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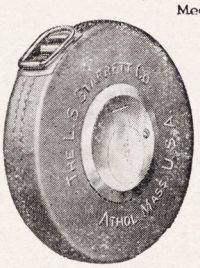

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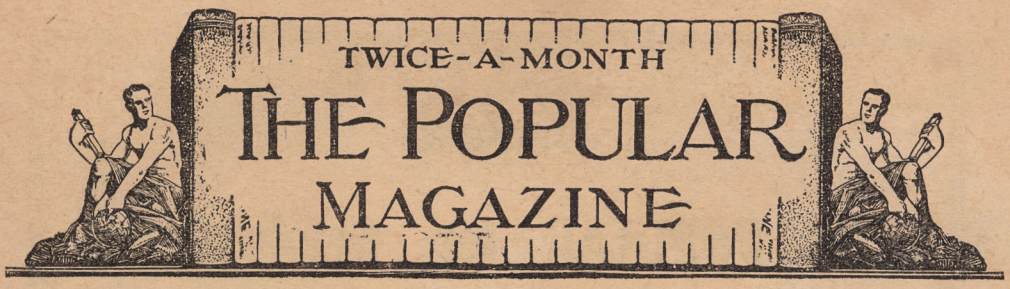

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXV. SEPTEMBER 20, 1922. No. 5.

That Nice Dragon

By William West Winter

Author of "The Lost Mine of Morgan le Fay," "The Count of Ten," Etc.

THE days of real dragons may be over, but there are substitutes. Old Wing's quaint Chinese myth about the princess and the dragon turned out not nearly so absurd as Marriner, the mining misogynist of the Coffin Range, had thought it.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

THE WHITE DEATH.

TWENTY years ago there was no railroad there, no town, no inhabitants. There was nothing but the desert, stretching on three sides for many miles. On the fourth—the north side—it also stretched; but not so far. Not more than five or six miles of the flat plain intervened between the spot where a town was to spring into being and the brown, bleak inhospitality of the mountains.

And such a desert! Perhaps in all the world there is none other like it. Certainly not in America. One expects even in a desert some trace of vegetation—and in North American deserts more than a trace. Sage or greasewood, mesquite or cactus, even sparse bunch grass, green after the infrequent rains and brown at other times, dots the monotony of sand and alkali. Even in the wind-piled hillocks of the White Sands —the terrible gypsum desert of New Mexico —the dunes are spotted with black and blue growths of gnarled shrubs, like ink spots against the dirty, whitish-gray surface.

But this was the Salduro! Salduro, the great Salt Desert—where for a space of ages the stagnant, leaden waves of a prehistoric lake had surged and then had gradually evaporated, leaving behind them their solid burden of salt, until either the rising land surface or the falling waters had left the vast, flat, unbroken surface bare beneath the sun, gleaming ghastly white where the rays smote the glittering plain of sodium chloride. During many centuries no plant had found hardihood to grow on that desiccating floor. Not even a prickly pear could survive that poisonous soil.

For many years it defied man himself.

To venture forth upon that blinding glare was to court death. The surface simmered in the sun with heat waves, but that was not the worst. Had it been sand underfoot one might have endured the heat, magnified though it was by refraction. And goggles might have guarded one's eyes against the glare. But what could guard one against the fine, impalpable dust that moving feet stirred up from the hard, crystalline surface—the deadly salt that sifted into nose and mouth, drying the mucous membranes; and that percolated through the clothes and was sucked into the body through the pores themselves?

Men who have been out on the Salduro for a few hours, even with a full canteen, have had their work cut out to win to safety—even though it was reasonably near by. Moreover, there is nothing on that desert to tempt a man to brave it, neither gold nor silver nor copper; nothing but the flat, billiard-table expanse of white salt.

Railroads, however, have small consideration for factors which deter man when considerations of grade and distance are to be calculated. The Salduro offered a route miles shorter and more direct than any other to the coast. Its hard, crystalline surface, flat as a floor, furnished a roadbed made to order, through which there was no necessity to drive expensive tunnels or cuts, or make fills. Consequently it was inevitable that, in time, a transcontinental road should lay its rails across it.

Even railroads have their limitations and water is one of them. That is why the line was laid across the Salduro near its northern limits. In the mountains there was water, although none of it flowed down to the thirsty salt beds—or, if it did, it was so quickly sucked in that it had no other effect than to create some small, stagnant, brackish pools where the salt began to thin out into brown sand. A man might drink at these pools, on a pinch. But occasional racks of bones with hide stretched tightly over them, protruding from the marsh grass and water, gave fair warning that temperance was the safer plan.

But water from the mountains could be piped to the railroad. And it was done. From distant springs it was led to huge tanks; and, where the thirsty locomotives drank, sprang up roundhouses, repair shops and switching yards. An adequately capitalized company even started an industry of gathering the salt, refining it and shipping it where it had a market value.

All this activity promoted the growth of a town. Railroad employees and others settled there, houses were built and a little hive of industry and civilization came into being, squatted like a yellow stain on the horrible, deadly poison trap of the Salduro. It boasted two streets, one running east and west, parallel to the railroad, while the other ran north and south at right angles to the adjacent range, whence the big pipe line brought the water without which this hamlet could not have endured.

Rising somewhat out of this flat basin, but still for the most part level and tablelike, the surrounding surface of the earth presented the usual appearance of desert country; brown and forbidding but not entirely hopeless. It was covered with sage or cactus, greasewood and bunch grass, which afforded feed to sheep and even, in the more favored sections, to moderate herds of cattle.

If one had looked down upon this country from an airplane it would have seemed a vast, yellow level, streaked at oddly regular intervals with dark patches, running parallel, north and south, irregular in shape. Had one viewed it as depicted on a relief model these patches would have appeared as wrinkles rising from the smooth surface. To one who journeyed through the country they were mountain ranges which, in the lost ages when Lake Bonneville was a mighty inland sea, formed fertile islands in the blue waste of cool waters.

But there were none of these ranges in the Salduro itself. They edged it round but did not touch it.

South of the railroad the salt beds stretched for from twenty to thirty miles. It was fifty to the first of the ranges, and twenty miles of arid, gently rolling plain screened the cool forest that rimmed the granite peak of Ibapah from the saline desert. Standing on the thirteen-thousand-foot crest one could look down to the valley on the west where the creeks flowing from Ibapah watered a fertile, if small valley; or one could look farther, to similar ranges in Nevada. To the east, across the plain, other brown and yellow walls of rock broke the surface as though they had been pushed through it from below. But there were miles of desert to separate each of the ranges from any other.

Naturally, that is a lonely land. Yet man

is there. In valleys like that beside Ibapah he forms isolated settlements where he tills the ground. On the yellow desert he builds lonely ranches where his herds of sheep or cattle may be supervised. Deep in the mountain ranges he delves for mineral and, if he finds it, builds smelters, railroads and towns to work it and haul it out where it may bring him wealth.

Even the Coffin Range is no exception. On the west of that rampart are fairly fertile valleys. In its depths are respectable streams of cool water. Once, many years ago, there had been mineral—auriferous sands which had lured so many across the deadly sands only to die before gaining the placers, that the name of the mountains became obvious to the point of inevitability.

There was timber there—but inaccessible for all practical purposes. There was pasture and it had once been well grazed. But stock raising had grown to be a precarious means of livelihood long since and the herds had shrunk to nothing in consequence. So with the homesteads. They were still there but the railroads had killed them. Hay and barley could be brought from the Salt Lake Valley cheaper than it could be hauled from the Coffin Range to Welcome City.

That was the name of the town on the Pacific Short Line. It was well bethought. Welcome to that hamlet on the edge of the Salduro was free and vociferous to any that had the temerity to visit it! Especially it had a welcome, a sinister welcome, for women.

CHAPTER II.

CRUEL WELCOME.

Miss Sylvia Bartlett, whose stage name was La Belle Hortense, had led a life of vicissitudes which were not reflected in her appearance. A dancer in variety shows is used to ups and downs and, of late, most of Sylvia's adventures had been of the down classification. In previous years she had had her share of successes but, for the time being, at least, the tide had turned.

She had started her career at the age of eighteen, at which time the joys of life in a puritanical New England home had palled upon her and some atavistic streak in her nature had caused her to rebel with violence and flight. Some Huguenot ancestor, perhaps, had given her not only her grace and piquant, dark beauty of foreign flavor, but some share of Gallic levity mixed with Calvinistic solidity and courage. She had run away from home and she had gone on the stage, both of which were crimes against the code in which she had been bred. As chorus girl in burlesque and musical comedy she had served her apprenticeship and then, with an endowment of character, thrift and perseverance, she had graduated to a dancing specialty in which she had been featured for some years. She had been no star of the Russian Ballet, it is true, but her hard and conscientious work aided by natural talent, had given her a certain standing and a certain following.

The "Varieties," however, are an unstable refuge, especially in these later days of cheaper and better entertainment. Although Sylvia drew a good salary and, ordinarily, never lacked for engagements, certain risks were always present. Thus, after six years of her career had passed, she found herself, through no fault of her own, stranded in a Western town when a road show in which she was appearing fell upon hard times and finally into the hands of the sheriff on an attachment in behalf of creditors.

The matter did not worry Sylvia at first. She had a little money, although, in spite of a good salary she had not saved a great deal. Costumes and other expenses had taken care of that. But native thrift and ambition alike told her that such an experience was a warning. If she ever expected to be independent, to achieve fame and wealth, it behooved her to look about for other opportunities than were offered in cheap and passing burlesque. The failure of the show offered her both an opportunity and an urge which bade her turn to the modern Mecca of fortune seekers, Los Angeles and the "pictures." They promised her a road to fortune and fame, not in the romantic imagination of a twenty-four-year-old girl but in the practical mind of a professional who knew she had ability and considered that ability salable.

Los Angeles was not far to reach and Sylvia went there. But she came at a time when the motion-picture producers were experiencing hard times themselves. What with censorship agitation, falling profits, poor financing and inflated salaries, the industry was in a rather precarious state. The cry was not now for expansion but for retrenchment. Everywhere in Los Angeles were actors and actresses out of work and many a girl as experienced as Sylvia was

glad to accept occasional employment as an "extra," where, shortly before, she would have expected to have her name included in the cast.

Perseverance might have overcome this handicap and Sylvia had that in plenty. But there was another handicap which nothing could overcome. She did not "screen" well. Although she looked like a flower rich in color and preserved an appearance of innocence and sweetness that sometimes surprised herself, the merciless camera illogically refused to register her charms and even invented defects in her features which the eye could not discern. Although Sylvia was prettier by far than many of the more famous stars, the camera did not think so and therefore the magnates and directors had no choice but to let her down as easy as possible.

