He looked from one to the other.

The master pressed his eyes, releasing a tired sigh.

"I was cutting that out for to-night," he said; "but, after all, it's something you've a right to know. It belongs with the case. In importance it stands back of the element of astrology, back of the jeweled collar, back of the ring itself."

He paused and they waited hungrily.

"The reason Carteret did not understand the warning that Adele Latour flung out at him, was because it contained a word he never before had heard: a word so unfamiliar that he could not recall it for us to-night. Then, asked if he thought he could recognize the word if he heard it, he said, after some hesitation, that he was pretty sure he could.

"Whereupon the medical examiner, who was present, prepared and pronounced to him a list of twelve words—unusual medical terms, eleven of them 'blind.' And Carteret on the instant recognized the word.

"Oh, yes, it was the right word. The M. E. had told us privately that it would be the one. For that matter, I had heard him use the word the time he examined the woman's body."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" uttered Jimmy.

The older operative smiled comfortably, proud of this tribute to the efficiency of departmental methods. But curiosity was still unsatisfied. He blinked inquiringly.

"The word that Adele Latour used was 'hæmophilic,'" the detective said. Abstractedly, he fingered a pencil on the table, his voice ruminative, his expression regretful, pitying.

"What she cried her alarm about, when she felt Carteret's touch, was to tell him that she was a hæmophilic." His head shook. "Poor girl!"

Slinky blinked heavily.

"She was a he—*what*, gov'nor?" His voice dropped.

"A hæmophilic—one afflicted with hæmophilia. It is a hereditary disease that manifests itself in a liability to excessive bleedings from trivial causes. The blood of such persons is slow to coagulate."

"Bleeders!" gasped Slinky. "That's what they call 'em. I knew one—a chap that died from having a tooth pulled. He bled a week—that guy did—and they couldn't stop it."

The detective nodded. "That frequently happens with them in tooth extraction. Sometimes bleeding of the gums or of the nose is fatal—a brier scratch—"

"But great crimimi, gov'nor"—the younger man was staring aghast—"how would a guy dare shave?"

The detective looked at him, his expression a trifle sinister.

"Hæmophilics seldom have to," he said dryly; "the men rarely ever survive to that age. Women now and then reach maturity—even old age; but it is only through exercise of extraordinary, unremitting care."

He went on, telling them other curious things about hæmophilia. Of how the affliction was largely confined to people of Teutonic race. Of how powerless surgery was without nature's cooperation through what is known as coagulation. That without coagulation, any flowing of blood remains continuous and no device can permanently stop it. That with many hæmophilics any bleeding would continue for days and even weeks before the end. With others, the most trivial bleedings brought death in only a few hours.

"Adele Latour—or to give her her right name—Lena Bergman—knew this. She must have had it instilled in her from babyhood. She must never get a scratch; she must never, in fact, touch or let herself be touched by any sharp point—by anything that might abrade the skin."

He made a pitying gesture.

"What a childhood to have lived! Think of the burden of apprehension, the constant watchfulness impressed, the forfeiture of almost all share in childish games and play!"

He told them of how Carteret, when questioned about it, recalled that he had never seen Adele Latour wearing a ring, though many beautiful ones were found among her jewels. She had shrunk several times at sight of his dragon ring—an aversion that he had attributed to its serpentine design.

"One thing we know: she never 'shook hands' unless gloved, thereby never suffering the contact of other fingers."

"Gee," breathed Jimmy; "then it must have been Carteret's nails—"

"That she feared? Yes, probably. Her jerk was involuntary, automatic; just her instinctive self-protection. Then, when she felt the unyielding pull of the necklace, she was frightened. What I think is that her movement brought the ring against her skin and she felt the harsh scrape of the two little diamond facets, or more likely, the prick of the needlelike point of the coils. That was when she lost her head; for she knew what that meant for her, poor girl."

The two listeners heard incredulously. They had shed more than their share of blood in their time; they had known wounds and abrasions—some ugly and deep. They knew the miracles of first aid and surgery. And here the gov'nor was talking of pin scratches, needle pricks—and in terms of death. It was beyond them.

The detective stretched his arms with a tired yawn. He looked at his watch and with an exclamation abruptly arose, moving toward the door.

"Time to go home, boys. The play is over—the curtain down."

He gathered his hat and cane from the chair where he had placed them. He stood, looking back at the two with quizzical eyes.

"I guess there's nothing else—eh? I've told you everything; you quite understand—everything?"

Jimmy looked at Slinky, receiving back a blink. Whereupon, he grinned pleasantly.

"Everyt'ing, gov'nor, except the main t'ing."

"The main thing? What is it?"

The mastiff's growl intervened—privileged, affectionate, in concern.

"It's about this guy Carteret, gov'nor." He blinked in puzzlement. "Why?"

"Why—"

"Why did you do all you did for a yellow dog like him? Days and weeks spent—all that trouble; yes, and the bringing back of Zaliel even. It don't seem he's worth it."

The man by the door looked down, his cane tracing a pattern at his feet.

"Slinky," he said in low voice, "when you went back into the fire that time when the old prison wing was burning and you brought out 'Reddy' Harlan, did you think about his being the scum of the prison? You, who

are so 'marked' with fear of fire that you don't even smoke because you shrink from handling matches. No," he went on, "you did it—to save a man. You weren't reasoning about whether or not he was worth it."

The cane lifted, pointing to the tapes-tried hangings that veiled the door of the observatory.

"To-night you saw a man pass out through that door; a man with a transforming light of high courage and sacrifice shining in his face; a man—who, as you say, had been a yellow dog—going out to make his last amends, to lay down his life—as he thought—to save another."

Jimmy muttered: "And scared, too, he was."

"Yes, but with this newborn manhood surmounting the terror of his soul."

The cane moved, swinging back straight at the former prison guard.

"You, Slinky, because you knew the horror—or felt the horror of fire—had to go into that red hell to save another from it. And I"—they saw his lips tremble slightly, smooth themselves; they saw a misty light flash in his eyes—"because I knew the horror of fear, I had to save another from it."

They swayed, staring. "Fear! You, gov'nor?"

He turned, his cane with a gesture summoning them to follow. Only when they paused on the aerie bridge strung high up against the still radiant stars did he speak again. Far in the west his pointing stick showed them a yellow point—faded, but still boring with malevolent gleam.

"It was my birth star, too," he said.

"Yours, gov'nor," gasped Slinky. "What, Saturn?"

"Aye, Saturn the malignant, dedicated by the ancients to everything of evil—of misfortune. And that power of suggestion has come down through centuries, gripping human minds in thrall—as it did Carteret's—as it once did mine—as it has done with thousands and thousands through the intervening ages, making evil to seem supreme and men to cower before it."

"Geel!" from Jimmy with an uneasy look at Slinky. "Then you mean to say there's somethin' in this star dope after all?"

The master turned upon them the quizzical smile they loved.

"Is there?" he asked. "What do you two think?"

Slinky blinked.

Idols of Clay

By Hamish McLaurin

Author of "Something to Kill a Canary," "Florrie Springs a New One," Etc.

There was a big story back of those little clay statues Martello made on the stage—a story showing that love of the beautiful can live through much ugliness

MY wife and I had grown rather fond of Martello, in a sort of detached way. I say detached because the man had a fixed habit of keeping almost entirely to himself. He was a silent, reserved individual, unflinchingly pleasant when spoken to, but never inclined to initiate a conversation on his own account.

The three of us were playing the Olio Circuit that season and, though there were times when our bookings failed to coincide with his, there were many other times when we went along on the same bill for weeks on end. There were some long jumps on that circuit, in those days, and what with the monotonous train rides and stopping at the same hotels and being thrown together around the theater all the time we got to know him pretty well in the end; about as well as he ever permitted any one to know him, I imagine.

Martello was a sculptor, with gifts far above the ordinary, but for the purposes of vaudeville he was billed simply as a clay modeler. Strictly speaking, that conveyed a more accurate idea of his act. He used to take great balls of damp clay, the size of a grapefruit, and throw them at a drawing board mounted on a heavy easel. The clay would stick to the board, and in five seconds he would have built the foundation for the portrait he had in mind. Then he would step up to the board and begin shaping the mass with those long fingers and extraordinary thumbs of his. He worked with a speed that had a never-ending fascination for me, and when he stepped back a few moments later, revealing the head of an Indian chief or Abraham Lincoln or somebody, the likeness would be so perfect that the hand he got from the audience was always one of instant, spontaneous appreciation.

His appearance helped his act. He stood

a good six feet or better, and had a spread of shoulders unusual even for a man of that height. When we knew him he was about forty-five or so, with a face as heavily lined as any Indian's he ever modeled. His nose had a prominent, narrow bridge that made his eyes seem even deeper set than they were, and his jaw was the bony, compact kind that generally goes with his type of framework. He wore his hair long, but it was nothing like the limp, silky fringe that cartoonists put on their spring poets. It was more like a mane and was quite in keeping with the rest of him.

It was his eyes which impressed me most, even before I ever spoke to him; their expression altered to such a marked degree, depending upon whether or not he knew any one was looking at him. In conversation they were alert with interest in the subject under discussion; they glistened with humor, or they speculated seriously. When he was occupied with his own thoughts those same eyes took on an expression which made me believe that at some time or other they had gazed upon more suffering than their owner was ever likely to forget. Just what conveyed that suggestion to me I could not say, but it was written there beneath the tangled eyebrows as unmistakably as though put into words. After he told us his story I understood why.

There was one thing about Martello's act which was different from that of any other clay modeler I ever saw, and much more effective. For a finish he used to set aside the easel and turn to a pedestal with a revolving top, on which stood an irregular column of clay about three feet high. With only one or two simple wooden tools to supplement the deftness of his fingers, he would model a statuette of a Spanish dancer in full fling, a figure so dainty, so accurate in its proportions, and so spirited that it could

have been cast and placed on exhibition almost anywhere with hardly the touching up of a single line.

This took him longer than the rough bas-relief portraits, of course, but considering the delicacy of the work and the rapidity with which he completed it, it was amazing. I never saw an audience that didn't give him its undistracted attention. In modeling his bas-reliefs he had his back to the house more or less, but when he sculpted his little dancer he stood behind the pedestal, facing the footlights, so the people out front could watch every move. I suppose not one person in every twenty vaudeville audiences has ever been inside a sculptor's studio, and Martello's skill was a revelation to them.

Sometimes he would model the dancer in the act of striding impudently forward, her hands on her swaying hips, and her cheek pressing against her upraised shoulder. Again he would catch her with tambourine raised overhead and skirts whirling in a mad pirouette. At other times her supple little body would be curved far over backward in the swoop of the difficult, spinning, back bend which is the gauge of a Spanish dancer's skill. At all times the figure was a perfect picture of arrested action and rollicking, warm-blooded, vigorous life.

The wife and I often wondered why it was always a Spanish dancer he chose for his subject and never a circus rider or a bathing girl or anything else which a vaudeville audience might have liked equally well. Our curiosity grew to such a point that one night we decided to ask him. It was on the trip between Salt Lake City and Denver, I remember, and the three of us were sitting out on the back platform of the observation car, after everybody else had gone to bed.

Martello looked at us gravely for several moments after I had put the question to him, and then he said, "Do you really want to know, or has somebody told you something about me?"

"Told us something?" my wife said. "How do you mean?"

"I didn't know," he went on. "There are still a few who remember the story, I suppose. It was quite a sensation at the time. I thought maybe you'd heard about it."

"Not a word," I assured him. "And if it's anything you'd rather not talk about, why then—"

"Oh, not at all," he interrupted. "I'd just as soon tell you. In fact, I'd rather tell

you than have you hear it from somebody else. You have been very friendly to me all these weeks, both of you, and—well, I haven't a great many friends any more. I'd like you to think kindly of me, even if we never see each other again after this trip. You might hear the story some day and, when you do, I want you to know my side of it."

He had been filling his pipe as he spoke, and when he got it going he settled himself on his camp stool, with his back leaning against the screen door and his eyes fixed on the glimmering rails in our wake.

"To begin with," he said, "my name isn't Martello. I suppose you guessed that. My real name doesn't matter, but it's a good name and a name that had a great deal of influence in the town where I was born. My father had money, slathers of it, and when I was a kid I had pretty much everything I wanted. I had about the usual American boyhood; school in the winter and a trip to the lakes or the mountains in the summer; wholesome companions, both boys and girls; and every opportunity to build up a healthy body and a clean mind. My mother died when I was very young, and as I was an only child I'm afraid I was pretty badly spoiled.

"However, it wasn't until I was in the latter years of high school that I had any trouble with my old man. He had an idea he wanted me to be a civil engineer, but when it came to the drawing classes in school I found that free-hand drawing came as natural to me as eating, while at mechanical drawing I was no good at all. Mathematics meant nothing to me, either, and I began to suspect that I wasn't cut out for engineering. I told my father so, and explained that I would much rather become a painter or a sculptor. He said he wasn't going to have any fool artists in his family, if he could help it, and I'd better make up my mind to that right away.

"I didn't argue the matter any more just then; I was having too good a time to bother much about what I would do later on, and when he suggested that I drop Latin the third year and take up Spanish I had no objections. Spanish was easy for me, easier than Latin, and if it made him happy to think I was preparing myself to take advantage of the engineering opportunities in Mexico and South America, why, well and good. I did the best I could to prepare for

a college engineering course, and, by doing a powerful lot of cramming at the last minute, I managed to slip through the necessary entrance examinations to a well-known technical school in the East.

"I struggled earnestly with my studies for a few months, and then I privately rose in revolt. I wasn't meant to be an engineer, and I knew it. There were good art classes in the city where my school was located, and I began spending most of my evenings and part of my allowance on a course in drawing and painting. I fooled with clay modeling a little, but at that time I thought I wanted to be a painter.

"Naturally my technical studies suffered, and when June came around I fell down hard in two or three subjects. My old man was good and mad. I tried to tell him that my inclinations still lay in the direction of art and that calculus and trigonometry would always be a hopeless mystery to me, but he was the kind that nobody can argue with.

"I scarcely made any attempts at study that winter. I kept up my Spanish and read a little French at odd moments, because I had made up my mind I was going abroad to study art. I went ahead with my art classes and made such rapid progress that I had two canvases in the mid-winter exhibition of students' work at the art museum. I tried my hand at illustrating, too; made half a dozen drawings for an advertising concern, and sold two or three others to the comic papers. I kept all the checks I got for that kind of work. I didn't need the money, and I wanted those checks handy when the blow-up came.

"It came at the end of the winter term, when the school authorities wrote my father to the effect that I was a nice boy but I was wasting their time. The old man and I had it out when I got home, and the only thing that saved my life was those checks. We finally compromised on architecture as my career, with mental reservations on my part, and a conviction on dad's part that he had put something over on me. He felt so good about it that when I said of course the study of architecture involved a trip abroad, he told me to go as far as I liked.

"I decided that I would start with Spain, and when the warm weather arrived I packed up my drawing kit and set off. I was twenty-three years old that summer; I was as husky as they make 'em; I had never been away from my family circle except during those

two years at technical school; and I was all alone. Women hadn't figured much in my life, not in an adult way, at least. One or two mild affairs with girls at the art school, but that was all. Just the same, I was full of what frequently passes for 'artistic temperament,' and I was dead ripe for exactly what happened.

"I landed at Cadiz and was entranced. It was my first glimpse of the old world, and everything I saw seemed to have an air of enchantment shimmering about it. I moused around the old cathedral and the new cathedral for days at a time, as if there were no other churches to be seen in all Europe. I reveled in the old Italian and Spanish paintings in the museums and paid a reverential visit to the little Capuchin monastery where Murillo fell to his death from the scaffolding as he was painting his last picture. I suppose there are architectural features to certain buildings in Cadiz which are worthy of note. If there are I can't recall them, but even to-day I can picture in my mind the heavenly quality of blue which Murillo got into the robe of one of the Madonnas I saw there.

"After spending much more time in Cadiz than the place was really worth, I went on up to Seville and with my first stroll around the city I cursed myself for not coming sooner. This was the Spain I had come to see. This was the land of my dreams.

"You have never been to Seville? It's an alluring place. To me it was the spot where all romance must have had its beginning.

"I explored the town conscientiously and joyously; the Alcazar, the cathedral, Pilate's castle, and the art museums, and each of them brought me a fresh gasp of pleasure. I found that people understood readily what I said to them and in a few days I was able to understand what they said in reply. Never before had I been so deeply grateful for the privilege of being alive.

"Then one night a young man at the hotel, a sort of guide, suggested that it might interest me to visit a dancing school where a famous old instructor had taught some of Spain's most celebrated dancers the steps with which they had dazzled the theatergoers of two continents. The old man was training a new group of girls, my guide explained, and an exhibition had been arranged that night for a party of tourists who were in town. The prospect of seeing some genuine Spanish dancing, in the very place where

the best dancers came from, was not to be resisted. I went along.

"The exhibition was held in a long, narrow room with rows of chairs on slightly elevated platforms facing each other from both sides of the dancing floor. There was no stage. The girls and their male dancing partners were clustered at one end of the hall beside the orchestra and took turns dancing down the floor between the spectators. There must have been sixty or seventy tourists in the party, and when we got there the front-row seats were all taken. We slipped into a couple of chairs in the second row, well down the hall, just as the orchestra struck up one of those irresistible Andalusian dance themes which are like no other music in the world.

"In another minute my head was fairly whirling. I had seen Spanish dancing before, but it had been amateurish and insipid compared to this. The Spanish dancers one saw in America at that time were either women of rather too opulent charms and too little ability—if they really hailed from Spain—or they were performers of other nationalities, who had little to offer beyond the costume and the tambourine. These girls were utterly different. There was nothing overvoluptuous about them. They were young and lithe and graceful; with a fresh beauty of feature which suggested flowers just opening to the sun. Tropical flowers if you will—heavy-scented, deep-hued, overpowering—but possessing a charm no man could escape.

"For a time I remained delightedly impartial in my admiration. There was not much to choose between the young women, either in beauty or in skill. Then, after what seemed to me an expectant, preparatory sort of pause, the musicians set their instruments throbbing with the languorous, pulsating measures of a piece that was fleetingly familiar, an air which threatened each instant to reveal itself to my memory, only to twist off into something unexpectedly different, as if it might have been the mother melody from which all Spanish music had descended.

"A girl was advancing down the floor with the perfect bodily correlation of a young panther, a girl who had not appeared before in any of the dances. I cannot describe what it was that happened inside me as my eyes fell upon her, but it was a queer momentary paralysis which seemed to involve my heart and everything surrounding it. People laugh

at that sort of thing, I know, but take my word for it—it can happen. Five seconds previous to that moment I had not known this young woman existed; five seconds afterward our destinies were as hopelessly entangled as though the events of years had interwoven them. I believe that—absolutely.

"Her costume was not noticeably different from those of the other girls, except that for this dance she had put on a wide-brimmed white felt hat and was carrying neither castanets nor tambourine. She held a full-blown rose between her teeth, just as you see in the pictures, and her fingers rested lazily on her hips. If the other girls had been beautiful here was one who was lovely beyond all eulogy. Her features were chiseled after the true Castilian pattern, yet I wrong her when I use the word 'chiseled,' for that implies something hard; and if ever there was a skin with the sweet softness of a baby's it was hers.

"Her hair had the sheen of black amber and her mouth, as I said in some verses I wrote to her one time, 'her mouth was Passion's scarlet self.' In figure she resembled the others save that her limbs were a shade more rounded, as if a certain childish plumpness, not quite lost when she grew into young womanhood, had remained to accentuate each charming curve.

"Her eyes were like nothing I had ever seen—dark pools of delight, with soft lids drooped over them so dreamily that it seemed the music must have seized upon her inmost soul and transported her into some far region of ecstasy. For her the spectators seemed not to exist; she danced for sheer love of the dancing, yet she must have peeped out from under her feathery eyelashes occasionally, for when the music came to an end she was just in front of our seats, and in the same movement with which she took her final posture, she tossed her gay silk handkerchief into my lap.

"It needed only that to complete my enthralment. Of course I knew there was a slight string to the compliment, and that she would be back for her handkerchief presently, expecting to find a piece of silver in it. The other girls had tossed their kerchiefs to various men among the tourists and had been quite openly piqued when certain of the favored ones, unaware of the custom, had returned the favor just as they received it. I promptly wrapped an English sovereign in the folds of the silk and awaited my

señorita's return. She opened the handkerchief right in front of me, with the pretty curiosity of a child, and the dazzling wondering smile she gave me when she found the gold piece would have been ample reward even had she not murmured, '*Gracia, señor,*' in a voice that was as soft as her eyes.

"I asked her her name, and when she heard her own tongue spoken, the smile became more radiant than before.

"*'Maria Peralta,'* she answered.

"*'You are very beautiful, Maria,'* I said.

"*'Gracia, señor,'* she said again, looking down at her slippers with unexpected shyness. Then, seeing that everybody was looking at us, she frisked down the floor to the piano, where she stood preening herself among the other girls and condescendingly displaying the gold piece to their envious gaze. I had other handkerchiefs flung into my lap after that, you may be sure, but their sprightly owners got nothing in return save a few silver pesetas. I had eyes for none but Maria, and when the others observed this they accepted it with the cheerful camaraderie of their kind.

"She danced twice after that; once alone and once with the others, and, although all the tourists applauded her and made a great do about her, it was apparent to every one in the hall that her glances, her postures, and her smiles were all for me. Before the evening was over my guide had procured an interview for me with old Benito Molina, the dancing master, and I had obtained his permission to attend a rehearsal the next afternoon and make some sketches of his prize pupil. When I explained to Maria that I was going to do her portrait and that she must bring all her pretty costumes to rehearsal the next day, her eyes opened wide with delight.

"*'You are most kind, señor,'* she said.

"*'To one so lovely, who could be other than kind?'* I replied, and with that I returned to my hotel. All night long my brain refused to quiet down. Maria's eyes, Maria's hair, Maria's countless, charming poses passed before me in endless review, rendering sleep impossible and leaving me next morning restless with impatience to see her again.

"The rehearsal was something of a disappointment. The hall looked dingy and drab by daylight. The girls, except for Maria, were attired in cheap, black, ill-fitting clothes, and the men, now that they were

off parade, were a rather hard-looking crew. They needed shaving and were not overly clean. All the sparkle and life of the night before had departed—except, as I say, for Maria. Maria was as fresh as a morning glory and as high spirited as a kitten. While the others were going through the daily routine of dances, she took one pose after another, blithely changing her costumes behind the piano from time to time, and watching me saucily out of the corner of her eye as I filled my book with little sketches.

"Old Benito sat at my elbow and chatted, flinging an occasional criticism at his pupils in a jargon too colloquial for me to follow, or offering a suggestion to Maria as to what pose would prove most effective. Presently he informed me that he and his whole company were to leave Seville that week and go directly to London, where they were to appear in the music halls for an indefinite season. The contracts were all signed, he said, and the scenery for the act was being painted in London at that moment, from designs he had sent there himself.

"My heart sank with dismay. I had not contemplated a visit to London for many months yet. There was all of Italy and France to cover first; but when, in one of her moments of relaxation from a particularly trying pose, Maria came and perched beside me, laying her arm frankly across my shoulders and pressing her cheek lightly against mine, the better to inspect the sketch, my previous itinerary suddenly went aglimmering and I decided that the rare specimens of Gothic architecture in England demanded my immediate observation and study.

"It was just at that moment that Benito, having tried vainly to explain to his pupils some change or other he wanted introduced into the dance they were doing, rose disgustingly and walked out on the floor to show them what he meant. It was the first time since my arrival that Maria and I had been left to ourselves. She seemed so intent upon the drawing that I thought she had not noticed Benito's departure until all at once I felt the clasp of her arm around my shoulder tighten unmistakably and the warm pressure of her cheek against mine take on a meaning which was anything but casual.

"The sensation bewildered and startled me. I tried to turn and face her, but she clutched me tight and would not let me look into her eyes.

"*'No, no,'* she whispered. *'They will see.'*

"I steadied myself at once and began pointing out the details of the drawing with my pencil.

"'Soon we go to London,' she went on, in a cautious undertone. 'You will come, too? Promise me you will come, too.'

"'I could not go elsewhere if I tried,' I said.

"She pressed my arm again and her lips grazed my temple as she stood up; barely grazed it, you understand, but it was a kiss, the first she ever gave me. The next moment she was capering in the middle of the floor with the rest of them, and our parting a little later was as impersonal as you please.

"I was back the next day, however. When I showed up I had a proposition to offer old Benito. I suggested that I should do Maria's portrait life size, in crayons, in several dashing poses that would make good posters. I told him he could have the drawings and get them reproduced in London, so long as I was allowed to keep one of the lot for myself, as a souvenir. The plan appealed to his frugal nature, even though he hesitated about the wisdom of ever spending any money on posters, so Maria was soon posing for me again, and we were making love to each other right before the eyes of all her fellows without their being a penny's worth the wiser.

"Just the same, they never left us alone with each other. Custom was too strong for that, even among such easy-going people as they. I was permitted to escort Maria home one evening, accompanied by one of the other girls, and, as I look back on it now, I realize how blind is the infatuation of youth. If I had not been quite mad over Maria that glimpse of her home must surely have brought me to my senses. It was a sordid place, a vulgar place, with a rank-smelling, cluttered courtyard which no amount of flowing vines could redeem. I could have made a picturesque painting of it, a painting which would have made people say, 'How quaint and charming,' but that would only have been because I could not reproduce the odor which went with it.

"It was on that occasion that I got my first and only glimpse of Maria's mother, a shocking, dried-up old harridan, with a face like a carved cork and the complexion of an oyster. One look at her should have lifted the veil from my eyes and caused me to peer cautiously into the future, but it didn't. I

had only to receive a furtive clasp of the hand from Maria, a melting glance from under her sweeping lashes, and the glory of her present beauty infolded me once more in its spell. She was young, she was beautiful, and she loved me; I would take her away, far from her own people, and there I would mold her into the perfect creature I desired.

"The mother fawned upon me annoyingly—I think Maria must have told her about the gold piece—and insisted on serving wine and little cakes. She chattered and grinned and smoked and strove to be entertaining, but she never let me have a moment alone with her daughter. Her husband, if she had one, was nowhere in evidence. In fact, as long as I knew Maria I can't remember that she ever mentioned her father, and it is an illuminating comment on my state of mind in those days that I never thought it worth while to inquire about him.

"At last I had to say good night and the mother accompanied us to the door. My departure was strictly formal, as, of course, it had to be, and I returned to the hotel with a feeling of exasperation. The effect of all this enforced decorum was just what might have been expected; it only deepened my infatuation and made me wildly impatient to get to London, where I felt confident Maria and I could slip away from the others once in a while and follow our hearts wherever they might lead us.

"The day came swiftly enough, and when Benito and his company set out for London, I took the same train. I had cabled home to say that I was changing my itinerary, but I had written nothing as to my reasons—my real reasons, I mean.

"London was all that I had hoped for. Benito, once he arrived there and got his act playing, relaxed his strict vigilance and permitted his dancers to do about as they pleased, so long as they showed up promptly at performances. There were one or two men in the company who rather fancied Maria, but she adopted such a haughty, discouraging attitude toward them that their attentions were never annoying and she was free to go out with me practically at will.

"Those were tempestuous days. I needn't describe them. I often had reason to recall that the first impression Maria had given me was that of a young panther, and there were times when her emotions reached a pitch of fierceness which took my breath away. I was none the less fascinated by dis-

covering that quality in her nature, you may be sure, and within two weeks after our arrival in London, I had asked her to marry me.

"She seemed surprised at that, as though it were something she had not been expecting, but presently she consented on condition that I would not ask her to leave the stage. She was under contract to Benito, she pointed out, and, besides, she loved the life. She was a great favorite with the audiences, and the applause she earned at each performance was what she had been struggling toward through all her years of hard study and training. Her trifling successes in Seville were as nothing to the sensation she was creating in London, and she would not give it up so soon, not even for me.

"I was willing to concede anything, if only I might have her all to myself during her leisure hours, so one day we hunted up a little Catholic church and went through the solemn ceremony that made us man and wife. Old Benito was threatened with apoplexy when we told him about it, but when we explained that Maria would finish out the season with him just the same, he calmed down at once and even gave us a little wedding supper at the funny, old hotel where the company had its lodgings. The other men in the company scowled a bit at the news, but I kept the waiter busy bringing in wine, and by the time the supper was over it had developed into quite a festal affair.

"I took Maria away with me to a comfortable apartment I had leased, and not until our honeymoon was well on its way did I write home and tell my father what I had done. I was planning, I said, to remain in England for several months and then take my wife with me on my trip through France and Italy, returning home the following year, when my studies were completed. With the selfishness of a youthful lover I had never stopped to consider the possible effect of this news. My world for the time being was centered in Maria, and the fact that I might not be treating my father quite fairly in the matter gave me no more than the faintest passing qualm.

"I was brought coldly face to face with my folly the very day my letter reached home. You have probably gathered that my father was a stubborn, self-willed, impetuous man, so I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised at the cablegram he sent me. I was surprised, though. I was more than sur-

prised, I was stunned. He said in so many words that my further plans did not interest him; that he was mailing me a check for a thousand dollars and that when I received it I could look upon it as the last cent I would ever get from him, either by gift or by inheritance. As for my returning home, it was a matter of complete indifference to him whether I ever came back or not.

"Well, the letter came, with the check in it, and after that I never heard from my father again as long as he lived. I have every confidence that he would have forgiven me in time, but within a month from the time I got that letter he was killed in a runaway accident and the estate passed into the hands of various institutions, as he had provided in his will. When I came to examine my letter of credit I realized that it would not be long before I would have to devise some means of making a living. I had a good deal of the old man's stubbornness in me, and I was determined to show him that I didn't need his help in order to get along in the world.

"My only talent lay in the direction of art, and, in trying to think of something that would not take me away from Maria, I developed this clay-modeling act which I'm using, except that in those days I worked only on the flat board and didn't attempt any three-dimension stuff. I said nothing to Maria about my father having disinherited me, and when I told her I was going to try my act in the music halls she took it for granted that I was merely accommodating my life to hers. That was true, in a measure, and, of course, it made her very happy, but it meant our bread and butter just the same.

"My turn proved to be enough of a novelty to get immediate booking, and I put in the happiest months of my life that season in London. Maria was adorable. She was with her own people enough to keep from getting homesick, and when we came home after the theater she was always the same impetuous, turbulent little lover who had enslaved me from the beginning. Even in the simplicity of her character—for she was always a child of nature in the truest sense of the word—she developed a many-sidedness that was unendingly fascinating to me, and I dreamed pleasant dreams of quitting the footlights after a little while and settling down somewhere to work at my painting and my modeling, with Maria as

the subject who would some day make me famous. She loved to pose for me at odd moments, and before the season came to an end I had modeled her and sketched her in scores of different postures and costumes.

"As the time drew near for Benito and his dancers to return to Spain, I got in touch with an American booking agent in London and arranged routes for Maria and myself in this country. She was to be featured in a series of solo dances and I was to do my clay modeling, with a stipulation that we were always to be booked on the same bill. This arrangement sent Maria into transports of enthusiasm. She was delighted with the prospect of seeing the United States and was even more delighted to think that now all the applause would be for her alone, without a single rival to share the honors. She would soon have the world at her feet, she predicted confidently.

"Unhappily for me, her confidence was all too well justified. Nothing like her had ever been seen before in this country, and her success was beyond belief. The papers raved about her. The magazines printed pages and pages of her photographs. She became a headliner overnight, and the managers of musical productions began bidding against each other for her services. Night after night we were invited out, to private homes, to dancing clubs, and to supper parties at the gayest of the gay restaurants. Everywhere she went she was pointed out and gazed at and flattered and toasted.

"For the first little while I rejoiced with her in her success. Then suddenly I became panic-stricken. I realized all at once that I had become merely Maria Peralta's husband, a person hardly to be taken into consideration by anybody who chanced to desire the pleasure of her company. I suppose I should have expected that. I suppose I should have seen it written in the stars, but never for a moment, even though I recognized it, could I resign myself to the situation. I had given up everything in the world for Maria, and the thought of losing her struck me cold with fear.

"It was inevitable that something of what was going on should creep into our daily life when we were by ourselves, and I perceived fast enough that the adulation the poor child was receiving had quite gone to her head. She was no longer interested in my simple plans for our future. Her talk was all of the people she had met and of what they had

said about her. When I told her I had rented a little top-floor studio apartment where we could live nicely and where I could go on with my art work at such times as we were not at the theater she received the news without enthusiasm.

She did evince considerable interest in furnishing the place when we moved into it, but I soon found that it was solely because she wanted to make it an attractive setting for her attractive self and that instead of being a quiet retreat where we could hide from the world it became a halfway house for a horde of her newly made acquaintances whom she invited in at all times and under all conditions.

"The end was just what any one could have predicted, I presume, given the circumstances and knowing something of Maria's origin. An extremely handsome, extremely wealthy man, one of her own countrymen—or, rather, a Portuguese, which was close enough—joined her train of admirers and began making love to her almost openly. To add the final drop of gall to my cup, the man was an importer of sardines, and it threw a bright-side light on Maria's character when I realized that a man who dealt in canned fish could attract her just as powerfully as one who made some pretension to the arts. My adoration, I could plainly see, had become a thing to be taken for granted. She had enjoyed my love to the full; now she must have the love of others. It was in her nature, in her breed, and nothing on earth could stop it.

"Hardly a month after we were settled in our new home, there came a week's lay-off in our mutual bookings, and, in order to fill in the gap, I accepted an engagement in a city some little distance from New York. Maria did not come along. She said she was tired and would prefer to spend the week quietly at home. I played the week out alone, but I was far from happy and, when Saturday night came, I could hardly wait for the treasurer to pay me off. Ordinarily I would not have been able to reach home until the middle of the following day, but I was number two on the bill and managed to get away from the theater in time to catch a night train which landed me in New York early Sunday morning.

"I went straight home to the studio and quietly opened the door. What I found there I will not describe to you, but God would have been kinder to me if he had stricken

me blind before I ever crossed the threshold. Even to this day my recollection of what happened is not clear, but when it was over I found myself standing with my heavy sculptor's mallet in my hand and the Portuguese quite dead at my feet.

"I turned to Maria, who stood against the wall, screaming with horror. In my every waking hour since that instant I have tried to console myself with the knowledge that I had not the faintest intention of harming her. I loved her just as truly at that dreadful moment as I ever had in my life, but there could have been nothing of mercy written on my face, for, the moment her eyes met mine, she screamed again, more wildly than before, and sprang for the open window. Before I could stop her she had flung herself into the courtyard, five floors below. Thank God I did not see her as she must have been when they picked her up.

"That was all. The court gave me twenty years. I served sixteen of them, and during every day of that time I modeled a little statue of her as she was in those first wonderful days we spent together. The wardens were all extremely kind and let me have the clay in my cell to do as I pleased with. When I got out, I turned naturally to my old profession. That is one feature of this profession of ours which was a blessing to me—no references are required.