She had not been affluent when she arrived and a few weeks of Los Angeles, even though she was as frugal as possible, saw the rapid exhaustion of her capital. But she was self-reliant and accustomed to the vicissitudes of her profession, endowed also with the fatalistic philosophy of the stage, and she did not allow herself to become alarmed. Instead she set out to retrieve her fortunes, and naturally concluded that the place to begin was back in New York where she was known. New York, however, was far away and travel was expensive. When she got through pawning everything that she could pledge, reserving only some items of costume that were necessary in her work, she found that she had not enough to take her a third of the way across the continent.

Nevertheless, she determined to start. Inquiry at the ticket offices developed the fact that her funds would take her a certain distance on each of the roads, to a point in Arizona on the Santa Fe or the S. P., to Idaho, on the U. P. or the Northwestern, or to Welcome City, on the line between Nevada and Utah on the P. S. L. The name of the town smote upon and roused her stage-bred superstition.

"Welcome City!" she exclaimed. "Well, I certainly need a welcome from somewhere. Railroad-shop town, isn't it? They're generally lively enough and if I can't sign on at anything else I can shoot biscuits until I get a stake to take me as far as Zion."

In this manner she set out casually for a town of which she knew nothing but the name and in the course of time dropped off a tourist sleeper at the dingy red station. Coming from the western side she was unprepared for what she encountered, since for many hours she had been traversing the yellow, barren plains of Nevada with no more than occasional patches of alkali breaking the monotony of yellow sand and black sage. Had she come from the east she would have been fortified to some extent by prolonged sight of the Salduro and would have had opportunity to steel her mind to what she might expect.

She stood on the platform, observed and observing, and slowly apprehension took hold upon her. It was not that the town was rough, for she had been in many that resembled it in physical aspect, but that it was a town obviously inhabited almost exclusively by men. Past the station ran a street which was dusty and without the usual gutters of irrigating water flowing at the sides. On either side of it ran board sidewalks, warped and splintered by the hot sun and the wear of feet. Lining it were unpainted, weather-beaten buildings, square and shapeless, some with false fronts. Farther away were sheds of red-painted, corrugated iron, a huge water tank beside the tracks, a great roundhouse and shops all baking in the sun. There was never a tree, never a fence inclosing a patch of ground, no flowers, no grass nor any least showing of an effort to make the place other than a barracks where the army of workers swarmed when their work was done.

There were women here and there, however, but they were the sort that might be expected in such a place. Rough, unkempt, coarse or worse, here and there they were to be seen. One, full blown, free of manner and coarse of face stood before the door of a pine shack whose sign proclaimed it an eating house. Evidently a waitress, equipped by nature and upbringing to cope with the male population of Welcome. Sylvia's idea of "biscuit shooting" died a violent death at the sight of her.

Her knowledge and experience of men were those of the stage woman. Her prejudices were her own. Mingled with her inherited puritanism, the training of the dancer compelled to lead a life of rigid exercise and regular hours, had kept her isolated from the seamy side of stage life but she knew it well enough, although not by experience. She knew no women except of the stage but men she had known of all walks, and she de-

spised and distrusted them all. They had presented only one side to her and the types, although differing in detail, agreed generally in their attitude toward women of her profession.

In New York and other large cities where prejudice and ignorance had yielded somewhat to the age men were such that some of them could be tolerated if not trusted but in the smaller places where prejudice still held sway and ignorance was common, the "hicks," as she regarded them, had no idea but one of her kind. And, in this knowledge, here had she stepped down into a town where there were none but men, to all intents and purposes, and men of the rudest and crudest kind.

She had only a few dollars, not enough to pay her passage to the next town, let alone to Salt Lake City; she had nothing she could sell, even if she could have found a purchaser, and her confidence that she could make her way had died a sudden death in a wave of panic.

Her life had made her grimly self-reliant and courageous, however, and, as the loafers about the station eyed her expectantly she picked up her bag and walked with head and eyes looking bleakly ahead toward the hotel. She walked boldly into the hotel lobby, noting that on one side were swinging doors under which she observed a sawdust-covered floor. That would be the bar, and, prohibition or no prohibition, she made a shrewd guess that soft liquors were not the only kind sold there. Out of it also came the droning buzz of the marble rolling in a roulette wheel.

Heavy-hearted, she registered, under the heavy-lidded scrutiny of a slack-mouthed clerk, and getting her key went unguided, to her dingy room.

CHAPTER III.

DENVER'S DREAM.

A two days' search for work had left Sylvia almost desperate and ready to do anything short of murder to escape from Welcome. She was not sure that she would hesitate at that, especially as her hatred of men and what they represented grew with each hour in the town. She had not dared announce herself as a stage woman, a professional dancer, at first, but had sought work of other kinds only to find that there was none that she could possibly accept.

To fall back upon her profession, she knew, would involve risk, yet at last she came to the conclusion that therein lay her only hope. There were several "cafés," common dance halls where drinks were served without regard to the eighteenth amendment, and women who could entertain were in demand. It was in one of these, a dance hall kept by a doubtful individual who passed by the name of "Slimy Jake," that she applied for and obtained an engagement to dance and to "entertain." It seemed her only hope. She felt that with a fairly liberal salary and a "rake-off" or percentage of the receipts from patrons whom her charms induced to purchase drinks she would be in a position, after a couple of weeks, to make her way to more salubrious climes.

She counted without the breed of men that infested Welcome City.

On her second night at Slimy Jake's the inevitable happened. Fortunately it found her prepared in a measure. She had secured money enough from her percentage of the night before to purchase a small but efficient revolver which she had tucked safely away inside her waist, ready to hand.

She had passed through that first night's ordeal safely, a certain hard contempt and self-confidence enabling her to fend off too fervent advances and to suppress too open remarks, while her charm and beauty had proved an efficient stimulant to spending.

But to-night, after her dance was over and she had descended to the floor, a hulking, brutal section hand of foreign extraction had commanded her attention. He was not to be denied and a glance in the direction of her employer gave her no hope that he would interfere. Frightened, she took her seat at a table with the man.

Already primed with poisonous liquor, his thickly whispered words were soon followed by undisguised advances. Vainly she strove to ward him off with sarcasm and even abuse. It only enraged and inflamed him until he suddenly seized her and attempted to drag her into his embrace. In wild revolt she struck at him with her hands and kicked with her feet with the result that he roared out in rage and loosed one hand to strike at her.

She snatched the pistol from her waist and fired and, with a hoarse cry, the man collapsed before her.

Shaken, nauseated and ill, she whirled and darted toward the door. How she gained it

when a dozen could have stopped her, she did not know. She saw them swarming from their seats all around but they did not interfere with her until she found herself in the clear, cool air laden with the curious, salt smell of the Salduro.

She was weak but she felt the urge to run. Not knowing where she was going, she stumbled along, her high-heeled dancing slippers turning under her feet and cruelly straining her ankles. One of them slipped off her heel and hung dangling, tripping her. Half in rage and half in fright at the delay, she paused long enough to kick it angrily into the night. It flew into the air, its rhinestone buckle flashing in the moonlight and, as luck would have it, landed on the post of a corral at the side of the road, where it hung by its strap.

Sylvia did not pause, but ran on, awkwardly, until the heel of the other slipper broke off, aiding her progress, although she hardly noticed it. Yet, as no sounds of pursuit came to her attention, she was recovering from her first fright.

Slowing down, she perceived a door through which the light streamed. It was next to the post office and she remembered it as a one-story building on the dusty windows of which she had seen the sign, "Real Estate," and a name which she had not taken the trouble to read.

But now a man and a woman were standing in the door, looking out into the street. The man she would have avoided but the woman represented her greatest need and in desperation she limped up to the door.

The woman, a girl almost as young as Sylvia, spoke sharply.

"Why, 'Denver!' It's the jane that blew in the other day! Whatta you know about that?"

The man peered at Sylvia as she leaned weakly against the door jamb.

"She was goin' to dance at Slimy Jake's and that's where the shot come from. Say, what's the trouble down there?"

Sylvia caught her breath as she answered.

"I signed up to dance—but there are limits! There was a man there—he got fresh and I shot him. I thought they would kill me and I ran."

"Huh!" snorted the man. "They wouldn't kill no one. Not if he was looking. These foreigners ain't got the nerve. Don't seem to be no one coming."

"What ever made you take the chance?" asked the girl wonderingly. "Believe me, dearie, I'd go a long ways, I'll tell the world, before I'd perform in this dump! I ain't any too particular, but this here town has me stopped."

"I was broke," said Sylvia, dully. "Trying to raise a stake for a get-away!"

The girl put out an arm and clasped Sylvia's shoulder with understanding, leading her into the room. She was slangy, bold, overdressed, but she seemed like a saint from heaven to the dancer.

"Some town to be broke in!" she ejaculated. "These buzzards would sure treat a lady rough. Take it from me, dearie, I wouldn't be in your silk stockings for a few grand. I'll say I wouldn't!"

A young man who was sitting in the room, rose lazily as the girl led Sylvia to a seat. She felt faint and sick now that the strain was over, glancing listlessly at her new-found friends. What she saw was both reassuring and disquieting.

The girl was pretty, in a rather hard, coarse way. But her coarseness was not of the sort that Sylvia had come to associate with the women of Welcome City. It was more the type she had seen in the green-room and the cabarets: Bold, unscrupulous, perhaps, but owning limits. Her appearance was good enough, and her eyes kindly, though they had a peculiar flatness of color and the brown iris was slightly rimmed with yellow.

The man who had stood at the door with her was a burly, half bald man of middle age. He was tanned in reddish blotches but the prevailing tone of his face was a pallor that defied the effects of sun and weather. Curiously expressionless, his features seemed to be ever on the move, twitching or grimacing as though he had some nervous trouble. His eyes, too, were flat, although the eyelids habitually veiled them. The eyeballs were glassy, when seen at all, and the gray irises, like the girl's, rimmed with yellow. In both of them Sylvia vaguely sensed an appearance that was familiar in some way though she could not, in her distracted state of mind, recall where and when she had observed their like.

The third member of the party was a young man of less than thirty, fairly good looking, but with a face that was coldly and recklessly hard, a mouth like a trap and eyes that, while keen and clear, half frightened the girl by their cruelty. He seemed

leisurely, almost bored, yet he could be alert if he so willed it.