"So now I live along as best I can with

what is left of my pitiful life, and twice a day, as you know, I model an image of my poor, unhappy little *señorita* with all the love and longing I can put into it. For you see, my friends, I am rehearsing—rehearsing and practicing and perfecting myself for the task which some day is to restore peace to my tormented soul. Some day I shall carve a statue of her in marble which will take rank with the greatest creations from the hand of man; a thing of such perfection that it will stand for all time in some great temple of art, to be worshiped by coming generations as long as the human heart holds a love of the beautiful. In that I will find some slight measure of happiness to pay for the misery life has seen fit to inflict upon me. That is to be my atonement."

Martello rose slowly to his feet and, turning his back on us, leaned against the edge of the observation platform, staring out over the moonlit plains. My wife laid her finger on my lips just as I was about to say something, and then stepped over to Martello and gave him a little squeeze and a pat on the arm.

"If you ask me," I said, when we got inside the car again, "that poor devil out there is a little queer in the head."

"Queer in the head!" she blazed at me indignantly, "I wish more men were queer in the head the way he is," and then I noticed that she had been crying.

Another McLaurin story, "The Glorious Privilege," in an early issue.



SOLITUDE AS A DESTROYER

DON'T be a recluse. "Man was not meant to live alone," is a splendid piece of psychology. So long as you desire to progress, so long as you have ambition, so long as you seek distinction, remember that human companionship is a necessity to you. Neither your mind nor your spirit can feed upon itself indefinitely. Self-renewal is the secret of strength, and it comes only from letting the thoughts, moods, and characteristics of your fellows play upon, and become a part of, your personality. In the long run, you give to the world in a transmuted form exactly what the world has given to you.

There have been, of course, famous hermits, recluses whose names are written big on the records. But these men went into retirement in late life. They went only after their contact with others had so enriched them that they had absorbed enough working material to last them to the end of their lives. They used their retirement as a means of digesting, and then making the wisest use of, what they had stored up in their minds.

But the young man, the man who sets achievement as his goal, must live and labor among his fellows. Unless he does, his ideas are exhausted, his emotional reactions made impotent. You serve humanity by learning to let humanity serve you. When you think yourself self-sufficient, you are no longer awake to the call of opportunity.

Providence Takes Charge

By J. Frank Davis

Author of "Statutes Made and Provided," "Making the Populi Vox," Etc.

Mayor Kendall never dreamed of raiding Anderson's "joint." On the contrary, he couldn't bear to leave him unprotected in this wicked world

MAYOR KENDALL, passing police headquarters on his way to keep morning office hours at city hall, almost collided with the Reverend John J. Quinlan, whose kindly, tolerant, rather tired eyes had surveyed Eddsfeld's comings and goings and whose ears had listened to the tale of Eddsfeld's sins and sorrows for close to two generations. He had not happened to see the priest for two or three months, and their greetings were cordial. The mayor, when each had assured himself as to the other's good health, looked over the clergyman's shoulder at the open doors through which he had just come, and inquired:

"Somebody in trouble?"

"In there they are all in trouble," Father Quinlan replied. "One a little more than the rest, to-day. Michael McHenry. You probably read about his arrest in the morning papers." He shook his head sorrowfully. "And nothing that I could do—or ought to do. It comforted his mother to have me come. A good woman, Mrs. McHenry. She is fairly heartbroken. Michael is surely going to prison for a long time."

"It looks so, if the evidence is what they say," Kendall agreed. "His bondsmen will be even more likely than Scott & Mowton to insist on a heavy penalty. And he has admitted the embezzlement, the papers say."

The priest nodded. "He is guilty," he said. "A pretty good boy, he used to be. Careless. Reckless, a little. But not a thief. He got to gambling when gambling houses were running wide open in this town, but after you closed them up he behaved himself fine—until that place of Anderson's was opened at Curryville. He has been playing roulette there; more heavily than he could afford, as they all do. He lost money that belonged to Scott & Mowton. He stole more in the hope of winning and paying the

first stealing back. It is not a new story." Father Quinlan sighed. "So he is going to prison. While Gilbert Anderson remains free, and prospers."

"And there isn't a thing we can do about it. Nothing I have ever been up against since I have been in politics has been quite so exasperating."

"They tell me Anderson is so cocksure of not being interfered with that he doesn't even have a guard on the door—a 'look-out' is the word, isn't it?"

"That's right. The place is literally wide open."

"Less than a hundred yards beyond the city line."

"Less than a hundred feet. The trolley runs to the line, and passengers don't have to take fifty steps to get there."

"I have heard," the priest said, "that Sheriff Sharples' infirmities are proving very profitable, indeed."

"His infirmities?"

"Blindness and deafness. Shared by other Douglas County officers, who also are increasing their real-estate holdings and bank accounts."

"Pretty much all officialdom in Douglas County is doing well, I gather," agreed the mayor. "The amount of graft a gambling joint can afford to distribute if it is not interfered with is a pretty striking commentary on what chance the public has to beat the game. It is common talk that Anderson spends not less than a thousand a week in Douglas County alone—and nobody knows what he has to contribute to powers higher up."

"It couldn't be the governor, could it?" Father Quinlan asked. "Governor Manning has always been spoken of very highly. It doesn't seem likely he could be a party to it. And yet, when the officials of a county fail to do their duty, it is his business to

make them do it or remove them—and he is as blind and deaf to the situation as Sheriff Sharples himself."

"I think Governor Manning is an honest man. But he is engrossed with those taxation reforms that he is trying to get the legislature to pass. It wouldn't be hard for clever and unscrupulous subordinates to keep him from learning a good many things."

Father Quinlan, who knew more about the practical inside workings of politics than many professional politicians, nodded gravely. "I suppose Rankin, his secretary, decides what letters shall reach him," he said. "Is Rankin the sort that would—"

"I don't know. Whoever it is and however it is done, the fact remains that a gambler is running a wide open, prosperous place not two minutes' walk from the Eddsfeld city line, and that neither the authorities of Eddsfeld nor the sheriff of Edds County can do a thing about it. And the people of Douglas County are not much interested, because Curryville, away over in one corner, is thinly settled, and Anderson isn't taking any money to speak of from their boys; his patronage all comes from the cities—especially this one."

"Are Sharples' deputies all in it as deep as he is?"

"All but one, I hear—Hindlebury. A rather decent man, Matt Hindlebury. Ever happen to meet him?"

"No."

"He runs a meat market here in the city, and lives just over the line there in Curryville. I am told he isn't in on the graft. Won't take it. And is opposed, personally, to letting Gil Anderson run. But he is under heavy political obligations to the sheriff."

"More sins are committed on the score of political obligations than ever can be credited to bribery." The priest rested his glance on the entrance to police headquarters. "So Mike McHenry must be tempted to steal from his employers, and his mother must see him sent to prison, and there is nothing we can do but pray and trust in the Providence that makes all things come out right in its own good season."

"Any time you see any way by which I can help Providence to do it, let me know and I assure you I won't hesitate," the mayor promised. "In the meantime, Gil Anderson will continue to gather in Eddsfeld boys' dollars and give Eddsfeld men and

women who want things run decently the contemptuous laugh." He summed up his emotions over the situation explosively: "Damn Gil Anderson! If you'll excuse me."

The faintest shadow of a smile flickered across Father Quinlan's lips.

"I cannot be expected to approve your way of putting it," he remarked dryly, "but if you mean it merely as a figure of speech, as most people do, that doesn't prevent my indorsing your sentiments. I'll say, 'May Heaven confound him!'—and I imagine we shall both be meaning about the same thing."

He and the mayor went their ways. In due time, young Mike McHenry also went his way, which was to the penitentiary, and other Eddsfeld young men, and some older ones, went in various unfortunate directions, due to the presence just across the county line of Gilbert Anderson's undisturbed establishment of chance. Sheriff Sharples, of Douglas County, waxed more and more prosperous. Governor Carlton Manning, deeply immersed in his tax-reform project, which he esteemed to be one of the most important things in the world, did nothing to cause the law to be enforced in the little Eddsfeld suburb of Curryville. The governor was a cold, reserved, not easily approachable man. To those who actually got his ear to complain of the condition of things there he said he would make earnest investigation and, if he found things to be as reported, would assuredly take action. Whereupon, on three distinct occasions, he sent confidential representatives to Eddsfeld, who boarded the Curryville trolley line, alighted at the terminus of the route, and found Anderson's big, square, barnlike building dark and deserted. Governor Manning, after the third of these fruitless expeditions, informed close friends that it looked to him as though his opponents—*he was a Democrat, as was Sheriff Sharples, while the city administration of Eddsfeld was Republican*—were playing a game of partisan politics.

It happened that young Mayor Kendall—for excellent reasons that were set forth in a previous chronicle, which recounted how three delegates from Yarboro came to shift their vote in the Democratic State convention—had personally been somewhat responsible for Governor Manning's nomination. This gave him neither access to nor influence with the governor, however, because Manning had never heard of what the Republicans did to give him victory over a

dangerous demagogue as the lesser of two evils, and he probably would not have believed a word of it if he had; he was one of those, of whom the number is legion, who invariably credit their defeats to the machinations of evil politicians but their victories to the freely expressed will of the people.

Quite by accident the mystery of why no executive attention was paid the many complaints that he knew were being made to the governor's office by the relatives of victims was explained to Mayor Kendall, in a manner which still left him helpless to take any advantage of his discovery.

He was in Hamilton, the State capital, on business, and spent an evening at the home of friends. It was after midnight when he set out for his hotel. Down in the heart of the city he entered a big dairy lunch room, secured a sandwich and glass of milk at the marble counter, and took them over to a broad-armed chair in a far corner. He had hardly begun to eat when Willis Rankin, the governor's secretary, came in. Rankin did not see Kendall; their acquaintance was of the slightest, anyway. He, also, bought food and drink and carried them to a chair well removed from other customers. A moment later Gilbert Anderson entered.

If the gambler recognized Rankin, he gave no sign of it. Bearing crullers and a cup of coffee, he surveyed the room for a good place to sit, glancing up at the lights to assure himself of ample illumination, and selected a chair but two removed from Rankin's. He took a late sporting extra of an afternoon paper out of his side pocket and read while he munched his crullers and sipped his coffee. Within three minutes he seemed to have exhausted all the news he was interested in and dropped the paper in the empty chair at his side. Immediately Willis Rankin addressed him:

"Are you through with that paper, neighbor?" It seemed to Kendall that he spoke more loudly than was really necessary, desiring to emphasize to all present his lack of acquaintance with the gambler and the innocence of his conversation. "I didn't happen to see the late editions. Do you mind if I glance at it?"

"Not at all," Anderson responded, and Rankin got up to get it. Anderson, equally polite, lifted it from the chair and also rose, passing it to him.

"I've finished; keep it," he said pleasantly. He did not sit down again, but went out of

the restaurant without looking back. Rankin became engrossed in the front-page news.

Now this had been a common and most natural happening, but Kendall, who doubted if it were possible that Rankin did not know the gambler, had been watching the entire incident closely, while seeming to pay exclusive attention to his lunch, and there had been a detail of it that was peculiarly awkward.

One man, passing another a folded newspaper, naturally holds it by one end and its recipient takes it by the other. The governor's secretary had reached far forward and taken it by the end nearest Anderson, a clumsy gesture. From where he sat he could not be positive, but Kendall thought their hands touched. If some small, thin object—such as a single, folded bank note—had been concealed in the gambler's palm, there was ample time and opportunity for it to pass to Rankin's.

For some minutes after Anderson's exit, the governor's secretary seemed to devour the sporting news with avidity. Then came the movement Kendall was looking for. Rankin's right hand left the newspaper, which he still appeared to be reading, and went to a vest pocket. It tucked something away there, deeply and carefully; no bill of small denomination, that, thought the mayor. Very soon afterward, he, too, arose and left the place.

A clever system! No surreptitious meetings in dark places, where chance might send some one to report their association, and gossip thereafter voice suspicion. They came together in a public place, brilliantly lighted, and transacted their little affair of commerce under the eyes of whomever might be there to see. The practicability of their plan was now demonstrated by the fact that Kendall had seen what took place and yet could prove nothing. Accusation on such evidence would be foolish. He could not swear that anything had passed between them, and certainly not that it was money. Any later trap to catch them, set on the theory that they would follow exactly the same procedure on another occasion, would be unlikely to work; they probably arranged their weekly or monthly meetings, as agreement might call for, at different places and with varying programs.

The sum total of his accidental observation, Mayor Kendall had to admit, as he stepped out onto the street and headed for

his hotel, after a judicious delay, was that he knew what theretofore he had suspected, and was not any better off for the knowing. It was Governor Manning who needed to be convinced of the crooked alliance that existed under his nose, before any result could be attained, and if any report of such an incident as this were to be made to him, the governor, with every confidence in Rankin's integrity, would merely put it up to his secretary—and accept his denial.

Back in Eddsfield, two days later, Kendall recounted what he had witnessed to Webster Judson, principal member of the party steering committee there, who, although he held no office other than that of treasurer of the Republican city committee, was commonly referred to by his enemies as "boss."

"So that's the answer," Judson mused. "No wonder the old fellow doesn't believe there is anything going on in Douglas County that he ought to get excited about. Rankin keeps the letters of complaint from mothers and wives from reaching him; when people actually get to his ear with it, Rankin tells him he doesn't believe there is really anything in it but that he will investigate, which he does and reports nothing discovered; when the governor decides, as he did two or three times after especially strong kicks were made, to have personal representatives other than Rankin investigate confidentially in his behalf, Rankin knows about it, slips a tip to Anderson, and the place closes until the excitement blows over."

"What chance have we to beat a game like that?"

Judson nodded agreement with the inference that the chance was small indeed. "Mr. Gil Anderson does seem to occupy a strong, strategic position," he commented.

"If the big newspapers would take it up—some paper like the *Hamilton Herald*, say—the governor's eyes would get opened."

"Know any way to make them take it up that we haven't talked over before?"

"No. The big papers at Hamilton can't be interested in it except by some sensational development that would make a news story. A smashing, exciting raid——"

Judson shrugged his shoulders. "Which only Walt Sharples can make," he reminded the mayor. "Look here, Orson! You are letting this thing get your goat. It isn't being pulled off in our city; nobody can accuse us of being responsible for it."

"I know it is getting my goat," admitted

Kendall. "And it is going to get my goat and keep it until Anderson gets closed up. I drove the gamblers out of this town and made my first campaign for mayor largely on the issue of keeping them out, and they haven't had a chance here since. And now this joint almost straddling the city line undoes everything I did!"

"I know," soothed Judson, "but nobody ever said a truer thing than that the things a man has no business to worry about are the things he can't help. There is nothing to do but sit tight and——"

The telephone bell interrupted. Judson, after a word or two, pushed the instrument across the desk. "For you," he said. "It's Forbes."

The mayor's secretary was speaking from city hall.

"Father Quinlan, of St. Luke's Church, is trying to get hold of you in a hurry," he said. "Told me, if I was able to find you, to ask if you could come up to his house right away—up to St. Luke's rectory. He said there was a reason for wanting you to come to see him instead of his hunting you up, which you would appreciate when you came. It is very important, he says."

"Call him up and tell him I am on my way," Kendall replied. "I'll be there in less than half an hour." He explained to Judson: "Father Quinlan, of St. Luke's, has something important he wants to see me about that he would rather discuss at home. Sort of odd he should happen to call while we were talking about Gil Anderson's joint."

"Yes. Give my regards to the old man. A fine old fellow, Father Quinlan. He and I have been good friends for years. He told me once that if he happens to outlive me he proposes to go to my funeral, even if they hold it in a Protestant church."

The figure slumped uncomfortably in a chair in Father Quinlan's study was unfamiliar to Kendall. He was a youth in the early twenties, with unkempt, reddish hair, a narrow, weak chin, and shallow blue eyes that shifted furtively from face to face.

"This is Joe Mulvey," Father Quinlan said. "Joe has been associating with some pretty bad young fellows, and there have been times when he thought he was just as bad as they were, but when it came to the pinch he found he couldn't be that bad, at all. So he came this morning to tell me about it—not in the confessional, of course

you understand. Since we've talked it over he sees that the only right thing to do is to tell others, because if he didn't there would be sin and crime on his conscience. It would be the police he would tell, naturally, but I thought it might be better if you heard the story first: Tell the mayor about it, Joseph."

The youth rolled his shifty eyes uneasily and mumbled: "It was in back of Maguire's that I heard 'em. They didn't know I was there."

"Maguire's," the priest explained, "is a resort for an evil crew of young men. They call themselves the 'Swiftly' Gibbons gang. Joe, here, has been associating with them, although I take his word he has never been mixed into their worst doings. Go on, Joe."

"I'd been sleepin' off a souse. Two days I'd been on it, and when once I went under I was dead to the world. Then I begin to wake up. How I got there I dunno, but I was layin'—"

"You can leave out about where you were and where they were," Father Quinlan put in. "They didn't know you were there, and you could hear them talking. Who were they?"

"Bill Frame and Frank Glennon and 'Dutch' Kinter and Swiftly himself. So they talk over how they're going to pull this big thing to-morrow night—that's to-night, of course. Wit' rubber coats and handkerchiefs for masks and automatics—loaded." Mulvey's features wrinkled uncomfortably. "I ain't never been mixed into nothing that rough. On the level! 'Course they don't expect they'll have to use their 'gats,' because they'll have the drop on everybody and nobody'll dare do anything but lift their hands up and stand for the frisking. And the get-away looks easy to 'em, too. They'll have an automobile right there waiting, and once they're clear they don't expect there'll be any trouble. Hundreds and maybe thousands they might get, but they're doping it there won't nobody report it to the bulls, because there won't nobody want to let out any squeal at all. Anderson won't make no holler, and Swiftly figures Anderson will fix everybody there so they won't make no holler, either."

"Anderson!" echoed Kendall.

"Joe is a little roundabout in his way of telling it," Father Quinlan said. "It is to be a holdup of Gilbert Anderson's gambling place."

"To-night at quarter to twelve o'clock," supplied young Mulvey. "The heavy-playing guys will all be there around that time, and the house roll will be fat, too. There ain't no lookout to stop 'em, and the three of 'em steps in with their guns all pulled and—"

"You named four."

"Glennon stays outside in the car, wit' the engine running, so's there won't be no time lost in the get-away." Mulvey wet his lips and looked imploringly into the priest's face. "If they ever found out I'd split, Father, they'd croak me!"

"I don't see, unless you tell it yourself, how they are ever going to know. They have no idea you overheard them. And by keeping you away from the police station—" Father Quinlan turned to Kendall. "That is one of the reasons I asked you to come up here. Joe wouldn't like to have to go out around town, where he might see some of those young men, to-day. He wouldn't feel comfortable, meeting them. Of course, Chief Tansey ought to be told, but it didn't seem wise to me for Joe to go to the police station. News of who comes into a police station, and why, sometimes travels fast.

"I told Joe he ought to keep quiet and secluded to-day if only so none of his friends would suspect him"—Kendall gathered from the note of significance in the priest's voice that he also deemed it best no chances should be taken of so weak a character as Mulvey repenting what he had done and warning his erstwhile companions—"and that he could stay right here in this house until night, if you and the chief could arrange it for somebody to stay here with him."

"Say, listen!" put in Mulvey. "I ain't done nothing to be pinched for, honest! You tell the mayor, Father, that I gotta right to be let go when they've got Swiftly and them."

"I don't see any difficulty about that," Kendall reassured him. "Where is your telephone, Father Quinlan? May I use it?"

To Chief of Police Tansey, a few moments later, he said:

"I am talking from Father John Quinlan's house. I want you to come out here immediately, without telling any one where you are going and without making any splurge about it. You had better not come in a department auto. And, chief! You trust Degnan as much as any of the plain-clothes men, don't you? Does he happen to be there

at headquarters? All right; bring him along with you."

He replaced the receiver, sat scowling at the instrument in deep thought, then began to search the pages of the telephone directory. A few moments later Mr. Matthew Hindlebury, deputy sheriff of Douglas County, returned to the duties of his meat market, much mystified at the urgent request he had just received to meet the mayor during his noon hour, not at city hall, but in a room in a downtown hotel—and not to tell anybody he was going to.

"When Emmett Tansey comes," Kendall said to Father Quinlan as he came from the phone, "will you let him and Degnan hear Mulvey's story, and then ask them both to stay right here and do nothing whatever about it until I either return or telephone. I am going downtown to have a little talk with Matt Hindlebury. If he is the man I have been given to understand he is, he and Providence, assisted by the Eddsfield police department, are likely to answer some prayers to-night."

Father Quinlan's eyes twinkled a bit as he replied gravely: "The Lord uses ungodly instruments at times to carry out his will. I thought, when I sent for you, that, perhaps, your political mind would see some way to get more out of this than the mere breaking up of a bad gang."

Swiftly Gibbons and his friends were exactly on time. Their car rolled up almost noiselessly to the front of Anderson's establishment, stopped where the fewest possible steps would need to be taken in the event its passengers needed to regain its shelter hurriedly, and instantly spilled three grotesque rubber-coated and bandanna-masked occupants. The fourth member of the party, who continued to sit at the steering wheel with his engine running, had a cap pulled far down over his eyes and a coat collar turned far up about the lower part of his face. It was a moonless night and there, beyond the city line, there were no street lights.

Rapidly the three active robbers crossed to the entrance of the building and disappeared through it. They had no more than passed out of sight when a pedestrian came into the bright path of the car's headlights, apparently with no other business on his mind than to make his belated and somewhat intoxicated way home. He tacked a little, as he came to the car, and addressed the wait-

ing chauffeur huskily: "Got a match, m' friend?" He lost his balance as he said it and lurched forward. His hands shot up and one of them gripped the driver's throat. A short club rose and fell. Frank Glennon, with the responsibility upon him of warning his companions if anything untoward should develop outside, had time neither to use the automatic that was in his pocket nor to sound the agreed signal on the auto horn. In the big room that covered the whole second floor of the building, except for a small managerial office partitioned off in one corner, fifty or sixty men were giving all their attention to the vagaries of chance, some intensely quiet, some boisterous, according to their temperaments. Marbles were whirring and clattering in two roulette wheels, their rattling drop into the numbered compartments followed by the monotonous announcements of the croupiers and the delighted or dismayed exclamations of those who won and lost.

Seven or eight men, most of them older than the average of the roulette players, sat with concentrated attention about a faro table. Behind them stood a dozen or more quiet spectators, most of whom were avidly eying the steadily increasing pile of checks in front of Mr. Milton Block, of Hamilton, a reputedly rich young man of well-known sporting proclivities who had never been seen in Anderson's place before that night, and whose initial appearance there was being marked by a run of luck which rather pleased the management than otherwise, because it would lead him to come back. Mr. Block, an hour before, had purchased a fifty-dollar stack of chips. Before him, now, was close to six hundred dollars. From time to time he made ecstatic comment to the effect that all there was to winning at this little old game was to know how to put the bets down. The dealer was ostentatiously mechanical and unconcerned.

Gil Anderson, well aware of what was going on at the faro bank, seemed to play the play there no attention whatever. A loss of five hundred dollars or so to one player at faro was not at all a serious matter with house winnings as satisfactory as they had been all the evening at the roulette tables, where a score of players had peddled in from fifty to a hundred dollars each and a hundred more, as the crowd came and went, had made small but cumulative contributions of two, five, and ten dollars.

It was a policy of Anderson's to slip behind each roulette table every fifteen minutes or so and quietly transfer most of the money in the drawer to the rolls in his pockets. Three advantages accrued from this custom. Players, when the croupier opened the drawer, gained no intimation from a spectacular heap of money of how profitable the game really was to the house. Temptation and opportunity for robbery were minimized. It was psychologically good for the house, when a player, having won twenty or thirty or fifty dollars, decided to cash in his chips, for the attendant to open the drawer, count its contents, find them insufficient and loudly call across the room for the proprietor to produce the money with which to pay; players thereby gained the impression that the management was losing.

Anderson was thus milking the drawer of the table farthest from the entrance when Swiftly Gibbons and his companions entered. They did not see him at first. Somebody, looking toward the door, observed the startlingly arrayed trio, saw the waving automatics that glinted in their hands, and made loud and frightened exclamation. Half those present were aware of their presence a second later. The remainder came out of their absorption in the play immediately afterward, at Swiftly's sharp command of "Hands up, everybody! Quick!"

He looked the room over, seeking the proprietor, before he spoke again. When his eye found the gambler, he commanded: "You get over into that corner, Anderson. Face the wall and put your hands up against it. That's right," as Anderson obeyed meekly and in silence. "Now all the rest of you. Move quick! Everybody!"

The gang leader's companions herded the company to the walls. One of them, evidently in accordance with careful prearrangement, first searched everybody for weapons. It was not a pistol-toting country and but one gun was found, a small automatic on Gil Anderson.

One of Anderson's trousers pockets gave up a bulging wad of greenbacks, which the searcher dropped into the side pocket of his rubber coat. A folded sheaf of bills, not thick but with a fifty gratifyingly displayed on the outside, came out of Milton Block's vest. Smaller sums, down to five dollars and less, were gathered from the others. The two thieves worked quickly and systematically, going through pockets with their right

hands while the pistols in their left hands bored terrorizingly into the backs of their victims.

They did not take watches. It would appear they had also decided not to take jewelry, but a glistening diamond on Milton Block's fat white hand, spread flat against the wall, caught Gibbons' eye. "Get that spark!" he commanded.

A robber emptied the money drawers. The pair of active searchers went back to join Swiftly, where he had stood from the beginning just inside the door with threatening weapons covering the entire room.

"We ain't going right away," Swiftly warned, loudly. "We're going to hang round outside some time—maybe ten minutes. Anybody tries to follow us—anybody even sticks his head out through the door—gets plugged. That goes!"

He and his companions disappeared.

A hundred hands came down simultaneously. Fifty voices rose in loud discussion and complaint. Twoscore and ten highly excited gentlemen told each other, in chorus, the details of the incident as each one had seen it, unmindful of the fact that all had been equally witnesses, and expressed themselves as to what ought to be done about it. None of them saw fit to go downstairs and out through the door to ascertain whether or not the bandits were keeping their word and hanging round.

Gil Anderson was the first to speak coherently and to the point.

"Listen, men!" he called, and the chattering hushed by degrees. "Things like this will happen. The chips on the tables ain't disturbed. I don't suppose you'll want to play any more to-night, but if you'll stack up your checks and pass 'em over we'll cash 'em. Such gentlemen as haven't got any checks to cash and were frisked clean, we'll slip 'em what they need for carfare."

There were murmurs of astonishment. How could Anderson hope to cash chips, when his every cent had been taken?

The gambler stooped over and moved aside the corner of a rug, disclosing a good-sized bundle of money.

"Lucky the house roll was split, in two pockets," he remarked coolly. "I had time, after they came in, to drop this on the floor and kick it under. I could have dropped them both, but if I hadn't had any roll on me at all they'd have been wise. All right.

We'll cash in the players at the bank, first. How much you got there, mister?"

He was addressing Block. Names are not spoken carelessly by the managers of gambling establishments.

"Five hundred and eighty-six dollars," Block told him, when he had counted. "But look here, Mr. Anderson. That don't square me. I had five hundred in my pocket, to say nothing of the ring. That diamond is worth more than a thousand dollars. It cost eight hundred, before they went up."

"Sure it doesn't square you," the gambler agreed. "We can't any of us expect to get squared. I'm talking about cashing in your chips."

"But you are responsible for what we lost—the whole business. I'll leave it to anybody. We come here to play a little game, expecting you to protect us. You've got protection, haven't you? We're entitled, when we come here, not to get held up and robbed like some mining camp out West. And the first time I come out here——"

"But you can't hold us responsible for a holdup."

Mr. Block drove at a root of the matter:

"Are you figuring on notifying the police?"

"That wouldn't do," Anderson said. "Of course it wouldn't; you can understand that. We don't any of us want publicity—you gentlemen not any more than I do."

"Then if you don't want to ask the police to try to get our money back, it's up to you to make it good."

There was a murmur of agreement with this viewpoint.

Gil Anderson acted with decision. From his recovered roll he counted out only the five hundred and eighty-six dollars, and laid the bills on the faro table before Block. "That cashes your chips," he said. "As to any other money, nothing doing."

"I've got friends!" the player cried. He gathered in the bank notes and stuffed them into a pocket. "Good friends. Good politicians, too. I'm going to see whether I can come down here, into a protected place, and get robbed. I'll go to the police, too. What do I care if it does get into the papers that I was in a gambling joint? Everybody knows I sport around, anyway."

Gil Anderson and his attaches were not above measures, violent if need be, to hush a prospective "squealer," but Mr. Block was rather too prominent a person for such direct action to be considered as might be used

in lesser cases; the gambler wished he could thrash this out with Block alone, when he could make some compromise, but compromising with him publicly meant settlement on the same basis with all these others, who unquestionably would in many cases exaggerate the amounts of which they had been robbed.

"Now the next gentleman," he called, and briskly proceeded to pay out cash for chips.

"You've got a tame sheriff down here," cried Block, refusing to be ignored. "I've heard all about him. Well, we'll see, when I go to the police about this—and the newspapers get hold of it—we'll see what old Carlton Manning will have to say about you and your little tame sheriff."

Anderson shifted his tactics and spoke placatingly:

"Now, listen, my friend! You don't look like a man that would go trying to make trouble just to make it. This is a square place, running quietly for good sports. You've got your five hundred dollars and more winnings. You wouldn't want to go to upsetting things by getting the governor all excited. You're a good sport and I'm a good sport, and——"

He stopped to stare at the door, through which entered a strange procession.

The incidents which had led to the forming of that procession had speedily and excitingly followed upon the exit from Mr. Anderson's place of Swifty Gibbons and his two fellow gangsters. When they left the stunned and frightened patrons of that square and sportsmanlike establishment still standing with hands stretched up against the wall like some earnest but ill-mixed class in gymnastics, they ran down the stairs, out through the door and across the few yards intervening between it and their waiting automobile with all the celerity their long and clumsy coats would allow.

No one was in sight except the chauffeur at the wheel, who sat in the same position as when they had left him there, his cap pulled far down over his eyes, his coat collar turned far up about the lower part of his face. They stowed away their automatics and whipped off their bandanna masks as they ran, and two of them climbed into the tonneau, their eyes over their shoulders on the building they had left, while Gibbons sprang into the front seat beside the driver.

"All right, Frank! Let her go!" he commanded.

At this word the driver, still looking strangely like Frank Glennon—he was of about the same size and build and was wearing Glennon's coat and cap—turned and rammed the muzzle of a pistol painfully into Gibbons' midriff. At the same instant, from where they were crouched in the darkness close against the side of the automobile away from the building, three men leaped into the tonneau.

From points at which they had taken strategic positions to head off any stragglers who might break clear of the main net, came Chief of Police Tansey, of Eddsfield, Mayor Kendall at his elbow, and Deputy Sheriff Hindlebury, of Douglas County. Out of a clump of trees across the road emerged a group of younger men, four or five of them, reporters who had been invited to be present without ever, up to that moment, being exactly aware why they were there or what they were to witness.

A bare two minutes, and the turmoil was over. "They've got stuff in their side pockets, chief!" one of the officers in the tonneau exclaimed. "Wads of it. They'd have transferred it after they got started, and then chucked the rubber coats away."

Chief Tansey turned to the deputy sheriff. "You're the boss, Hindlebury," he said. "What next?"

"Let's take 'em inside and see if there's anybody in there wants to do any identifying," suggested the county officer. "Bring that other one along, too; that shofer."

Each handcuffed thief flanked by two policemen, the procession moved into the building and up the stairs. They paused on the upper landing to listen to an angry voice:

"Well, we'll see, when I go to the police about this, and the newspapers get hold of it—we'll see what old Carlton Manning will have to say about you and your little tame sheriff."

They heard Anderson's soothing reply, ending with, "You're a good sport and I'm a good sport and—"

Then they filed in. A hysterical wail came from back in a corner at sight of the uniforms: "Gee, as if it wasn't enough to get robbed! Now the place is pinched!"

Deputy Sheriff Hindlebury amiably addressed the company:

"Anybody here got any charge to make against these men? We just caught 'em coming out of here with masks on."

Gil Anderson replied without hesitation.

"No," he said. "No charge at all. They weren't in here, that I know of."

"Oh, say, Anderson, cut out the bull!" cried Mr. Milton Block. "I've got a charge to make against them. They held us up and robbed me of five hundred dollars—four hundred and eighty-odd—and a diamond worth close to fifteen hundred. One of 'em's got it in his pocket. It's a ring—a solitaire."

"Take anything from anybody else?" Mr. Hindlebury inquired. "If you don't claim it, there ain't any chance of your getting it back."

A babel of accusation arose.

"All right; all right," the deputy sheriff cried good-naturedly. "We'll take the names and amounts and see about sorting the stuff out down to the Eddsfield station. I'm going to put 'em there for safe-keeping; this lockup here in Curryville is no place for regular criminals like them."

Gil Anderson put the question that was of more importance to him than the robbery; he had been held up for more than two thousand dollars, but any fairly busy Saturday afternoon and evening would make that up.

"Is this a raid?" he demanded.

"A raid?" repeated Mr. Hindlebury innocently. "Why? Why should there be a raid?" He seemed then to see the roulette wheels and faro table for the first time. "Darned if it don't look like you've got some kind of gambling apparatus here. I never saw any tables just like those. What sort of games are they?"

A reporter chuckled.

"Did the sheriff send you here? Where is he?" Anderson asked. "What are all these Eddsfield cops doing here? This isn't Eddsfield. They haven't any business this side of the line."

"I haven't any more idea where the sheriff is than Adam," Hindlebury admitted. "Over the other end of the county, somewheres. I got a tip there was a plot to rob somebody, and I didn't have time to look him up at all. I just had to have help, though. So I asked Mayor Kendall, here, he being head of the Eddsfield police department, for a little assistance. Raids and things like that can wait for evidence to be gathered, and such, but robbers with masks and pistols—Great grief! Walt Sharples would never have forgiven me the longest day he lived if I hadn't acted quick. What *are* those games?"

The reporter who had chuckled was scribbling notes on a folded wad of copy paper; this rural deputy sheriff was giving him one of the most entertaining human-interest stories he had got for many a day. Anderson turned to him abruptly.

"You're on the *Hamilton Herald*, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"See here!" He embraced the reporters collectively in his argument. "This little difficulty ought not to get into the papers. These men came into this club—it is a private club, you know—and held up some of the members, but there isn't anything that calls for any publicity. The money that was stolen is all recovered—"

"Will be, if them that lost it put in their claims and are willing to appear against them that stole it," Deputy Sheriff Hindlebury amended.