The three of them exchanged glances while the girl gave Sylvia a drink of water and reassured her with commonplace but kindly sympathy. The burly man stood looking at and through her, vaguely. At frequent intervals he rubbed his lip or nose, or scratched his chin, his half-dropped eyelids twitching.

"Here, you come and lie down a minute," said the girl, after a moment. "It won't do you no harm to rest up a little."

Sylvia let her lead her to a room in the rear which was furnished as a bedroom and which evidently was occupied by the girl. Here she was urged to lie down, and her hostess then went out, shutting the door behind her.

The big man faced the girl as she reentered the room.

"What you going to do with her, Nellie?"

"You can search me," said the girl. "She's up against it, I'll say."

"Nice little jane: good lookin': lots of class," said the big man, absently. "We might be using her, now?"

"Don't go havin' any dreams, Denver," said the girl, curtly. "We got troubles enough as it is, without takin' on any charity."

"I guess my dreamin' ain't helped us none in the past," said the man called Denver, ironically. "Who dreamed about this graft, I'd like to know? It wasn't me, I suppose."

"Oh, so long as you dream right, I got no kick comin'. Only, don't go to havin' visions that'll lead these dicks right on top of us. Am I right, Micky?"

The younger man yawned. "Oh, maybe so! I don't care what you dream, anyhow. One of Denver's visions, even, wouldn't go bad if it broke the monotony. I'm sick of the whole business."

"Ain't you draggin' down enough?"

"Oh, it's coming in regular. That's the trouble. Take a trip, unload, drag down the dough; take a trip, unload, drag down the dough. Over and over again. Say, what kind of a life is that, I'd like to know?"

"Maybe you'd like to start something on the side and have these agents on top of us," said the girl, sarcastically. "They're prowlin' round the place enough, so all you got to do is get conspicuous. You'll get plenty of action right away."

"At the rate they're going I'll be dead before they get wise," said Micky, contemptuously. "Let's rob a train, or something."

"Lay off of that, Micky," said Denver, flatly. "These agents are gettin' too close, and that's a fact. Nell's right. Then, there's this guy down around Ibapah! I ain't never been easy about his bein' there."

"He hasn't done anything harmful yet," said Micky, indifferently. "Nothing but a miner. Too slow to catch cold."

"I guess he's kinda simple. I met one o' them miners once. Spent all his time chasin' round the desert lookin' for a mine. Used to gabble to himself mostly, he was so lonesome. He was what they call locoed out in these parts."

"This fellow may be, for all I know. He hasn't so much as shown his nose around up here although I guess he's heard of us. You know that chink I brought in a month or so back?"

"Sure."

"I put him down and told him to beat it to the valley. He was wandering around when this guy picks him up. I don't know what yarn the chink told him but I guess he swallowed it. He hired the chop-suey expert and has him working away digging sand just as though he thought Chinese mandarins were dropped from the sky for his special benefit. Don't know what old Wing has up his sleeve but maybe he thinks the guy may really find some gold, and he can get away with it. A couple of naturals, if you ask me."

Denver sat at a table, plucking at his face and gazing blankly at the wall.

"He goes out pretty regular, don't he?"

"About once a month."

"What's the matter with our plantin' somethin' on him in case these dicks get any livelier?"

Micky chuckled. "Wouldn't be a bad idea. He's so dumb he'd be easy. Slip a can or two under his blankets some day when he's out and then steer the bulls onto him. It'd work all right if they get wise to the place."

"Well," Denver went on, "it'd be a good idea to have a plant ready. Besides, I ain't so sure he's all he seems to be. There ain't no gold in those hills. When we bought those claims up there to keep people out, we heard all about how the place petered out twenty years ago. I'm thinkin' we'd better have some one there to watch him, anyhow."

"Not me," said Nellie, emphatically. "It's going to be bad enough livin' in the valley and tappin' the key, with no one to visit with me except that rat, Harley. What's the use of watchin' him? He don't come near the landing."

"How do you know he don't? He might be sneakin' there any old time, gettin' an eyeful. I'm thinkin' we ought to be sure he ain't gettin' too curious and anyway, we ought to keep his mind on somethin' else, so he won't ever be tempted to get curious."

"I'd shoot the sucker, but he's too slick," said Micky. "Sort of shy and wild like an Indian. Never could get near him."

Denver broke into a chuckle. When he laughed his skin seemed to break like dry parchment into a thousand cracks. His vague eyes became even more glassy than usual.

"He's off again," snorted Nellie.

"Here's this girl! Say, I've got an idea. It'll cost us somethin' but we're gettin' it easy. Let's drop her down on him."

"Ah, wake up! You're snorin'!" said Nellie. But Micky looked interested.

"We can wise her up that we're dicks lookin' for a moonshiner that's runnin' stuff outa the mountains and this guy is it. She'll fall fer that if I show her the badge. We'll fix her up a story and give her the papers to the claim under this guy's roost. She drops outa the sky, all dolled up like a Fifth Avenue broad, smilin' and vampin' him. She's goin' to escape from the crool, heartless world into the boundless ha'nts of nater, where she delves the dirt and rakes the hay and dry-nurses the cows and writes stories fer the magazines. Say, do you get me?"

"It's a scream, Denver," said Nellie, admiringly. "You must be aimin' to paralyze this hick."

"You said a mouthful, Nell! I'll knock him for a row of sanitary churns, take it from me! This doll sets him gogglin' by the way she lights on him outa the sky! Not only that but she knocks him for a gong with her make-up. Say, he'll be eatin' outa her hand and groanin' love all over the place before she's sat down to eat!"

"You win the genuine cheese-handled monkey wrench, Denver," asserted Nellie, with conviction. "When this scenario is shown, I want to be there."

"It's a bird of an idea!" insisted Denver, stubbornly. "I'll leave it to Micky."

"It might be all right, at that," said the latter, thoughtfully. "It wouldn't do any harm to keep the guy busy and away from our plant. Then, if things break like they may, we'd have a chance to plant it on him. Nellie could give the bulls a steer that way. The girl might even slip the goods in on him. It listens pretty well. In any case, it might break the monotony."

"Well, if you're goin' to outvote me——" said Nellie, half aggrieved.

Denver went on, dreamily. "We'd have to get her an outfit of cows and pigs and things —whatever they use fer farmin' out here. I guess Baldwin will have enough in stock to send up to her. We can get it from him. And the guy'll have to do her plantin' and fertilizin' and the rest of it for her and that'll keep him too busy to stick his nose into our business."

"All of which is leavin' the girl out of it. Maybe you better make sure she'll do it," said Nellie.

"Do it? Why wouldn't she do it? Ain't she goin' to be workin' fer the secret service of the U. S. A. as soon as I flash this here phony tin on her? And supposin' she has some lingerin' disinclinations that way, whatta you suppose she's goin' to do instead? Go back to Slimy Jake's?"

"Say, I'm no phylanthropist, Nellie, and I wouldn't found no rescue homes if I had the dough, but even me and Micky, here, would feel sorry for that jane if she has to stay in Welcome until she can make enough to hit the rattler outa the place. I watched her since she come in, and she ain't feelin' any too chirpy about her prospects, neither. She's wise! And she ain't the kind, I'll say that for her, that *wants* to stay in Welcome.

"Will she fall for it? Say, go drag her out and we'll see whether she'll fall for it!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SLIPPER OF RHODOPIS.

A night train passed through Welcome City, coming from the east. It was a mixed freight and local and to the station hangers-on did not present an attraction which could compete with the night life of the place. When it stopped there was no one on hand to note the few passengers who descended from the coach at the rear of the train. Most of them went to the hotel.

But one man turned down the street and walked briskly until he had come to a barn built of unpainted pine boards. Beside it

and fronting on the street was a roughly fenced feed yard.

The man roused a slumbering attendant and went into the barn where the two busied themselves in saddling a horse. The newcomer led the beast out into the road, paid the attendant for its keep and swung into the saddle. The man subsided at his post beside the door and went to sleep again.

"Looks like a hophead to me," muttered the stranger. He touched his horse with his heels and rode sedately on past the fence bounding the feed yard.

Something caught his eye as it flashed in a stray moonbeam and he reined up beside the post on which it rested. Then he lifted it, examined it curiously and tucked it into his pocket. Finally, he jogged away, heading westward along the railroad then veering south.

Long past midnight the rider came to a brackish spring, where he unsaddled and spread his blankets for the rest of the night. At dawn he was up and eating from a package of cold food carried in his saddle pockets. Then he rode on again.

He made no haste and yet his plodding horse covered the miles with inexorable finality. The brown waste of sand and bunch grass, dotted with the blue-black sage or whitened with patches of alkali, grew more and more rolling. Here and there outcrops of rock burst their way through the soil and stood up gauntly, carrying gnarled and stunted brush, mesquite and ironwood, in the crevices. There was little wind, but what stirred from the east brought with it a faint, stale odor of salt from the Salduro.

The desert was growing less forbidding, however. By afternoon it began to take on the appearance almost of a rolling meadow, parched by a dry summer. The sage had thinned and the grass, yellow and scattered, had become the predominant vegetation. Cattle could be seen grazing here and there.

The traveler was following an apology for a road, merely two ruts in the surface which had been worn by passing vehicles, and accentuated by the hoofs of horses. It was dusty, but presented otherwise no difficulties. There were no signs of habitation except that along the side of the road could be seen occasional bottles, tin cans, scraps of weather-browned paper.

Late in the afternoon the rider drew to one side at the sound of rolling wheels and jingling harness rising above the drumming of trotting hoofs. He pulled his hat down over his eyes and hardly deigned to cast a sidelong glance at the four-horse stage which rolled by.

It was a three-seated carryall with a top and canvas side curtains, rolled down to keep out the dust. A woman sat on the front seat beside the driver, but she was so muffled with veil and dust coat that one could not tell what she looked like or whether she was young or old.

The rear curtain was up, however, and the rider's careless glance, as he fell in behind the dust-stirring vehicle, fell on the backs of two other passengers, seated side by side. One was a rancher of Coyote Creek, roughly dressed and slouch-hatted. The other was of the ubiquitous tribe of traveling salesmen, to judge by his dress, visored cap and the black sample cases piled on the back seat behind him.

The stage gained steadily, crested a rise, and passed out of sight, leaving behind it a rolling spiral of dust that clung above the road, hiding the horseman, who, for some reason, preferred to keep in it instead of turning out of the road.