"Will be, anyway," declared Anderson. "We had just been talking it over, as you came in, and we had about decided the club owes it to its members to reimburse them for any losses of that sort in the clubhouse. These gentlemen might not want to appear in court. If they don't, I know I speak for the board of governors when I assure them—as I do now—that they will get their money back; every cent of it." He addressed the reporters with some desperation: "See here, boys! Let's not have a lot of talk and gossip about this. Come in my office, there in the corner, and let's talk it over." The roll

of bills from which he had been redeeming chips was still in his hand, and he displayed it significantly. "We can come to some sort of a settlement that will be satisfactory to everybody."

"Up to now, it was just going to be a peach of an interesting bandit story," the *Herald* man snapped, "but just for that, Anderson, I'm going to give you about half a column more of descriptive details about your little place here than I had intended to. And then I'm going to see to it, if you keep open and the governor doesn't do anything, that a pretty fair list of those present gets before the grand jury."

"That goes for the rest of us, too," one of the other newspaper men added. "Although, if you ask me, it isn't necessary. When the governor reads the papers in the morning—"

Professional gambling-house keepers are not always the good sports they like to say they are, but most of them know when to lay down beaten hands. His professional mask of frozen imperturbability settled upon Mr. Anderson's face. He turned from the police and reporters to those who had been players.

"This officer says this isn't a raid or anything like that," he said, "so I guess you gentlemen are free to go whenever you get ready, after you have told him whatever you want to about how much these crooks here frisked you out of. After to-night this club will be closed until further notice."

More stories of Eddsfield politics will follow soon.



WHEN WHISTLING WAS HARD

WHEN Harry Tuthill, famous handler of athletes, first went to West Point to train the army's football players, many of the officers thought it absurd to employ a professional trainer to look after the physical condition of young men subject to the regulations and exercises of the service.

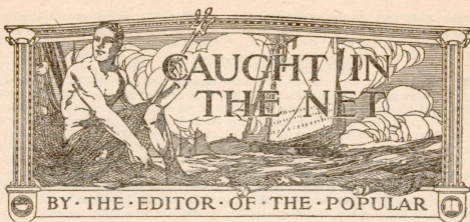
"You can't improve these men," an officer told Tuthill. "They're in top form."

"Ask those four cadets to run around the parade ground, will you, captain?" responded Tuthill.

The order was given. When the runners drew up in front of the captain after the race, Tuthill said to them:

"Now, please whistle."

None of them could produce a note. Not one of them had that much breath left. And Tuthill has been training them every fall for years since then.



OUR SHIPPING SITUATION

LATE figures bearing on the condition of American shipping continue encouraging. To fully appreciate our improvement in this regard it is necessary to look backward a moment to the state of affairs just prior to the war. At that time, though the total tonnage of our merchant marine was given as 7,428,688, only 1,066,288 tons were in foreign trade, the rest being lake, coastwise, and fishing vessels, and it is with our carrying of foreign trade in our own bottoms that we are most concerned. Only about ten per cent of our imports and exports was then carried in distinctively American vessels. In 1858 seventy-three per cent of our foreign trade was carried in our own ships! As for construction in 1914 here, the production of our yards stood at barely over 300,000 tons, only a comparatively small part of which was designed for foreign work.

Contrast this situation with that outlined in the recent report of the Shipping Board presented by Admiral Benson, chairman, who states that when the government's ship-building plan is completed we probably will have as much ocean-going tonnage as all the other nations of the world combined, with the exception of Great Britain. He reports that at the end of the last fiscal year American merchant ships, government and private owned, totaled 16,918,212 tons, and states that the net program of government-owned ships contemplated over 13,500,000 tons, adding that at the past fiscal year's end over 11,500,000 tons had been completed. Of the present existent tonnage reported by him some 10,000,000 tons are registered for foreign trade. In passing, it is also to be noted that most of the government-owned shipping is operated by private concerns under a system of allocation. During the past year the Shipping Board sold 426 ships, including 131 new steel vessels and 34 new wooden ships. In this latter connection the statement of H. H. Raymond, president of the American Steamship Owners' Association, has especial interest. He says:

"All practical men of the shipping industry believe that it is essential to the enduring prosperity of the business that the shipping board fleet be sold to private ownership as soon as possible."

With this opinion Admiral Benson himself agrees. Mr. Raymond adds:

"Given reasonable aid and encouragement, some of which we have already had and more of which we may need later on, the American merchant marine can and will grow and prosper. The difference in actual cost of operation between American and foreign vessels is far narrower than most persons unfamiliar with shipping conditions have supposed. In the earlier years of the last century, when this country had merchant ships on every sea and the greater part of our commerce was smartly carried by our own seamen, it was the deliberate policy of the nation to foster its merchant marine. This was known to all men to prove a good investment. So, I am convinced, will experience quickly prove it to be again."

Just what form the encouragement should take Mr. Raymond does not undertake at present to say. Leaving that to be decided by circumstances, he is only certain that serious

thought should be given to the effecting of it, and that, if it is, our ocean shipping industry will presently rival our manufacturing in profit and permanence. Which is good hearing.

THE RISING COST OF WAR

WAR has always been a sadly expensive business, and continues to grow more and more so. A startling illustration of this is afforded in a comparison of the cost of our latest war experience with that of our first war as an organized nation—the war of 1812. The cost of the World War to us, excluding all outlay having no relation to its actual prosecution, is put at \$24,000,000,000, covering the period from April 6, 1917, to June 30, 1920—these two dates representing the extreme limits of the government's war-time fiscal operations. To us this has seemed a thoroughly sufficiently high price to have been called upon to pay, and few have hesitated to say so. Eloquent as we are on the subject, though, we doubt if our eloquence would be a patch on that of those Americans who were alive and kicking at the conclusion of the 1812 war, if they could know of and express an opinion on our late World War expenses. For no more than ourselves did they hesitate to exclaim at the outlay occasioned by their own war—and the expense which they complained of was only a beggarly 288 million dollars. And this, it is to be noted, included estimates of indirect losses caused by the war. Their actual disbursements on account of the war from the treasury was only \$75,000,000, as against our \$24,000,000,000.

Computed figures for the total expense of the War of 1812 were given in the *Huntingdon Gazette*, issue of July 20, 1815, as follows:

Actual war disbursements from the treasury	\$75,000,000
Deficit in revenue, due to the war.....	32,000,000
Allowing for "loss of property," et cetera, demands against United States....	6,000,000
Loss to nation from temporarily not exporting surplus produce	100,000,000
Loss to nation from general business stagnation	75,000,000
Total	\$288,000,000

What a trifling amount for a nation to pay for a war this seems to us! Politicians to-day boast of having effected savings alone amounting to billions in the course of one year's routine expenses of administration and liquidation of public debt. None the less, the *Huntingdon Gazette*, of July 20, 1815, upon presenting the above figures, was just as vociferously critical of their size as are we of our own war expenses. Commenting upon what had been gained by "this great expenditure from the treasury and sacrifice of property" during the 1812 war, the editor somewhat caustically noted that the people had learned, among other things, who were and who were not adequate to the government, and had discovered that a brave and free people could defend themselves and their liberties even though seriously handicapped by a weak and pusillanimous administration. The country, said he, had been taught how to go to war when it should hereafter be necessary. His remarks in general would need no editing to suit an "opposition" paper of the present. In conclusion he declared that we had been taught "the value of peace and the danger of war to any nation." About this remark, too, there is an air of familiarity, as well as a suggestion of apparently unconscious charity on the editor's part toward those in authority at the time—to the extent of hinting that war is a difficult business for any government to learn to handle.

At any rate, this latter bit of education appears to have to be taught pretty frequently. Regarding the tremendous cost of our own recent war operations there is, perhaps, the consolation that its very immensity would seem calculated to drive the lesson home better.

A NEW BELIEF

MAN has needed a religion for as long as he has been man, though men have not always agreed as to what was the proper one. Hence the age-long arising of new sects and cults. One of the latest religions to have taken appreciable root among a great people is the cult called Omoto-Kyo, in Japan. Essentially it is a religion of socialistic patriotism, though, at the same time, it bears a resemblance to Christian

Science, in that it was originated by a woman and substitutes prayer for medicine in sickness. Since the war, this comparatively new religion has been gaining ground rapidly, and it has been said that "if the Japanese government will only persecute it long enough to solidify the new sect in common defense, it may become a power in the world."

The founder of it, a poor widow of Ayabe, in the province of Tamba, was moved, on New Year's Day, 1892, to begin prophesying, and went about scribbling her revelations on walls and stray bits of white paper. She was known as O Nao Baasan, or Old Woman Nao, and was eventually imprisoned on a charge of incendiarism alleged to have been committed in order to bring one of her prophecies true. Upon being paroled by the police into the care of her relatives, to be kept locked up for life, she kept writing, until her death in 1918, the many volumes which now form the bible of the new faith. This gospel—the written record of her visions—is known as Fude Saki, or the "Flourish of the Honorable Brush."

Foremost among its tenets is the belief that the curse of the world is the individualism upon which it claims all Occidental civilization is founded. The followers of Omoto-Kyo are looking for a day of judgment, due, according to the "Flourish of the Honorable Brush," in 1922, at which time, it is claimed, only the rock which supports the sacred district of Tamba shall remain secure, and the chosen survivors who have gathered in this place of refuge will repopulate and regenerate the world. Since these survivors will presumably all be Japanese, this doctrine connects the cult of Omoto-Kyo with Japan's ancient Shintoism, which is in itself a religion of ancestor worship and patriotism.

The Omoto cult regards money as the root of all evil and denies the right of private property, believing in holding all things in common. And, as a matter of fact, O Nao's son-in-law, who was trained for the Shinto priesthood, has made a success of the Omoto socialistic community at Ayabe, where land is divided up among families. Disease, the cult states, is caused by evil spirits in the form of animals and can be cast out by divine power invoked by prayer. It is believed possible to attain to a sinless state in this life and that those sufficiently pure may, in a state of trance, see and hear divine beings.

As a religion preaching both a socialistic future and the lordship of Japan over the whole world the cult of Omoto-Kyo appeals to both workman and soldier. The Japanese government is much alarmed over the spread of its doctrines in the army, and General Nagasaka of the military police exclaims at the number of "men and officers, mostly those among the reserve list, who are becoming tainted with the hideous doctrine of Omoto-Kyo."

With all their mysticism, it is to be noted that the leaders of the cult are practical enough to make good use of the press—another respect in which they resemble Christian Scientists. Besides books and its monthly religious organ, the sect's publication department issues in Osaka an evening paper, the *Taisho Nichi-nichi*, which promises to rival the *Christian Science Monitor* in the extent and completeness of its news. Whatever one's feelings about it, the Omoto cult is clearly one to be reckoned with in the world's ecclesiastical history.

A JOYFUL NOISE

WHEN the sirens, with their long-drawn, piercing notes, were first planted to warn the people in our seaboard cities and towns of approaching hostile aeroplanes, it was not thought that they would become the popular institution they are to-day. No one would have predicted that they would have another more permanent use after the war; that of aiding the bands of music and horns, with unusual effectiveness, in celebrating joyful happenings, such as welcoming distinguished visitors or greeting our soldiers on their return from France after the surrender of Germany.

That the shriek of the siren was the first and dominant note heard in the celebration, ahead of time, of the surrender of Germany, through the cablegram sent to and published by the press of the United States of that event a day or two before it actually occurred, does not alter the fact that the siren has evidently come to stay. It made such a hit in outshrieking the horns and bands that it at once won its title to first place among joyful noise producers.

While music, singing, and dancing have been the natural outlet for joy in all countries at all times, a joyful noise has always held a place in demonstrations of popular pleasure. Regimental bands would sound more or less ineffectual at times, especially in welcoming heroes, without the drums and cymbals.

The clash of the cymbal and the ringing sound of the tambour—the modern timbrel—often intensify the note of joy in orchestral music of a triumphal character, and noise has always been regarded as a necessary adjunct to music in giving expression to a general feeling of gladness. When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea on solid ground, through the miraculous dividing of its waters, and Pharaoh's pursuing hosts were drowned by the return of the sea to its bed after the Children of Israel reached the opposite shore in safety, Miriam, the prophetess, and a band of other women celebrated their deliverance by dancing, to the accompaniment of timbrels, which they beat as they danced. In some church organs there is a stop called the sesquialtera, which brings out several ranks of pipes of loud high harmonics, each key struck releasing two or more consecutive notes. By themselves the sesquialtera notes seem a deafening discord, but when the full organ is played in a triumphal passage they give an effective vitality to the music, the discord being drowned in the general harmony.

When the lines:

See the conquering hero comes,
Sound the trumpets, beat the drums.

were first penned the siren had not appeared. Now that it is here, it will be generally conceded that during great public celebrations its noise has all other noises beaten to a frazzle. Its strident wailing note of welcome sounded like the sweetest music to our returning soldiers after the war, and it will prove a boon to future poets when they are describing such celebrations in heroic verse.

WORKMANSHIP

THE gifted writer, no matter how great a genius he may be, will tell you that it is a long way from the brain to the point of the pen. Which is another way of describing the tremendous difficulty of putting into words the images that form in the mind. Imagination in some degree is the attribute of everybody. Many of us are endowed with a great play of fancy. We "see" in our minds thrilling stories and beautiful scenes. All that is comparatively easy.

But the trouble comes when we try to translate the mental pictures into actual being. We can't find the words that will express what we imagine. The thing was so clear when we thought of it! It is so clumsy and botched when we have set it down!

When that happens, we lack craftsmanship; our workmanship is inadequate. Workmanship! That is the open sesame to all success, it matters not what kind of dreams we are trying to make real. The genius is the good workman. He has mastered the art of giving shape and substance to the pictures of his mind. He can make his hands do the bidding of his brain.

Master the technique of your profession or your business, and you are a good workman. Men fail when they become discouraged in their attempts to perfect their craftsmanship. They do not master the waywardness and clumsiness of their fingers. They are conquered by detail, by the "little things." You may map out splendidly in your imagination how a big business can be built up, or you may form a perfect mental picture of a wonderful statue; and either will be a failure unless by practice and study you have equipped yourself with the knowledge of the right way to secure the desired result.

Benvenuto Cellini, pet of kings and king of artists, went through his years of study, his groping after the gift of making his fingers follow the lovely lines of his imagination. Charles Schwab is king of the steel business only after studying every phase of it, learning the one best way of getting results in his big business. Ideas are as plentiful as the leaves on the trees; the trained and obedient hands are rare. Because it is easy to think, too many men expect it to be easy to use their hands. We fail because of our fingers, not because of our thoughts. Get craftsmanship for yourself; it is the body of success.

POPULAR TOPICS

REVISED census reports give the population of the United States, including outlying possessions and men serving in the naval and military services abroad, as 117,857,509, an increase of 16,710,979 over 1910. The revised figures place the population of continental United States at 105,708,771, an increase of 13,736,505, or 14.9 per cent, over 1910. The increase of 1910 over 1900 was 15,997,691, or 21 per cent.



FROM the beginning of the "coal year"—which starts on April 1—to October 31st last, shipments of anthracite coal from the mines amounted to 39,720,645 gross tons, a decrease of 2,050,668 gross tons from the shipments for the same period of 1919. The average shipment per month in 1920 was 6,262,699 tons.



CAPRONI, the Italian airplane wizard, is completing plans for a giant plane that will carry three hundred passengers across the Atlantic in thirty-six hours.



OUR total trade with Greece shows a marked decline. For the first nine months of 1920 our imports from that country were valued at \$16,866,274, as against \$22,662,184 for that period in 1919. Our exports to Greece, however, show a slight gain, being valued at \$30,293,757, as against \$29,029,113 for the first nine months of 1919.



OIL used for lubricating watches and delicate machinery of various kinds is a high-priced product. It is obtained from the jaw of the porpoise, and sells for between fifty and one hundred dollars a gallon.



CANADA reports 341,396 motor vehicles registered in 1919—five times the number registered in 1914. Ontario shows the largest gain in the number of vehicles, having 113,080 more than in 1914, while Prince Edward Island reports the greatest proportionate gain, 3,019 per cent.



SINCE the outbreak of the World War rates of American railroads have been increased a total of 47 per cent. The rates of other nations, according to the British board of trade, have been increased as follows: Russia, 1,400 per cent; Austria, 290 per cent; Belgium, Sweden, and Switzerland, 100 per cent; France, 70 to 80 per cent; Norway, 60 to 180 per cent; United Kingdom, 75 per cent; Canada, 60 per cent.



IN about two hundred years, estimates Professor Pearl, of Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health, the United States will be confronted by a food crisis. By that time, he says, there will be a hundred and ninety-seven million people living in continental United States, and 260 trillion calories of food a year will be needed to feed them. Judging from the food production of the last seven years, Professor Pearl predicts that half this food will have to be imported.



THE department of agriculture estimates the 1920 cotton crop at 6,213,262,000 pounds, or 12,987,000 equivalent five-hundred-pound bales. In 1919 the crop totaled 11,329,755 bales; in 1918, 12,040,532 bales; in 1917, 11,302,375 bales, and in 1916, 11,449,930 bales.



NEW YORK has more motor trucks than any other city in the world. One-ninth of all the motor trucks in the United States are owned there. In 1920 the big town had 74,000 of these vehicles, as compared with 53,821 in 1919, and 42,122 in 1918.

In Bonanza

By William MacLeod Raine

Author of "Tangled Trails," "Troubled Waters," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

In the early 1860's, when what is now Nevada was called "Washoe," Hugh McClintock, a Pony Express rider, was wounded by Indians and taken by his brother, Scot, a "square gambler," to Virginia City to recover. Among the gold seekers were Robert Dodson, a worthless drunkard; Mollie, his wife; their baby daughter, and Victoria, Mollie's young sister. Through Scot's efforts the baby was adopted by the miners and generous provision made for her education. Furious because he couldn't dissipate this fund, Dodson abused his wife, and was beaten by Scot. Further trouble loomed up for Scot when Sam Dutch, a gunman, tried to cow him at his faro game, but with Hugh's help Scot drove him from town. Dodson, while drunk, accidentally killed his child, and the educational fund was transferred to Victoria. Later Mollie divorced him. After Hugh again had mastered Dutch in Aurora, a new camp, the McClintock brothers joined the Union army, and after the war Scot and Mollie were married. Meanwhile, Dodson had become rich and had been joined by his brother, Ralph. The McClintocks went into the freighting business, and when Hugh visited Piodie, a new camp controlled by the Dodsons, he was attacked in the dark by Dutch, who left no trace of his identity but a bowie knife.

(A Five-Part Story—Part III.)

CHAPTER XVII.

A KNIFE WITH FOURTEEN NOTCHES.

HUGH was feeding his horse next morning when a voice moved wheezily toward him as its owner passed through the stable into the corral.

"Old Grimes is dead, that good old man, We ne'er shall see him more."

Budd informed the world at large by way of announcing his arrival.

"When's the funeral, Jim?" asked McClintock. "I'll be there, if it's soon. Like to be right sure he's buried. Don't mind pilin' a big, flat rock on top o' the single-breasted coat my own se'f."

The fat man looked at him severely. "Young fella, I been hearin' about you. Met up with Doc Rogers. Says you got all cut up. How about it?"

"Doc Rogers ought to know."

"Was it serious?"

"I'd say it was serious. Cost me twenty-five dollars."

"Rogers ain't no two-bit man," Budd explained with pride. "Piodie is sure one high-tariff town. Nothing cheap about it."

"Here's where he's gittin' ready to stick me on my feed bill," Hugh mentioned to his buckskin.

"Not on yore tintype. Yore money's no good at the Pony Express Corral, kid."

"Much obliged to Budd & Byers, Props."

"Sho, we'll quit business when we can't feed a friend's bronc, onct in a while. Say, was you much hurt, kid? An' howcome it? Never knew you to go hellin' around askin' for trouble."

"No, an' you never will. I sure wasn't askin' for this."

Byers had joined them. He nodded silently to Hugh.

"Who did it?" asked Budd.

"Wish you'd tell me that, Jim. He didn't leave his name."

"What'd he look like?"

"He felt like a ton of bricks when he landed on me. I don't know how he looked. It was darker than the inside of Jonah's whale."

"Tell it to us," urged Budd.

Hugh told the story of the attack on him.

"An' you don't know who the scawalag was?" asked the fat man when he had finished.

"I don't know. I've got a guess—several of 'em."

"For instance?"

"Is Sam Dutch living here?"

"Yep. He's the handy man of the Dod-

sons—camp bouncer, killer, mine jumper, general all-round thug.”

“The Dodsons are the big moguls here, seems to me, from what I hear.”

“They come close to it—own the Standard Union and the Katie Brackett, have a controllin’ interest in both stamp mills, run the stage line an’ the Mammoth Saloon.”

“And the big store, Dodson & Dodson. They own that, I reckon.”

“Yep, an’ the building it’s in. Fact is, they’ve got title to half the lots in town.”

“They’re a sweet pair.”

“Sure are. Run the politics, too. The sheriff’s their property. The job’s worth twenty thousand a year, an’ they elected him. Course he’s good an’ grateful. Why shouldn’t he be?”

“So Dutch carries the Dodson brand, does he?”

“He does their dirty work.”

“And his own, too.”

“Sure.”

“I’ve a notion Mr. Dutch has my autograph stamped on his face this glad mo’nin’,” drawled Hugh.

“Sorry to hear that. It’ll mean trouble, unless you leave.”

“That’s what he told me at Aurora,” Hugh answered quietly.

“I heard about that. You’ve got his number. So has yore brother. Makes it worse. You’ll get no even break from him. It’ll be like last night. A shot out the dark. Only next time he won’t miss.”

“I’m not sure it was Dutch. I was one of the vigilance committee at Aurora. We ran a bunch of thugs from town. Might be any one of that gang. Or some one may have took me for Scot. He has enemies, of course.”

“An’ you’re the spittin’ image of him, kid. That last is one good guess.”

“Whoever he was he left his card behind him.” Hugh stooped and drew from his boot leg a bowie knife with a horn handle. Upon the lower part of the horn had been filed fourteen little notches. “This was the sticker he flung at me. He was in a hurry and didn’t take it with him when he vamoosed.”

Byers examined the knife and spoke for the first time. “Dutch claims fourteen.”

“Well, I’m going to advertise it in the paper and give the owner a chance to reclaim his property,” McClintock said grimly.

“Won’t that be a call for a show-down?” Budd asked gravely.

“I aim to call for one. Then I’ll know Mr. Pig Sticker is sittin’ on the other side of the table from me an’ ain’t pluggin’ me in the back.”

“If he stands for a show-down.”

“If he stands for one. If he don’t, well, I’ll call his bluff that he’s chief of Piodie, anyhow.”

“You sure want to pack a good gun handy, then.”

Byers nodded agreement. The simple, direct way always suited him.

The fat man glanced at his partner before he changed the subject. “We had a talk yestiddy after you left, kid, me’n Dan. We’re locatin’ a bunch of claims on Bald Knob. Looks to us like a good chance. The stampedeers are all headed over Antelope Hill way, but there ain’t no reason why there shouldn’t be ore across the valley, too. Anyhow, we’re gonna take a crack at it. A bird in the hand gathers no moss, as the old sayin’ ain’t. We had a notion to ask you to go in with us. Needs three to handle the thing, account of claim jumpers in case we make a strike. But I don’t reckon now you’d want to stay here permanent.”

“Why not?”

“This climate ain’t suitable for you. Too many gunmen who don’t like the color of yore hair. I reckon there are seven or eight of them birds you helped run outa Aurora, let alone Dutch. Irish Tom is in our midst, as the old sayin’ is, and Vance and that mule skinner Hopkins. It’s a cinch they don’t waste any time loving Kid McClintock.”

“If you’ve got a proposition that looks good to me you can forget the quick-on-the-trigger gang. I’m not the only Aurora vigilante in town. Last night I met several. The gunmen won’t look for trouble on that account. We might start something again.”

“We’ll sure talk turkey if you feel that way. What say we ride up Bald Knob an’ if you like the lay of the land we’ll make our locations?”

“Suits me fine.”

Few people can live in a new and prosperous mining camp without catching the contagion of the speculator. The magic word, whether it be gold, silver, or oil, sets the blood afire with the microbe of unrest. Just beyond reach of the hand lies a fortune. The opportunity of a lifetime is knocking

at the door. All the spirit of adventure in one leaps to the risk. Sedate caution seems a dull-spirited jade at such a time.

Hugh was no exception to the rule. As he had passed to and fro among the miners in the saloons and gaming halls last night the stories to which he had listened quickened his blood.

He was ready for a hazard of new fortunes as soon as he could shake the dice.

CHAPTER XVIII.

APPLY TO HUGH M'CLINTOCK.

Hugh dropped into the office of the *Podium Banner* and paid for an advertisement in the paper and for two hundred and fifty posters set with display type.

The editor glanced over the copy. "I can get the bills out this afternoon. The ad will appear in the morning."

The sheet of paper handed in by McClintock bore no evidence of being loaded with dynamite. Upon it was printed roughly with a pencil this notice:

FOUND.

In the Alley between Turkey Creek Avenue and Monument Street.

(At the Sacramento Storage Warehouse)

ONE BOWIE KNIFE WITH FOURTEEN NOTCHES.

Owner Can Have Same By Claiming and Proving Title to Property.
Apply to Hugh McClintock.

The owner of the printing plant looked the copy over a second time. "Course I'm not here to turn business away, Mr. McClintock, but—well, are the dodgers necessary? Wouldn't the ad in the paper be enough?"

"Maybe so. But I want to be sure the owner sees it. I reckon I'll take the bills, too," Hugh said easily.

He hired an old colored man to tack up the bills on buildings, fences, and posts. To make sure that they were in conspicuous places Hugh went along himself. He also made arrangements with saloon keepers and gambling-house owners by which he was allowed to have the posters put on the walls of these resorts. His manner was so matter of fact that not one of his innocent accomplices suspected there was more behind the advertisement than appeared on the face of it.

"Fourteen notches. Looks like it might be Sam Dutch's bowie you found, stranger," one bartender suggested. "This camp sure howls, but I reckon it ain't got many fourteen notchers. Only one, far as I know."

"If the knife belongs to Mr. Dutch he can have it by applying for it," Hugh said mildly.

"I expect he can have 'most anything he wants in this here town, if he sure enough asks for it," the man in the apron grinned.

In the middle of the afternoon, at which hour he first daily appeared to the world, Sam Dutch slouched downtown with a story already prepared to account for his battered face. The tale he meant to tell was that in the darkness he had fallen into a prospect hole and cut his cheeks, forehead, and lips on the sharp quartz he had struck.

On a telegraph pole near the end of Turkey Creek Avenue a poster caught his eye. He read it with mixed emotions. The predominating ones were rage, a fury of hate, and an undercurrent of apprehension. He tore the bill down and trampled it in the mud under his feet.

Half a minute later he saw a second bill, this time on the side of a store. This, too, he destroyed, with much explosive language. Between Rawhide Street and the Porphyry Lode Saloon he ripped down three more notices of the finding of a bowie knife with fourteen notches. "When he stopped at the bar and ordered a brandy sling the man was dangerous as a wounded grizzly.

The bartender chatted affably. He was in the habit of saying that he had not lost any quarrels with gunmen and he did not intend to find any.

"Fine glad day, Mr. Dutch. Nice change from Monday. 'Hotter'n hell or Yuma then, I say."

The bad man growled.

"I was sure enough spittin' cotton. Went up the gulch with T. B. Gill. Creek's dry as a cork leg. Good rain wouldn't hurt none," the young fellow went on.

"'Nother'thesame," snarled Dutch, his voice thick with uncontrollable fury.

The bartender made a mental comment. "Sore's a toad on a hot rock this mo'ning." He tried another subject, with intent to conciliate. "Young fellow in a while back and wanted to hang up a bill. I said, 'Sure, hop to it.' Ain't lost any hog stickers myse'f, but maybe some other gent——"

Dutch glared round, found the bill with

his eyes, and dragged out a navy revolver. Three bullets crashed through the poster, and the wall back of it. The killer whirled and flung the fourth shot at the man behind the bar.

But that garrulous youth was fleeing wildly for safety. He had no intention whatever of being Number Fifteen. Between him and the back door was a table. He took it in his stride with all the ease of a champion hurdler. Down the alley he went like a tin-canned cur with a mob of small boys behind.

Inside of ten minutes Piodie knew that Sam Dutch was on the warpath again and that no man who did not want a permanent home on Boot Hill would be wise to mention posters or bowie knives to him. Piodie made a good many guesses as to the truth of the situation. Something had taken place that the town knew nothing about. The poster, Dutch's battered face, his rage, and the absence of his bowie knife from its accustomed sheath in the man's boot, all bore some relation to the mystery.

"Who is this Hugh McClintock, anyhow?" asked a citizen newly arrived from Ohio. "Anybody know anything about him?"

"Irish Tom" Carberry grinned. He was at the post office getting his mail when the innocent question drifted to him. He looked at the stranger. "Sam Dutch knows him. So do I. We know him damn well."

He gave no further information, but after he had gone another former resident of Aurora whispered advice to the Ohioan. "Better not be so curious in public, friend."

"Why?"

"Because there's liable to be a killin' before night. Don't you see McClintock has served notice on Dutch that he can't be chief of Piodie while he's here? It's up to Sam to make good or shut up."

"All I asked was——"

"We done heard what you asked. It ain't etiquette in Nevada to ask questions unless you aim to take a hand in the play. You ain't declarin' yoreself in, are you?"

"Bet your boots I'm not. None of my business."

"You said something that time." The former Aurora man walked away.

The man from the Western Reserve looked after him resentfully. "This is the darndest place. I ask a question, and you'd think I'd made a break of some kind. Is there any harm in what I said? I leave it to any of you. Is there?" he asked querulously.

Jim Budd drew him aside and explained. "Hell's bells, man, don't be so inquisitive! I knew a fellow lived to be a hundred onct 'tendin' to his own business. But I'll tell you who Hugh McClintock is, since yore system is so loaded with whyfors and who ishes. The kid's the man that ran Dutch outa the Esmeralda country. He's the man whose vote saved Irish Tom from being hanged when the stranglers got busy at Aurora. He's the shotgun messenger who bumped off 'Black Hank' Perronoud when he held up the Carson stage. No gamer man ever threw leg over leather. I'd oughto know, for he rode Pony Express for me two years through the Indian country."

"Are he and Dutch going to fight?"

"Great jumpin' Jehosophat, how do I know?" rasped the fat man irritably. "I'm no tin god on wheels, an' I ain't no seventh son of a seventh son. If I was I'd go locate me a million-dollar mine pronto. You know the layout well as I do. Do yore own guessin', an' do it private."

Dutch whispered a word in the ears of his satellites Vance and Hopkins later in the day. Those two gentlemen made together a tour of the town and tore down all the bills McClintock had tacked up.

CHAPTER XIX.

MCCLINTOCK BILLS THE TOWN.

Hugh's advertisement did not appear in the *Banner* next morning. The editor had killed it as soon as he learned that its purpose was to annoy Dutch. He knew several safer amusements than that. Young McClintock might enjoy flirting with death, but as the responsible head of a family the editor was in quite a different position.

To say that Hugh was enjoying himself is to stretch the truth. But experience had taught him that the bold course is sometimes the least hazardous. A line from a play he had seen at Piper's Opera House not long since flashed to his mind. "Out of this nettle danger, we pluck this flower safety." He would go through, if necessary to a fighting finish. The chances were that his scorn of risk would lessen it. Accompanied by his faithful colored bill sticker, Hugh redecorated the town with posters.

Jim Budd came wheezing down Turkey Creek Avenue.

"You billin' the town for a circus, kid?" he asked, his fat paunch shaking. And

when Hugh had stepped forward to him he added a warning in a lower voice. "Dutch is waitin' for you in front of Dodson's store; least it looks to me like he's aimin' to call yore hand."

"Any one with him?"

"Hopkins and Bob Dodson. I kinda figured they were lookout men for him. Say, you don't have to play a lone hand. I'd as lief sit in. Byers, too."

"No, Jim. My hand's stronger if I play it alone. Much obliged, just the same."

Budd conceded this as a matter of principle, but he was reluctant to do so in practice. "Well, don't you get careless, kid. Dutch is sudden death with a gun. Sure is."

Opposite Dodson & Dodson's emporium was the Mammoth Saloon.

"Tack one on the door, Uncle Ned," said Hugh.

McClintock spoke without looking at the bill sticker. He was watching three men standing in front of the store opposite. One of these hastily retreated inside. The two who remained were Dutch and Hopkins.

The killer growled a warning. "Lay off on that bill stickin'. It don't go here."

Hugh stepped across the street. He moved evenly and without haste. "Well, well, if it ain't Sam Dutch, chief of Virginia and Aurora, j'nt as big as life and as handsome. Lemme see, you were takin' the Candelabria stage last time I saw you." Smilingly the young man began to hum, "Git out de way, ole Dan Tucker." But the smile was of the lips only. His steely eyes held those of the big ruffian fast.

A snarling sound that might have been an oath fell from the ugly lips of the gun fighter. His face reflected his slow thoughts. Should he strike now? He knew that a dozen men were waiting for the sound of a shot, that they expected him to kill McClintock on sight. Well, he would kill him all right—soon.

Without lifting his eyes for an instant from his enemy Hugh gave the old negro the order a second time. "Nail up the bill, Uncle. Mr. Dutch is joking. You *are* joking, aren't you?"

Dutch glared at Hugh furiously. He moistened his dry lips with his tongue.

From the left boot leg McClintock drew a bowie knife. The horn handle was marked in a peculiar way. Hugh had shown it to a dozen men, and most of them had recognized

it. One of the pleasant habits of Dutch was to play with it threateningly before a fascinated circle of reluctant admirers. Now the young man held it up, in his left hand.

"I'm tryin' to find an owner for this knife. Happen to know him, Mr. Dutch?" The straight, swift probe of the eyes was cold as iron, hard as hammered brass.

It was a call for a show-down. The men watching from the store windows, from the saloon opposite, from the blacksmith shop below, knew that a demand had been made on Dutch for a declaration of intentions. In the silence which followed men suspended their breathing. The shadow of death hung low over the two tense figures standing out in relief.

Afterward those present spoke of the contrast between the sullen, sodden killer and the erect soldierly athlete facing him. The guttural snarl, the great slouching, apelike figure of one, suggested a throwback to prehistoric days. The clear, expressive eyes, the unconscious grace, and the quiet confidence of manner in the other were products of a new land flowering to manhood.

Men breathed again. Their hearts functioned normally once more. Dutch had chosen to dodge the challenge.

"I dunno as I know more about him than anybody else," he had growled.

Hugh did not relax the thrust of his eyes. "No? Thought maybe you did. I found it at the storage warehouse, corner of the alley, up the avenue. Didn't leave it there?"

Dutch did not answer at once. Inside, he surged with murderous impulse. He might beat this fellow McClintock to the draw. He had always boasted that he wanted no more than an even break with any man alive. Well, he had it here.

"Who says I left it there?" he demanded.

"I'm asking if you did."

The killer's right hand hung motionless. A weight paralyzed his will. These McClintocks had the Indian sign on him. Deep in him a voice whispered that if he accepted the challenge he was lost. Better wait and get this fellow right when he had no chance.

"No-o." To Dutch it seemed that the husky monosyllable was dragged out of him by some external force.

Tauntingly the cold voice jeered him. "Not you, then, that bushwhacked me in the alley and tried to shoot me in the back? Wouldn't do that, would you, Dutch? Got all yore fourteen on the level, of course."

"I aim to—to give every man a show," the gunman muttered.

"Good of you. Then it couldn't have been you that threw this knife at me and tried to gun me. It was dark. I couldn't make out his face, but I left the marks of my fist on it aplenty."

Now that it seemed there was to be no gun play the watchers had come into the open. A battery of eyes focused on the hammered face of Dutch. Cut lips, a black eye, purple weals on the forehead, and swollen cheeks told of recent punishment.

"I fell down a prospect hole," the bad man mentioned.

A bark of laughter, quickly smothered, met this explanation. Dutch glared round angrily.

"That prospect hole must have landed on you hard," Hugh told him grimly. "Take my advice. *Don't fall down any more.* Next time the shaft might shoot a hole through you."

"I ain't scared of you none. You can't run on me," Dutch growled sulkily, to save his face. "One o' these days I'm liable to get tired of you and feed you to the buzzards."

"Yes, I know you're chief here, same as you were at Virginia and Aurora. But, just to show there's no hard feelings, you'll help Uncle Ned tack up that poster, won't you?"

"No."

"Yes."

Again Dutch's sullen eyes battled and were beaten. "I don't have to," he flung out rebelliously.

"Not at all," Hugh mocked. "But out of good will you'll do it."

The ruffian shuffled across the road, snatched a bill from the old negro, and with a hammer drove a tack through the middle of it.

Out of the Mammoth walked a big, well-dressed man without a hat. He had black, glossy hair, and a small, black mustache. In his manner and bearing was that dominance which comes to those who are successful. With a glance he took in the situation.

"Tear that bill down, Dutch," he said crisply.

The bad man looked at him, then at McClintock.

Hugh laughed. "You hear yore master's voice, Dutch."

Dutch ripped the bill down and tore it into a dozen pieces. Released from the mas-

tery that had held him, he broke into savage furious oaths. At a word from the black-eyed man he would have fought it out with his enemy. But Ralph Dodson did not speak the word. His frowning attention was fixed on Hugh.

"Mr. McClintock, the Mammoth is owned by me and my brother. If we want bills on the walls we'll put them there. Understand?" he demanded arrogantly.

Hugh bowed, almost as mockingly and as gracefully as Scot himself could have done it. "Quite. My fault, Mr. Dodson. I'll explain. This knife was sheathed two nights ago in my arm. A scoundrel waited for me in a dark alley and tried to murder me."

"Interesting no doubt, but not my business," retorted Dodson curtly.

"So I'm puttin' up posters to find the owner of the knife."

"Not here. You can't put 'em up here."

"Not necessary. Everybody here knows who owns the knife—or, rather, who did own it. It's mine now, unless some one claims it. That all right with you, Dutch?"

The killer said nothing, but he said it with bloodshot, vindictive eyes—eyes in which hate and fear and cunning and the lust to kill struggled for victory.

Hugh turned on his heel and walked away, the sound of his footsteps sharp and ringing. Not once did he look back to see whether the murderer he had discredited would shoot him in the back. Yet he was glad when he was out of range. Experiments in the psychology of a killer might easily be carried too far.

CHAPTER XX.

"LITTLE VICKY."

Jim Budd had a dozen reasons to offer why there must be gold in Bald Knob. Like many others, he was letting his hopes influence his judgment.

When he had finished his argument Hugh grinned. "May be here. May not. A fifty-to-one bet I'd call it, us on the short end. But that's mining. No can tell. Might as well stick up our notice here as anywhere. What say, Dan?"

Byers said, "Suits me."

"What about this fellow Single-foot Bill who took up the claims originally—sure he's outa the country and won't make a kick?"

"Handed in his checks last year in Austin. Anyhow, he never did any assessment

work here. You can see that. Just filed his location notice and let it go at that," Budd explained.

"Didn't he patent any of his claims?"

"I reckon. But not these. He couldn't have. There's not been enough work done on the ground. He jest scratched around."

"If he patented there would be a record of it, of course."

"I ain't so sure of that, either. The house where they used to keep the county papers burned down in the big fire a couple years ago more or less."

"Well, the recorder would know."

"Oh, he died a month since. But we're in the clear. All you got to do is to use yore eyes to see this land couldn't 'a' been patented."

Hugh used his eyes and they corroborated his friend's opinion.

The partners surveyed roughly the claims they decided on, drove in corner stakes, and put up their announcements of ownership. Four locations were taken in partnership. Each of them filed on several individual claims. Hugh took one in his brother's name, the rest in his own. One of these last was to be held in trust for Vicky until she became of age. It was a custom of the country to take up mining prospects for friends.

Hugh wrote the notice for the partners. It read:

We, the undersigned, claim four claims of three hundred feet each in this silver-and-gold-bearing quartz lead or lode, extending north and south from this notice, with all its dips, spurs, angles, and variations, together with fifty feet of ground on either side for working the same.

Each of the three signed the paper.

Similar location notices were posted on the individual claims.

Hugh took charge of operations. He hired men, bought tools and supplies, selected the spot for the shaft, and himself tossed out the first shovel of dirt. When operations were under way he turned the management over to his partners and returned to Virginia City. The business of the firm called him. Incidentally he wanted to see his week-old nephew, Alexander Hugh McClintock.

He went directly to his brother's house on A Street. At his knock the door was opened by a young woman. She was dark and slender, and at sight of him her eyes flashed.

"You're Mr. Hugh McClintock," she cried.

"Yes. You're the nurse, I suppose. How is Mollie?"

The face of the young woman held surprises. Mischief bubbled over it for a moment. "Yes, I'm the nurse. Would you like to see—Mrs. McClintock?"

"If I may."

The nurse led the way into the house. Presently, after disappearing for a minute into Mollie's room, she returned for Hugh. He trod softly, as men do in the presence of sickness or some mystery of life or death that awes them.

Mollie had never looked lovelier. A faint pink of apple blossoms fluttered into her cheeks. In the crook of her arm lay Alexander Hugh McClintock, a red and wrinkled little morsel of humanity. She smiled, with such a radiance of motherhood that the man's bachelor heart registered a pang of envy.

"Oh, Hugh, I'm so happy," she whispered as he kissed her.

"That's fine—fine," he said gently.

"We named him after your father and you. Scot would have it, wouldn't he, Vicky?"

The dark young woman nodded.

Hugh felt the flush dyeing his face. "Little Vicky!" he stammered. "Why, I thought that——"

"Thank you for the dolls, kind sir," she said, and curtsied.

He felt like a fool. How long was it since he had sent her a black doll baby?

"I thought you were still a little girl," he blurted. "Nobody told me——"

"That little girls grow up? They do."

"You can't be more than fourteen—or fifteen," he charged, trying to escape from his mistake.

"I'm going on seventeen, sir," she said demurely.

"Your letter——"

"Was from a little girl to whom you sent a nigger doll."

"You said in it——"

"I said thank you for the doll. Wasn't it a proper letter for a little girl to write to a kind gentleman?"

She asked it with a manner of naive innocence, hardly a hint of mirth in the dark, long-lashed eyes meeting his so directly.

Mollie laughed. "She wrote and asked us not to tell you she had grown up, Hugh.

We wondered when you would guess she wasn't any longer a child."

"I've been several kinds of an idiot in my time, but this—this takes the cake," Hugh said grimly.

Suddenly Victoria relented. She held out her hand impulsively. Her smile was warm and kind.

"You don't mind my little joke, do you?"

"Not a bit. I brought it on myself."

"If you want to know I thought it was dear of you to remember the little girl away at school alone." A faint shell-pink beat into the clear, satiny cheeks.

"I liked that little girl. She had a lot of git-up-an'-git."

Vicky laughed. "She was a terror, if that's what you mean. Always in mischief. Mollie will tell you that."

"Yes, but she was a tender-hearted little cyclone," smiled the older sister.

Scot came into the room. "Lo, Hugh," he said. "When'd you get back?" Without waiting for an answer he passed to the bed upon which were his wife and his first-born. Lightly his hand caressed her soft hair. "Everything right, Mollie?"

Her eyes rested happily in his. "Everything in the world, Scot."

"This nurse I got for you treating you proper?" With a motion of his head he indicated Victoria.

"She's spoiling me."

"A. H. McClintock behaving himself?"

"He's an angel."

He kissed her. "Must take after his father, then."

"I hope he does. He looks like you."

Scot laughed, and with a touch of embarrassment turned to his brother. "You see what you'll be letting yourself in for when you marry, Hugh. Got to walk a straight and narrow line to keep your wife fooled about you. And for a reward she'll tell you that a red, wrinkled little skeezicks looks like you."

"He's the dearest little baby I ever saw," protested Vicky warmly.

Scot poked a forefinger at the midriff of his heir. "I kind of like the little grasshopper myself."

"You know very well you're *crazy* about him," Vicky answered triumphantly.

Mollie only smiled. It was not necessary for her any longer to reassure herself about Scot's love. She knew him. The days of her doubts were past.

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Presently Scot left the bedside and sat down on the arm of a big chair. "How's Piodie, Hugh?"

"One live camp," the younger brother answered. "Plenty of room for us there. We can put an outfit in and get all the teaming we want. One objection is that the Dodsons run the camp."

"Run it how?"

"Own the biggest store, the stamp mills, a controlling interest in the best producing mines, the stage line, half the town site, and the sheriff."

"Anything else?" asked Scot with a dry smile.

"A bunch of thugs and the courts. Our old friend Sam Dutch is their handy man."

"Did you see Dutch?"

"We met," Hugh answered briefly. "I bumped into Jim Budd and Dan Byers, too. They're runnin' a feed corral there. We located a bunch of prospects together. I wrote you about that."

"Yes."

"Took up one in yore name."

"And one in trust for Vicky, you said in the letter."

Hugh flushed to the roots of his hair. He turned to the girl. "A part of that fool mistake of mine. I kinda thought it might turn out a good prospect and, if so, you'd have it when you grew up. I didn't aim to—to overstep."

Victoria had been listening eagerly to every word they had said. She had her own reasons for being interested in Piodie.

"Of course you didn't. It was for that wild little Vicky you used to know. I'll thank you for her, but, of course, I can't keep a claim you took up for me on a misunderstanding."

"I wish you would. Not likely it'll amount to anything. But we've got more than we can work now. You're welcome as the sun in May."

"Do you think that's *really* true—about his not wanting it?" Vicky asked Scot. "I'd like to take it if—if you folks can't use it. But I'm not going to rob you and him."

"I'd take it, Vicky," Scot told her. "Chances are we'll never do the assessment work on our own claims. We're not miners—not by business. Hugh has all he can handle without yours."

She turned to Hugh, with a brisk little nod of the dark head. "Then I'll take it—and thank you."

"What will you do with it now you have it?" Mollie asked.

"Do the assessment work—have a shaft dug," answered Vicky. "I have four hundred dollars left of the Virginia Dodson Fund, and, dear people, I'm going to begin earning more week after next."

"How?" asked her sister, surprised.

"I've been asked to teach school at Piodie, and I accepted to-day."

Mollie protested, and knew that her protest was in vain. Her young sister was compact of energy. It expressed itself in the untamed joyous freedom of her rhythmic tread, in the vitality of the spirit emanating from the light, erect figure of the bright-eyed vestal. If she had made up her mind to go to Piodie to teach there would be no stopping her. All Mollie could do would be to see through Scot that the girl had a good boarding place where she would be properly looked after.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE BLIZZARD.

The McClintocks decided after all not to put in a freight outfit to Piodie. The Dodsons beat them to it by putting in a large number of wagons as adjuncts to the stages they ran from Carson.

From Hugh's partners word came at intervals of the progress made in sinking the shaft of the Ground Hog, which was the name they had given the mine. These messages reflected Budd's enthusiasm. The postscript of each of them, whether it came in the form of a letter or a word of mouth greeting, was to the effect that he expected to strike the ledge now at any time.

"Bald Knob is sure looking up," he wrote in one note. "Ralph Dodson has done made some locations above us and two lads from American Flat of the name of Jenson have staked out a claim just below us down the hill. They're running a tunnel in from the hillside. Well, kid, look out for news of a big strike soon. We're sure right close to the vein, looks like."

Hugh smiled when he read it. Budd had been on the verge of a discovery so many times that his nonresident partner discounted the prophecy. There was no use in building up hopes that would probably never be realized.

In another letter the fat man mentioned a second piece of news. "Our schoolmarm

here, Miss Victoria Lowell, has begun scratching dirt right lively on that claim you staked out for her. She has got a Swede on the job, but she has been out most every Saturday to see how tricks are. I notice Ralph Dodson has been mighty attentive to her. *You better drift over, kid, and do your assessment work on that claim if you aim to get it patented in your name.* Me, if I was a high-stepping colt like you, I'd be dog-goned if I'd let that smooth guy, Dodson, jump as rich a prospect as the Little Schoolmarm."

This time Hugh did not smile. Budd, of course, was on the wrong track. He had leaped to the conclusion that Hugh was in love with the girl because he had staked a claim for her, and in his blunt blundering way he was giving his friend a tip. McClintock was troubled. He profoundly distrusted Ralph Dodson, had disliked him from the first moment when their eyes met. The fellow was a ravening wolf if he had ever seen one. But he was handsome, well-dressed, the kind of man who is like wild-fire among women. He probably knew how to make love amazingly well.

And Vicky—impetuous, imperious, little Vicky of the brave heart and generous instincts—was just the girl to yield to the glamour of his charm. He could see now her flashing face, finely cut like a rare brilliant, full of fire and high lights. She had better be dead than the wife of Ralph Dodson.

The thing worried him. It would not let him alone. At work and in his leisure hours he thought of the girl with keen-edged anxiety. His imagination began to play him tricks. At dusk, as he walked to his room, he would see her filmy in front of him, moving like sweet music toward the open arms of Dodson. Once she turned and gave Hugh her cryptic, tantalizing smile.

Some one ought to interfere to save the girl from an event so ruinous. He thought of telling Scot, but after all he had nothing better to go on than the gossip of old Jim Budd.

On swift impulse he decided to go to Piodie himself. It would not do any harm, anyhow, to have a look at the Ground Hog and see how it was developing. While he was there maybe he could drop a casual hint to Vicky. Perhaps he would discover that Budd's warning was all moonshine.

Winter was white on the hills when Hugh started over the Geiger Grade to Reno by

stage. At Reno he found traffic tied up. The snow in the valleys was deep and it drifted with the wind so fast that the cuts filled up and prevented the stage from getting through. Hugh learned that a pack train had broken trail the day before and had reached Stampede Notch in safety. From there it was working across the divide to Piodie.

He bought a pair of snowshoes and set out on the long trip. The day was warm and the snow soft. This made travel difficult, and McClintock made slow progress until he was out of the Truckee Meadows. By afternoon he was in the hills. The wind was whistling in gusts, sometimes wrathfully, again in a plaintive whine. It was colder now and the snow less slushy. In spite of fatigue he covered the miles faster than he had been able to do in the valley.

Many times he glanced at the sky uneasily. It was heavy with dun clouds, and unless he missed his guess snow would fall soon and in quantity. Came dusk, and after dusk darkness. Hugh kept going. He was an old-timer and could tell his direction by the wind, the dip of the land, and the slope of the snow waves.

It was nearly midnight when he knocked at the door of a Mormon ranch house and asked shelter for the night. Healthily fatigued in every muscle, he slept like a school-boy almost round the clock. Before he took the road again it was near noon. At intervals during the night snow had fallen, but just now the storm had died down.

"Better stay another night," the rancher advised. "Gettin' her back up for a blizzard, looks like."

The taste of the air and the look of the sky backed his prophecy. There was going to be more snow and a lot of it. Very likely there would be snow and wind together. But Hugh did not want to be tied up for several days in the hills. He decided to make a dash for Piodie. The town was not more than twenty-five miles away.

He had covered half the distance before the storm hit him hard. It began with wind, heavy sweeping gusts of it driving over the hills and into the ravines. Presently snow came, a hard sleet that pelted his face like ground glass. The temperature was falling fast. Hugh set his teeth and plowed forward, putting his head down into the blizzard as a football player does when he is bucking the line.

Young and warm-blooded though he was, the chill of the tempest bit to his bones and sapped his vitality. The wind and the fine sleet were like a wall that pressed closely and savagely on him. Now and again he raised his head and took the full fury of the leaping storm to make sure that he was still on the trail.

Far and near became relative words. The end of the world, as far as he could tell, was almost within reach of his outstretched hand. The whistle of the shrieking wind was so furious that it deadened all sounds, even itself. The sleety snow was a silent, stinging foe that flogged him mile after mile as he wallowed on.

The afternoon had been dark, but an added murkiness told him that night was at hand. He was nearly exhausted, and in the darkness, with the raging blizzard all about him, he felt that directions would become confused. He must be close to town now, but if he should get lost a quarter of a mile would be as far away as Carson.

And presently he knew that he was lost. He was staggering through the deep snow on a hillside. Somehow he had got off the trail and it was swallowed up in the bleak night. He had an extraordinary store of strength, vitality, and courage. But it was not in human endurance to stand up under the flailing of the wind and sleet that pelted him, to keep going through the heavy drifts that had been swept into every hollow and draw. The bitter cold penetrated closer to his heart. An overpowering desire to lie down and sleep tugged at his will.

Not for a moment did he give up. One of his snowshoes was lost in a snow bank. He kicked off the other. Now, on his hands and knees, now on his feet, weaving forward like a drunken man, all sense of direction gone, he still plunged into the howling waste of desolation that hemmed him in. He followed the path of least resistance. It took him downhill into a draw. His stumbling steps zigzagged toward a lower level, and he followed the arroyo to its mouth. A slight dip in the ground swung him to the right.

His boots were clogged with snow. The muscles of his thighs were so weary that each time he dragged a leg out of the drifts it felt as though weighted with a cannonball. There were times when he could make ground only by throwing his body forward and beating down the white bank that obstructed the way. Still he crawled on, an

indomitable atom of fighting humanity in a great frozen desert of death.

A groping hand struck something solid. The stiff fingers of the hand searched the surface of the barrier. Hugh's heart renewed hope. He had come up against a pile of corded wood. It was cut in short lengths to fit a stove. The chances were that somewhere within fifty feet of him was a house.

But where? In what direction? The fury of the storm filled the night, made it opaque as a wall. He could not see five feet in front of him. The landmark that he had found he dared not leave, for if he wandered from it the chances were that he would never find it again. It would be of no use to shout. The shrieking wind would drown a voice instantly. Yet he did call out, again and again.

The thing he did was born of the necessity of the situation. He dug aside the snow from the top of the pile and with a loose piece of wood hammered free others from the niche into which they were frozen. How he did this he could never afterward tell, for his muscles were so paralyzed from cold that they would scarcely answer the call his will made on them.

Then, hard and straight, he flung a stick out into the storm. His reserves of strength were nearly gone, but he held himself to the job before him. One after another he threw the pieces of firewood, following a definite plan as to direction, in such a way as to make the place where he stood the center of a circle. His hope was to strike the house. If he could do this, and if some one opened the door to find out the cause of the blow, and if the door happened to be on the side of the house nearest him, then the light of the lamp would, perhaps, penetrate into the storm so that he could see it.

He knew it was a gamble with all the odds against him. He was backing a series of contingencies each one of which must turn in his favor if he was to win.

He collapsed on the woodpile at last from sheer physical exhaustion. For a few moments he lay there, helpless, drifting toward that sleep from which he would never awake in this world. But the will to live still struggled feebly. He was of that iron breed which has won the West for civilization against untold odds. It was not in him to give up as long as he could force his tortured body forward.

Even now he did not forget the craft of

the frontiersman which reads signs and makes deductions from them. The corded wood was two lengths deep. Near one end there was a sag in it two or three feet deep. This depression was greater on the side near Hugh. He reasoned that it is human nature to choose the easiest way. The people who lived in the house would use first that part of the wood which was nearest. Therefore, it followed that the house must be on the same side of the corded pine nut as he was, and it must be closest to the place from which the wood had been carried to the kitchen stove.

He struck out at a right angle from the pile. Before he had gone three steps he stumbled and fell. His prostration was so complete that he could not at once get to his feet again. He lay inert for a time, then crawled up again and lurched forward. A second time his knees buckled under him. As he fell, an outstretched hand hit the wall of the house.

Weakly he felt his way along the wall till he came to a door. His hand fumbled with the latch, but his frozen fingers could not work the catch. He beat on the door.

It opened unexpectedly, and he plunged forward to the floor of the cabin. He saw, as though a long way off, the faces of devils and of angels lit by high lights. His body lost weight, and he floated into space luxuriously. Pain and fatigue, devils and angels, all were blotted out.

CHAPTER XXII.

A HAVEN OF REFUGE.

Vicky was enjoying herself tremendously. All her young life she had been chaperoned and directed. Teachers had watched over and instructed her. She had better do this. It was not ladylike to do that. The right kind of a girl could not be too careful what she did and how she did it. The sweet demureness of watchful waiting was the only proper attitude of a nice young woman toward that important and vital business of getting married. So much she had learned at school.

It happened that Vicky did not want to get married—not yet, at any rate. She wanted to try her own wings. She wanted to flutter out into the world and see what it was like.

Already she had made experiments and discoveries. One of them was that if you

smiled in the right way when you asked for it you could get anything you wanted from men. She had wanted a globe and some new seats for the schoolroom, and the directors had voted them cheerfully even though the district was short of funds. Jim Budd had spent two hours building some bookshelves she needed for her bedroom, just because she had said a pretty please to him.

Now, Mrs. Budd was different. She liked Victoria and fed her well and saw that she wore her heavy coat when it was cold, but the young woman understood that smiles would not have the least effect on any of that plump mother's decisions. In this Mrs. Budd was like the rest of her sex. They did not go out of their way to please you because you were a—well, a not exactly plain girl.

The experiments of the young school-teacher were innocent enough. She was not by nature a coquette. But the world was her oyster, and she meant to have a perfectly delightful time prying it open. She found that there were a good many people, at least fifty per cent of whom were of the masculine gender, ready to lend a hand at operating on the bivalve.

One of the most assiduous was Ralph Dodson.

Vicky discouraged his attentions. For one thing he was the brother of a man she had detested all her life. She did not want to have anything whatever to do with Dodson. After what had taken place it was not decent that the families should have any relationship at all.

But she found Ralph Dodson not easily disheartened. He did not lay himself open to a direct snub. A member of the board had properly introduced him to her. If he came out of a store as she was going down the street and walked a block beside her she could hardly rebuff him. Before she had been at Piodie a month the clerk of the school district retired and Dodson was appointed in his place. This annoyed her, because she now had to see a good deal of him; but she could not very well accuse him of having brought about the change merely for that purpose.

Vicky found herself studying the man. She looked in him for the same traits that had made her as a child hate his brother. It irritated her that she did not find them. Ralph Dodson was strong, competent, energetic. She would have liked to discover him

mean, but instead she uncovered in his view a largeness of vision in civic affairs that surprised her. He believed in good schools even though they cost money.

One flaw she found in him. He had kept out of the army during the war and made money while Scot and Hugh were fighting for the Union. But this was true of many men in the Far West, which was a long way from the fighting line.

One day an accident took place that increased her unwilling admiration of him. Near the schoolhouse was an abandoned mine tunnel, poorly timbered, in which she had forbidden the children to play. Little Johnny Haxtun, playing hide and seek, ventured into it, and in the darkness stumbled against a rotten post. At his weight the support crumbled. There was a cave-in, and Johnny lay crushed beneath a mass of rock and timber.

Among the first of the rescuers to arrive was Ralph Dodson. He told the young school-teacher, who was standing there white and shaken, to get a doctor and have first-aid relief at hand in case Johnny should be alive when he was released.

Then, ax in hand, he led the men into the tunnel. It was dangerous work. The fallen timbering had to be cut and dug away. At any moment an avalanche of rock and dirt might pour down from above and kill them all. Dodson did not shirk. He stood up to his job deep in the tunnel, regardless of the little slides trickling down that might at any instant precipitate a hundred tons upon him. The worst of it was that the more dirt and jammed timbers were removed the greater the peril of a second cave-in.

Johnny was still alive. A couple of crossed timbers had protected him from the weight of rock and dirt. Vicky heard his whimpering and came into the tunnel to comfort him. But Dodson would have none of that. He ordered the girl into the open instantly.

"This isn't a woman's job. Get out," he told her curtly.

Perhaps she resented his manner at the moment, but when half an hour later he emerged from the tunnel carrying the maimed body of the little fellow she forgot her pique. The man's hands were torn and bleeding, his face stained with sweat and streaks of dirt. The clothes of which he was usually so careful were daubed with yellow clay. She remembered only that he had risked his life to save Johnny.

Nor could she forget it when he called that evening at her boarding house, ostensibly to tell her that the doctor had set Johnny's broken leg and found no other injury from the accident.

"It's going to be hard on his mother. You know she's a widow and takes in washing," Vicky said. "I wonder if we couldn't give a school entertainment for her benefit."

"It won't be necessary," he said promptly. "It's partly my fault the accident happened. As school clerk I should have had the mouth of the tunnel boarded up. I'm going to pay all the bills and see that Mrs. Haxtun doesn't lose anything by it."

Victoria felt a glow at her heart. It always did her good to find out that people were kinder and more generous than she had supposed. Her judgment of Ralph Dodson had been that he was hard and selfish. Now she was ashamed of herself for thinking so. She thought of the "Greater love than this" verse, and in her soul she humbled herself before him. What a little prig she had been to set herself up as arbiter of right and wrong.

Dodson made the most of the opportunity chance had given him. He used it as a wedge to open up a friendship with the girl. She was still reluctant, but this was based on some subconscious impulse. All the fine generosity in her was in arms to be fair to him regardless of his brother.

As soon as he learned that she had a claim on Bald Knob that she wanted to develop Dodson put his experience at her service. He helped her arrange with a man to do the actual assessment work, and he went over the ground with her to choose the spot for the shaft. Afterward he kept an eye on Oscar Sorenson to see that he did a fair day's work for the pay he received.

On holidays Vicky usually walked or rode out to her claim to see how Sorenson was getting along. She was pretty apt to meet Dodson on the way to Bald Knob or else superintending operations there. Two or three times he came down to her prospect at noon, and they strolled up a little gulch to pick wild flowers and eat their lunch together.

He knew so much more about the world than she did that she found his talk interesting. The glimpse she had had of San Francisco had whetted her appetite. Were other cities like the one by the Golden Gate, gay and full of life and fashion which young

girls at a finishing school were not permitted to see? He told her of London and Paris and Vienna, and her innocent credulity accepted what he said at face value. He had the gift of talk, the manner of a man of the world. From the confident ease of his descriptions she could not guess that he had never been in Paris or Vienna and only once in London for a flying visit to float a mining scheme.

"You'll not be going to the mine to-day, dearie," Mrs. Budd said to Vicky one Saturday morning when the hills were white with a blanket of snow.

"Yes. I promised Oscar to bring his mail and some tobacco. Besides, I want to see how he's been getting along."

"If you take my advice you'll stay comfy at home and not go traipsing all over the hills gettin' your feet an' your skirts wet."

One of the things Vicky rarely did was to accept advice and follow it. A fault of her years and of her temperament was that she had to gain her wisdom through experience.

"I love to get out in the snow and tramp in it," Vicky said cheerfully, helping herself to another hot biscuit. "And I'll not get wet if I wear arctics and tuck up my skirts when I'm out of town."

"Hmp! If you're set on it you'll go. I know that well enough. But you'll come home early, won't you? There's a lot more snow up in the sky yet and by night we're likely to have some of it."

Vicky promised. When she struck the trail to Bald Knob she discovered that the snow was deeper than she had supposed. But there was a well-beaten track as far as the shoulder of the ridge. Beyond that she had to break a path for herself.

It was heavy work. She grew tired long before she reached the mine. But she kept going rather than turn back. It was nearly two o'clock when Sorenson answered her hail.

Vicky did not stay long at the mine. She did not like the look of the sky. The wind was rising, too, and the temperature falling. Once she thought of asking Sorenson to go back to town with her, but she scouted the idea promptly and dismissed it. It did not agree with her view of the self-reliance she was cultivating. Incidentally, too, Sorenson was a lazy, sulky fellow who would resent taking any unnecessary trouble. She did not want to put herself under an obligation to him.

The wind had sifted a good deal of snow

into the tracks she had made on the way down from the shoulder of the hill. It came now in great swirling gusts, filling the air with the light surface snow. By the time she had passed the Dodson properties the wind had risen to a gale, a biting, wintry hurricane that almost lifted her from her feet. A stinging sleet swept into her face and blinded her. She found it difficult to make out the way.

Before she reached the foot of the slope below Bald Knob she was very tired. The wind drifts had filled the path, so that she had to break her own trail. The fury of the storm was constantly increasing.

In the comparative shelter of a little draw she stopped to decide what she had better do. It was still a mile and a half to town. She did not believe she could possibly make it even if she did not lose the way. Nor could she climb Bald Knob again to the Dodson camp. That would not be within her power. There was a little cabin in the next draw where Ralph slept when he did not care to go to town after spending the day on his Bald Knob property. It was usually stocked with supplies of food and fuel. No doubt it would be unoccupied now.

She put her head down into the white blizzard and trudged round the edge of the ridge that divided the two small gulches. Three minutes later she pushed open the door of the cabin and walked in.

A man sitting at a table jumped to his feet with a startled oath. "Goddammighty, who are you?" he demanded.

Vicky was as much taken aback as he. "I thought the cabin was empty," she explained. "I'm Victoria Lowell, the school-teacher at Piodie. I've been up to my claim."

The man's look was half a scowl and half a leer. He was a big, round-shouldered ruffian with long hair and tangled, unkempt beard. There floated in her mind a vague and fugitive recollection of having seen him before somewhere.

"Better dry yorese'f," he said ungraciously.

From the fireplace a big, twisted piñon knot threw out a glow of heat. The girl took off her coat, shook the snow from the wet skirts, and moved forward to absorb the warmth. Her host pushed a chair toward her with his foot. She sank into it, worn out. Presently the moist skirts began to steam and the warmth of the fire made her

drowsy. She aroused herself to conversation.

"Sorry I had to trouble you. I was 'fraid I couldn't make it to town."

"Hel'v a day," he agreed.

On the table were a whisky bottle and a glass. He indicated them with a sweep of his hand. "Have a nip. Warm you up, miss."

"No thanks. I'm all right."

Over her stole a delightful lassitude, the reaction from her fight with the storm. She looked sleepily into the live coals. The howling of the storm outside was deadened enough to make a sort of lullaby. Her head began to nod and her eyelids closed. With a start she brought herself awake again.

"Didn't know I was so done up," she murmured.

" 'S all right. Sleep if you want to, miss," the man told her.

Not for an hour or more did she open her eyes again. The table was set for a meal. A coffeepot was heating on some coals and a black kettle hung suspended from a crane above the fire.

"Come an' eat, miss," the man said gruffly when he saw that she was awake.

Vicky discovered that she was hungry. She drank the coffee he poured out and ate the stew he ladled from the kettle. He did not eat with her.

"If the storm would break I'd try to reach town," she said presently.

"No chance. You stay here where you're safe, miss."

"My friends will worry."

"Let 'em."

"What was that?" the girl asked.

She had heard a sound of something striking the side of the house.

"Prob'ly a limb flung by the wind. Never saw such a night."

Victoria shuddered. But for good fortune she might have now been perishing in the snow.

"How long do you think it will last?" she asked.

"Can't tell. Maybe till mo'ning. Maybe two-three days."

"Oh, it couldn't last that long," the girl cried, appalled.

"Hmp! Guess you don't know a Nevada blizzard." Again he looked at her, a leer on his heavy face. "You're liable to have to put up with old Sam for quite a spell, missie."

Vicky did not answer. Her eyes were

meeting his and the blood crept into her cheeks. There was a furtive, sinister menace between his narrowed lids that reminded her of a wolf creeping toward its kill. She looked away, her heart hammering fast. What sort of a creature was this man with whom she was locked up a million miles away from all the safeguards of society? In the glowing coals she found no answer to that question.

Presently she stole a sidelong look at him. He was pouring a drink from the whisky bottle.

"How?" he said, lifting the glass toward her. He tilted back his hairy throat and drained the tumbler.

A heavy pounding on the door startled the drinker. He listened. Victoria was at the door instantly. She flung it open. A man lurched forward and crumpled up on the floor.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TWO PLUS ONE MAKE THREE.

With a swift movement of her supple body Vicky was on her knees beside the man. She slipped an arm under his head. Icy sleet incrustated his clothes. It clung in icicles to his hair and eyebrows. It matted his lashes and small Vandyke beard.

From her throat came an astonished little cry of recognition. The man was Hugh McClintock. Over her shoulder she called to the big man at the table.

"Bring me whisky and water—please."

He brought it, then closed the door. Awkwardly he stood above her.

"Had a hell'v a close call," he growled sulkily. It did not suit him to entertain a second guest.

Vicky let the whisky drop between the lips. Presently Hugh opened his eyes. He smiled feebly at her. Surprise wiped out the smile. "Little Vicky," he murmured.

"Ump-hu," she nodded. Then, to the hulking figure behind her, the girl gave order: "Help me carry him nearer the fire. He's 'most frozen."

The fellow shambled forward and stooped down. As he did so his eyes fell on the face of the helpless traveler. He ripped out a savage oath. With the sweep of an arm he dragged the girl to her feet and hurled her back to the wall.

His fury struggled for expression. "Gotcha. Gotcha good an' right. I'm gonna stomp the life outa you. Gonna put

my heel on yore throat an' crack yore spine. Un'erstand me?"

Victoria knew the ruffian now. A flash of memory carried her back to a day in her childhood when she had seen a horrible ape-like figure standing over the prostrate body of a man from which life had just been violently ejected. She saw the same gargoyle face, the same hulking muscle-bound shoulders and long arms with hairy wrists projecting from the coat sleeves. Her memory brought her a second picture of the same incident. A smiling young fellow was lifting her gently from the ground. His hand was caressing her hair softly as he spoke. She recalled even his words, "Run right along into the wagon, li' girl, an' don't turn yore head."

The girl's arm rested on a shelf, in the same position where it had fallen when she had been hurled back. Her fingers touched something cold.

"You first. Yore brother next," the guttural voice of Dutch went on, and the horrible malice of it seemed unhuman. "I been waitin' a mighty long time, an' I gotcha at last. Sure have. Thought I was scared of you an' that damned high-heeled brother o' yours, did you? Me, I was settin' back an' waitin'—waitin' for my chance. An' it's come, like I knew it would. Beg! Whine like a papoose! It won't do you no good, but go do it jest the same. Hear me. Before I turn you over an' crack yore back-bone at the neck."