When the stage had appeared again for a fleeting moment, and again gone out of sight behind a rise, he did turn out. He even took off his hat and beat his legs and shoulders and breast with it to rid them of the clinging dust. Then he unshipped his canteen and drank enough to wash the crust from his mouth.

When his head was bared and his face turned upward, he showed young and good looking, except for a certain leanness and sharpness of feature that suggested animal alertness. He had good gray eyes, but they seemed restless, and puckered as though he found the sun irked them.

From his costume the man might have been almost anything except a cow-puncher. He might even have been that newer hybrid of the range, a fence rider, except that he carried no pliers nor coil of wire. Failing that, you might have set him down as a "nester" or homesteader, farming a small claim, a surveyor without his tools, a forest ranger, had there been any reserve in that section, a lone hunter, an engineer or a miner. He wore drab riding breeches, but that was no uncommon thing in a country where most of the able-bodied men had been in the army. His drab woolen shirt was the only other thing reminiscent of the uniform

and was likewise common. Instead of high-heeled boots, or shoes and leggings, he wore high-laced walking boots, nail-studded. An open waistcoat of faded worsted and a more or less shapeless felt hat completed his costume. A coat, rolled with blankets, and a few utensils behind his saddle, were his only other impedimenta except lariat and tie rope strapped below the fork of his saddle.

He did not ride with the inimitable certainty and ease of the cow hand although one would have judged him at least a good horseman. He gave the impression that he was more used to walking than riding. His legs hung straight and without the forklike curve of the vaquero. His back, after hours in the saddle, betrayed some tendency to droop as though he were tired.

Late in the evening he turned off on a high meadow where a barbed-wire fence, inclosing good grass, marked an extensive pasture. If there was a ranch near by, he did not seek it. Instead he rode along the fence for a mile or two until, in the gathering dusk, he came on a rough, one-room cabin, built of unplaned, raw boards. Here he dismounted.

A thin-faced, sallow, blue-shirted man came to his knock. He was incurious, pathetically hospitable. The stranger was welcome and he was glad to see him back again. It appeared from a brief question and answer that the visitor had ridden that way and passed the night a few days before, on his way to the railroad.

His host was a fence rider, and, in his lonely isolation and monotonous existence, more than ready to welcome the wayfarer. Bed and hay were at his service. The horse was stripped and turned into a small pasture with the fence rider's own horses.

The wayfarer passed the night there and went on in the morning and, if the fence rider had any curiosity as to why he preferred to come out of his way to share his isolation rather than go the other way and gain the comfort of the main ranch, he kept it to himself. All he knew or cared was that the man had gone down last week with the same equipment except that he had a more heavily laden pack by the weight of whatever was in a gunny sack which, tied in the middle, sagged down beside the horse's hips with bulging ends. Having been gone almost a week, he was now returning. His name was Marriner and he came from somewhere vaguely described as "beyond Coyote Creek." That was all.

In a dead land even curiosity dies. Sometimes, in this half-dead land, the man in whom curiosity lived, died instead. There are regions where it is considered a vice, to be rigidly suppressed because it is unhealthy.

The man named Marriner rode on the next day, descending from the high, grassy plateau into another stretch of rolling semi-desert country. Always he traveled south and a little east, crossing the border back into Utah but not far into that State. On his right the bare mountain ranges of Nevada floated, brown-yellow against the sky. On his left ranges that almost duplicated them could be seen in the hazy distance whenever he topped a rise. Ahead rose a towering, bare granite peak. Beneath it tumbled black slopes which ran out and dwindled in a grass and brush-covered ridge melting gradually into the desert.

This was the Coffin Range, and to the west of it, under the frowning guardianship of the single peak of Ibapah, lay Coyote Creek and a more or less fertile valley of small ranches. To its east was nothing but the illimitable desert range until, miles and miles away, one encountered other ranges somewhat like it.

It was a small range, not more than twenty or twenty-five miles in length and, at its widest, twelve or fifteen. Yet it had a quality of mystery which was all its own. Ibapah, perhaps, created some of it. In no other range to east or west did there tower any spike of granite which reared itself thirteen thousand feet toward the sky.

Its real mystery probably lay in its history, however. Twenty years ago or more there had been the second of a pair of gold rushes. Back before the memory of most men the first search for placers had brought miners in from the north across the dread Salduro. So many had died in getting there that the name had settled upon it for all time as the Coffin Range. That rush had been short lived though some promising placers had been worked for a year or two and the creeks that flowed from Ibapah's cliffs had been pretty well dug over and panned.

In the second excitement placers again had furnished the occasion and again they had proved evanescent. This time men had come with more capital and a very consid-

erable flume had been built. There had been hydraulic mining there for two or three years but, after the sands along Red Gulch, east of Ibapah, had been torn and mangled by the "giants" until the whole gully was now but a tangled waste of gravel and boulders, the last of the miners had gone and Coyote Creek Valley had settled once more into somnolent peace.

Somehow or other, Ibapah and the range had come to acquire the reputation of being unlucky. The two unsuccessful camps, the traces left of the scarred creeks and the mangled Red Gulch placers, the tales of starvation, death by thirst and by violence, all had promoted the growth of a superstition that no good was to be got in the Coffin Range. In spite of the fact that there was fine grazing there, the valley folk, who owned few cattle, preferred the sparser range of the plateaus to the west and left Ibapah alone. So also did the scattered ranchers who ranged eastward of the peak. After all, the range was small and if any considerable herds were driven onto it it would soon be depleted.

Thus, although in spite of their forbidding name the Coffin Mountains were like a dainty jewel set in a barren waste, they were deserted of men.

It was to this range of mountains, or rather, of one mountain and its surrounding approaches, that Marriner journeyed. He did not go by way of Coyote Creek and the ranches clustered up and down the valley under Ibapah. Instead he headed out into the flat semidesert, skirting around the spur of the range that pointed to the north, and circling it on the eastern side. He rode steadily until he had come to a gully heading into the range, about ten or twelve miles from its northern end. Up this he turned his tired horse, coming, after a little, to a stream of clear mountain water that would have run out to be lost on the desert had it not elected to dive suddenly underground before reaching the plain.

Here man and horse refreshed themselves and then went on. Again it was dark before, after steady climbing through and over rough slopes thickly carpeted and shaded by verdure of fern and pine and fir, lush with rank grass and wild flowers, they came out upon a fairly level bench of small extent, behind which the dark slopes of Ibapah towered, thick-grown with coniferous forest.

Here the lone rider came to rest. He unsaddled his horse, turned him loose, picked up saddle and pack and—disappeared.

He merely walked into the grove of pines fringing the bench and vanished.

CHAPTER V.

THE BENEVOLENT DRAGON.

Out somewhere in the void above or beyond the mountains the droning of what might have been a portable sawmill filled the silence with the effect of an alien, disconnected and inconsequential intrusion. The sound, whatever it was and much as it resembled the tearing of saws in stubborn timber, had this peculiarity; that it began, low and murmurous and distant, and gradually waxed and grew until it beat upon any listening ear with a steady, full-bodied pulsation. Then, with a swift decision, without the parting wail of saws shutting down, it beat once, twice and thrice, and ceased entirely.

When the noise was done another noise—the sound of swishing, tearing waters, driven with resistless force—could be heard coming from the dark depths of the forest that covered Ibapah's slopes. This noise did not cease but certain irregularities in it, certain changes and shifts of direction, certain breaks and pauses which had marked it, became a steady, roaring and changeless tumult. A moment later Marriner, now clad in rubber boots, with shirt sleeves rolled up above his elbows, stepped swiftly from the fringe of somber trees and looked up at the sky. There was nothing to be seen except a stray eagle or buzzard, floating against the darkening blue. He turned and reëntered the thicket, going so silently that he gave the impression again of disappearing entirely.

A moment later and the ripping sound of hard-driven water droned off to silence broken only by the singing of a stream. The peace of nature descended upon the Coffin Range.

Back in the woods, however, there was sign of life, though it was hidden from passing sight by the wall of trees. When one had climbed the steep slope of disintegrating granite he might have come upon a sort of clearing, or, rather, a slide from which the trees that had once grown there had been cut. This slide was but a talus slope of half-rotten, white granite which rolled

downward, fanlike, from a beetling cliff about a hundred feet high. Far above it the rim was notched shallowly but the cleft did not extend downward more than a few feet. All between was frowning rock.

The talus extended far down through the woods, merging gradually with the ordinary soil, from which, indeed, it did not differ materially.

Placed to one side and away from the cliff, however, was a big tripod of poles, lashed and braced firmly together, with a sort of trough hinged to its fork and extending backward. On this trough and lashed firmly to it, lay a huge nozzle like that of a fireman's hose, though larger. Attached to the nozzle was a length of wire-bound hose five or six inches in diameter. This led to a wooden flume, boxed in. The flume, in turn, sloped back, up the hill, following its contours but always rising until it was lost in the depths of the woods.

Hose and nozzle and tripod were more or less new and fresh, but the flume, except in places showing the marks of recent patching and repair, was gray and lichen-clad and ancient. It had once extended farther down the slope and the groove in the soil, left when it had been torn up, was plainly visible.

Below the flume and the nozzle was a series of long, flat troughs, one joining on to another in a descending series. The stream from the "giant" had been tearing deep into the talus slope and washing the gravel and rock into these troughs. Below them were piled the detritus and débris left from the screening.

In the troughs were series of transverse grooves or "riffles;" and in each groove a slimy mass of yellowish or black mud which had settled to the bottom from the mass swept through by the water and dammed back by the projections. Over these grooves stooped the man, Marriner, and another who, although dressed about as he was, evidently was a Chinese.

The two ladled the mud carefully from the riffles into buckskin sacks. It seemed very heavy and fluid and formed a considerable weight for each of them before they had gathered it all. When this was accomplished, they turned from the place, plunged into the woods and, with almost uncanny silence, strode away, following the slope of the mountain.

A hundred yards they went until they came out of the trees on to a ledge about a dozen feet wide. It was merely a sort of sag in the hillside, a hundred feet long or so. Above it the mountain loomed, tree-clad as high as timber line. Below it the slope fell away, with thinning cover, to a valley, grass-grown and pleasant, through which ran a tinkling stream. The valley was not more than a quarter of a mile wide and the level land in its bed may have measured fifty or sixty acres in extent; not more.

The stream ran clear, so that it could not be the same which flowed through the flume and washed the gravel through the troughs.

It was possible to survey the valley plainly from the ledge, but, because of trees and brush, the ledge was not visible from below, nor could it be seen from the other side. From above it probably looked like a mere depression in the forest cover. Only from the sky was its area open to view.