His gloating was horrible. It sent chills through Victoria's blood. Her fingers spasmodically closed—on the ivory handle of a revolver. The force of the recoil had flung her hand into contact with the revolver Dutch had tossed on the shelf a few hours earlier.

"Don'tcha hear me? Beg me to let you go. Crawl over an' lick my boots. Maybe I'll go easy on you like you two dern fools done with me." A jangle of hideous laughter accompanied his words. He kicked his opponent in the side.

Hugh looked at him, steadily, without a word.

"Thought you had the Injun sign on me, eh? Both of you? Well, I'll say right here there never was a minute I was scared of either one of you—or both. Me, I'm Sam Dutch, a sure-enough killer. An' you—you're Number Fifteen. Ole Dan Tucker's

come to git his supper, an' he ain't too late, neither."

He was working himself up for murder. Soon his passion would be boiling over. Then he would strike.

One thought dominated Vicky, drove out all others. She must save Hugh McClintock. She forgot to be afraid, forgot to remember that this scoundrel was the terror of Nevada. Noiselessly she crept forward and pushed the revolver into his back just below the shoulders.

"If you move I'll shoot you," she said hoarsely.

The stream of curses died in the fellow's throat. His jaw fell. Ludicrously his immature mind groped with the situation.

Three slow taps rose from the floor. Dutch gasped. Those taps had always heralded disaster for him.

Vicky drew a knife from his boot and a revolver from the belt he was wearing. She dropped them on the floor.

"Walk to the door," she ordered. "Go outside. If you come in before I call you I'll shoot holes in you."

She hardly recognized her own voice. There was in it a new note. She knew that if he refused to go she would kill him as she would a wolf.

Dutch whined. "You wouldn't drive me into the storm after I done took you in an' fed you, miss. There can't any one live in that blizzard. I was jest a-funnin' about him. Jest my li'l' way."

"Go on," she told him inexorably. "Now."

He went. She closed the door behind him.

McClintock crept toward the fire. Vicky gathered the weapons and put them down beside her. Then she took one of his hands in hers and began to rub it to restore circulation. She worked on the other hand, on his ears, his face, his throat. She helped him to take off his boots and, in spite of his protests, massaged his frozen feet.

The pain was intense as the circulation began to be renewed in his body. He clamped his teeth to keep back the groans. He walked up and down nursing his hands and his ears. But not a sound came from his lips.

"I know it's awful," Vicky comforted. "But the pain's a good sign. Soon as it's gone you'll be all right."

He grinned. There was nothing to do but endure until the circulation was fully restored. He beat the back of his hands

against the palms. If Dutch should grow troublesome he might need the use of his fingers shortly.

A fist beat on the door.

"Shall I let him in?" the girl asked.

Hugh picked up one of the revolvers and crooked his stiff forefinger over the trigger. He could make out to use it at a pinch.

"Yes, let him in," he said.

Vicky took the second revolver. The knife Hugh thrust into one of his empty boot legs.

When the girl opened the door Dutch slouched in. He was covered from head to foot with frozen snow and sleet. His venomous eyes slanted first at McClintock, then at the young woman. The sullen impotent hatred in his heart was plain enough to send goose quills down Vicky's spine. She knew that if ever he were top dog it would go hard with her or Hugh.

The man poured out half a tumbler of whisky and drank it neat. He shuffled up to the fire, taking the opposite side to the one occupied by his guests. Silently he glared at them. But for the moment he could do nothing. They were armed. He was not.

Exhausted by his long battle with the storm, Hugh could hardly keep his eyes open. His worn body called for sleep. But with that wild beast crouched five feet away he dared not relax his vigilance for a moment.

Vicky whispered in his ear. "Cuddle down in the chair and sleep a while. I'll watch him."

Hugh shook his head. No, that would never do. At some unexpected instant the killer would fling his huge bulk on her and wrest the revolver from her hand. Much as his system craved it, Hugh rejected sleep as unsafe. He would stay awake and protect her.

But even as he was firmly resolving this his eyelids drooped. His head relaxed against the back of the chair. He made an effort to throw off the drowsiness pressing him down. It was a feeble and unsuccessful one. Presently he was sound asleep.

From the summit of Bald Knob the storm swept down with a roar. It hurled itself into the valley with screams like those of a lost soul. It beat against the hut in furious gusts, rattling the windows and shaking the door like some living monster intent on de-

struction. For hours its rage continued unabated.

Meanwhile, from opposite sides of the fireplace, the desperado and the girl watched each other. He had a feral cunning. It had served to keep him alive more than once when he seemed at the end of his rope. Now he piled the fuel high in the stone chimney and pretended to go to sleep.

The glow of the heat had the intended effect. It formed an alliance with Vicky's fatigue. She, too, began to nod at last, her wariness lulled by the stertorous breathing of the big, huddled figure opposite. The sense of responsibility was still active in her mind. She decided afterward that she must have catnapped, as drivers do on a long night trip, now and again for a few seconds at a time.

From one of these she awakened with a start. Dutch was tiptoeing toward her. Their eyes met. He crouched for the leap as her fingers busied themselves with the revolver. The roar of the explosion filled the cabin. The weight of the plunging man flung Vicky to the floor. She lay face down, breathless, oppressed by his huge bulk. The six-shooter had gone clattering beyond her reach.

The weight lifted from her. She heard scuffling feet and heavy grunts as she recovered the weapon and fled to the wall. When she turned it was to see the butt of a six-gun rising and falling. There was a gasp, a groan, and one of the struggling figures sank down.

The one still standing was Hugh McClintock. The man on the floor writhed painfully, turned over, and sank into quietude.

"Are you hurt?" Hugh asked Vicky.

"No. Are you?"

He shook his head. "I fell asleep. Lucky it was no worse."

"So did I. He was creeping on me when I woke. Is—he dead?" she asked, awed.

"No such luck. I tapped his skull with my gun." He stooped over the prostrate man and turned him on his back. "Hello! Here's a wound in his shoulder. You must have hit him."

"Oh, I hope not," Vicky cried.

She looked at the big revolver with a face of horror and threw it on the shelf where she had found it some hours earlier.

"Probably saved my life," Hugh told her quietly. "And you haven't killed him. He'll

be all right in a week or two. Good work, Vicky."

"I—didn't know what I was doing," she sobbed. "My fingers just pressed."

Dutch groaned.

"Best thing could have happened," Hugh said cheerfully. "He'll not trouble us any more. Have to dress the wound, though. If it makes you sick to—"

"It won't," she cried eagerly. "Let me help. What can I do?" Her reaction was toward activity. If she could help to look after the man she might forget the awful thing she had by chance escaped doing.

"Rummage through that drawer. Find clean shirts or rags. Tear one into strips," Hugh told her.

She flew to the drawer and began tossing out socks, woolen shirts, old gloves, a pipe, some "dog-leg" tobacco, a pack of cards, a few ore samples, and a vest or two of fancy patterns. Near the bottom she found a cotton shirt. This she ripped up for bandages. McClintock brought water and washed the wound. His enemy permitted it, sulky as a sore bear. The wounded man winced when Hugh tried, as gently as possible, to locate the bullet.

"Quit—stop that," he growled. "Doc Rogers'll find the pill."

"Expect you're right about that," Hugh agreed. "He can follow the drift better than I can. Never worked on that level before myself. Doc will sure strike the ore when he digs for it."

Vicky passed the bandages to him as he needed them. He noticed once that the blood had washed from her face and left it colorless.

"You'd better sit down," he said gently. "I can manage alone."

"No," she told him firmly. In spite of the soft pallor of the neck and throat there was a look of strength about her. He knew she would not faint. The spirit of the girl shone in her eyes.

But afterward, when Dutch had been ordered to lie down on the cot by the window, Hugh took charge of Vicky without consulting her. He arranged three chairs in such a way that they might serve for a bed, padded them with sacks, and doubled a blanket so that the girl could lie between its folds. An old coat belonging to Ralph Dodson did well enough for a pillow. In five minutes she was breathing softly and regularly, though she had told Hugh it would be impos-

sible for her to sleep. The firelight playing on her cheek reflected a faint and delicate color.

When Vicky woke it was morning. A pale and wintry sunbeam stole through the window. The storm had passed. Hugh was cooking at the fireplace, his back to her. The desperado was sleeping noisily and restlessly. She rose, flushed with embarrassment, and arranged her wrinkled and disordered skirts.

"Good mo'ning," the young man called cheerfully without turning.

"Good morning," she answered shyly. For the first time since she had come into the house a queer surge of timidity swept her blood. The modesty of the girl was in arms.

"Your shoes are on the hearth warming."

"Yes," she murmured.

He carried hot water in a basin to a summer kitchen adjoining the main cabin.

"Towel hangin' on the nail," he told her when he returned a moment later.

Vicky gave him a grateful look and passed into the back room. Ten minutes later she emerged flushed and radiant. The dark, rebellious hair had been smoothed down. To Hugh the blue dress looked miraculously fresh and clean.

"Come an' have breakfast," he called cheerfully.

His matter-of-fact acceptance of the situation dissipated measurably her sense of alarm at the shocked proprieties. If he were not disconcerted at the intimacy into which the blizzard had plunged them why should she be? With the good, hearty appetite of youth she ate eggs, bacon, corn pone, and two flapjacks.

"When can we go?" she asked as he poured coffee into the tin cup before her.

"Soon as we've eaten. Some job to buck the drifts to town, but we'll make it."

"And him?" A little lift of her head showed that Vicky's elliptical question referred to Dutch.

"I'll notify his friends to come and look after him."

Hugh broke trail and Vicky followed in his steps. They traveled slowly, for in places the drifts were high. Usually the girl's clear complexion showed little color, but now she glowed from exercise. Once when he turned to lend her a hand through a bank of snow she shook her head gayly.

"No, I'm doing fine. Isn't it a *splendiferous* day?"

It was. The sun had come out in all its glory and was driving the clouds in ragged billows toward the horizon. The snow sparkled, it was crisp and sharp beneath their feet. The air, washed clean by the tempest, filled the lungs as with wine. Not on creation's dawn had the world looked purer or more unsullied.

Youth calls to youth. Vicky looked at Hugh with a new interest. She had always admired his clean strength, the wholesome directness of his character. To-day her eyes saw him differently. He belonged to her generation, not that of Mollie and Scot. For the first time his personality touched her own life. They could not be the same hereafter. They would have to know each other better—or not at all.

In her childhood days, when fairy tales were still possible, she had dreamed of a prince in shining silver armor, handsome as Apollo Belvidere, valiant as Lancelot, a pure and ardent young Galahad. Now, as she followed the trail breaker through the white banks, an involuntary smile touched her lips. She was wondering, in the shy, daring fashion of a girl's exploring mind, what Hugh McClintock was really like behind the mask of his physical clothing. Certainly nobody could be less like the shining knight of her dreams than he. For Hugh walked the straight, plain road of life without any heroic gestures. Ralph Dodson made a far more romantic figure than Hugh. Even Scot, with his native touch of the grand manner, had more glamour for her than the younger brother.

Good old Hugh, faithful and true. She could not think of anybody she liked better.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OLD DOG TRAY BARKS.

Jim Budd had picked up a new song. Much to the relief of his sore-trying wife, he occasionally monotoned it in place of the Grimes catalogue of virtues and clothing. Vicky could hear him in the kitchen singing it now:

"Old dog Tray ever faithful,
Grief cannot drive him away,
He's gentle and he's kind,
And you'll never, never find
A better friend than old dog Tray."

Oddly enough the words hummed them-

selves into Vicky's musings. She was standing before the mirror putting the finishing touches to a very attractive picture, a picture of lovely youth, warm, vital, piquant. Miss Vicky was expecting a caller, and though she hadn't any desire to dazzle this particular admirer—if he were an admirer, for she hadn't made sure of that yet—she did not choose to be so ungrateful as to neglect any of the natural advantages with which a kind Providence had endowed her.

She murmured the fat man's refrain:

"He's gentle and he's kind,
And you'll never, never find
A better friend than——"

Mrs. Budd poked her head into the room. "Hugh McClintock," she announced. "In the parlor."

"Here to see me?" asked Miss Lowell, just as though she had not known he was coming.

"I kinda gather that notion. Anyhow, he asked for you. Were you fixin' up for me an' Jim?"

"I'll be right down, tell him."

"I would, dearie. He's certainly wearin' out the rim of his hat makin' it travel in circles." After which shot Mrs. Budd puffed downstairs and read the riot act mildly to Jim for having tracked mud into her immaculate kitchen.

If Hugh was embarrassed it was because of the nature of his mission this evening. He had plenty of native dignity, but he knew nothing of the thought processes of young women going on eighteen. Would they take well-meant advice in the same spirit in which it was given? He did not know, but he intended to find out.

Indirectly Vicky gave him a lead. "I've just had a letter from Mollie. What do you think? Scot's going to run for secretary or state."

"Made up his mind to run, has he? Knew he was thinkin' about it. Wonder if anybody else is goin' after the Republican nomination."

"Yes," said the girl quietly.

Hugh looked a surprised question at her.

"Mr. Ralph Dodson is going to run," she continued.

He let that sink in for a moment. "Sorry," he said. "It's liable to open up the old sore."

"Do you think it will?" she asked anxiously.

"Not unless the Dodsons make it a personal fight."

"I don't think Ralph would do that."

"You know him pretty well." He put his comment with the rising inflection.

"Yes. That is, he comes to see me."

Vicky's chin was up ever so little. She sensed McClintock's hostility. "I like him."

"Do you? Can't say I do. I don't trust him."

"Do you know him well?"

"No. And I don't want to."

The girl laughed. "You remind me of what Charles Lamb says in one of his essays. We were reading it in school. Or maybe it was an anecdote about him the teacher told us. Anyhow, he said he didn't like a certain man. A friend asked him if he knew him. 'Of course I don't,' Lamb said. 'If I did I'd like him. That's why I don't want to know him.' Is it like that with you?"

He considered this gravely. "Maybe so. I'm prejudiced against him on account of his brother."

"But that's not fair," the girl cried quickly.

"And because of two or three things I've known him do."

"What things?" she demanded.

Hugh did not care to discuss with Vicky the man's amours. He shifted ground. "He's selfish through and through. Thinks only of himself."

The girl's eyes sparkled. "When you say that it just shows how little you know him. He's the most generous man I ever met."

"He's good lookin', and he's hail fellow enough. That's not what I mean."

"And it's not what I mean," she retorted, her temper beginning to rise: "Two or three months ago he did the bravest thing I ever saw—risked his life for hours in a caved tunnel, to save the life of a ragged little boy. Was that selfish? Was that thinkin' only of himself?"

"He's game. He'll go through," admitted Hugh. "I didn't mean that way."

Her stormy eyes challenged him. "Then just what *do* you mean?"

Hugh flushed. He did not find it possible to tell her explicitly just what he did mean. It was bad enough for him to be violating the masculine instinct against exposing another man to one of the opposite sex. He could not draw a bill of particulars about Dodson before an innocent girl. Moreover, what he

had heard of the man's escapades was merely town gossip, true enough he felt sure, but not evidence that could be held good before an ardent young advocate like Vicky.

"He's not very scrupulous some ways," he said lamely.

"What ways?"

McClintock felt himself being driven into a blind alley. He could not go on, nor could he turn back.

"I wouldn't want a sister of mine to know him too well," was the best he could do by way of explanation.

"That's merely an expression of a personal feeling," she flashed. "And since I'm not your sister it does not weigh with me. You come here and attack my friend. You say he's selfish and—unscrupulous. I ask for facts to back what you've said."

Though he had been put helplessly in the wrong, Hugh felt that he was right at bottom. Vicky had no business to have this fellow on the list of her friends. He tried to break from the logic of the position into which she had forced him by an appeal to their old friendship.

"I used to have a little partner called Vicky Lowell. We did not see much of each other, but we were *tillicams*. Oughtn't I to warn her when I see her going with the wrong kind of man?"

"And oughtn't I to ask you to *prove* to me he's the wrong kind? Or must I take it for granted and give up any of my friends if you happen not to fancy them?"

"I tell you he isn't right—not right for a girl like you to know."

"You admit yourself you're prejudiced."

"Not about that. If you'll let me I'll call his hand for a show-down. Let him prove to me he's been slandered and I'll—"

Vicky exploded. "If you dare, Hugh McClintock! Did Scot appoint you deputy guardian of me? Do you think I can't look after myself? Do you think you can come here and slander my friends?" She stopped white with anger.

He gave up, with a helpless lift of his hands. "I made a mistake. Sorry. I believe every word I've said, but I reckon I blundered somehow. I meant the best ever, Vicky, but—oh, well, you can't see it my way. I'll say good evenin'."

Hugh rose. He offered his strong brown

hand and with it a smile that asked for forgiveness. She hesitated. Her anger at him was not yet spent. From the next room came Jim Budd's wheezy refrain, tuneless and monotonous.

"Old dog Tray ever faithful,
Grief cannot drive him away;
He's gentle and he's kind,
And you'll never, never find
A better friend than old—dog—Tray."

"Just old dog Tray," Hugh said, and his smile was a little wistful. "A faithful old blunderer, but, after all, an honest friend."

Vicky relented on swift impulse and gave him her hand. "All right—old dog Tray. But I warn you that you'll have grief enough to drive you away if you behave like this again."

"I'll come back even though you throw stones at me," he said, and this time his grin was gay. "Maybe I'll bark again at yore friends and maybe I won't. We'll see."

"Take my advice, and don't," she warned.

"You didn't take mine."

"And that's only half of it. I'm not going to," the girl flung back, looking at him with a flash of mischief in her eyes.

"Well, I can't help that. It's good medicine." He added a suggestion: "Tell Dodson that I warned you against him if you like."

"Why would I do that?" she asked.

"I don't want to feel underhanded about it. I'd rather you did tell him."

"Well, I won't," she said with decision.

"What kind of a girl do you think I am?"

"If you want me to tell you how nice a girl I think you are—"

"Now, now," she protested, laughing. "That's not what old dog Trays are for."

"Thought you asked me," he replied with deep innocence.

"First you were Mr. Goodman to me. Then you were Santa Claus. Then Mr. Hugh McClintock. Now you're old dog Tray. I wonder what you'll be next," she queried.

For a flash their eyes met before the mask fell. She drew back, startled; then decided that she had been mistaken. For in that beat of time it seemed to her that his soul had answered her question and told her what he meant to be to her next.

Of course she had imagined it.

Ways of the Orient

By Roy Norton

Author of "Goliath and Delilah," "Old Harmless," Etc.

Chinese highbinders weren't quite in David and Goliath's line, but the partners were determined that Yip Sin Tan's niece should get what was coming to her

WHEN the mining partners, commonly known as David and Goliath because of their contrast in size, rode out of Auburn, late in a summer's evening, and passed down the mysteriously long and beautiful road that led to the forks of the American River, their world was at peace. When they dismounted by the old Wire Bridge, that ancient structure woven with infinite pains by long-dead hands, and stopped at the tollhouse, they had no intention of paying to cross; for the way to their camp lay far upward along that climbing, rugged, and picturesque tongue of mountain spur which necessitated a forage rather than a toll. They dismounted at the tollhouse, because it was the custom that not even the stage from Georgetown or from Forest Hill or travelers from the Big Divide that lay wild, rugged, and remote against the far eastern sky, should pass the tollhouse without at least a few minutes of conversation with old Charley Case, or, possibly, something in the way of refreshment that Charley Case, the tollkeeper, bearded, but kindly, taciturn, but sociable, might thrust across his ancient wooden bar.

"Don't make as much out of you fellers as I used to when you was handlin' the Big Dam property. Goin' across to-night?" Case bantered.

"Nope, Charley. Headin' for the high hills. Reckon we'll push through by moonlight, or if we get too lazy, maybe we'll stop overnight when we get to Forest Hill," Goliath drawled, in his big, friendly voice.

"Yip Sin Tan seems to have a pretty steady job, lookin' after Miss Sloan's property," David added in his crisp snap, and then added thoughtfully, "Good old Yip! If ever there was a white chink, he's sure one."

"Sure is," Case agreed, leaning on his elbows across the bar and then looking out of the window of the tollhouse, which hung

above the river that brawled far below at the base of a little cliff. "I like old Yip," he said. "Known him for more'n thirty years. Honest as gold, that old chink, and never done nobody any harm in all his life. Worked hard ever since he first came along in them days when there was a gang of China boys that was hired by the Bench Diggin's Company. Poor cusses! There's sixteen of 'em under the hillside up there. Buried when the big slide came, and a whole mountain slipped over on top of 'em. Yip and four others was all that was left, and—they wouldn't ever work that ground any more.

He stopped, frowned a trifle, and his voice lost its reminiscent quality as he again faced the partners.

"By the way, you two ain't seen Yip lately, have you? Thought you hadn't. Somethin' botherin' the old chap. Looks as if he had a heap of trouble, or was scared about somethin' or another, or as if he was gettin' old and ill. Come to think of it, he's been actin' that way for about a month now—ever since a strange chink showed up here. This strange chink blew in here and asked how to find Yip. Maybe I'd not of thought much about it if it hadn't been that this feller was—was—somehow different from most of 'em. No pidgin-English chink this. Talked the lingo as well as me and you. It was about noon when he crossed the bridge, and it was about sunset when he came back. On foot he was. Awful big feller. Must have stood about six feet three and— My Lord! Ugly, savage, surly lookin' cuss with hard eyes—just like jet beads.

"That night Yip comes down and sits over there in the corner, as if he was lonely. Nothin' so terrible strange about that, because he comes two or three times a week. But this night the old feller sits there and is all huddled up, and shivers as if he had

a chill, and I asked him if he was sick. But he said 'no,' and shook his head. But he didn't tell me anything, of course. Chinks is mighty uncommunicative about 'emselfes even with old friends. Then he gets up, with another big sigh, and toddles off home. Then he almost quits comin' here any more, and I ain't seen him now for more'n ten days.

"I'd have gone up to see if he was sick, but one of the boys that came down from that side, who'd been prospectin' up in the hills behind, said he'd seen Yip, and that the old man was putterin' away on that piece of old ground you fellers told him he could work, so then I know'd it wa'n't sickness that was keepin' him away. And it can't be that I've done anything to the old feller. Not after thirty years bein' friends this a way."

The partners listened without attempt to conceal their interest and solicitude, for not only was Yip Sin in a sense an employee of theirs, but they had for him a genuine liking.

"That settles that, I reckon, don't it, pardner?" David said, reaching in his pocket for his wallet.

Goliath nodded.

"We'll put up with Yip to-night, Charley. Here's the toll," said David, planking his money on the bar. And then, as if in haste to solve this mystery, the partners trudged outside, gathered up the reins that had been thrown over their horses' heads to tether them cowboy fashion, swung up into their saddles, and rode at a sedate walk across the long bridge.

"He's in his old cabin," said David, when they came in sight of the camp. "Gettin' his grub, I reckon. See smoke comin' out. So he can't be sick abed."

And within a few minutes more they learned that his deductions were correct, and when they dismounted in front of the familiar stoop, Yip Sin, bent, old, and gnarled, peered at them from the door with something akin to apprehension in his eyes until he recognized them. His face twisted itself into a leathery grin of welcome, and he hastened to greet them.

"Velly glad! Velly glad you come," he said. "Glub? Stlay all night? Sure. Velly glad. Get more glub. Kill chicken now. Flid chicken velly good."

They cared for their horses, and climbed the hillside above the river to their own cabin, where they started a fire and made

their quick ablutions before returning to the cabin below. It was more or less like returning home and their eyes swept over the river below, scanned the empty bunk houses and shacks of the camp where they had once fought against nature, and wrested therefrom payment for their toil.

"I reckon Miss Marthy and her brother'll be back here next spring and this old dig-gin's will hum again. But she sure looks like the lonesomest place in the world right now," David commented as they descended the hillside.

"What I'm thinkin' about most, just now, is what's botherin' poor old Yip," Goliath grumbled, as if perplexed. "But maybe he'll talk. If he don't, there's no use in askin' questions. Chinks is mighty funny people, after all."

But whatever Yip Sin's peculiarities, he could cook, as they well knew, and so they ate and waited. It seemed that they were to wait in vain, for the old fellow passed nothing but commonplace comments, and did not seem elated even when he told them that he had found a few square yards of virgin soil that had yielded him more than two thousand dollars' worth of dust.

"Gee whiz! That orter make you right happy, Yip," David exclaimed, but the old man merely shook his head and stared at the floor as if nothing could lighten his secret gloom. They smoked, stretched, and waited, and at last, with an interchanged shrug of hopelessness, got up and announced their departure for their own cabin. Yip Sin gave a little gesture of despair, and then suddenly spoke, as if throughout the evening he had been considering something and had at last come to a decision. He came closer to them, and spoke in a low voice, as if fearful that even in the security of his cabin his words might be overheard by an enemy.

"Listen," he said. "You go. Bimeby I come. Allee same make talkee. Huh?"

The partners nodded, and passed out into the darkness through which they plodded upward toward where the treetops were barely silhouetted against the sky. They sat on the tiny porch in front of their cabin, talking but little and smoking steadily, until they saw the light go out from Yip Sin's window, and awaited his coming. He came noiselessly, and by a roundabout way as if fearful of the regular trail, and was upon them before they knew it.

"Come inside," he said. "No want any-

body hear. Maybe—maybe—you come—huh?"

They humored him, and even then he was not content until the door had been closed behind them and the heavy curtains drawn. In the meantime, he stood in the middle of the floor bent forward, with what appeared to be a faded denim blouse wrapped into a bundle and clutched in his arms.

"Mebbe best lock door," he said, and to humor him Dave did so. "Now, all velly good," he remarked and deposited his bundle in the middle of the rough pine table. He pulled a stool close to the two partners and spoke in a low murmur, scarcely audible.

"In Canton, China, I have a niece," he said, in his strange broken English. "My mother died a very old woman. Ten years in bed. My mother and my father gave all they had, sold themselves, to get money to send me to America to make my fortune. All their lives they worked hard, because for a long, long time I made not enough money to repay them. My niece was all my mother had left, and she cared for my mother faithfully.

"Now, all I have left is my niece. All gone to my ancestors. I have worked and worked and saved and saved, all the time saved, so that I could lay my bones beside my ancestors in China and make comfortable the faithful niece. Not until last week was it possible, and then I found the gold on the land you gave me. I was happy. I am very tired. Very old. And just then there——"

He stopped, clutched his gnarled, worn hands together, and twisted his fingers as an indication of his misery. He looked behind him into the corners of the room and listened breathlessly as if fearful that all he might say was being heard by enemy ears, and his every movement watched by enemy eyes.

"A long time ago—many, many years—more than thirty-five—I joined a Chinese secret company. I was a fool. I paid and paid and paid, but got nothing back. Then—I quit paying, and always said I was poor, and so by and by they left me alone, and I thought I was forgotten. But the way of the Chinese society is dark. You—you white men don't understand. They never forget. They never forgive. They never let go. Sometimes they kill! Understand? Kill those who will no longer obey or pay." He lifted his hands in a gesture of despair and

hopelessness, and stared abstractedly at the lamp with somber eyes.

"Well, go on Yip," David encouraged.

"No—more I dare not tell. No can do. Only this." He fished from his blouse pocket an envelope on which was scrawled in painful English an address of a woman's name in Canton, and this had been repeated in Chinese characters underneath it, as if to make certain of its delivery.

"Come here," he said, rising from his seat, and advancing to the table where he unrolled the blouse. Two worn, heavy leather bags were exposed, one of which he untied, showing that it was filled with gold dust. "Six thousand dollars there," he said laconically, as he retied the bag, and deposited it with its fellow. "Enough to make me rich in China, or make my faithful niece comfortable." He rerolled the treasure and returned to his seat. "Now," he said in that same subdued voice, "you have been my friends, have made it possible for me to get most of this, and I want you to help me again. You will do it because you are honest men. I want you to take this gold with you, and—if anything happens to me—send it to my niece. Understand?"

"But—but—what's the matter? Why don't you take it down to the bank in Auburn and send it yourself, Yip?" David asked, rubbing his bristling red hair with the tips of his fingers, as if perplexed.

"No can trust banks," said Yip emphatically. "One time, long time ago, I have more than two thousand dollars in one and then one day its door was shut and neither I nor a lot of China boys ever got our money back. Gone bust, the white sheriff told us. Never again money in banks. Always keep hid. That all I got. Too old to run risks of losing. Too old to work all over again. Niece too old to wait. They will not rob white men like you who savvy all things. But me—just an old chink! No, I want you to keep and send. Maybe not have to keep very long now," he added grimly, reaching for his hat.

"But—but hold on, Yip," said David, arresting him, "we don't get all this quite straight yet. Do you mean that—that this damned secret society is after you, now? After all these years?"

Yip Sin nodded with grim emphasis.

"Then, why didn't you square it some-way? Do they want money?"

"All of it! All me got!" exclaimed Yip

Sin, throwing his hands wide until the loose sleeves of his blouse spread out and waved like the wings of some helpless bird.

"Then, why in the deuce don't you shake 'em off? If you're really afraid of 'em, and think they'll get you, why don't you skip out for China now? You say you wanted to get back home," Goliath rumbled his questions one after the other without giving the depressed old man time to reply, and when the latter did so he gave a single answer.

"Can't! They killee me 'fore I get San Flisco, mebbe. If not, then killee me there before can catchee sleamship. You no savvy highblinder? Hatchet men? You no savvy many, many China boy killed on steets San Flisco maybe daylight, maybe noon, maybe night?"

"Well, if you stay here, what happens?"

The Chinese gave a shrug of his shoulders that while phlegmatic and stoical, indicated his utter helplessness, and his surrender to fate.

"Listen," he said gravely, "me velly old man. No can live many years more. Me? No matter! But—my niece. She must have that gold. You will send it to her?"

"If they get you, Yip, she shall have it if me and David have to carry it to her!" Goliath exclaimed. "You can bet on that! But why won't you let us help you to fight these damned highbinder countrymen of yours off? Fight 'em to a finish."

"Nope," said Yip Sin, "no good!" He turned, walked back, and caught the giant's hand and looked up at him with warm eyes, then bestowed a look of equal gratitude on David. "You been good fends to me. No use you mix up. Maybe you, too, get killed. No can tell. Highblinders velly bad men, but velly unafraid."

He stopped, turned away, and, without looking at them, said as he moved toward the door: "Nope. Besides, maybe not come at all. Maybe all what you callum bluff. Maybe nothing happen—nothing at all, at all. Good night."

The partners followed him to the door and saw him trudge away, unhurriedly, without looking back, a fatalist with all the tendencies of his race. For a long time after he had left they discussed the matter, but could come to no conclusion. David summed the situation up.

"If it wasn't for what Charley told us about that chink coming up here to see old Yip, I'd not think nothin' about it except

that the old chap's got the blues, or don't feel any too good, or needs a liver pill; but now—

"Say, by the way! He never said anything at all about that big chink, did he? I'll bet that's the nigger in the woodpile. That big stiff has been throwin' the hooks into the poor little cuss, and has got him scared stiff. Probably wants to hold him up for his money. But when he comes again and finds out that it's all in our hands, it's ten to one that he'll just shoot off a few fancy swear words about what he's goin' to do to us, and—that'll be the end of it. When he finds out that Yip ain't got nothin' left to be bluffed out of, he'll hop it for some more promisin' diggin's. What do you think?"

"Maybe so! Maybe so," Goliath agreed. "You most always get things figured out about right, Davy. Anyhow, I don't see as we can do nothin' about it. We can take care of his dust till he calls for it, though. I reckon he'll be around for it sooner or later."

It was nearly noon when, having bid Yip Sin good-by, "bucked him up" as much as they could, they halted before the tollhouse.

"How's Yip?" Case asked.

"Oh, he's all right. Only I guess he's got the blues," David answered.

The toll keeper shook his head and turned away to collect the toll from an outfit bound for Georgetown. The partners lounged in their saddles, and Goliath glanced at the ford, and then at the road to Auburn.

"Dave," he said, "don't you reckon maybe we'd better go on into town again and put this dust in the bank? If it was ours we could take a chance on caching it up at the camp, but—"

"Right you are," said Dave, and they turned and rode away toward the town. Once there they thought of other business they might just as well finish. They met friends they had not seen in months, played seven-up for another hour, then discovered that it was time to have supper. It was nearly ten o'clock that night when in the half moonlight they again dismounted before the tollhouse and found their friend drowsing over a county newspaper.

"Say," he began, "I didn't get a chance to hear from you fellers this mornin' all about old Yip. What did you say ailed him?"

"We told you he was all right," David answered. "All that ails him, I reckon, is that

he's bothered, and some superstitious—maybe it's some of those dod-gasted high-binder societies, or tongs, or somethin' like that. I reckon there's nothin' to it."

"What? What's that?" demanded the toll-keeper, suddenly thrusting his head forward as if he had not exactly understood. "Bothered about— Say! I don't know about there bein' nothin' to it. I reckon you chaps haven't seen as much of chinks as I have, maybe. I've seen a highbinder war right here in this gulch. I've seen six chinks killed in broad daylight—one of 'em, a cook, stabbed with a carving knife, on top of the roof of his shack where a hatchet man had chased him. They're devils, them high-binders are. And that ain't all of it, either, by a long shot."

He walked out from behind his bar and halted close to where the partners were standing and lowered his voice to a confidential pitch when he proceeded with: "This mornin' at half past three o'clock, that old mare of mine who is so old she's like a bed-ridden old woman, slung herself in her stall and woke me up tryin' to kick herself loose. I goes out with a lantern swearin' a little at bein' disturbed, and gets her straightened out. I blowed the lantern out and hung it up on a hook in the barn, and was just startin' back across the road to go to bed, when I heard a funny noise, and so stood still and listened, wonderin' what it could be.

"It was somebody comin' down the trail. They was almost in the road below me, and it was gettin' a little lighter as if dawn was bustin' along, and I could make out it was five men. But that ain't all, they were chinks! I could tell by their talk. I squatted down behind a stump, wonderin' what on earth that meant and why they should be comin' up here, and why at that time of mornin'. Chinks ain't any fonder of travelin' at night than any of the rest of us, if they're honest chinks. And then I'll be hanged if I didn't make out the one in the lead. Couldn't be mistaken. It was that six-foot-three, ugly-faced, English-speakin' cuss that called here askin' for Yip that time I told you about. He hissed 'em to keep still while they passed my house.