On the ledge was a cabin and into the cabin the two men conveyed the amalgam which they had gathered from the troughs —the week's clean-up from their hydraulic mining.

The Chinese poured himself a basin of water from a galvanized bucket and set to cleaning his hands. Marriner took the heavy buckskin sacks and dumped their contents carefully into a large retort. Then he wrung them out in a sort of vise attached to a table on which his utensils were placed. Through the hide appeared drops and globules of mercury which dripped into a flask. Turning the sacks inside out he scraped them carefully, gathering the mud in which appeared yellow flakes. This went into a pan.

The retort was attached to another beaker and set upon a small gasoline stove. In a moment the mercury began to distill off, leaving the precipitate behind. Marriner left it and began his own ablutions. The Chinese already was devoting himself to preparations for supper.

"Pretty good?" he asked, in good English, nodding toward the stove.

"Getting better," replied Marriner. "We've not reached the right gravel yet."

"We will get it soon," commented the Chinese.

There was a note of grim certainty in Marriner's answer.

"In a month or less we'll get it so rich that you can corner all the laundry business in the country, if you choose."

The Chinese grinned cheerfully and began to sing a monosyllabic ditty that sounded something like the mingled rattle of tin pans and the yapping of a fox. But, after Marriner had gone back to his distilling, he broke in with another question.

"Do you know what that sound we heard was?"

Marriner shrugged his broad shoulders. "Sure. A bird—but one operated by a man, Wing."

"You mean a man was flying?"

Marriner nodded and began to drain the precipitate out of the retort into the pan. This he filled with water, twirled a couple of times, slopping off some remaining soil and mud and leaving a glittering mass of gold dust. He weighed it, jotted a memorandum in a notebook and then poured it into a sack. This and the notebook he locked in a steel box and shoved under a bunk.

"Sixty ounces this week, Wing," he said. "That's not bad."

"How much is that?" asked the practical Wing.

"Something over a thousand dollars. Beats the laundry business, doesn't it?"

"I dare say," agreed the smiling Wing. "But I would suggest that you watch it. Perhaps this flying man might have a fancy for gold and visit us."

Marriner frowned. "If he flies over this place he might get curious," he commented. "But he's never come this side of the ridge. No telling when he will, of course."

Then he grinned. "I don't want any stampede. They'd get nothing, of course, since I've filed on the only spot, but it would be awkward. I have an idea that, whoever it is, he isn't interested in gold mining. Never heard of prospecting by airplane."

"Airplane. So that is what you mean by the bird operated by a man?"

"Yeah. Never saw one, I suppose. Don't have 'em in China." His tone was slightly ironic.

Wing smiled. "We are very backward. Still——"

He paused and began to arrange the dining table with tin plates and food. As he did so he broke once more into his high, tin-panny song in Chinese. It had a musical, if somewhat monotonous, tinkling cadence, not at all unpleasant, but lilting and catchy.

"What's that you're singing?" asked Marriner, as he sat down on a backless stool. Wing drew up another and began to dig up slices of beef from the pot in which he had cooked it. Marriner broke a baked potato.

"That song? It is all about something like a flying man," explained the cheerful Wing. "One known in China for I don't know how many years. Does that interest you?"

"I'd sure admire to know about flying in China a thousand years ago," said Marriner. "I've heard about gunpowder, magnetic compasses and the rest of that truck, but this is a new one. Let's have it."

Wing smiled guilelessly, his black eyes twinkling.

"We do not call them airplanes in China. In fact they are not quite the same as mechanical instruments. They are what are called dragons and are popularly supposed to devour the moon at intervals—at least the bad ones."

"The song didn't sound so ferocious."

"That was about a benevolent dragon. A very nice one. I will tell you the story.

"A great many years ago, in China, there was an unfortunate young man, much afflicted with poverty which increased as the years went by. His filial piety compelled him to look after his aged parents and his brothers and sisters, and so, although he desired to marry, he was unable to find any young maiden whose parents would favor him as a son-in-law. Day by day his prospects grew more hopeless and it seemed that he could never have children to look after him in his old age.

"One day, in despair, he went out into the fields and prayed to a dragon god, setting forth his poverty and his desire for a wife and promising worship in exchange for the dragon's help. While he lay on his face, praying, he heard thunder and the earth shook as the dragon flew down to earth, flapping his wings. The man did not dare look up until after silence told him the dragon had gone.

"Then, at last, he raised his head and there, before him, where the very nice dragon had set her down, was a beautiful little princess, clad in silk and cloth of gold, holding her arms out to him."

Wing looked at Marriner, and slyly closed one eye.

"That's what I should call a nice dragon," he remarked.

"A pretty nice yarn, at any rate," said Marriner, tolerantly.

"Yes," said Wing. "Now, maybe this airplane is somewhat like that dragon. Who knows? It might even bring a princess."

Marriner grinned sourly. "I hope not," he said.

"You don't seem to appreciate princesses."

"My Celestial friend," said Marriner, dryly, "I've been stung once. Never again!"

But Wing took this very calmly. "Princesses may be very desirable, nevertheless. There may come a time when you will change your views."

Marriner was lighting a cigarette. "Wing Yow Chiu," he said, suddenly, "I'm thinking you may know more about airplanes than you let on. Your arrival here lacks any other explanation."

"Well, you found me here," said the imperturbable Wing. "Maybe an airplane or dragon brought me. Knowing your aversion to pretty girls I was substituted to assist in your gold hunting."

"I'm wondering," said Marriner, thoughtfully. "But there have been only three trips of that plane in the past two months, and they couldn't tote more than a couple of chinks at a time. I can guess that you came that way, but they'd hardly make a business of bringing them. Nothing in it. What made you want to come here—and stay?"

"There are people in China with a reprehensible habit of chopping the heads from persons they dislike," said Wing, calmly. "I came here—it is safe—I stay! That is all."

"Yeah!" Marriner scrutinized the cheerful soul closely. "And I'll bet that whoever was laying for you in China was no piker. There must have been some prominent politics in it."

"Politics?" said Wing, innocently. "Oh, I am hardly prominent enough for that. More likely a Tong feud, such as you are acquainted with even in America."

Marriner laughed skeptically and rose. He pulled off his rubber boots and put on a pair of moccasins built like boots, to reach almost to the knee. Then he took his rifle from the wall and stepped toward the door.

"I'm going out and take a look at our dragon," he said.

Wing followed him to the door.

"Look around carefully," he suggested, with his infectious smile. "It is possible that the princess may have arrived. Who knows?"

But Marriner chuckled scornfully and went out.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE EAGLE'S WINGS.

Sylvia followed whispered directions and headed at once toward the wall of trees that ringed the meadow. When she had plunged into them she forced her way easily enough for some distance and found herself descending a slope. It was somewhat rough but the going would not have been hard had she been properly dressed for the work. As it was she had it in her heart to curse the weird imagination of Denver which had sent her on this bizarre expedition clad for a promenade on Fifth Avenue. Besides, it would soon be getting dark and the prospect of being caught in these woods was not at all pleasant. She was not equipped for camping.

However, she was glad to be rid of the silent, bold Micky Wilkes, who, somehow, frightened her. Flying, also, although nothing like so terrifying as she had imagined it, had surfeited her with noise. She had had enough of it and the firm ground underfoot was pleasant.

She wandered on down the gully, which was plain enough, and gradually descended to a valley. It was a pleasant, open place, still warm from the sun setting behind the mountain, and it was a relief to get out into the open again. She was hot and beginning to be tired.

She had expected to see some one in the valley but it was deserted. For the first time she became uneasy. The shadows were weirdly long on the eastern wall of trees where the rays of the sun threw them. In the valley it was all shadow.

She made her way downward again. The walking was good, but the air was getting chilly. The silence of the place was menacing. The dark wall of trees on either hand seemed to close in on her and she imagined that, in their depths, lurked all kinds of wild beasts.

Pretty soon she heard a faint, far-off yapping, like the barking of a pack of petulant terriers. Somehow the sound was not reassuring. If there had been any place to

which to go, she would have fled immediately. But there was no place. She had been told to come here and wait. If she left the place she would be irretrievably lost in the mountains and woods.

She had a light hand bag with a few clothes and a lunch. Through the meadow ran a small stream. As it was a spot farthest removed from the threatening forest, she sat down on the bank of the creek and endeavored to still her growing fear by eating. She found herself surprisingly hungry and in the satisfaction of her appetite for a while almost forgot her terrors. But the darkness was growing steadily and swiftly.

It continued to grow and so did her alarm. No one appeared. The velvety woods closed in on her. Instead of the yapping of coyotes a long, inconceivably mournful and indescribably fierce ululation suddenly filled the air. It was distant but it was nevertheless terrifying. The dancer shivered in an ecstasy of terror and would have screamed if she had dared to. But she was afraid to make a noise.

At first, on leaving Wilkes, she had felt relief at being freed from his presence. He had not done anything to make her fear him but he was a man, and one she did not trust —if, indeed, she could ever trust any of that sex again. Somehow his cold self-sufficiency was as terrifying as a too-open interest would have been. He gave the feeling that if his casual fancy should turn that way he would crush her as he would a fly. His very indifference was a menace.

Yet now she would even have welcomed the presence of the aviator. Shivering, she crouched beside the stream, striving to gain courage and comfort from the soft murmur of the waters. They bestowed little. She would have made a fire but there was no wood near her and she dared not go forth to hunt any.

The silence grew until it became almost tangible. The velvet night deepened around her. Stars appeared in the sky but they did not relieve the denseness of the heavy darkness. Somewhere in the woods a heavy body rustled and crashed in the brush and she heard a snorting grunt.

Although hardened and self-reliant, courageous beyond the ordinary, utter and paralyzing terror came upon her. Doomed to wander by day and cower by night until she starved or was dismembered by wild beasts, her courage utterly forsook her. So great was her terror that she did not even dare to call for help. With what little mind was left to her she dimly realized that it would be useless. She was too far away from the flat plateau on which the plane had landed to expect her cries to reach that far and there was no one else. The tale of a mysterious man in the mountains she now set down to the crazy imagination of Denver. There was no man—and she was doomed.

She found herself sobbing with great, dry gasps, tearless and hoarse. Her body was shivering, partly from cold but more from stark terror. The muscles of neck and jaw were set and aching with the tense strain she put on them. Her head was aching also. She had not feeling enough to realize it.