"I stood there scratchin' my head after they passed and thinkin' 'That's funny! Mighty funny!' and watched 'em out of sight. They stopped for a minute or two near the bridge head, then turned off up the left fork on the old Riggs Road. You ever

been up that way? Well, then you know that there's nobody been livin' up there for five or six years, and nothin' there but a half dozen abandoned cabins and shacks. Old dumps been worked over so much that even the chinks that used to be there finally gave it up, and when a Chinese miner leaves ground, you can bet it's worked out." He stopped, stared abstractedly at the open door, at the moonlight, at the great watering trough across the road and the pile of pails marked with the stage company's initials, and then turned and muttered: "Do you reckon them chinks was goin' up to Riggs' old camp to mine? If so, why the hell did they sneak along that way in the dark? Maybe you don't know Chinese as well as I do; but—I don't like it, I don't!"

"You're as bad as Yip!" Goliath rumbled, with good-humored contempt. "But—say, Dave, what's the use in us ridin' all night? What's the rush to get back up to our camp? Suppose we go over and sleep in our old cabin again, and in the mornin' maybe we'd better tell Yip about the chinks that went toward Riggs'. Eh?"

"Good!" David assented, and they dismissed the topic and detailed gossip of the camp to the toll keeper.

It was nearly midnight when they reached their old camp, and clattered past Yip's cabin on their way to the stable. No light was visible. The door did not open, and there was no call. David pulled his horse to a stop and said, "Hello! That's odd. Usually the old feller is on his feet in a minute. Sleeps like a cat. Yip! Hello the house! You asleep?"

Evoking no reply, he swung from his saddle and thumped on the door. Again there was no response. He tried the handle and found the door unfastened, opened it, and again bawled, "Yip! Hey you! You're a bird of a watchman, you are. Anybody could ride in here and rob the whole blamed camp without wakin' you up."

Goliath, sitting outside, heard his feet clumping across the floor, saw the flare of a match, and then heard an exclamation. He, too, dropped to earth, and followed his partner.

"He's not here!" David called. "Where's his lamp? Ah! Here it is." He lighted it and the partners scanned the room. The bed had been occupied, but was now cold. Otherwise the room was in order. They exchanged puzzled, bewildered glances until

David suddenly seized the lamp and went outside, into the still night, and dropping to a squatting posture began inspecting the earth in front of the stoop. Finding it too dry to bear signs, he moved out into the roadway, so little used, and Goliath, bending over him, heard him make a noise between his teeth that was half whistle, half hum. They suddenly straightened and stared at each other; for there in the dust, faint, but readable to their skilled eyes, were the footmarks of several men who had worn peculiar shoes. Like a pair of hounds on scent they now hastened farther down the road and bending forward and holding the lamp low in the still night, picked up signs still more readable to their trained sight.

"That settles it!" David said, straightening up. "Two men half led or dragged or half forced a man between them down this trail some time to-night. That man was Yip, and the men that nailed him was that gang from up Riggs' way."

As if words were useless he turned back toward the cabin. The light flamed up against the glass globe and he paused to blow it out, then hastened inside and left it on the table, returned to Goliath, and together they ran up the hill to their own old quarters where, still speechless and in hot haste, they rushed to the inner room and seized the heavy pistols and belts they had not worn for a long interim of peaceful days, strapped them on, and ran pell-mell down the hillside.

They swung into their saddles, turned their horses, and at a full gallop charged over the road they had so recently traveled, exchanging speculations as they went. They tore across the bridge and leaped to the ground in front of the tollhouse that was now closed, and battered on the door. The tollkeeper, who was just turning in, opened it and peered at them.

"It's Yip! Yip's gone!" David explained. "Been dragged from his bed, and brought down this way some time to-night."

"God! Them hatchet men didn't waste much time after they got here, did they?" growled Case. "Here. Wait a minute till I get my coat and my gun. I'll go with you. It's to Riggs' camp that we want to go, and want to go fast. I'll hang on to your stirrups and we'll be there in no time at all. It's only about a mile and a half from here."

"We'll take turns at the running and riding," said Goliath. "Good!" Case answered.

Within five minutes they were charging up

the old abandoned road that was soft with overgrowth and fallen leaves, and finally with the horses panting and David, who had done the last stretch afoot, panting also, they led the horses into the thickets beside the road, tethered them, and hurried forward on foot. They went cautiously, talking in whispers and fearful lest there be a watchman on guard, despite the tollkeeper's muttered surmise that this would not be the case.

"Nope! I think if they're here they'd take it for certain that no one would ever molest 'em at whatever they're at," he explained. "No one ever comes this way any more. There's the cabins, down there in the shadow of the gulch. See 'em?"

"Yes, and that isn't all. There's a light in one of 'em, if I'm not mistaken," said Goliath.

"By heck! I believe you're right," said David. "We'd best go mighty easy now."

They slipped downward, avoiding the open trail and moonlit spots, and traveling in the shadows of the trees at the border. They held their guns in readiness when they ran across the one open space of moonlight between them and the first cabin, half expecting to hear a shout of alarm; but none came, and now they went even more cautiously toward the cabin where a dim light could be seen through a blanketed window. They gained the side of the cabin and listened intently. A harsh voice was uttering emphatic words in Chinese, and there was a wait as if an answer had been demanded to a question, and the answer was not forthcoming. The harsh voice again spoke, and now there was a babel of voices, excited, but otherwise meaningless to the listening ears.

David plucked Goliath by the arm and drew him along the wall.

"The chinkin's gone from between the logs over there," he whispered, and they came to a spot near the corner where a ray of light shone forth, but could not gain a view of the room. They reconnoitered around the corner and now came to a place where there was a gap an inch wide and extending for many feet. They looked within, and suddenly shut their teeth grimly; for they saw, stripped and bound on a tumble-down old bench, Yip Sin Tan, while bending above him, and threatening him, stood a huge yellow man with sleeves rolled up as if he were an executioner. Yip Sin's face was scarcely recognizable for the bloodstains, indicating that he had been heavily beaten, but his eyes

were fixed resolutely on the man above him, and there was no sign of flinching.

There were three other men peering at him, one of whom held a knife whose edge he tested tentatively with his thumb, as if expecting to be called upon to use it. A fire was going in the old fireplace, despite the warmth of the night, but was partially concealed by a man bending above it.

"My God! Whatever we do has got to be done fast," whispered Case. "And the worst of it is that if we charge into 'em they'll probably blow out the light if they get a chance, and slip a knife between Yip's ribs. They'll try to get him, no matter what happens. But we've got to chance it."

"Goliath," whispered David, "you're the heaviest. You go round to the front and go through that door like a batterin'-ram. Charley, you get around by the window and the minute you hear Goliath at the door smash it in. Me, I'll stay here and try and keep anybody from blowin' out the lamp."

The others skipped stealthily away, and David again bent and peered through the slit, then stifled an oath of anger. The man who had been bending in front of the fireplace suddenly arose and his occupation was now plain, for he held a poker that was heated to white heat and that glowed savagely as he turned with it in his hand. The tall man took it from him and again bent above Yip Sin with another threatening flow of words, as if making a final demand. Yip shook his head grimly and kept his lips shut tightly above his teeth.

"Lord! Lord! They won't dare do it! Why doesn't Goliath hurry! Ain't he ever goin' to smash that door in," groaned David to himself, and hoping for just a minute more of delay within.

Suddenly the huge man moved and before David could even shout had pressed the heated iron into the palm of one of Yip's hands. A quick spurt of vicious smoke from burning flesh swept upward, and Yip Sin Tan's scream of anguish was drowned in a heavy report. The man holding the poker threw his hands upward, the poker flew into the air, and the torturer fell backward with a crash and lay motionless upon the floor.

David, with blazing eyes and mind had fired to kill, and his marksmanship was proven. As if everything had come to an abrupt climax at once, the door came crashing inward, the window fell in fragments, and one of the highbinders plunged forward

to extinguish the light. Again David shot and the man wildly clutched his throat and fell writhing to the floor. The shot was instantly followed by another, for David's quick eye had caught the movement of the man with the knife who was leaping forward to strike death into their victim, and again David effectually shot to kill. Goliath was confronted by a man with a knife and felled him with a single shot, just as Case came bounding through the window. The last of the highbinders dropped to hands and knees, ran nimble as a squirrel almost beneath Goliath's lifted arm, and out into the night.

As if time were resting after all this breathless, swift clash of combat and death, there was an abrupt and strange silence that had the effect of a prodigious pause. It was broken by a moan, and the three men hastened forward to Yip Sin, and bent above him.

"Poor old Yip!" said David. "You're all right now. Here, we'll have you loose from this in a jiffy."

He opened his clasp knife and slashed at the thin cords, and together they lifted him up into a more comfortable position. They looked at his frightfully burned palm and swore softly in sympathy. Case brought from the corner a battered old pail that was half filled with water, and with his handkerchief began cleansing the old man's face with a rough hand that strove to be as tender as a woman's. Not for ten minutes did they pay any heed at all to the fallen men upon the floor, and then discovered that another was missing.

"It's that feller I plugged through the neck," growled David, bending over the body of the chief torturer. "This one's dead. Bull's-eye on his forehead." He moved to another. "This, too, was a right neat shot. Never knew what got him. And this one," he said, as he half lifted the third highbinder, "will be gone in about ten minutes from now, I reckon. Here, let's lay him on the bench and see where he's hit and if we can do anything for him."

But whatever pity they had was futile, for almost before they had stripped loose the denim blouse the man gave a final twitch and lay still. Goliath slipped his hand down over the heart and shook his head. "Finished. He'll heat no more irons to burn decent flesh," he said. "What are we goin' to do next? I'm not particularly fond of this place."

"Reckon we'd better blow out the lamp, shut the door, and get poor old Yip down to my cabin where I can souse that hand of his in sweet oil, and wrap it up in cotton, hadn't we? We can talk it over then and come to a decision," suggested the tollkeeper, and with a last glance around the room they acted.

At the tollhouse they ministered to the victim of the highbinders, and put him to bed, after which, with heads together, like conspirators, they discussed and weighed and planned. They spoke so quietly that, had any one been eavesdropping outside, he could not have distinguished their words. At last all three stood up, and Goliath remarked, "I reckon that's the best way out of it. We're all agreed on that, ain't we?"

"We are," said the tollkeeper. "I'll stay here and keep an eye on Yip so that if them other snakes are hangin' around anywhere and come this way, I'll——" he stopped and patted his pistol holster with significant emphasis, and the partners nodded their heads and trudged outside.

The lamp in the tollhouse had guttered out, and the dawn was breaking when they returned. Case was sound asleep in his chair, with his pistol lying in his lap; but at the sound of their footsteps he sat up with a jerk and rubbed his eyes.

"All right?" he asked, and when they answered "yes," said, "Then all that's left for us to do is to get poor old Yip back up to his cabin, and for some of us to stick around till he gets healed up. I'll make some coffee. Yip'll need somethin' to brace him up, and a little of it'll do Dave an' you a heap of good."

It was a week later when the partners made a mysterious trip with old Yip Sin Tan. They halted at the tollhouse, and Case and the old man shook hands as if for a final parting. The tollkeeper stood in the middle of the road with the wind blowing his shock of hair and beard and watched them out of sight. At the last turn Yip Sin stopped, looked back and waved his hand, and then trudged on after the two white men.

But it was many months later when the partners, coming down from the great back hills of the divide, grinned at the tollkeeper as they dismounted, and received his friendly grin in return.

"Got a letter inside here directed to all three of us," he said, getting his spectacles from behind the bar and pulling out his cash till, from behind which he extracted the letter and opened it.

"Whoever Yip got to write it for him, was surely some string halted in using this beautiful language of our'n," he said. "Here. You make it out," and the partners spread it on the bar and read:

I very happy home. My honored niece well. My honored niece happy. I buy farm. No but sometimes my heart cly for you good mans. more minen. I too old. I well. I happy. All I pray my Joss each day make you all happy. Joss very good Joss. He make very good luck by you. Goodbye. Yip Sin Tan.

For a time the partners said nothing and the tollkeeper stared absently through the doorway as if recalling a long past event.

"Funny stamps they put on letters over in China, ain't they," said David, inspecting the envelope. "Ain't at all like ours, be they?"

Nobody answered him. Case turned round and replaced the letter in the till and shut it.

"I get tired of hangin' round here all the time," he said. "Day before yesterday I took a walk. Went up toward Riggs' old camp. Damn lonesome place, Looked just the same way it's looked for about six years. Couldn't see nothin' at all unusual or wuth lookin' at; but—the trip was sort of lucky for me. I found one of my shovels that had been missin' for some months, and I brung it back home." He glared good-humoredly at David and added, "Some folks I know is mighty all-fired careless about returnin' shovels they've borrowed. I reckon if any stranger had of wandered up that way, he might have wondered whyfor that shovel was leanin' up against a tree out there in the woods, and as for me, I'd have been a shovel short all the rest of my life."

David's hand slapped itself on the bar as if to emphasize his exclamation.

"By heck!" he said, "I never thought of that blamed shovel from that night till now! I reckon I'm one of the forgetfullest cusses that ever walked on two legs."

Goliath grinned. The tollkeeper yawned and said, as if addressing no one in particular, "Forgettin's a mighty convenient thing, after all. Well, here's luck!"

Another David and Goliath story, "The Lord Provides," appears in the next issue.

Number Fifteen and Jonah

By Hugh Kennedy

Author of "The Alcohaling Tragedy," "The Plute and Z-23," Etc.

Here is a seagoing detective problem which will keep you guessing to the last line. A patient man was Pindar in his search for the one who "knew too much," but there was more than patience to his plan of campaign

ALREADY the *Valdes* had steam up. From the open door of my little wireless cabin on the upper deck I could hear the sputter and hiss of the safety valve overhead, as if it threatened to break into a roar if goaded by another pound of pressure.

It was somewhere near ten-thirty of a cloudless night in June and we were due to sail at eleven. From the skipper to Ah Ling, the cook's understudy, all hands were already on board. The wharf alongside was thundering to the trucks of the longshoremen as they transferred the last deliveries of freight from the receiving shed to the lower deck.

A stout little freight and passenger boat, the *Valdes* plied in the Gulf of Georgia and up and down the west coast of Vancouver Island. For passengers—cabin passengers, that is to say—she had small accommodation and required less. Except for laborers drifting between town and camp and for coast Indians on excursions from their villages, travelers avoided her. They had good reason; for a principal item of her cargo was whale oil. Seasickness itself is an evil to be braved where it cannot be avoided—and on any west coast boat only the hardiest ordinarily can avoid it; but only on the *Valdes* could whale oil—to the novice almost equally nauseating—be had as a traveling companion. What wonder that few ever braved the double affliction by taking voluntary passage with us.

Between puffs of a cigarette I idly watched the machinelike movements of the freight handlers. At times, my glance drifting shoreward, I caught a glimpse of some shadowy pedestrian against the gloomy front of a warehouse, or indifferently took in the length of Water Street, dimly lighted and at this hour almost deserted.

Far down the street some moving figures caught my eye. Invading the cone of light cast by a street lamp, they revealed themselves as a small crowd of men and boys. They were approaching. In the lead came on a tall man who seemed to be closely following—rather to be pulled along by—a dog on a chain, a dog that kept an eager nose to the ground. Never halting, straining always at his leash, he scented unerringly along some warm and undeviating trail.

Suddenly I thrilled to the meaning of what I saw. Often I had read of Vancoria's notorious experiment with police dogs. For weeks after the force had adopted them they had been a favorite butt of every newspaper paragrapher. Here was one of them in action. I was watching a man hunt.

The cabin just forward of mine and aft of the wheelhouse was the skipper's. He was in, for I had just heard him splashing water in his hand basin. A dapper officer was Captain Angon, as spruce as any master of an ocean liner, tied down though he was to an evil-smelling little coaster like the *Valdes*; tied down, but not for much longer if water-front gossips spoke true.

"Oh, captain," I shouted, "come on out, will you, and take in the show."

After a deliberate interval the skipper opened his door. His coat fully buttoned, his cap at its usual jaunty angle, he stepped out all ready for the bridge, except that he was still using a nail file. A tidy officer. Captain Angon, if ever there was one. "What's all the ballyhoo, Sparks?" he asked in his usual cool voice.

I pointed eagerly shoreward. "Look there, sir," I said.

He didn't even desist from his manicuring. "H'm!" he commented presently. "Tracking some one, eh?"

Nose down, the dog had by this time

led straight along until almost opposite the berth of the *Valdes*. Now he crossed the curving street diagonally to the footbridge that led down to the wharf. Silently, at the length of the taut leash, the stalwart keeper followed. The men and boys, a dozen or more, trailed in the rear.

"Here," thought I, "is where we get some action. Those longshoremen are a tough lot at best. Wonder what one of them has been putting over."

On the wharf the dog for the first time seemed to be at a loss. He stopped, raised his muzzle, sniffed the air to right and left. His eagerness increased. His body quivered. He uttered subdued little yips, as though aware that his quarry lurked near. Intently the man watched him, but gave him no word either of encouragement or command. Soon his nose went down again. Slowly, haltingly, with false starts to one side or the other, he led his master step by step to the foot of the gangplank thrown out from the forward deck of the *Valdes*.

Still interested in his nails, the skipper moved forward to the bridge for a better view. More eagerly I followed and leaned over the rail. "Surely, sir," I ventured, "that brute is not going to accuse the old *Valdes* of crime!"

The idea seemed to tickle the skipper. He chuckled softly.

All the dog's former certainty had now returned. He led straight up the gangplank. I could hear the scratching of his claws, his eager panting, could even see the pink of his tongue. As he broke into the brighter light at the deck level his glittering eyes and forward-pointing ears made an unforgettable picture of zeal and alertness.

On the deck he came again to a momentary standstill. Once more his muzzle went into the air. Then with shrill yips of triumph he dashed across the tarpaulined hatch, dancing on hind legs to strain at his leash. At last his quarry stood before him. Fiercely he pawed and scratched at the nearest of the deck load of empty oil drums. This was the malefactor he had tracked from the scene of his crime!

His master, a plain-clothes man, made no attempt to correct the dog or to put him again on the trail. After a quick look as though to assure himself that no one could be lurking among the close-packed drums he seemed to accept the animal's verdict as final.

"Well, Mr. Sleuth," chuckled the skipper, "now that you have run the rascal down, why don't you arrest him? I'll answer for him going quietly." Always keen for his joke was the captain; and the sharper its sting the keener his relish for it.

The officer kept his temper. "I suppose we do look a bit foolish, captain. Hope we haven't alarmed you. I was just—er—giving the dog a work-out."

"Some dog you have there. It takes a keen nose to scent out a drum of whale oil."

The man led his dog back to the head of the gangplank. "Oh, Bruno's all right." You could feel that his professional pride was touched, but he managed a smile. "I swear by Bruno. He has never let me down yet."

The skipper had no mercy. "What's his favorite whale—sperm or humpback? We carry all kinds and our aim is to please."

The officer laughed a low, mellow laugh. "Come along, old pup, we must be going. They'll be guying us if we hang around here any longer."

"Come again," invited the skipper. "We've no end of even smellier drums in the hold."

With a gleam of even white teeth the man looked up. "I will," he promised pleasantly.

The crowd, waiting curiously on the wharf, broke into muttered derisive laughter, as though feeling itself sold. It fell apart into groups and melted away toward the street and fresh attractions. Captain Angon turned back to his room. The rumble of the longshoremen's barrows once more resounded from the freight shed.

My curiosity far from satisfied, I watched the officer descend the gangplank with his dog. He made no further move to depart, but seated himself on a low mooring post near by. For a full minute he sat with bent head, elbow on knee, motionless, absorbed. Obscured as he was in the shadow of the vessel, I could not distinguish his features, but his pose reminded me of pictures I had seen of a figure called *The Thinker*, by Rodin. His very back seemed to think.

Suddenly he sprang erect and looked up at me. "Sails at eleven, doesn't she?" he asked in his deep, pleasant voice.

"Eleven sharp," I assured him.

He turned and strode briskly across the wharf. The dog followed at his heels. He did not go back the way he had come, but took the most direct course uptown. In a

minute his vigorous strides had carried him out of sight.

"Well," thought I, "that's the last we'll see of that bird. Whatever his game, he fell down, and fell hard. The papers spoke the proverbial true word in their jesting. Those dogs are a flivver. They be all right across country, but in the city, where they've got to pick their way among a thousand false trails, they simply are not there. They switch to the strongest scent that gets into their nostrils. My guess is that old Bruno followed his man all right to the wharf. That's where he must have got his scents mixed. He got off on the smell of the oil and took the shortest cut to the nearest drum."

I went back to my cabin and put on the ear phones to listen in until sailing time. A Jap liner inbound off Flattery was giving his position and some of the news of his voyage—dull stuff. Now, what had that plain-clothes man meant by asking the hour of sailing? What had that to do with his man hunt—or his work-out? Did he still take the thing seriously?

It was almost on the stroke of eleven. The skipper, watch in hand, stood waiting to pull the whistle cord for the usual signal of departure. The helmsman stood ready with hand on wheel. Just then a motor car shot up to the street end of the footbridge. Even before its screeching brakes had brought it to a stop a tall man had stepped briskly from it. He began to hurry along the bridge toward the wharf. He carried a suit case and a light overcoat, as though prepared for a journey. He reached the wharf and made directly for the gangplank of the *Valdes*. For once we were to have a cabin passenger. It was the plain-clothes man.

In a small ship's company, cooped up much together without the stimulus of fresh faces or of stirring incident, conversation ordinarily lags. Its tendency is to reduce itself to a monotone of personal banter, a tame exercise of wit that serves the same purpose between men as graphite between the engaged surfaces of machinery.

Now, however, the *Valdes* lacked neither the fresh face nor unusual incident. Some version of the police-dog story had spread to every member of the crew, and the knowledge that the detective had at the last moment taken passage on board was common property. In the little dining saloon, there-

fore, breakfast the next morning proved a lively meal. Gregg, the purser, who at best had no great share of that imperturbability with which the sea is wont to clothe its followers, became almost garrulous in his eagerness for news. Even dour old MacGrudder, the chief engineer, pricked up his ears to listen with occasional grunts of doubt or disapproval.

I had nearly finished my own meal before the skipper, self-possessed and well groomed as usual, took his place at the head of the table. He was evidently in one of his chaffing moods. "Well, Sparks," he began, "what has become of your Jonah this morning?"

"Jonah, sir?" He had me puzzled for the moment.

"The sleuth," he explained. "As the sole and unwelcome passenger of a vessel bound for the whale zone don't you think the name fits him? Has he no appetite for ham and eggs this fine, fresh morning?"

Our passenger had, in fact, not yet appeared. We were not yet out of the strait, but Flattery loomed on our bow, and the roll of the vessel to the long swell of the Pacific made breakfasting a possibility to seasoned appetites only.

"What do you think, chief," pursued the skipper, "the blighter told me for my ear alone on the bridge last night?"

"Hist!" warned the purser. "He might hear. I put him in number three last night." He pointed to one of the stateroom doors that opened directly off the little saloon. All space had to be utilized on the *Valdes*.

"Thank you, Gregg. Politeness to passengers is a purser's first duty." With no attempt to lower his voice the skipper continued: "He told me that there had been a stabbing affair in town last night below the dead line and that the indications pointed to a member of this crew as the criminal! What do you think of that, Mac?"

The chief set down his cup of coffee without any sign of surprise. "If he can prove onything worse about some of this crew than I mysel' think of them," he growled through his beard, "it's hangman's work he'll be making."

The skipper grinned the delight he never failed to evince at drawing one of the taciturn old chief's caustic sallies. "Right, chief. He seems a pleasant enough sort of

chucklehead; but hangman's work is precisely what he intends to make of it."

The purser could preserve silence no longer. "Why, sir, Sparks says that he only claimed to be giving his dog a practice run. You don't think he's in earnest?"

"As earnest as a bear with a jam tin. That work-out story was only a bluff invented on the spur of the moment to cover his dog's mistake and prevent the guilty man taking alarm. Nothing can shake his faith in that dog. His man, he maintains, is a member of this crew."

"But why," argued the purser, "if the brute is so good, did he not go on and actually scent out the man he had been tracking?"

Ah Ling diverted the skipper's attention for a moment. "Yes, Ling, bacon and eggs; and let those eggs be just right. I say, you deep, mysterious villain, you haven't been pulling off anything special in the stabbing line lately, have you?"

Ah Ling had the Oriental virtue of silence. Grinning like a true courtier at the jest of royalty, he slid on noiseless feet to the galley. "Eggsy bacon," he sing-songed to Wing Foy, the cook, "eggsy all same sleepy eyes."

The skipper listened with as much apparent delight as though hearing Ah Ling's well-known litany for the first time. Then with a return to his caustic tone he leveled his porridge spoon at the purser. "You fail, my friend, to get the delicate compliment that Jonah is paying us all. He has worked out a theory that all members of this crew have the same characteristic odor. We have all associated with oil drums till we have come to resemble them—a fact I had myself long suspected of the engine-room crew."

Old Mac drew a scornful draft of coffee through his mustache.

"In short," concluded the skipper, with a wink of gratification over scoring on the old chief, "our shoe soles, our clothes, are all heavy with the smell of the oil. This is the scent, according to Jonah, that the dog first picked up at the scene of the crime; therefore, a man whose soles reeked with that odor committed the crime. That smell led the dog to our deck; therefore, the criminal is one of this ship's company. There you have the sleuth's reasoning."

"But how," persisted Gregg, "does he explain the drum?"

"Better ask him himself," suggested the

skipper tartly; "he seems to be a patient sort of fellow."

"Don't you think, sir," I ventured, "that the dog might have tracked some one—a longshoreman, for instance—as far as the wharf, and that there the smell of the oil became so overpowering that he simply switched to it and made his way to the nearest object that gave out that smell direct?"

"I think it's all poppycock," snapped the skipper. Then with a quick return to affability: "Not that Jonah isn't entirely welcome to his theories. Once let that dog get a scent and you cannot switch him, he says. Moreover, the brute had his nose to an unbroken track, he maintains, until he stood on the deck in plain sight of the drum that answered to the scent he had been following. For him, that puts it up to the *Valdes*. The dog having picked out the right boat, the dog's master undertakes to pick out the right man."

"Sounds sort of reasonable," conceded Gregg; "more reasonable than comforting. I'm wondering what sort of welcome those roughnecks forward will give him when they hear of it."

The skipper stroked his neatly pointed beard. "Perhaps," he mused, "you can recall what happened to the original Jonah at the hands of the crew." He broke into a laugh of relish for the conceit. "What do you think, chief?"

The old engineer had risen. "I'm thinkin', if I'm tae be under suspicion of murder, I'll e'en be keeping ma mouth shut. Ithers can dae as they please."

"Don't be too canny," grinned the skipper, "or you may only bring suspicion on yourself. Think of your dark past."

"It's ill company I keep, at ony rate," admitted Mac from the companionway.

Gregg's curiosity was not to be diverted. "What beats me," he persisted, "is how the man will go about a job of detective work like that. Seems to me he has mighty little to go on."

"Enough for him," said the skipper. "He's the cocksure sort. Can't fail, he says. The ship's company numbers fifteen. Fifteen to one—easy odds, he thinks."

"Perhaps," I suggested, "he has a clew."

"A clew!" The skipper shrugged in dismissal of the whole matter. "Possibly. I don't know. I think he has bats myself. I'm fed up with the whole crazy business." He wheeled in his chair and rose.

"By the way, captain"—the purser was deaf to hints—"about the crime itself—did he go into any of the ghastly details, so to speak?"

"Not with me." The skipper's manner was again testy. "I've no stomach for horrors myself. Better get them at first hand as soon as Jonah begins to take an interest in victuals and sleuthing again."

"Trust me for that!" Gregg fervently averred as the skipper disappeared to the companionway. "Think of it," he burst out, "shipmates with a cutthroat! I say, Sparksy, strictly between ourselves and the bulkhead, how do you dope it out? Who's the guilty man?"

I had no answer and would not have breathed it if I had. Yet, granting that the detective was right and the skipper wrong, there stood the question to be faced: who was the man?

It would not be evaded. Who was the man? Naturally one's painfully groping doubts turned first to the rougher elements of the crew. Of all the firemen and deckhands, who— One checked oneself as though caught in an act of treachery to a shipmate. Steady men all—family men, most of them—they stood above suspicion of violence, not to say bloodshed.

No; wait! That new deck hand—what was his name? Burk—no, Berger—that was it. What did I—did any of us—know about him? He had made but one round trip with us. "Bolsky," his mates had already dubbed him, from his habit of spouting "red" doctrines in the forecabin or wherever he could corner a listener. A shambling fellow, anything but formidable personally, but given to ranting of violence by wholesale. Could it be he? There was at least a negative comfort in the suggestion; for it cleared from his better-known mates the cloud of a most unhappy suspicion.

All morning the *Valdes* rolled to the long mounting swell of the Pacific, rolled as only a boat of her tubby construction can. Not till mid-afternoon, when she had begun to thread the wooded islands of Barclay Sound and her deck rode as steady as a dancing floor, did our passenger desert his cabin. A shade pale under his healthy tan he looked; but otherwise he strode about decks the same erect, self-confident, and debonaire person who had boarded us the evening before. A man well under middle age, at the very height of his fighting capacity, he looked his

part—a man agreeable as a companion, dependable as a friend, dangerous as an enemy.

To be friendly in the most natural and engaging manner with everybody appeared to be his only present aim; unless, indeed, it were to make a full record of his trip by means of the small camera which never left his hand. Basking luxuriously in the sunshine, he strolled about, always ready with a delighted "By Jove!" or, "That's great!" for each new feature of headland or bay disclosed by the winding passage of the boat. He had a carefree nod and a cheery word for every man he approached. Yet it took small mental effort to fancy that his keen blue eye was taking notes of other things than scenery.

Once while he stood on the forward deck wrinkling a humorously protesting nose at the oil drums lashed in place there, the skipper leaned down over the bridge rail. "Glad to see you up and about, Mr. Sleuth." There was a hint of steel in the tone. You couldn't help but feel that the skipper secretly resented the presence of this strange passenger, with its implied threat against the peace of the crew and the good name of the ship.

"Oh, good day, captain," returned the detective affably. "Thank you for the compliment, but Pindar is the name, if you don't mind—Jim Pindar. Thought I mentioned it last night."

"May have," admitted the skipper, a trifle abashed. "How's your quest coming on?"

"Oh, that!" The detective waved his hand as though pained at the introduction of an unwelcome topic. "Surely there's no hurry about that."

"I'm not so sure. The round trip takes only ten days."

With a pleasant smile Pindar ignored the sarcasm. "One will be ample. To tell the truth, I was hoping to make a bit of a holiday of it."

The skipper bowed an ironical bow. "The boat is all yours," he said, "and the smells thereof."

With no reply but his deep, mellow laugh Pindar again put himself in motion.

Naturally I was no less curious than Gregg to see how he would set about his difficult business; and since my duties left me more leisure than did the purser's I made use of it to watch the detective's every move as closely as I could without positive rudeness manage.

Outward bound our deck hands had no lack of hard work unloading freight at our many ports of call. Consequently they were often allowed to rest about decks between times. Thus it happened that "Buck" Sanders, head on elbow, took his ease on the slope of the saloon skylight; while Bolshy Berger adorned the other side. When Pindar, evidently ready for a chat, stopped near them Bolshy arose, like a man mindful of his class-conscious antipathy to the whole "white-collared bourgeoisie." Our passenger's manner, however, struck just the right note of offhand bonhomie, without a trace of condescension. Soon he was telling a story. Buck sat up. Berger, partially thawing, remained.

While he talked Pindar tucked his camera under one arm and drew from his pocket a pack of playing cards. Absently, but deftly, he began to shuffle them. I drew near at that. The cards had perfectly plain celluloid backs, but otherwise, so far as I could see, had no features out of the common.

"Here's a little thing, mates," the detective was saying as I came up. "Ever see this one? I don't say I'll get it every time, but it's a bird when I do."

Seeing me, "Here's Mister Marconi," he cordially exclaimed. "Come on in, old Dots-and-Dashes, the water's fine."

He held out the shuffled pack toward Buck. "Like to cut 'em?"

"Sure," Buck obliged.

Pindar then smilingly spread the cards fanwise and again held them out. "Choose any card," he directed, "and I'll name it—if I have luck."

Buck took a card.

"Ace of spades," announced Pindar after an instant of calculation.

"Blessed if it ain't!" Buck guffawed. In the heartiness of his admiration he held up the card for Berger to see.

"You like to try it, too?" invited Pindar. Berger still hung back.

"Go on, Bolshy," urged Buck. "It ain't like you to be bashful."

"Try anything once," Berger rather ungraciously acquiesced. He cut the cards, then drew one.

"Curious," said Pindar in amazement. "It's the same old card again—the ace of spades!"

"Right," pronounced Berger, thoroughly mystified.

A fireman taking a breathing spell had

come up from below. He stood wiping a grimy neck with a grimy neckcloth.

"Look here, old sport!" Buck hailed him. "Here's something good in the card line. Have a go at it, won't you?"

The fireman cut the cards as directed and chose one. Pindar wrinkled his brows. "I'm hanged," he marveled, "if it's not that same old black ace again!"

"Aw, gwan!" objected Bolshy, becoming suspicious. "Lemme see them cards. There's something fishy about them."

"Fishy? I'm surprised at you." Pindar pretended to be hurt. He ran the cards swiftly through his fingers, face up. "Look. A perfectly honest pack, every card in it an ace of spades!"

Like the children they were, the men roared at the hoax. "Where's the big Swede?" yelled Buck in sudden inspiration. "Let's work it on him."

"Fetch him on," agreed Pindar, keeping in the spirit of the thing. "Fetch all the boys on."

As a mixer he was scoring high; but as a sleuth, much though I had begun to admire him, I had to admit that, so far, he had failed to show any class at all. Pleasure first, business nowhere, appeared to be his present motto.

On the call of dinner that evening our passenger for the first time joined us at table. We had made our call at Port Alberni and were treading the long, narrow Alberni Canal on our return to the open sea. The water lay as smooth as a mill pond. Pindar seemed as happy as a boy on a milk wagon.

He took the place that Ah Ling had laid for him opposite me and at once engaged me in talk about the government wireless stations along the coast, inquiring about their number, their sending radius, and the nature of the messages they usually handled. We were getting on swimmingly when the skipper, still in ironic mood, interrupted:

"Well, Mr. Pindar, here's a whole day already gone. Only nine more, you know. Any progress to report?"

Pindar flashed a quick smile at his questioner. "Yes, indeed, captain. I'm having a whale of a time. Feel better already. Just the trip I was needing."

"They do say," answered the skipper dryly, "that the aroma of whale oil is rather bracing. We're a healthy lot on the *Valdes*, at any rate."

"And a jolly lot, too," agreed Pindar cordially.

"Except one," hinted the skipper.

"Oh, that!" shrugged the detective as though dragged back unwillingly to the subject.

"A fool's errand your quest still appears to me to be. Perhaps, though, you have already decided to drop it?"

Pindar gave the skipper another engaging flash of his even white teeth. "Have it your own way, captain."