How long she crouched there on the grass she could not tell. She may have lost consciousness but if she did she regained it to find herself in the same tense, strained position, feet doubled under her, head raised, eyes staring into the dark, teeth set and locked.

Then the moon came up and a white light glowed coldly over the grass. Out of the wall of forest, again springing in black relief against the sky, a something which was blacker than the trees moved. It came toward her and her staring terror grew even more unbearable.

The thing came on swiftly and silently, drifting like a wraith across the grass. She wanted to scream out but her jaws, stiffened into position, would not open. Her breath now came in moans.

The figure swept on toward her, still without a sound her ears could mark, though they were sensitized to all possible acuteness.

"What are you doing here?" said a calm voice.

Sylvia felt something snap in her and the world went black as though it had been blotted out.

When she came to it was to find that some one had laid her out on the grass, covered her feet and limbs with a heavy coat and was bathing her face with a wet cloth. She came out of her faint with breath still coming hard and her heart throbbing painfully. Every muscle was hurting and face and neck ached from relaxed tension. She felt dizzy and ill and her face was hot with the blood that was once more coursing through her veins.

She opened her eyes and looked at the man who bent over her. She could see little of him in the faint light and nothing of his face.

"All right now?" he asked. There was little feeling in his voice. It was casual and rather gruff.

She tried to nod but her neck hurt her. "I was silly to faint," she stammered, "but I thought you were a—a bear or something. When you spoke——"

"Scared you worse than the bear, I suppose!" said the stranger. "Well, never mind that. What are you doing out here alone?"

"I—I—am out here to—to——"

She found the tale she had been coached to tell so utterly preposterous that she could not go on with it. Had it been daylight she might have had the courage but she felt that this man would simply know she was lying and would despise her. What if she did have the patent papers in her bag to show that she owned a hundred and sixty acres in this valley? That would not excuse her for being found alone, at night, beside a stream in the mountains.

For almost the first time in her life Sylvia wanted to be respectable—so respectable that no one could ever suspect her of anything other than the perfectly conventional. She felt that humdrum, smug propriety was the most desirable attribute in nature. Out here she was utterly shamed and destitute of anything to cover her naked conscience.

Desperately she plunged into a story, the first that came to hand.

"I don't know. It's all a mystery to me! I—I was on my way out to—to take up a homestead I own and went to sleep on the train—this afternoon. I must have been drugged. I—I came to up in the woods—over there and walked down here just before it got dark. I was afraid to go any farther. I sat down and it got dark and I was frightened. Then you came!"

"You mean you don't know how you got here?" asked Marriner harshly. She was in terror because she knew he disbelieved her but there was nothing to do but stick to the lie.

"Yes. I was up there—in a sort of flat meadow with trees all around when I awoke. I don't know how I came to be there and I was nearly frightened to death. It was late in the afternoon."

"Humph!" said Marriner. "Must have been that plane. That's two I've picked up here. I wonder if those birds are trying to plant a colony in these hills."

He rose to his feet. "Can you walk?" he asked.

When he had helped her up she found that she could although it was difficult. Her limbs ached but she was an athlete in perfect condition and her recovery was rapid. With a stammered apology she staggered a few steps with his assistance and then found her balance.

Without further talk he picked up her bag, tucked his rifle under his arm and, with her hand on his sleeve, led the way toward the inclosing trees. Although Sylvia had regarded them with such terror only a few moments back, she now went confidently with him, filled with a temporary sense of security that was proof against any fear so long as he was with her.

This courage did not desert her even when they had stepped into the forest. It was not so black as it had looked from the meadow. The trees were not very large and were more or less scattering, especially on the edges of the timber belt. For the first steps it was as though they stepped into a gridiron of white moonlight striped with black shadows. As they went farther and the trees became more dense, the light and shadows became a checkerboard and then a mosaic. It was dark and mysterious but the passage from the moonlit meadow to the denser shade was gradual and not terrifying.

They climbed upward, crossing a ridge. The ground underfoot was gravelly and harsh. It was overgrown with brush through which a way must be forced though, on the whole, the going was not too difficult. The girl had no idea what direction they took, except that for some time they climbed a fairly gentle slope.

Then they were skirting the side of a hill, following a fairly distinct trail. The walking grew easier but, easy or hard, she began to note that her companion went with a silence and surety which was uncanny. He seemed to have eyes that saw in the dark and feet that barely touched the surface they trod upon. Not a twig snapped nor did a stone roll under his moccasins. He moved ahead of her like a dark ghost of the mountain.

As she walked Sylvia rapidly recovered her strength and lost her discomfort. Her supple, well-trained muscles shook off the

stiffness born of tension and cold. In the clear, winelike air her blood began to course pleasurably. Her curiosity awoke, piqued by the silent, wraithlike figure that floated ahead of her.

She wondered if this was the lawbreaker she had been sent to hunt down. She decided that it must be. She speculated upon the likelihood of there being a hidden still somewhere in these mountains, in spite of the statement of Denver that the stuff was brought in from outside. She had flown over this country that afternoon and had seen it from the sky. She was inclined to dismiss as preposterous the statement Denver had made. There was no way in which it could be brought in in profitable quantities, over deserts and mountains—unless it came as she had come.

But no airplane could carry the stuff in sufficient amount to make the enterprise profitable. It cost money to fly, and a plane was limited in capacity. Why bring it hundreds of miles from civilization only to ship it back again by devious and dangerous routes?

More and more the story told by Denver became a wild dream of a disordered brain. She wondered why it had been told to her. But she never doubted that he was what he pretended to be. The little badge on the inside of his waistcoat had convinced her. Probably he had made up the story to satisfy her temporarily and to keep her from knowing more than he wished her to know. If he had let her into his real plans and secrets she might, inadvertently or purposely, have betrayed them.

After all, she cared little what the true story was. She had a certain quality of loyalty. These men and the girl had saved her from the worst danger of her career, had befriended her when her whole world was united against her. She did not care what they were nor what they were doing. If they wanted her to beguile this man, to spy upon him, to bring him to destruction, it was her business to do it. She had taken their wage and she would do their work.

But, half convinced that, if it was moonshining for which the man was wanted, there must be a still somewhere in the neighborhood, she sniffed the air delicately. She smelled nothing except the pungent odor of pine and fir.

They came suddenly and quietly out upon a bench of grassy soil from which she saw a peaceful, beautiful valley lying below her in the moonlight. With the towering mass of Ibapah behind her, the dark forest on either hand and the white and sparkling jewel of moonlit glebe and dancing stream below her, she might have been in fairyland. Her starved soul, dried and dusty from long immurement behind footlights and in theatrical boarding houses, expanded sharply, filling with the beauty and the glory of it even as her lungs stretched under the gasping inrush of pure mountain air.

"O-oh! Lovely!" she murmured, softly, for an instant forgetting where and how she had come. The shadowy, silent figure of her guide turned toward her.

"This is the place," he said.

She shook herself together, doubtful now, and troubled by a vague uneasiness and shame. The man was pointing toward a cabin set among trees which formed a little grove. Back of the cabin splashed a spring, dripping musically from the granite cliff, overgrown with ferns.

The cabin was small but well built. Although the windows were curtained with canvas she saw light around the edges. The door was held open to her and for a moment the flood of yellow light streamed out before she had stepped in and the door had closed behind her.

She came into a room roughly furnished. A bunk beside the wall, a deal table with backless chairs, now piled neatly with cooking utensils freshly washed, a sheet-iron stove, a chair cut from a barrel and upholstered with burlap, a rather long bench or table against another wall, on which were a gasoline stove, bottles and retorts. On the floor were two or three Navajo blankets in lieu of rugs. A door opened into another room at the end opposite to which she had entered.

A Chinese, dressed in dungarees and woolen shirt, with slippered feet, was standing beside the table. He smiled at her and bowed his sleek head, his hands across his breast.

"It seems that I was right about the little princess," he said. "Evidently that was a nice dragon."

"Shut up, you heathen fraud," said Marriner, curtly. "Get the lady some food. And, madam, here is—er—your room."

He threw open the door opposite the entrance, showing a chamber with an iron bed, a rough chair, washstand. The floor was

covered by Navajo rugs. Stepping inside he tore from the walls clothing and masculine equipment, carrying them out and tossing them on the bunk. On a box he left brushes and comb beneath a mirror hanging on the wall. A cartridge belt and revolver hung on a nail. He left the belt but drew the weapon from the holster and tossed it beside the pillow on the bed.

Wondering, Sylvia passed in and the door shut behind her.

CHAPTER VII.

MEN OF THE RIGHT BREED.

The cheerful Chinese rattled his pots and pans and sang his ballad. Marriner smoked a cigarette and looked out the window. In the silence the Chinese smiled and the Caucasian frowned.

"Who is the little girl?" asked Wing, at last.

"The biggest liar even the female sex ever produced," replied Marriner, morosely. "See here, Wing, I can stand for one person being dropped on me from the clouds, but I'm darned if I'll stand for a periodic visitation like this. Who the deuce are the mysterious parties who are raining strangers on to Ibapah?"

Wing only smiled serenely and shook his head. The black eyes held malicious amusement and the smooth face was as bland as oil.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that, Wally," he said. "The best I can do is to say that, for reasons we need not discuss, I found myself in Mexico and desired to enter this country. A friend arranged to have me brought by air. I flew here and was left on this mountain to find my way to the town as best I could. After the plane had gone, you found me. You accepted my story that I was lost, brought me here and fed me. The place seemed well situated for me, I liked you, so I stayed and helped you in your work. That is all I know."

"Don't you know who these flyers are?"

Wing shook his head, still smiling.

"I know—very little about them. Who they are, I can't tell. There are, of course —connections—which I can guess. But these men I know nothing about."

He broke into his infectious chuckle. "But they seemed to have a kindly feeling toward you, what with me—and now the princess. Evidently——"

"Ah! Cut it out, Wing. It's a darned nuisance having this woman dropping on us this way. As far as you're concerned, it's different. I can guess, of course, that you're on the run from some highbinder row or other and I have sense to know that you're something in the mandarin line in China. But where does this girl come in? Her story is a lie, just as surely as yours is the truth."

"What is her story?" asked Wing.

"Some yarn about being drugged and kidnaped on the train while on her way here to take up a homestead. Woke up to find herself on the plateau near the landing. She had nothing but a hand bag and was dressed the way you saw her."

"Well, maybe she will tell the truth when she knows us better," said Wing, easily. He pattered to the table, setting hot food on it. A moment later the door into the bedroom opened and Sylvia entered, flushed and timid with a restraint and embarrassment that was new to her.