The skipper's only reply was a shrug of dismissal, a shrug indifferent and not a little contemptuous. His withdrawal gave Gregg an opening which he was prompt to seize.

"What I can't figure out," puzzled he, addressing Pindar, "is how you go about a thing like the job you have on hand. Is it fair to ask what you intend to do?"

"Perfectly fair," smiled Pindar, attacking his roast beef.

Gregg had the grace to color slightly, but he persisted: "And it is——"

"Nothing—mostly."

"Nothing! You'll wait and see. Is that the idea?"

"Partly. I'll wait at any rate for my confederate to take a hand. Then I may see."

"A confederate! You don't mean——"

The purser's bewildered eye running up and down the table as though in search of the mysterious ally was comic in the extreme.

Pindar laughed softly. "Yes; I have an old friend on the job with me."

"And his name?" gasped the purser.

"Human nature."

A smile ran around the table at Gregg's grunt of discomfiture.

"But I don't quite——"

Not a man present but was giving keen attention. Suddenly throwing aside all pretense of distaste for his subject the plain-clothes man faced up the table. "Curiosity," he interrupted, "is, in men no less than in women, one of the most unfailing motives of conduct."

"How about that, chief?" the skipper teased. "Do you agree?"

"It's worth thinkin' about," Mac cautiously answered.

"Curiosity," went on Pindar, "the natural craving of the human mind to uncover what is half hidden from it, will keep fourteen of this ship's company alert for every fresh de-

tail concerning me and the unfortunate business that has brought me here. Number Fifteen already knows too much."

"And how," Gregg broke into his pause, "how is that going to help?"

"With fourteen men actually curious, and the fifteenth compelled for his own protection to feign curiosity, something significant is going to happen. By some sign—some slight, involuntary sign, it may be—that fifteenth man, beset with pitfalls, is going to betray to me that he does know too much."

Bland, noiseless, inscrutable, Ah Ling removed an emptied plate from the detective's place.

Gregg raised an eyebrow toward the chink. "Think you could read any sign that he might give?" he asked.

"Human nature," asserted Pindar, "knows none of the bounds of continents."

"For Heaven's sake," broke in the skipper testily, "leave *him* out of it."

"By all means, captain," assented Pindar suavely.

The skipper had one of his instant returns to good humor. "Perhaps," he smilingly quizzed, "you have already observed the telltale sign."

Pindar's teeth flashed again in his quick, controlled smile. "Perhaps," he parried. He had a wonderful face for poker.

"But look here," objected the purser, "isn't it going to take more than your sign—if you get it—to satisfy a court?"

"I'm very much afraid, sir," laughed the detective, "that you are one of the fourteen curious."

"Guilty as charged," admitted Gregg with an answering laugh.

"The sign," continued Pindar, "would, of course, be only a start. My clew would do the rest."

"Oh, then," said I, "there *is* a clew."

"Fortunately for my case," Pindar assured me, "there is. I think I mentioned that fact to the captain last night."

"You may have," admitted the skipper. "The fact is, although I admit being one of the curious, I didn't take the thing seriously. I don't yet. Not," he added politely, "that we won't all be interested to hear about your clew."

Pindar appeared to hesitate. "To tell you that," he warned, "I should first have to recount the circumstances of the crime. They are anything but pleasant."

"No occasion to be squeamish here," urged the pursuer. "This is a hard-boiled crowd."

"Really, gentlemen," the detective began in a tone of deprecation, "it's a nasty business." He paused to light a cigarette. "Already most of you have guessed that the victim was a woman. No; she was not altogether the sort you might infer from the place in which she met her fate. The Ranscombe Building has a pretty rotten reputation, I admit. She, however, must have been a newcomer there; even our roundsman didn't know her. Plenty of them travel that road, you know. First a friend, more or less prosperous, and semirespectability. Then a quarrel, desertion, destitution, and swift descent to such a manner of life as prevails in resorts of the Ranscombe type. It's ugly; but it's life—seaport life."

We all were listening intently, each after his manner. The skipper, a faint curl still on his lip, flicked the ashes of his cigarette into his empty cup; Mac, gazing straight before him, pulled stonily at his short brier; we others, fascinated, watched every move of the narrator's lips. Ah Ling, noiseless, wooden-faced, but listening, cleared away the dishes from the table.

"You may ask what could be the motive for striking down such a woman. Happily, as the case stands, we are not just now concerned with the motive. The clew will give us the man; the motive may be trusted to appear later. Personally I have a theory which concerns the former friend; but at present it is immaterial.

"We found the woman's body in the farthest corner of the kitchen of her little flat. She wore a low-cut gown, and from her neck, here behind the collar bone, protruded the handle, the rough, bone handle, of what at first appeared to be a dagger. It proved to be an ordinary steel. On a tray of cutlery from which it had been snatched in the heat of passion lay the carving knife and fork to match—a relic, shall we say, of better days; a gift, even, of the very man who had struck her down.

"The murderer had used it like a dagger, with a downward thrust—this way." He illustrated with his table knife, his fingers clasping the handle, his thumb on top. "The point had reached her heart. Death must have been instantaneous.

"That steel gave us our clew. As surely as it killed her it will hang her assailant."

"How?" asked the skipper coldly.

"Let me explain: The end of each handle of the carving set was finished with a smooth disk of nicked steel about the size of a quarter, but more oval in shape. On this the man who struck the blow had left his signature, a single thumb print. Only one man in the world can make its duplicate. He cannot escape."

For us it was as though he had pronounced the doom of a shipmate. Followed an interval of uncomfortable silence which the skipper broke in his cool voice.

"But surely the bare thumb without any marking fluid—such as ink, let us say; or blood—will not leave a permanent mark?"

"Let us experiment," suggested Pindar. "Here is a sugar bowl with a polished surface much like that of the metal disk. Allow me to give it a rub with my napkin to remove any chance impressions already there. Now, captain, just for purposes of illustration, will you take hold of it between your thumb and fingers."

"Happy to oblige," acquiesced the skipper, "even to the extent of hanging myself."

Pindar laughed his mellow, unforced laugh at the captain's jest. "Thank you," he said, receiving the bowl again. His face became instantly grave. He held the bowl up, tilting it experimentally to get the best light on it. "Now here, formed by nothing but the natural moisture of the skin, is a perfectly readable imprint of the captain's thumb, every arch, loop, and whorl easily traceable."

He gave to its perusal a moment of concentration so grave and intense that he failed utterly to notice the trickle of sugar that cascaded from the rim of the bowl to the cloth. Then he passed the vessel back.

"Satisfy yourself, captain. The print, if undisturbed, will be as clear next week as it is to-night."

"Aye, but will it hang him?" Mac's harsh voice interjected.

The table broke into nervous laughter in which the detective, still wrapped in his professional earnestness, did not join. "No, chief, since you must have your joke, it will not. The thumb which made this imprint and that which made my clew are positively different."

The skipper set down the bowl and rose. "Many thanks"—he bowed with ironic ceremony—"for this unsolicited certificate of character."

About ten next morning, after a pleasant

run through a gently swelling sea, we tied up to the jetty at the little Indian village of Uchucklet. Lending Gregg a hand, as I sometimes did, I sprang out on the rather shaky structure and began to check the various articles of freight consigned to that point as the deck hands set them down. They consisted chiefly of dry goods in boxes, sacks of provisions, and cases of canned goods—all for the local general store.

Pindar, once more the mere tourist without a care, leaned over the rail in delighted inspection, now of the rough, shake-built dwellings of the straggling village, now of the grotesque totem poles that marked the homes of the native aristocrats, and again at such of the villagers themselves as stood in stolid groups along the sands, or floated in skillfully handled canoes offshore, making the most of the weekly break in the monotony of their lives. Repeatedly his camera clicked.

From the freight deck came a sudden howl of anguish, an execration, a confusion of cries, above which rose the mate's authoritative voice, stilling the hubbub and giving terse directions:

"You, Buck, help him on deck. One's enough. Call the purser. He'll dress it. Get on with that freight, the rest of you."

Up to the deck came Buck Sanders supporting a limp form. It was that of Berger, pallid, groaning, almost at the point of collapse.

Pindar sprang instantly toward them. "What's up, mates? Let me help; first aid's right in my line."

Speechless, Berger held up a mangled right hand. The thumb of it appeared to be crushed to a bleeding pulp.

"Packing case," explained Buck. "It fell edgewise against another and nipped his flap-ber between—see?"

We were again paralleling the coast line at sea before Pindar returned from the fore-castle, to which he had led Berger after dressing his wound. "He'll do for the time," he answered my inquiry; "but you ought to rush him to the hospital as soon as we get back. He'll have a coon's luck if he doesn't lose that thumb."

I looked at him sharply, trying to read him. What did it mean to him, this so timely crushing of a suspect's thumb? Did he regard it as a cruel accident, or mere clumsy design? Was it, indeed, the very

happening, the betraying sign, for which he had been waiting?

That he even thought of the matter at all Pindar gave no sign. The man's mental defense was impenetrable. I could read in his eyes nothing but an undisguised human concern for a fellow man in trouble. Not that there was any trace of softness or exaggerated sentiment in his attitude. He had done his physical utmost to afford relief. Beyond that, and until his services could again be of use, he was unmoved.

To ask him point-blank for his opinion would, I knew, produce no reply more elucidating than the flash of his enigmatic smile. I shrank from putting myself in the way of even so mild a rebuff; and Pindar put an end to further talk by withdrawing with the explanation that he wished to develop some of his new-made negatives.

From stokehole to bridge ran the story of Berger's mishap, a story whose interest was many times magnified by speculation as to its true significance. It was no unheard-of thing for a freight handler to have a hand or finger crushed; yet the theory that this had been a pure accident found few supporters. It had been too timely, too perfectly adapted to a self-evident purpose. On the whole this view came to be accepted with a feeling of relief that it was not some more highly regarded member of the crew that had finally come under suspicion.

Gregg, at the end of a discussion that rambled over every phase of the subject, rather happily summarized the general view: "The nerve of him! That's what gets me. By smashing up his thumb he as good as confesses his guilt; yet at the same stroke he destroys the whole value of the one clew that could convict him. Some scheme that! I wouldn't have credited him with the brains—nor the nerve."

With his usual lack of reticence he took the first occasion to rally Pindar on the new dilemma which now appeared to confront him. "Call it what you will, accident or foresight," he said, drawing him out, "there is one thumb print you'll find it hard to get."

"Indeed! Whose?" Pindar lightly inquired.

"Why, Berger's, of course."

"Oh, that!" shrugged Pindar. "I'll hardly require it again. I got his yesterday."

It took the wind out of Gregg's sails. "If

you're not the quick worker!" he managed to gasp.

Pindar smiled. "We did some card tricks together, he and I. A plain-backed playing card—there's no better surface for finger prints."

"Aha!" said I, seeing a light. "So that was the game."

"Part of it," smiled Pindar.

"And was it," blurted Gregg; "did it—that is, is Berger your man?"

Without the flicker of an eyelash Pindar met his searching look. "The man has had a nasty accident," he said evenly. "Further than that I wouldn't care to go. See you at dinner." With that he walked away.

"Well, ain't he the original tightwad!" complained Gregg. "Now that simply turns us all back again to as-you-were. I wonder how much he really knows himself."

He expressed his doubt soon after to the skipper.

"Knows?" snorted the skipper. "Nothing. Don't be a simpleton, Gregg. He's stumped. That thumb-print gag is too thin. Do you think if he had it he could carry it in his head? He'd have a photograph of it, or something to show. He's sure his man is aboard, I'll admit; but beyond that he knows nothing. He's trusting to luck. His game is to look wise, pretend he has the goods, and keep twisting the thumbscrews now and again. He hopes that before ten days his man's nerve will go. It's all a colossal bluff, a cute little third-degree stunt."

Gregg shook his head doubtfully. "That's a new slant on the game. Heavens! Think of the torture of that poor, guilty devil. Thumbscrew is right. I should think his nerve *would* go."

"It's up to him," laughed the skipper grimly; "if there is a him."

This stubborn spirit of unbelief it must have been that prompted the skipper that evening to spring a trap, as it seemed to me, on the detective. The first table had been served. Mac's cutty was already filled, an invariable preliminary to his departure to relieve his voracious second, big Herrick McCaig. The skipper had been in unusual spirits; which had meant wounds for Gregg and an even exchange with Mac.

"Which thumb," he suddenly asked, "did Berger injure?"

Pindar cut short the remark he had been making to me. "The right, captain," he answered.

"Ah! The one you said the assassin had used."

Pindar touched a match to his cigarette, then dropped it into his cup, watching it till its glow died out. "I can't recollect, captain," he deliberated, "that I mentioned that."

"No? Part of the general mystery, is it?"
"Not to Number Fifteen, captain. He knows."

"I see. And you think he'll show that he knows—give himself away, in fact."

"It wouldn't surprise me."

"But, as I recollect, when you took your own knife to show how the blow was struck you used your left hand."

Pindar laughed his soft, controlled laugh. "That means nothing, captain. Unlike the rest of you, I was born left-handed, you see."

The skipper hadn't got very far on that tack. He grinned like a man making the best of defeat. "Anyway, Berger hurt his right. An unlucky choice, considering all that it implies."

"Either would have been bad luck for him," said I, remembering how he had been tricked into giving his thumb print.

"Either," agreed Pindar gravely. "It was a bad smash he got."

"Oh, look here," protested Gregg, "I thought this thing had been settled this morning. Now it's all on again. If it's to go on like this for eight days more it's going to get on my nerves. Tell you what let's do. Let's all make our thumb prints in ink for our friend here—both thumbs—and put our signatures to them. That'll get the whole business off our minds so we can begin to enjoy ourselves again. What say, skipper?"

"Go to it," approved the skipper heartily. "I'm already acquitted. What about you, chief?"

"I'll dae naething of the sort," growled Mac, getting up from the table. "If he wants thumb print of mine tae hang me with he can just make shift tae get it himself."

Pindar's laugh rang louder than usual. "I already have it, chief—a dandy. Couldn't be better if done in India ink."

"I'm no surprised," said Mac calmly. "I misdoot ye got it off me in my sleep."

"Nothing at all so clever," grinned Pindar delightedly. "There's no place to equal a steamboat for finger prints. A burnished binnacle"—he bowed to the skipper—"what better? Engine-room oil and grime more-

over makes a perfect marking fluid and a polished brass handrail a perfect surface. That's how I got yours, chief."

"And wull it hang me?"

"A perfectly fair question; but time alone will answer. Me, I'm a little brother to the clam."

"Huh!" grunted Mac, and disappeared.

"That ends my helpful little scheme," lamented Gregg. "You've got us all in your rogues' gallery already, I suppose."

"All I require," smiled Pindar blandly. He seemed to enjoy this kind of sparring with the purser's inquisitiveness.

"List is closed, eh? Ended with Berger, I bet."

"Not at all. I got the old chief's after Berger's."

"Well, then, Mac's ended it?"

"By no means; I got yours after his."

"Mine! For Heaven's sake, man, don't get it mixed with Number Fifteen's. By the way, how do you keep the different prints separate? You must keep some sort of record."

"Certainly. My camera."

"Oh, I say! I thought that was for scenery and natives and things."

"In reality it's a dud on all those. Its lens is specially focused for fine close-ups only."

Gregg gave an amazed moment to that. "Gee!" he concluded. "What chance has poor old Number Fifteen?"

"Utterly none."

Yet one chance he had, in spite of all Pindar's foresight, a chance that he was to make the most of when the time came.

If Pindar, working out his own purposes, had been able in the mess to obscure the issue of Berger's guilt it proved far otherwise in the forecabin, where sentiment had crystallized to a sullen unanimity. The pack is quick in judgment and its verdicts notoriously harsh. Even on the day of his accident Berger's ostracism had begun.

I had marked him the afternoon of that day as we slid through a sea dotted sparsely with halibut dories and power boats. He sat on the forward hatch, a lonely and disconsolate figure. His hand, which had been most competently dressed, still seemed to give him acute twinges. A shudder of suffering now and again ran through his frame. All his bounce and bravado had fled.

"Feeling any easier now?" I inquired.

He made a sulky move as though to disappear down the forecabin ladder, but

thought better of it. "Naw; worse," he complained.

I would have expressed my sympathy, but he broke in roughly: "Aw, it ain't that. I kin stand the pain. But them brain boys forward has got me spotted fer this Jack-the-Ripper guy. That's what gits a guy down where he lives. They got it figured that this"—he raised his injured hand—"is as good as ownin' up to it, now that collectin' thumb prints is the latest fad at sea."

"That oughtn't to worry you," I said, trying to comfort him. "You know yourself whether—well, whether it was an accident or not."

"Who's gonna listen to that?" he demanded. "Not them know-it-all's forward; no, nor the bulls, either. I can prove what I done every minute of my leave in port; but that ain't gonna help none. I'm up against the machine, the good old capitalistic machine. Justice, the master class calls it. Huh! Them bulls is bound to nail some guy or lose their jobs; and if they ain't got the right dope they'll fake it. This a free country! Hell!"

He had at least not exaggerated the feeling of the forecabin toward himself; for next day it found expression through a deputation, headed by the once well-disposed Buck Sanders, that waited on the skipper.

"We're decent guys, sir, down forward," was the gist of Buck's appeal, "and we draw the line at bunkin' with cutthroats. He ain't safe, that new bo. What he's done once he's liable to do again. We ask to have him out of there, sir. Why don't that fly cop go to work and put him in irons, says we, where he ought to be?"

Of course the skipper, lacking any decisive word from Pindar, could not interfere with Berger's liberty. Yet, whether out of pity for the scapegoat's misery or to appease the men, he took an unheard-of step. He excused the injured man from all duties and instructed the purser to assign him to one of the unused first-passenger cabins for the rest of the voyage.

"I've put him next to you," he chucklingly informed Pindar. "I thought you might find him a handy thing to have around."

The detective bowed. "You're master here, captain. My authority only begins at Water Street. I do hope, though, that he is not to be under restraint of any kind."

"Not till you say the word," the skipper

promised. "You'll take a hand, you say, at Water Street?"

"At Water Street. Not before."

The days succeeding brought little new light to our mystery. Berger, electing the martyr's rôle, insisted on regarding himself as a prisoner and sulkily refused to talk, on the ground that anything he might say would only be used against him. In the same spirit he withdrew so completely into the unwonted luxury of his sheets that he might as well have been under lock and key. Indeed, it was as a prisoner—a prisoner suffering a mild foretaste of his just deserts—that the fore-castle regarded him. The mess felt less certain of his guilt, entertaining as it did all shades of opinion from the canny pig-headedness of Mac to the veiled ridicule of Captain Angon.

Pindar, who alone could have resolved our doubts—if we except that mysterious lurker, Number Fifteen himself—became even more secretive than at first. Not that he showed himself any less a mixer, now that he professed to have all the facts he required, than he had been while securing them. His vigor of body kept him incessantly on the move about the ship; while his mental avidity pounced upon each unfamiliar object that our progress disclosed.

From a navigation buoy squatting duck-like on the water to a lighthouse crowning a headland; from the far smudge that marked the course of an invisible liner to the nearer battle, the flailing, tumultuous battle, of a shoal of killers with a doomed sperm—all was grist to the mill of his interest.

Yet the tabooed subject did manage, if rarely, to intrude; for Gregg, the insatiable, had to be reckoned with. He joined us once on the upper deck—Pindar was forming the habit of visiting at the door of my wireless cabin—and plunged straightway into the matter then uppermost in his mind.

"Been thinking," said he, not without a note of admiration, "and I must say I don't envy you your business."

Physically, at least, Pindar was cornered. "It has its drawbacks," he sighed resignedly. "Sure has," breezed on Gregg, unscathed. "I've been arguing things out with the skipper. At least I argued and he pooh-poohed. You know his way."

"Argued what?" asked Pindar.

"Why, about finger prints, and whether a man could carry one for twenty-four hours in his head. Poppycock, he calls it."

"I'm inclined to agree with him," said Pindar, with the caution of one waiting for the cat to jump.

Slightly crestfallen, Gregg persisted. "But isn't that just what you had to do yourself? You compared the skipper's mark on the bowl with—with that other one. Didn't that mean you had carried it in your head—the other one?"

"Oh—er—that was easy." The detective had a rare instant of hesitation. "Finger prints, you know, fall into classes. Distinguishing Captain Angon's from Number Fifteen's—that was no trick. Any amateur could have done it."

"Looked some stunt to me. The skipper says it couldn't be done—not from memory. To do it a man would have to have a record of a maze of lines like that. Since you haven't got that—you know his way; hope you don't mind it—he rather jeers at the whole thing."

"That's why, is it?" With the manner of one making a sudden resolution the detective produced a thin leather wallet from his breast pocket. Thumbing some papers—photographic prints, apparently—he selected one and handed it to Gregg. "Have a look at this," he requested.

"H'm! H'm! Looks like the home sector of a spider's web to me. What's it supposed to be?"

"A close-up of a thumb print."

The purser examined it again. "Sure enough," he agreed, "it might be that."

"It is," Pindar held out his hand for it. "It's Number Fifteen's."

"Number—oh, I say! Then you've had it all along."

"Necessarily. Our first care was to secure it. There was ample time to develop and print it while I was out with Bruno; the dog, you know."

"That ought to convince the skipper. Let me show it to him, will you?"

Pindar returned the print to his folder. "Facts are facts. Why worry about opinions?" he disposed of the matter. His glance sought the horizon, as though for escape. "What on earth—or on the sea—is that?"

A glance told me the nature of the object that had so welcomingly diverted his attention; but it required the aid of the ship's glass to make its details clear to his less accustomed eye. One of the hunting steamers from the whaling station, her decks aslant under her ill-balanced load, was staggering slowly

home. That load was a huge whale, the latest victim of her deadly harpoon. Its tail, lashed up to her bow, its head awash in the spume of her propeller, she half-carried, half-towed, her valuable kill.

"For all the world," laughed Pindar, "like a bustling ant lugging home a fishworm." For hours his imagination played about the incident, sensing romance, adventure, in it.

The hours of our stay at the whaling station afforded him fresh diversion. For the novel manufacturing processes of that malodorous place he had all his usual avid interest, and came back the richer for a couple of barnacles scraped from the hide of a whale as souvenirs of his experience. But never once, it afterward occurred to me, had he left the trestled approach to the wharf entirely out of his field of vision. A more hopeless place for a criminal to attempt escape could not be imagined; but, as I had begun to understand, in all that he did, Pindar was thorough.

And then that ill-named sea, the Pacific, took a jealous hand in the game, and under the lash of a brisk southwester set the old *Valdes* so grievously aroll that our poor landsman was driven once more to his berth. Not till the blessed placidity of Barclay Sound had a second time released him did he reappear on our deck.

His disappearance, if anything, added zest to the skipper's already high spirits. Never had I known him so addicted to his own peculiar brand of caustic wit. Gregg, the unconscious butt of much of it, sought to account for such a sign of elation. "I've got it," he solved the problem at last: "that berth he's been working for so long with the C. P. & O. is coming through. He'll be making his next trip as master of one of the princesses. What say, Mac?"

"Aye," agreed Mac. "I've sailed with him, master and mate, this many a year. I misdoot he'll be makin' a change." You could almost imagine that the grim old ruffian felt a secret pang at the impending separation.

About nine the morning of our last day out I sat at my key. We were entering the straits, and I was making the usual report to Tatoosh when Pindar appeared in my doorway.

"I wish you'd send this little word for me," he said when I had taken off the ear phones. The paper he handed me contained

a message for police headquarters, Vancoria. It read:

Meet me arrival Valdes five-thirty. Will have my man.

I took time to it before looking up. "Strictly private and confidential?" I asked.

He shrugged his indifference. "Quite the contrary; it's public property."

I could not repress a sigh. "Poor devil!" I said, thinking of Berger. Who could any longer doubt the identity of Number Fifteen?

But the softer emotions were luxuries which Pindar could ill afford. "All in a day's work," he disposed of it, and disappeared.

Prompt to her hour the *Valdes* rounded Klootch Point and shoved her nose into the harbor at Vancoria. The skipper had the bridge and he headed her straight for her berth at Water Street. Already I could see that a crowd awaited us. Some wind of our secret had blown through the city streets, whisking before it into this eddy its findings of the idle, the curious, the morbid. They stood massed on the wharf. They lined the footbridge to the street. There a motor car stood, of limousine type, apparently. No; our closer approach revealed it for what it was, the police motor. In the forefront of the crowd a couple of bluecoats killed time with the lofty bored air of their calling.

Standing on the forward hatch like a passenger eager to land, except that he carried neither coat nor grip, Pindar gave his fellows a hardly perceptible signal of greeting. Berger, too, nervously awaiting his ordeal, although no one had yet interfered with him, slouched against the drum of the winch, his bandaged hand supported in the V of his half-buttoned coat. As he watched the silent crowd a new terror entered his eyes. He shrank closer to Pindar.

Bells jangled below. The engines reversed. At once the decks shuddered to the thudding screw. The ship lost way and eased in toward the wharf. An eddying current from the propeller seethed forward along her water line.

Mac, off watch, leaned over the rail amidships, grimly smoking, outstaring the crowd. "I'm hanged," thought I, "if the chief isn't getting old!" A curious time, a curious place, it immediately came to me, for so odd a notion to flit across one's mind.

The headline thumped on the wharf and

was made fast. The skipper silenced the engines. The spring came up taut to its chock. To the grinding of the capstan the boat leaned toward the wharf, creaking gently against the fender and came to rest. A perfect landing. The skipper, overseeing all from the shore end of the bridge, blew his whistle. The men began to run out the gangplank.

All the time Pindar had stood motionless. The skipper moved to the head of the companionway, looking down at him. "Water Street, Mr. Sleuth," he announced. His bow was that of one officer relinquishing his command to another; but the old-mockery, and a touch of insolence, again steeled his tone.

Pindar looked sharply up to reply; but Berger, putting his own dazed construction on the skipper's sarcasm, spat suddenly on the deck. "All right, damn yuh, git busy." He lurched toward Pindar, wrists extended. "Here y'are. Do yer masters' dirty work."

Pindar wheeled on him. "Get ashore, you ass!" he barked. "Go get that hand of yours looked after."

He took a quick step toward the companionway, then stopped. The bridge was deserted. The skipper had vanished. With a baffled cry Pindar sprang to the outer rail. Still foamed and swirling from the churn of the screw, the muddy water had already closed over the body of the suicide that had fallen headlong from the bridge. From the depths a cap eddied to the surface, drifting toward the bow. Even in that turbid flow it seemed to ride at a jaunty angle.

I took Pindar to task later. "Look here," I reproached him, "do you call that playing the game? You distinctly told us—twice, I recollect—that Captain Angon was innocent."

"Did I? I thought I only said that his thumb print was distinctly different from Number Fifteen's."

"Same thing," I complained.

"Not at all. That sugar bowl gave me the surprise of my life—and my sign. He knew too much. Otherwise, would he have given me the print of his left thumb?"



A SEEKER AFTER KNOWLEDGE

HUGHIE JENNINGS, manager of the Detroit Tigers, took an afternoon off not long ago and went to see the New York Giants play a game. With a friend, he sat in the grand stand, and the two of them had a fine old time criticizing the play in that frank and ardent language known as baseball slang. Pretty soon Jennings' attention was attracted to a little wizened old man who sat on his left. The old gentleman wore very tight trousers, a collar two sizes too large for his stringy neck, and a frock coat that showed the shine of many years of usage. He divided his time between watching the play and looking in awe at Jennings, obviously admiring the manager's knowledge of the game.

In the last half of the eighth inning, with the score three and three and two out, a Giant runner was called out on a close decision after an attempted steal of home. The next moment it was seen that the catcher, after tagging the runner, had dropped the ball. There ensued then a row, clamor, and outcry that rocked the stands, every member of the two teams taking a hand and a voice in the hubbub.

While the din was at its height, the little old gentleman slid forward to the edge of his seat, put a palsied hand on Jennings' arm and in a squeaky voice, inquired:

"Will you kindly inform me whether the catcher's failure to maintain his grasp of the ball vitiated that occurrence?"

The Filial Piety of Wong Kee Lim

By Lemuel L. de Bra

Author of "Mock Don Yuen Meditates," "Dregs of Design," Etc.

Injustice in the Occident may be the justice of the Orient

"HAI!" exclaimed my good friend Lee Bow T'sin, widening his long, slant eyes; "you Americans know nothing of filial piety. You build palaces for your young, and send your old to the poorhouse."

I bowed my head. To cover my embarrassment I refilled our bowls with the steaming Sou-chong. He is a very strange man, this Chinese friend of mine; and I did not know what to say. Sometimes when I hear only his words, spoken in the precise English he acquired at Harvard, I feel that there is a common bond between us; but when he changes to the tuneful cadences of the Cantonese, and I look up from my bowl and see his dark face and the long, slant eyes, eyes as expressionless at times as black stones, then Lee Bow T'sin seems to me like a stranger whom I can never know.

"I realize that the Chinese put filial piety at the head of all virtues," I said finally. "It is the basis of your family life, the main-spring of your religion, the very foundation of your government. Still, don't you think that much of this Chinese filial love is mostly talk and form? Now, I have read that famous Chinese classic, 'The Twenty-four Patterns of Filial Piety.' I thought it very silly."

Mr. Lee waved a slender, brown hand in a gesture of dismissal.

"Written for Chinese youths centuries ago! Of course, you did not understand that it is entirely symbolical. But right here in the Chinese quarter of San Francisco there have been many instances of the loyalty of our young people to their parents and their family name. There was, for example," and Lee Bow T'sin nodded thoughtfully, "the remarkable case of Kee Lim, of the family of Wong."

I held silent. I wanted to hear the story of Wong Kee Lim; but many years in the government service among the Chinese had

taught me not to appear curious about anything I desired to learn from a wily son of T'ong. So presently, Lee Bow T'sin took a cigarette, lighted it with a graceful flourish, then told me this strange tale of the filial piety of Wong Kee Lim.

I.

Wong Doo smacked his lips over the last bite of *Cha Sui Dun* and moved ponderously to the rattan rocker that stood by his pipe rack. Wong was an old man, and his stomach was big with wisdom and much eating; and as he eased himself into the rocker one could hardly distinguish between the squeaky grunting of the old man and the creaky protesting of the old chair.

Having served her honorable husband, the wife of Wong prepared more eggs with broiled ham and sat down to second rice. The son, Kee Lim, a slender, dark-eyed youth of studious habits, stood by the window waiting politely for his venerable father to speak.

"My son," Wong rumbled musically when he had smoked his three pipes, "to-day the wheel of your life turns twenty. As you very well know, it is your duty now to marry and have sons that our honorable family name may be preserved and that our ancestors may be properly worshiped. Is it not so?"

"Yes—yes—honorable father," Kee Lim replied hesitantly.

Wong refilled his pipe. For about the time then that it takes one to write down the Five Relations and the Five Cardinal Virtues there was silence save for the guttural bubbling of the water pipe, and the spluttering of the old man's lips as he blew the ashes from the tiny bowl.

"Wives," said Wong at length, "are a nuisance, as you shall learn. They are always talking or eating; and quite often they suc-

ceed in doing both at the same time. To keep a wife in peace one must have much patience and many provisions. Now, a poet may have patience; but how is he to feed his wife? She cannot eat his verses."

"That is true, sir," admitted Kee Lim; "and that is why I do not wish to marry now. I want to go to the university across the bay and become a great scholar. Then I shall go to China and be a teacher. I shall take my part in the upbuilding of the new China."

"What nonsense! What a wicked waste of time! Didn't your Chinese tutor instruct you in the Trimetrical Classics? Haven't you read the *San Tze Ching* and the *Chou Pei*; and can't you do sums on the abacus? Certainly! And that is sufficient. To-morrow you shall go to work in Pow Lung's butcher shop. After a time you can buy an interest in the business; but you shall begin as I began—by scraping hogs."

Kee Lim's dark eyes widened and lost their dreamy look. His slender hands picked nervously at the embroidery on the front of his blouse.

"Well!" crackled old Wong. "I have spoken!"

"Yes, honorable father, but——"

"*Haie!* You are becoming more impudent every day! I am sorry I ever permitted you to attend that foreign-devil school. Their foolish books have made you stubborn and unfilial and perverse."

"But, sir," ventured Kee Lim politely, "while I know it is my duty to obey you in all things, I don't want to marry. Neither do I want to be a scraper of filthy swine. I—I want to be a scholar."

Wong struggled to his feet. He shook his fists with rage. "You shall do as I say! No son of mine shall waste his time with books and small talk. I have fed you; but by the seven-faced god I will not feed your wife. Out of my sight, worthless scribbler of worthless verses!"

Kee Lim, knowing well his father's terrible anger, turned at once to leave. Enraged as much by the boy's prompt obedience as by what little he had ventured to say, Wong snatched a heavy argentan pipe from the rack, and struck the young man over the shoulders. With a sharp cry of pain, Kee Lim sprang aside. He turned to face the enraged man, at the same time reaching for the doorknob.

Again Wong raised the pipe and swung it

at Kee Lim; but the youth jumped quickly out of the way. The force of the blow threw Wong off his balance. He stumbled forward and crashed into the door. The pipe fell from his hand. Kee Lim picked it up.

With a bellow of fury, the old man snatched up a heavy teakwood stool. He swung it over his head. Kee Lim was now in a corner. His father stood between him and the door. "Father!" he cried, backing away; "father, don't kill me!"

The old man came on, murder glaring in his eyes. Kee Lim had seen him like this before; and he knew his life was in peril.

"Father, if you come nearer I will strike!"

Wong crowded forward, and struck with the heavy stool. Kee Lim, beside himself with fear, swung the pipe at the old man's arm, hoping to make him drop the stool. The pipe glanced off Wong's arm and caught him on the forehead. Kee Lim heard the wicked *swish* of the heavy stool as it grazed his head. He saw his father put his hands to his forehead, saw him rise slowly to his full height, turn half around, then pitch forward and crash to the floor.

Two plain-clothes officers of the Chinatown squad, attracted by the sound of fighting, rushed into the place. They saw Wong Doo on the floor, his face black, his eyes closed. Kee Lim, still clutching the heavy pipe in his hands, was bending over his father. The wife of Wong crouched by the table, babbling hysterically in Cantonese.

A half hour later, the body of old Wong was taken to the morgue. The poet, Wong Kee Lim, was arrested and charged with murder.

II.

Juu Shuck, climbing the littered stairs that led to his home, was in a surly mood; for he had lingered long in the rear room of the Happy Life Cigar Store, and he had played long and unluckily at fan-tan. When he thought of his mother, whom he knew had kept a platter of hot *Chow Yuk Se Mein* waiting for him, his shame made him feel resentful; and when he thought of his father, whom he knew would be by the charcoal fire grumbling over his long bamboo pipe, his head became hot with anger.

There would be the same wrangling again. His father would scold; not because of the gambling, for any one knows that is not wrong; but because of the son's idleness, which every one knows is a very great sin.