Wing bustled about her, setting the stool for her and placing her food at hand while Marriner leaned against the wall and scrutinized her somberly.

"I am sorry," said Wing, "that the food is not better. With more preparation we would have had real delicacies such as broiled rats, snails, bird's-nest soup, fried puppies' tails, snakes, and so forth."

Sylvia let her fork pause over the beef and baked potato. "Heavens! Don't you worry! This will do very nicely, thank you!" she said emphatically. She glanced appealingly at the frowning Marriner.

"Say," she said, "assure the gentleman that my appetite isn't that cultivated, will you?"

Marriner's eyes were roving over her, missing no detail of her appearance. He answered her shortly.

"Don't worry. That Mongolian idol is the worst little joker in Utah."

As she turned back to her eating he spoke abruptly.

"D'you usually travel in that sort of costume?"

Again Sylvia flushed and then paled. She guessed that she was in for an investigation, and again the puerile story of mystery with which she had been primed and that tamer one which she had half invented on the spur of the moment, struck her as wild absurdi-

ties. Still, she saw no alternative but to stick to the one with which she had started.

"No," she said, sullenly. "I was on the train. I was going to get off at a place called Welcome City, where I would take a stage. I knew it was the last chance I'd have to wear clothes like these so I was wearing them—even if it was on a train. I went to sleep in my section. I don't know what happened after that. I must have been drugged."

"Drugged?" queried Wing, guilelessly. He looked sharply at her eyes, as clear as pools, and shook his head slightly. Marriner caught the gesture and answered it with a barely perceptible nod.

"Well, I was either drugged or hypnotized," asserted Sylvia, positively. "Otherwise, how could I have come to this place without knowing how I got here or where I am? Now, all I want is to be shown how to get out and find the place I'm going to."

"We'll see about that in the morning. It isn't hard to get out—if you know the way, nor hard to get in. You didn't come in an airplane, then?"

"Airplane! Why, I was never in one in my life! I'd be scared stiff to go up in one of those things."

She found herself with a desperate appetite, born of flying and also of the emptiness that follows on extreme fright, and in spite of the interrogation and suspicion surrounding her, she continued to eat. She was a dainty thing, in spite of her antecedents, and one might have taken pleasure in watching her firm little hands and delicate, sweet face as it bent over the food. But Marriner apparently took none. His eyes were all for the sheer georgette waist, showing bare throat and arms, the little lace collar, the silken skirt and stockings and the high-heeled pumps, now somewhat scarred by contact with the granite gravel and the brush.

Here was a dainty thing to drop from the skies into this wilderness abandoned of men!

Frankly, he was puzzled, angry and suspicious. Had she come in any natural manner he would have been disposed to accept her as a necessary evil and to make the best of it. But he could form no other conclusion, under the circumstances, than that she had some ulterior and threatening purpose in coming with lies on her lips, in a manner mysterious and secretive, aided and abetted by those people whose objects he did not know but which were furtive and suspicious.

Sylvia knew and felt his enmity and returned it with interest. Men, here or elsewhere, she hated and distrusted. They either made victims of women or tools of them. In either case they were evil. Most of them she did not fear especially except in such places as Welcome City—or here. In either place a woman was defenseless against them.

Still, although realizing that she was alone in this wilderness with these two men, one a heathen Chinese, she was unable to feel any uneasiness in that respect. Scandal, which might have troubled another woman, meant nothing to her. Violence, somehow, did not seem to be a thing to be considered. On the whole, mixed with some shame at the rôle she was to fulfill, there was only a sort of contempt for Marriner, as a man and as what she scornfully designated as a "hick."

The miner spoke again. "We'll talk about it in the morning," he said. Then he picked up his rifle and went out without another word.

Sylvia was tired. The Chinese went about his work for a while, chanting his tin-panny ballads, which seemed, somehow, as soothing as lullabies. She sat in the arm-chair made of a barrel, determined to wait until Marriner came in, but an hour and two hours passed and he did not return.

Finally Wing went to the bunk, hauled from beneath it a lacquered box which he opened. Half drowsing, Sylvia caught a glimpse of shimmering silks and gold. She saw him draw from it a long mandarin coat of scarlet and blue and yellow, a marvelous thing of silk and embroidered gold. This he held out to her with a bow that had in it something inexpressibly dignified and courteous.

She did not understand what he said, for he spoke in his native tongue, but his smile was reassuring, as was his manner. With an inexplicable warmth of gratitude she took the thing, crying out her delighted appreciation. He bowed again and went out to sit like a statue on the wooden step before the door.

Sylvia, in some doubt, asked a question. "When will the other man come back?"

Wing shook his head.

"It would be hard to say. He may be gone an hour, two hours, or all night."

She went into the room which had been turned over to her. The door had a stout bar to fit into a solidly made socket. She dropped this home and then turned to the bed. The revolver lying by her pillow caught her eye. She glanced again at the door, a little puzzled and strangely doubtful. Somehow the conduct of the two men, although on Marriner's part at least it held an element of hostility, was not what she expected or looked for. There had been no clumsy gallantry, no furtive looks, none of the more or less clumsy methods of approach which her experience had taught her she could expect. Instead had been a calm, rather cold ministration to her comfort and a casual, matter-of-fact provision for her safeguarding.

The conviction suddenly awoke that they regarded her as a nuisance; something to be tolerated and gotten rid of at the earliest moment. She felt a sudden wave of pique and rebellion at being so lightly regarded, never sensing the contradiction and illogicalness of the new attitude.

Over and above all other feeling was a sense of security which may have been quite as illogical, but which was, nevertheless, deliciously full and complete. Even in the company of Nellie McCarthy she had slept in some lingering dread. That was gone and it was with a complete abandonment to her weariness that she crept into the iron bed and fell into a dreamless sleep. She did not even place either her own or Marriner's revolver within easy reach.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TALL STORY.

The following morning Marriner and Wing awaited Sylvia's awakening patiently. The former, although he had been out most of the night, showed hardly a sign of the lack of sleep which should have afflicted him. It was noticeable, however, that neither of the men had put on the hip boots they wore when at work. Instead, the Chinese was clad in blouse and soft, felt shoes while Marriner wore the high, deerskin moccasins in which he had moved like a ghost in the night.

The reason was explained in a word to Wing, spoken long before the tired girl appeared.

"Whoever she is and whatever she's here for, we'll not run the 'giant' while she's around. What she don't know won't hurt her."

To which Wing had nodded aquiescence

Sylvia opened her door and came smilingly out to the breakfast table. Wing bowed to her ceremoniously and Marriner greeted her with a curt nod. She felt piqued again that he did not comment on, or apparently notice her appearance. She had put on the mandarin coat as a sort of negligee and she knew that it was wonderfully effective, bringing, as it did, a note of luxury and feminine allure into this abode of roughness and masculine self-sufficiency. Her innocent, sweet face, above the collar of silk, blazing with embroidery, showed like a flower, beautiful enough to turn any man's head. The coat came below her knees but permitted the sight of sheer silk covering slim ankles.

Sylvia suffered two other surprises when they had sat down to the table. Wing ate with them. Furthermore, both he and Marriner ate with full knowledge of how to handle knife and fork and with table manners as good as her own. Indeed, the yellow man's were better in some respects, since neither of the white people could equal his age-old, innate courtesy.

But Marriner had little to say. Taciturn and coldly polite, he allowed her to finish the rather substantial meal without broaching the subject of her arrival and plans. When it was over he and Wing swiftly cleared away the remnants of the meal and washed the dishes. They declined assistance from her. Meantime she examined, with curiosity, the large bench or table on which Marriner's miniature laboratory rested. She had no idea for what the apparatus was intended but suspected it of being the paraphernalia requisite to the concoction of illicit liquors.

Finally, while Wing pottered about the place setting things to rights, Marriner drew up a stool and sat down to smoke a cigarette. Sylvia mentally stiffened herself to meet the inquiry that was impending.

He lost no time in coming to the point.

"You were drugged or hypnotized, then, Miss——"

"Bartlett! Sylvia Bartlett!"

"Thank you. My name's Walter Marriner. This is Wing Yow Chiu, late of China. We are prospecting up here. Now, to resume. You got here, you do not know how, although as we heard an airplane late in the afternoon it is to be presumed that you were

brought in that. At any rate the plane was on the plateau and left very early this morning."

"How do you know?" asked Sylvia, quickly.

"I watched it most of the night. The aviator kept his helmet and goggles on so I can't say what he looks like. You could have heard the propeller if you'd been awake."

"I suppose so," said Sylvia, and then, remembering her part, mused wonderingly: "Queer! What earthly object could they have had?"

"That's what I'm wondering," said Marriner, dryly. He went on heedless of her reproachful look: "You were coming West to take up a homestead which you'd filed on. Is that right?"

"That's correct," said Sylvia. "You see, I've worked in the city all my life and——"

"Yes. I know! You've longed for the free and open spaces, the blue sky and the boundless handiwork of nature. You've been cramped and stifled in the hives of man and a victim of the cruelty incident to civilization. You've dreamed all your life of a little home in the embowered hills and—and so, and so on. You needn't trouble to hand me all that. I've read it in two or three romances."

"Well," said Sylvia, indignantly, "if you know all that, there is no use my saying anything. It's true, anyhow."

She tried to say it with conviction and, even as the words passed her lips she remembered that jeweled valley which she had glimpsed in the moonlight and wondered if the words were not, after all, true in some measure. But Marriner was resuming unfeelingly.

"There are some points in the story not quite clear," he said, ironically. "Aside from the fact that I wouldn't trust any woman as far as she could throw a stone, you'll perhaps admit that your yarn is extraordinary enough to justify inquiry on my part. Now, in regard to this kidnaping! Just who did you meet on the train that might be suspected?"

"No one," said Sylvia shortly. She wondered why the man would not trust women.

"No man? No woman?"

"No. There were only the ordinary sort as far as I noticed. A girl with light-brown hair and eyes, dressed in a plaid skirt and a black silk waist, was about the only one I talked with. She seemed to be some sort of stenographer, or something."

Safely enough, as she thought, Sylvia was describing Miss Nellie McCarthy. The description was so vague that it might fit a thousand girls. Marriner, however, noting the definiteness of her tone, mentally concluded that she was using some actual model.

"Nothing suspicious about her or her actions?"

"Nothing. I told her about myself and where I was going. She was interested and I showed her my patent papers. She thought it would be a great thing to come with me but regretted that she could not."