Opening the door quietly, Joo Shuck stepped in, hung up his cap, and, without looking toward his father's chair, started for the table. He took one step, then halted. A startled cry broke from his lips. There on the floor, his arms outflung, his face shrunken and ghastly in the half light, lay his father. Above the breast of the old man's crimsoned jacket showed the corded hilt of a long Chinese knife.

For about the time then that it takes one to sip a bowl of fiery *Ng Ka Py*, the young man crouched over his dead father, his mouth and eyes wide, his long-nailed fingers outspread like the ribs of a Swatow fan. Presently he realized that his mother was not in the room.

Joo Chuck padded swiftly across the floor to the door of the bedroom, and flung it open. His mother was not there. He ran then to a closet door by the charcoal stove; and there he found the woman, hiding in a dark corner, too frightened to speak. He caught her by the arm and dragged her out into the room. "*Aih-yah!*" he cried. "See what has happened! Who did that? Who killed my father?"

Finally, in broken sentences, the woman told what she knew of the affair. They were at evening rice, she said, when Gar Dick Ben, the gambler, came to collect money the boy, Joo Chuck, owed him. The old man had declared again that he would not pay Shuck's gambling debts unless he went to work; and he had ordered the gambler out of the house.

Whereupon Gar Dick Ben had spoken of the son, the father, and all their male ancestors in language highly insulting. The woman saw old Joo reach for the revolver that he kept beneath the grass-seed pillow at the head of his bunk. She saw the gambler draw his long knife. Terrified, she had crawled into the closet and shut the door.

After the funeral services, when old Joo had been laid in a lacquered coffin to await shipment to Canton, Joo Shuck and his mother returned sorrowfully to their home; and while the widow burned devil papers and muttered tearful prayers before the family ancestral tablets, the son sat by the window and cursed the man who had slain his father.

"He is a cowardly jackal!" cried Joo Shuck fiercely; "and may his wicked arm be hacked off with dull knives!"

Then came old Joo Ah Toy, principal elder of the family of Joo, to drink Sor-

rowful Autumn tea with the widow, and to smoke many pipes of strong tobacco with the son. When he had spoken all the flowery phrases prescribed for such occasions by the August Boos or Ceremonial Rites, and when they had talked about many other things in which none of them were interested, the elder put his long bamboo pipe aside and turned to the son of Joo.

"Filial piety, my son, is the root of all moral principles. The *Ta Hsueh*, which teaches good government, is wise; the *Chung Yü-g*, which teaches virtue, is sublime; but the *Hsia'o Ching*, which teaches filial piety—that is the most loved book of all China!"

"Yes, venerable Joo, that is so," agreed Joo Shuck, nodding his head many times.

"Recite for me, then, the whole duty of a filial son!"

"To serve his parents with all courtesy while they live, to bury them with all courtesy when they die, and to worship them with all courtesy. So says *Kung-foo-tsze*."

"That is quite correct. Now! It is a long journey the bones of your father must make to the burial ground in our home land. That the journey may be a safe one, you have doubtless attended to the prescribed ceremonies. There remains but one thing."

Joo Shuck's slant eyes narrowed to mere lines of glittering jet. He nodded slowly.

"Even if the journey should be made with no misfortune, and should the bones of your father be interred in a place selected by competent astrologers, there would still remain the one thing necessary to insure our honorable family a propitious *fung shui*."

"*Hi low!*" agreed Joo Shuck quickly; "that is true. Any one knows that only misfortune can befall us so long as the murder of my venerable father goes unavenged. *Haie!* We may as well bury him in a damp place where the winds and waters are unfavorable, as to bury him before I deal with his murderer."

The elder, with hearty approval, nodded his head many times. Then, presently, he sharpened his eyes and looked up. "You could make complaint to the white foreign-devil police," he ventured, watching the young man's face. "They are asking many questions."

Joo Shuck scowled. "Surely, Talented One of the Family of Joo, you do not mean I should do such a stupid thing. Every one knows that the white foreign devils have many laws but little justice."

"True, true!" cried the elder; "but some of the younger generation preach that we should take all complaints to the foreign officials. I am glad to learn that you are a filial son of your father."

Then the elder put on his slippers, and stood up. Rising to his full height, he stared at the family scroll on the wall above Joo Shuck's head. Like a priest in the Mother of Heaven Temple, he chanted in Cantonese:

"A double edge to your blade, my son; a double strength to your good right arm!"

When the elder had walked his way, Joo Shuck sat for a time in silent meditation. Then he arose, took a stick of burning punk from the brazen incense bowl, and knelt before the ancestral tablets. Holding the punk between his palms, the burning end down, the son of Joo lifted his face and cried in the weird sing-song of the Cantonese:

"*K'u kwo shan lok!* He is dead! So shall I slay the unspeakable one who caused my father's spirit to ascend the dragon. By the Three Precious Ones I shall have blood for blood that my father's murder may be avenged, that my ancestors may rest in abiding peace, and that the *jung shui* of our honorable family may be always propitious!"

That night Joo Shuck waited in a darkened doorway in the narrow Alley of Linger-ing Shadows. When Gar Dick Ben came from the gambling house, the son of Joo sprang upon him. The long Chinese knife rose—and fell.

Two plain-clothes officers of the China-town squad, seeking evidence against the gambling house, heard a cry, and ran to the scene. They found Gar Dick Ben lying on the pavement, a corded hilt protruding from the breast of his jacket. After a chase they caught Joo Shuck. He was arrested and charged with murder.

"*Haie!*" exclaimed my good friend Lee Bow T'sin, widening his long, slant eyes; "you Americans know even less of justice than you do of filial piety. Everybody knew that Wong Kee Lim, the poet, had slain his father and should be beheaded at once; but your stupid magistrates hired doctors and proved that death had been caused, not by

being struck with the pipe, but by a disease of the heart that Wong had had many years. So, although Wong Kee Lim admitted his guilt, he was set free."

I refilled our bowls with the fragrant Sou-chong, and held silent.

"Also," went on Mr. Lee, "everybody knew that Joo Shuck had done his filial duty in avenging his father's slaying; yet your magistrates charged him with murder and wanted him to be hung. Instead, Joo Shuck became prosperous, married, and had sons, and acquired all the blessings that come to those who have performed their filial duty."

"How can that be?" I spoke up quickly. "Couldn't the police convict Joo Shuck of killing the gambler?"

Lee Bow T'sin made a queer noise with his tongue; and when I looked up from my tea bowl and saw his dark face and the long, slant eyes, eyes as expressionless as black marbles, he seemed to me then like a stranger whom I can neither know nor understand.

"Oh, yes, they could have convicted Joo Shuck; but there we come to the filial piety of Wong Kee Lim. He had been led astray by your American books; but in his heart he was a filial son of Wong. When he found that he could not put his mind to his studies, he knew something was wrong. When a strange disease afflicted his mother, when thieves broke into their house and stole most of the money old Wong had left them, and when all of the Wong clan averted their faces when Kee Lim passed down Dupont Street, then he knew what was wrong.

"He knew he was guilty of slaying his father and should be punished. He knew also that Joo Shuck had done only his filial duty and should be saved. So Kee Lim went to the foreign-devil police and told them he had killed Gar Dick Ben and was hiding in a doorway when they arrested Joo Shuck. Whereupon Kee Lim's mother recovered her health, the stolen money was found, and the clan of Wong saved its face."

"But Kee Lim?" I pursued; "Kee Lim, the poet? What became of him?"

"Him?" echoed my Chinese friend, dropping into English. "Oh, they hung him at San Quentin years ago!"

"*Mock Don Yuen and the Tongs,*" by *Mr. de Bra,* will appear in an early issue.



Closed for the Night

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

I SAW the midnight shadows twist
Along the warehouse wall;
I smelled the warm, dank river mist,
And I heard the long road call.

I saw the sweating doorways frown,
"Closed for the night," they read.
And, "It's time to beat it out of town,"
The muttering arc lights said.

I heard a lone bull bounce his stick,
Slouching along his beat;
I made for the alley shadows quick,
Till he turned to another street.

Then I slung my roll and I hit the trail
That the blanket stiffs all know;
Switch light, siding, block, and rail,
The boulevard of the Bo.

I breathed the smell of the fields, and then,
I burrowed a stack of hay,
I dreamed that same old dream again,
And I heard the foreman say:

"Guilty, your honor!" quick and clear.
I took it, with no appeal,
For the sake of a friend who was there to hear
And knew I would never squeal.

Old stuff? Yes. And never a call or word,
From him—as he played the swell;
Married and wealthy—so I heard,
While I sweated his trick in hell.

Twenty years! Then they set me free:
And I'll say that they broke me right!
Then Luck she handed an ace to me,
When I met him alone, one night.

Down at the wharf where the schooners tie,
And the dock hands match for beers,
He took his last look at the sky,
And he paid for my twenty years.

I saw the sweating doorways frown,
"Closed for the night," they read.
And "It's time to beat it out of town,"
The muttering arc lights said.

The Blue One

By Earl Wayland Bowman

Author of "Th' Ramblin' Kid," "Shag," Etc.

Pablo Montoya's dog was a faithful guardian of his master's flocks until he was tempted beyond endurance and heeded the call of the wild. Yet in the end there came another call

PABLO MONTOYA—he who cares for the sheep of Don Hernando and takes them, in the springtime, when the grass first answers the call of the chinook, across the Llano de Gota to the lower slopes of San Miguel, and later, after the lambing and the shearing, follows with the flocks the feed line to the lava-ridged summits of Del Cristo range—taught the Blue One from the time when he was a little puppy.

By the crucifix above the altar in Padre Algonza's mission at Magdalena, by all the holy saints, by his own soul and even by the love in his heart for the beautiful, the warm-lipped, the enchanting Señorita Mercedes Aloyez, Pablo swore, and made oath, that, of all dogs guarding the sheep in the whole San Bendito country—from the top of the Sierra Negritos even to Nacazori, beyond the desert—not one had the courage, was so wise, or would endure and keep faith, to the death if need be, like the Blue One—he with the shaggy white and dove-mottled coat; with the great shoulders, the sharp, curved teeth, the brown eyes—mild and gentle as the eyes of the antelope or, on occasion, fiercely red and flaming as those of the yellow panther—

And who should know better than Pablo?

Had he not, many times, proved the heart, the cunning, the honor, of the Blue One?

"For the smallest lamb—even one that is sick—he, the Blue One, *el perro* magnificent, would die!" Pablo, at the time of the feast of the Penitentes, drank much mescal in the cantina La Merino, at Socorro, and so, being in the mood to talk, boasted. "I swear it! It is because in him is the soul, the faith to care for the sheep, and the sheep, he knows, are mine to guard and I, Pablo Montoya, to him am the God—*los sacre Dios!* From the time he was very small, I, myself, have taught him! Such

another dog there is not! By all things I swear it!"

Also, in the soft moonlight, among the vines at the corner of the casa of Don Aloyez, by the great fig tree, the Señorita Mercedes, desiring, as do the lovers, much assurance, whispered:

"Pablo, my own—lovest thou me? You will not change?"

"Forever I love, *mio amorata!*" Pablo trembling, his blood like streams of burning wine, answered. "Forever, soul of my soul, will I worship. Even as the Blue One, to the death, is devoted to the little ones of the flock of Don Hernando, so am I, thy Pablo, devoted to thee! Ah, *amorita mio*, such faithfulness no other can have!"

Yet, later, Pablo with his own eyes, while among the rocks and stunted pinons of the high Del Christos, when the summer was well gone and the grass on the Llano de Gato and the slopes of San Miguel had become parched and brown and no feed was to be had save far up close to the peaks where the dens are many and the loafer wolves—gray and lean and swift of foot—have their hiding places, saw the Blue One yield at last to a call that came out of the night and become an outlaw, a killer, a raider of the herds he had so many times fought to save—a *perro diablo*—with a price on his head, even as the Gringo desperado, the Americano, Señor "Buck" Dawson, once much trusted by the Company los Minera, became among men the black scourge, the quick death, the terror and dread of the haciendas, until he, too, was hunted like an animal gone mad in the hills.

By the cantina La Baca, in Pozo, Pablo found him.

It was when the sheep were being taken from the corrals of the Rancho del Verde, in the springtime, to the first grazing. Pablo,

outside of the town, left the flock with Pascal, the Yaqui boy, who helped for a few days until the lambing ground was reached.

By the door of the cantina Pablo threw down his poncho.

Then came the Blue One. A little puppy, very young, lean, and hungry, and scarcely able to walk. From where? It does not matter. It may be he was an orphan—his mother having been killed or taken away—it makes no difference.

His tiny nose, hunting food, sniffed at the poncho. Ah, there was the odor—the smell—that his ancestors, for a hundred generations, had been bred to guard. And it was alone—unwatched! He forgot his hunger, that he was wet, that he was cold—all but the instinct of duty. With a whimper of recognition the Blue One laid down on the poncho of Pablo, on this something he knew he should protect.

In a little while, having had two, three—perhaps it was several—drinks of mescal, for it would be long before he returned again from the mountains, Pablo came from the cantina. The puppy snarled back his lips, his ratlike teeth were bared, the blue hair on his thin back rose in anger, and with gleaming eyes he challenged Pablo to pick up his own garment!

"*Un grande perro!*" Pablo laughed. "You think I am the thief—I would steal my own poncho! And you will fight—magnificent! You shall be mine! The wonder dog I will make of you!"

Though the puppy snapped wickedly Pablo lifted him up and soon the red tongue licked eagerly, frantically, at the hands, the face, of this God-man whom at last he had found.

So it came Pablo carried him in his arms to the flock.

Milk from the ewes Pablo took to give to the puppy, and with much food he grew strong. When the lambing ground was left and the sheep were started to the farther range the Blue One already had become wise. And though he was small, yet he would guard the lambs, watching them patiently, and when one would stop in the brush and lie down—to hide itself because it was foot-sore—he would bark until Pablo came and, lifting the tired one, would carry it a little while that it might rest and be able to walk once more beside the old ones.

Many times, that first summer, the Blue One proved himself.

Once, when yet a small puppy, on the slopes of San Miguel, below the basalt cliff where there are the holes under the rocks and one must be careful because among the bunches of grass and the spanish dagger there sometimes creeps the great rattler or, it may be, the *serpente diablo*—the Gila monster—Pablo stopped for a little while and, sitting on the rock, dreamed of the rancho in Socorro and the time when he again should be with the Señorita Mercedes at the fandango or, in the moonlight, outside the casa, whispering words.

It was warm.

One must close ones eyes to dream—shutting out the long distances that lie between one and the desire that is in the heart. So it was that Pablo did not see the supple, graceful, diamond-mottled thing writhe silently out from beneath the bowlder on which he sat, nor the blunt, wedge-shaped head with the black, glistening eyes, swing from side to side with that slow, searching motion that can be changed instantly into a lightning flash of death. Only when he moved his foot, unconsciously, and the sinewy form, within a yard of his leg, whipped itself into coil to attack and the rattles sung their first shrill warning—only then did Pablo, suddenly aroused from his dreaming, still dazed and too confused to spring away, see the open jaws, the red throat, the white, gleaming fangs, dripping venom, and the bulldog head drawn far back ready to strike.

Then he saw. And as he looked the Blue One, with a whine of fear, yet with courage that mastered his dread, leaped in and sunk his teeth—still but puppy teeth—in the neck of the serpent!

With his own knife he slashed the place where the fangs, before the great snake died, drove deep into the flesh of the Blue One, and with his own lips Pablo sucked hard at the raw cut, after which he carried the puppy to the water hole by the willows, where the sheep drink, and much mud he put on the wound so that the Blue One lived, though, for a time, very sick.

Again the Blue One proved his courage that year when—after the season was over and Pablo was bringing the flock once more to the Rancho del Verde for the winter—as they came down out of the cañon Los Sonoyta before dawn, the fight took place with the yellow panther. Though still a young dog, the Blue One, even after El Negro, the old one that had been so many

years with the flock, was cut and torn by the claws and the teeth of the great beast until later he died, even then, did the Blue One so savagely attack the mighty cat that the creature leaped into a low piñon tree and dared not come down until Pablo, running swiftly through the moonlight, brought the rifle and shot him.

From that time on, the old dog being dead, the Blue One alone guarded the flock. So it was the next spring when Pablo again took the sheep to the range.

And that summer not one lamb, even a small one, was lost.

"He, the Blue One, is the *mastre perro*!" Pablo declared proudly, talking with Don Hernando when he came to camp, after they were on the summits of Del Cristo range, as was his custom each year to see that there was nothing wrong and that the sheep had come safely through the cattle country without trouble with the vaqueros. "Every sheep he knows as well even as myself, and that, señor, you have seen is perfect! Forever I can trust him, and no coyote or brown bear or *gato feroz*—or for that matter the great loafer wolf—could get one little ewe or a wether without first the Blue One would die fighting!"

The Blue One, hearing, understood, and in his eyes was great joy when Don Hernando patted his head.

Thus, when came the celebration of *los gallina dias*—it is the day when they bury the chicken, leaving only its head out of the sand, and the fowl is alive, after which the riders, the vaqueros, run their horses very hard past the place and, reaching down, pull the bird out by the neck, trying then, before the others can come, to get once more to the goal—because of his trust in the Blue One, both in his courage and his wisdom, as well as the great strength of him, Pablo left the flock in his charge alone and went into Socorro.

"You will guard them," Pablo, at parting, warned the Blue One, holding the strong jaws tightly between his hands and looking steadily into the brown eyes, "You will keep them, *mio perro* magnificent, and not one must be lost. To-day they shall feed and this night—when the sun is very round and red and hangs a little way above the top of El Capitan—you will bring them, every one, the ewes, the wethers, the lambs, and even also the old bucks, to the stone corral! After that you shall not sleep—but watch, at the

entrance! Do not forget! You must watch, always, until I return, for many things will come if you sleep—the wild cat, the coyote, the bear or, perhaps, it may be the hungry loafer wolves from the rock dens. One day and one night will I be away and then I will come!"

Because of the mescal and the fandango after the celebration, and because of the lure of the black eyes and the moist, red lips of the Señorita Mercedes, three days it was before Pablo returned.

Yet, when he came again, not one sheep was missing!

For three days, among the lava reefs and the lonely peaks of the Del Cristo range, the Blue One, by himself, with the flock had kept faith. Each morning, early, had he taken the herd first to the summit, then to the water, and again at night, when the sun was resting on the top of El Capitan, back once more to the stone corral, and there—all night—without food, not sleeping, had he watched even as Pablo had said.

So, in time, throughout all the San Bendito country, from the Sierra Negritos to Nacazari, for his great faithfulness, the Blue One became known. Lovers, pledging themselves to sweethearts, swore by the honor of the Blue One—he who would die, if need be, for even the smallest lamb in the flock of Don Hernando. Eager hearts thrilled, dark eyes sparkled, hot blood leaped more quickly, at the oath—at the thought—of such devotion.

Then came the night when a hundred generations of shepherd blood in the veins of the Blue One became, by magic, scorching streams of elemental passion.

Even that day the Blue One, in defense of the sheep of Don Hernando, had killed. It was the *gato feroz*. He with the sharp claws, the strong, thick teeth, the quick muscles. The Blue One, hearing the commotion among the ewes, found him, creeping through the brush, in the thick mesquites and thorns, at the foot of the black ledge. Never before in the San Bendito or the Del Christos or, for that matter, in the deep cañons of the Sierra Negritos, had one dog, without help, been known to master the ferocious wild cat. Yet, the Blue One, though slashed much by the teeth and claws, his shoulders being ripped badly and in places the skin hanging in strips from ragged wounds, killed him.

That night Swift Foot, the young she-wolf,

came. On the low cliff back of the stone corral in which the sheep were bedded she stopped. Pablo heard and the Blue One, sleeping at the opening of the tent, heard also, the long trembling cry that rolled from her throat. Like the swift, clear, ripple of the bugle call it came. Each heard, but to each it brought a different message.

"Only one wolf—*el loafer!*" Pablo, roused from his dreams, murmured, laughing half contemptuously, remembering the thing the Blue One, that day, had done at the foot of the black ledge. "The Blue One, he that can destroy the great cat, even the *gato feros*, will kill it!"

In the brain of the Blue One strange thoughts were racing.

The cry of Swift Foot brought no rage to his heart. Instead, while he listened, his body shook with a queer uneasiness. Once more the tremulous notes cut through the moonlit night, quivered among the shadowed crags of the Del Christos, echoed back from the sides of Capaline, the dead volcano. The Blue One, still sore and stiff a little from the battle of the day, went out.

Swift Foot, the young loafer wolf, that had come from the far side of El Capitan, did not run nor did she offer fight when the Blue One came up. She stood very quiet. Her muzzle she stretched out; the keen fangs were bared, but not in anger.

In the soul of the Blue One was terrible strife.

He knew he should kill, yet he dared not. Duty battled with something—something that seemed to paralyze his will. His lips curled back from the white teeth that had sunk a hundred times into the flesh of the kin of Swift Foot—his eyes sought the place, and rested an instant on the exact spot where his jaws should close on the soft, gray neck to find the jugular—still, he did not attack.

Swift Foot bounded like a gray shadow, silent, and with sure intent, into the stone corral. The Blue One followed quickly, equally silent. As the long jaws of the young wolf fastened upon the throat of a sheep and the creature fell, struggling, to the ground the Blue One, remembering duty, with a savage growl sprang upon her. One instant the great eyes of Swift Foot—even while her cruel fangs sunk deeper into the throbbing flesh of her victim—looked into the eyes of the Blue One. It was enough!

The soul of the Blue One leaped back a thousand years.

A hundred generations of ancestry faithful to man rolled from him. Pablo, Don Hernando—all became his enemies, and the lambs, the ewes, the wethers his prey!

Pablo, after the Blue One went out, listened for the noise of the fight. No sound came. None, save the faint shuffle of feet as the Blue One and Swift Foot came down from the low bluff. Then there was the rush of the sheep within the corral. At that, uneasy, he went to see and in the dim moonlight he saw the Blue One and Swift Foot with their muzzles buried, side by side, in the dark stream pouring from the throat of an old ewe, one of the fattest of the flock. Then Pablo screamed. In his voice was the agony of terror. It was the cry of a heart that is broken. It was a curse, a prayer, a sob, in one.

"*Sacre diablo!* He is mad—the Blue One—*mió perro* magnificent—he is mad!"

The Blue One, hearing, raised his head, his eyes glared, his blood-wet fangs were bared, from his throat there came such a sound as would make the heart of one turn cold.

It was as if he knew he had chosen and in the choice there was pain; it was as if he understood that never again could he look into the eyes of Pablo, he for whom before there had been adoration, devotion; it was as though in his spirit there was utter death, yet, in the cry there was also wild, fierce exultation.

Pablo saw them go.

Through wet eyes he looked while Swift Foot and the Blue One leaped from the corral and ran quickly up the long ridge. For a moment, against the sky line, they paused and stood motionless; black silhouettes, rigid and silent, in the moonlight. Then, as if by magic, the two forms blended into one, and like shadows, without a sound, they disappeared. After that Pablo, stunned by what he had seen, went back into the tent and, lying with his face buried in the blankets, wept bitterly the rest of the night, until the red dawn painted the top of El Capitan and the cañons no longer were dark.

Many sheep were lost that summer from the flocks of Don Hernando. Also from other herds.

Sometimes the Blue One and Swift Foot sought the corrals among the rough crags of the Del Christos; sometimes they ap-

peared, suddenly, beyond Capaline, the volcano that is cold; again they would strike far to the south, on the other side of the Llamo de Gato; and once there was slaughter of Señor Orrozco's ewes and lambs as far away as Los Servino which, as all know, is many miles to the east.

Under the summit of El Capitan they found the Black Cave, its entrance well hidden by the thick growth of laurel and little piñons mixed with some mesquites and many thorns. After a hard fight with White Tooth, the yellow panther, they took it for their own, and there Swift Foot and the Blue One had their home. There, later, also, puppies were born.

Much wisdom in the ways of men had the Blue One. All this he taught to Swift Foot. He made her know it was not wise to send out the loud, terrifying, hunting call of the loafers when an attack was to be made. True, the sound brought fear to the hearts of the sheep and the young cattle, also it gave warning to those who guarded the flocks. To kill in silence was best.

All this he taught Swift Foot. Yet some things she did not learn nor could the wolf soul of her understand.

It was so when, after the night in which they cut down the red yearling far out on the Llano de Gato, as they trotted swiftly through the gray morning returning, before the sun came over Capaline, to the Black Cave, they came suddenly on the coat some vaquero—perhaps an Americano—had lost from his saddle, and she, Swift Foot, in play, leaped upon it to shake it, the Blue One, growling savagely, showing his teeth, crouched over it, whining and beating the ground with his tail.

Such a thing Swift Foot could not understand. It was the same when they found the stray lamb. Already that day, below the Black Rock on San Miguel, nine wethers, besides some ewes, had they killed. The Blue One himself, very cleverly, cut them away from the flock while Pasco, the herder, dozed in the warm sunshine. Then he took them over the ridge into the cañon, where Swift Foot waited. At their leisure the two cut the throats of the sheep and drank blood until they were tired. Then they had come on the lamb. It was a very small one and weak. The Blue One would not kill it, nor would he let Swift Foot pull it down. Instead, he drove it—while his muzzle was still wet with the blood of the others—

through the thick brush to the Black Cave. There, until morning, he kept it when it died itself!

Why did he do this? Swift Foot could not tell. How could she, a loafer wolf, understand that even after he had become an outlaw, a killer, a raider of the flocks, there came still to the soul of the Blue One flashes of passion to save instead of destroy—echoes of the centuries of devotion bred in his kind by man? It was very strange.

Then Swift Foot became heavy with puppy and could not run. Soon, in the Black Cave under the summit of El Capitan, the puppies were born. Seven there were, all beautiful and well formed.

While the puppies were young the Blue One hunted alone. After each kill he returned again to Swift Foot—even as the desperado Americano, Señor Buck Dawson, the outlaw, when he had robbed a stage or raided the mines or it might be "shot up"—they call it—the little village or the isolated hacienda, came always once more to the rancho in Socorro, there to be with the Señorita Carlota, most beautiful, most bewitching, most enticing *cortesana* in all San Bendito.

"It is enough!" Don Hernando, very angry, declared when Pablo sent word by Mateo, the camp tender, he who brings provisions to the herders, that the second time within one week there had been a killing of sheep in the corrals in the Del Christos. "The Blue One shall die! Five hundred pesos, *oro Americano*, is the reward to the one who brings to the Rancho del Verde the head of *los perro diablo!* Let the Yaquis hunt him!"

So, for the death of the Blue One there was offered a price—much money—half as much it was as the Company los Minera had promised to pay for the body, dead or alive, of the laughing, desperado Americano, Señor Buck Dawson.

The vaquero—the cow-puncher—Señor "Skinny" Rawlins, going from the Rancho del Crazy Snake to Magdalena; riding swiftly though the afternoon was hot; rounded the turn of Lone Butte—where the basalt dyke juts out from the slope of the hill and there is much cactus as well as some mesquites and thick brush—and met, suddenly, the Blue One.

One bullet cut the breast of the great dog; one gashed the lean rump; one tore through the shoulder, shattering the bone,

causing him to somersault in the air, as if the wound at once was mortal. Yet, when Señor Skinny reached the thicket of mesquite the Blue One could not be found.

Until Señor Skinny was gone the Blue One remained, very quiet, in the thicket. Then, terribly hurt, he fought to win his way—dying though he was—to the Black Cave where Swift Foot and the puppies were. It was very hot. The sun was brutal; it burned him; the sand scorched his feet; thirst and pain and the loss of blood blinded him; he staggered and fell often. Yet, at last, he came to the springs, Agua Claro, halfway between Lone Butte and the foot of El Capitan. Another, wounded also to the death, already was there.

After the fight, the night before, in the streets of Socorro, with the "Rangers"—they who at last had outguessed him and waited, knowing he would come, following the robbery of the Rincon stage, to bring presents, as was his habit, to the Señorita Carlota, the *cortesana*—"Black-eyed Flame o' Hell" he called her—Señor Buck Dawson tried desperately to reach the cañon Del Norte in the Sierra Negritas.

It was too much. With a slug in his lung, spitting much blood, his horse having been left—shot through the loins—in the Arroya Grande, the Señor Buck staggered, still laughing, delirious, into the shade of the mesquites around the springs, and dropped, utterly spent, gasping for breath, beside the cold stream seeping from under the roots of the great yucca.

There he was lying, by the water, when the Blue One dragged himself, inch by inch, to the edge of the shelter. At the sound made by the Blue One, Señor Buck turned his head, the gun in his hand whipped over and bore on the point from which the noise had come; the hammer clicked back; a lean, red-stained finger nursed the trigger. For one moment the great brown eyes of the Blue One, mad almost with agony, stared with wild ferocity into the gray, bloodshot eyes of Señor Buck.

Suddenly Señor Buck laughed. It was the laugh of a man when he knows the end has

come and he does not care. "The—the—Blue One!" he muttered thickly, choking on that which kept pouring up into his throat. "The—Blue One—an' shot—shot all to hell! Play—play—it out, old pal. Damned if I'll—if I'll—finish you—"

The tension on the trigger relaxed; a red stream gushed from the lips of the outlaw Americano, he pitched forward on his side, his face still turned toward the Blue One, and lay still.

The look in the eyes of the Blue One changed. At the sound of the voice of the man it seemed to him—some way—that it was Pablo on the ground before him—no!—it was a lamb, tired, fallen in the brush. He—he must guard— A great tenderness came in his eyes, so dim now he could scarcely see the thing lying there by the water. Whining piteously, his ears back, his nose stretched out—reaching—he crawled closer, closer, until the swollen tongue licked the dirty, blood-flecked, mouth of the dead outlaw, still half open in a last laugh.

The ranchito in Socorro, that night, was very gay.

In the cantina La Merino bright, indeed, were the lights; soft and enticing was the music; more charming than ever was the *cortesana*, the "Black-Eyed Flame o' Hell," Señorita Carlota. So thought El Capitan Maytorena, as he led her through the fandango, yet, had he looked closely he would have seen that the moisture in her eyes was not the dew of laughter, though her carmined lips were parted in a smile; and even while she pressed her warm, slim body against his breast, she seemed to be listening—

When the white moon had flung shadows down the sides of Capaline; when the chill of midnight lay over the Llano de Gato, Pablo, awakened from a dream of the Señorita Mercedes—a dream, very sweet, in which some way the Blue One had a part, strange though it was—heard, from the top of El Capitan, the wailing, trembling call of a she-wolf, crying in the night for its mate—and there was no answer.



A Chat With You

IT is great," says a critic, speaking of a recently published story, "because of its pitiless fidelity to everyday people and everyday life."

Is this what makes for greatness in a story? We don't think so. If it were, the painstaking account of the funeral of some dignitary in a country newspaper might be great literature.

What makes a story "great?" Homer's "Odyssey" is great stuff. Will any one try to tell us that it owes its position to its pitiless pictures of everyday life? Is it the pitiless and everyday quality that makes people read Shakespeare or Kipling or Jack London or Bertrand Sinclair or H. H. Knibbs? Not a bit of it.



WELL, then, is a story great because it is interesting? There are many sorts of interest. A jealous woman shoots her husband and another woman. She gets a column or so in a newspaper, starting on the first page and going over to the third. It is so undeniably interesting that, if you start reading it, you are going to hunt for the continuation on the third page. Does this make it a "great" story? Is the reporter who set down the facts with pitiless severity a great writer? Similarly the financial page of a paper, either during a boom or a panic, may be acutely interesting—but it is certainly not great in the sense of literary value.

HERE we have tried out two tests as to the quality of stories, and apparently neither of them works. There must be some other standard. Let us try to find it in some of the stories themselves. Think back and remember some story you thought was splendid. Take the work of your favorite POPULAR author. What did it do to you? It interested you, of course. But it did something more than that. It gave you a picture of human nature, the thrill of a human drama, a measurably true and vivid view of life in one or another of its phases. Was this all? Think again. Don't try to remember what it was, try to remember *what it did to you*. Now we have it. It stirred you up. It was something more than interest. It was exhilaration of some sort or another. It took you out of yourself. It made you laugh or almost cry, it kept you guessing. It aroused your sympathy with some fellow human struggling against odds. It gave you the awe and reverence for the works of God that is sometimes the message of the wide and open spaces. It made you forget the little ego. For a moment your own personality had escaped from its trammels, and was floating free in the great sea of human sympathy and love.



IT matters little how the author attains his result. One story does it by a delicate and tender interpretation

of the life of the humblest of humanity. Another shows you stark, human heroism. Another buoys you aloft on a gale of laughter. If the story has the quality of lifting the man out of himself, it is a "great" story. Not otherwise. Realism, romanticism are two doors, either of which may open on the enchanted land. The wonder of the world, its immensity and variety, the worth and dignity of human nature, the pathetic yet stirring drama in which we daily move, above all, the ineffable appeal of human aspiration, courage, and optimism—these are the raw materials for the great stories.

The man who can take these materials and realize them for us in fiction must have unusual qualities. Cleverness is not enough. He must have love and sympathy for his fellow man. He must have a certain respect and awe and reverence for nature—and, above all, for human nature. He must see the beauty and the drama that is concealed somewhere in the dullest reality. If he has not these qualities, how can he give them to us?



WE cannot succeed perfectly. What we can do is continually to strive for that spark and fire, that essence of hope and wonder and adventure that lifts the story out of the class of milk-and-water entertainment, and transmutes it into a wine for the soul. One story has it in one way, another in another. "Rainbow Landing," the complete novel by Frank Lillie Pollock, which appears in the next issue, has its own thrill and exaltation. We see and

smell the Alabama woods and the rolling river. We see a new South rising on the ashes of the old, a new industry winning back the tangled woods to order and usefulness. Besides this, it is a tale of strong adventure. The story that follows it, "Two Tickets to Paradise," by Thomas McMorrow, has for its setting the real-estate business in New York. Could anything be duller? Just read the story. Here is adventure and romance in another guise, and, above all, real mirth and hearty laughter. And what about Knibbs and Stacpoole and Norton, all of whom have stories in the next issue? It is true that they all can describe life with absolute fidelity, but they can do a lot more than that. They can take us out of ourselves into a brighter and more vivid world. They can help us to like and understand each other. They can show us what a wonderful thing, after all, is this round ball, rolling upon its appointed orbit through uncharted seas of space.

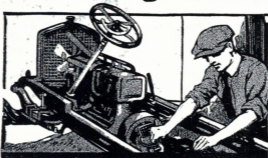


WH Y do authors write? One will tell you one thing, another another, but the wisest among them will finally admit that it is because they want to and because they can't help it. They have seen the wonders of the earth and the fullness thereof. The spell is on them. They must tell about it, and how can anything be told half so well as in a story?

Why do authors write? For the same reason that people—old-fashioned, inarticulate, but wise people—go to church; to praise and magnify the works of the Lord.

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