"Anything unusual besides what you have described?"

"No."

"When you awoke, up on the plateau, did you feel any nausea—any heaviness, as though you'd been drugged? Smell anything like ether or chloroform?"

"No. I had a headache and my tongue felt thick. I was thirsty. That is all."

"Eat anything on the train? Drink anything?"

"I ate in the dining car. I drank nothing but water. Wait! I forgot. This girl had some candy and I ate one or two chocolates with her."

"And you went to sleep right after that?"

"I—I don't know. It was some time after. I never thought about it."

Sylvia was wary and careful. She knew that her best refuge lay in giving as few details as possible but even such admissions as she had made to strengthen her story had led her into further fabrications which she knew might at any moment overwhelm her. Marriner, however, passed the subject.

"You were going to Welcome City! Any idea where you are, now?"

"No," said Sylvia, candidly. "Miles and miles away from there, I suppose."

"Yeah! Several miles," was the dry comment. "Now, where was this homestead which you had patented and how'd you come to patent it instead of merely filing on it? It takes five years to prove up on a homestead, you know, although you can shorten the time by paying more money for it."

"Oh, I didn't patent it," said Sylvia, readily. "I once had an uncle who died some time ago. He lived in this country at one time. He took up one of the alternate State quarters and bought it outright from the

State. He died a year or so ago and left me the land. When I had saved some money I came out to live on it."

"Humph!" said Marriner. "Where's your deed to it?"

Sylvia, with a superior smile of tolerance for his skepticism, went in and got some papers out of her hand bag. These she brought to Marriner and sat down with an air of lofty scorn for his ill-concealed doubt. She felt secure, now.

Wally Marriner unfolded the papers and read them with an expressionless face. He slowly read out the description of the land, by meridian, range, township, section and quarter section.

"You've no idea where this is?" he asked, sarcastically. She shook her head.

Marriner arose, walked to the door, threw it open and motioned her to come. When she had stepped to his side he pointed to the verdant valley below them.

"There's your ranch," he said with a sneer. Sylvia, endeavoring to assume an expression of stupefied surprise, sensed that the whole weird, outlandish fiction in which she had been coached had defeated itself. The man knew that she was lying. How much more did he know?

He came back to his seat, frowning and heedless of her bewildered exclamations.

"You may spare us all of that," he said, curtly. "Now, Miss Bartlett, if that is your name, you've been mysteriously dumped down by an airplane of which you know nothing, in the very spot for which you were looking. You have come here without anything to prove your story except the title deeds to the land. They seem to be all right. Why you came and what your object in telling such a story is, we can't guess. But you'll hardly blame me for doubting your good faith until you've proved it a little better."

"But," remonstrated Sylvia, feebly, "what object could I have in deceiving you?"

"That's to be seen," he answered, grimly. "For the present, you've declared your intention and desire of cultivating your homestead. Very well. If you're in earnest, you are here to cultivate it. The proof is easy."

"How do you mean—proof!" she exclaimed.

"You'll cultivate it!" he said, tersely. "You and your silk stockings and your pumps and peekaboo waist will get down in that hollow and *farm!* You've come two thousand miles by train and Heaven knows how many by air, to do it—and now you *do it!* Do you get me?"

"Why—yes! That's what I came for, of course."

"And how are you going to go about it?" His sneer was open, mirthful, half pitying for her ignorance.

But she brightened. "There was a lot of stuff to come to a place called Coyote Creek. My trunk should be there too. It was to go by stage. And an agent in Welcome City, a Mr. Stacy, I think, with whom I corresponded, was to gather other things there for me. I'll go down there and get some one to haul them up."

Marriner glared at her. "Yes, you will," he said. "I think you'll stay right here for the time being, Miss Bartlett. Wing and I will see that you have a cabin to sleep in. As for your stuff, you'll give me an order for it and *I'll* go down and get it. I've no notion for having all the shorthorns in Coyote Creek poking around Ibapah. You'll farm Grass Valley—but you'll do it, for the present, without outside assistance."

Sylvia bridled indignantly. "This is rather high-handed," she asserted, with a good imitation of spirit. "What right have you——"

"No right at all—except the right to find out who the cute party is who is so interested in my business as to drop little girls out of the sky on me. Now, don't misunderstand me. I'm not compelling you to stay here. You can get out and walk to Coyote Creek if you wish. That is, if you know the way across Ibapah."

"I don't," said Sylvia, feebly.

"I thought not." Marriner rose again and motioned to the stolid Wing.

"We'll get out the tools. I'll ride over to the sawmill some joker has set up in Pickens' Draw—and, by the way, Miss Bartlett, I'm wondering if that sawmill which seems to run very irregularly, may not be merely a blind to drown the noise of airplane propellers. It's on the other slope, toward the valley, and the fellow that operates it is a half-wit. We'll be able to get a couple of loads of lumber there—and *I'll* drive them over. Wing, you go down and pick out a good place for a cabin."

Wing nodded and set about getting the tools. Sylvia sat helplessly, striving to make up her mind whether to blaze into righteous indignation or to submit. In the end she

submitted, as Marriner calmly went out, saddled his horse and rode away.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FARMERETTE.

A cabin of sorts had risen as though by magic in the little valley, with both Marriner and Wing working at the job. To their vast astonishment, Sylvia had insisted on helping in the work although the idea of this filled Marriner with sardonic mirth.

He had borrowed a team from the valley and brought in a load of stuff, including her trunk, household utensils and a plow and harrow which, much to his bewilderment, he found had been gathered at Baldwin's General Store on an order from a man named Stacy, in Welcome City, just as Sylvia had said.

Her further conduct also kept him guessing. Although she very evidently knew as little about farming as it was possible to know, she appeared the day after he had brought her trunk, dressed in a sort of farmerette costume of loose denim overalls and a woolen shirt in which she looked like a Broadway burlesque of a rural maiden, more suitable to frame and hang on a wall than to subject to the wear and tear of hard labor.

Yet she calmly got an ax and went with Wing to the corners he had marked out on the ground. Here she went to work with a will although very awkwardly. The two men, working at cutting down and trimming logs and hauling them to the site of the cabin, now and then saw her as she industriously hacked away at cutting posts. They chuckled to themselves, expecting her to quit after a while, with aching back and torn hands. But she fooled them. At noon she appeared smiling, flushed, disheveled and with hands blistered indeed, but cheerfully enthusiastic about the work.

When the cabin was completed she moved into it. By that time she had also begun to break ground for planting. She took Marriner's horse, harnessed him to the plow and set out to prepare her homestead. She knew no more about plowing than she did about other things but she made a brave essay and the horse, being patient and philosophical, gave her very little trouble. After a fashion she managed to stir up a gridiron of wavering furrows two or three acres in extent.

Marriner, working stolidly on the house, a barn and corral and, later, on the fence, did not know what to make of it. The girl's strength was amazing to him. Although she looked as though she would break in a strong blast, she tripped about the place, singing most of the time, her bobbed hair dancing above her shoulders. She heaved and tugged at the handles of the plow or rode the harrow, with a gay determination that went far to disarm him. Supple and resilient, she worked steadily and, in the evenings, had enough reserve energy to sing as she performed her household tasks.

Yet neither Wing nor Marriner knew the terror that often came over her after she had blown out her lights and retired for the night. Then the valley became a brooding haunt of everything mysterious and terrifying, peopled by wild beasts and threatening silences or even more threatening noises. The yapping bark of the coyotes she learned to hear without fear but the mournful, grim howl of the wolves never ceased to send a tremor of panic through her. The weird cry of a mountain lion or the shriller scream of a bobcat often sent her beneath her blankets with quaking limbs and strangled breath.

She bore it with grim persistence. A great anger at the self-sufficient miner filled her and she was bent upon showing that she was as capable as he could wish any one to be. Not for the world would she have confessed her fears to him. She took a secret delight in her toil because she knew that her tough strength and courage amazed and confounded the man. Later she came to take pleasure in it for its own sake.

Her mission, vague as it was, seemed as far from accomplishment as the day she had arrived. Neither Marriner nor Wing worked at anything suspicious. For that month, indeed, they were fully occupied in assisting her, building her cabin and barn and fences. Never a sign of a still or of unusual and secret activities met her scrutiny. They never went into the woods along the side of Ibapah where the rusting "giant" remained at rest. Nor did she gain speech with any of her confederates although once she heard the drone of the airplane as it came and, later, as it departed again.

The day that she finished harrowing her plowed field Marriner came and leaned upon the flimsy fence and watched her as she unhooked the horse and drove it to the corral. His smile was still doubtful and suspicious

and, tired and hot, with flushed face and dirty hands, she flamed into sudden resentment.

"You think you're smart, laughing at me," she said, turning on him. Her lip was quivering and she was near to tears of rage. A sudden reaction against the meaningless, silly toil swept her like a wave. She could have lashed him across the face with the reins that lay on the ground.

A dull flush crept over Marriner's face under the brown overlay of the sun. He felt shame at the justice of her outburst. But he was not yet ready to yield.

"Well, I'm not exactly laughing at you," he said. "I was just wondering what you're going to do next."

"I'm going to plant this field, smarty!" she flamed back. "And I'm the little lady that can do it. Don't fool yourself that I can't!"

His grin became somewhat wider. "I wouldn't bet you couldn't," he said, with grudging admiration. "But, just the same, I'm wondering what you're going to plant it with and what you're going to do with whatever you plant after you've planted it."

Sylvia shrugged her shoulders. "I'm going to plant wheat," she said.

"With the season half over? And there ain't enough snow for winter wheat. You might raise a crop of hay, although it would be a short one. Besides, what would you do with it? You haven't any stock to feed—except old Baldy."

"People down in the valley will buy it, won't they?" She was dubious, suddenly confronted with another of the interminable and unlooked-for difficulties that surrounded every attempt to maintain her rôle.

"They raise all they need and more, too. It sells for six dollars a ton down there—and it'd cost you almost that much to haul it over the mountain. It sure doesn't look very profitable to me."

Sylvia's temper broke sharply. She walked over to the fence where the man leaned on the top rail and smiled at her. Her face was white beneath the tan of her days of toil in the sun and her eyes blazed angrily beneath the film of tears. She faced him like a fury, lips trembling and stiff.

"And you tell me that now, after—all this—and stand there and laugh! You coward! You rotten, mean-spirited hick! You let me go on—*make* me go on, working like a truck driver while you and the chink hang around and snort and laugh at me! You're a pretty sort of thing! You're a—you're a *man*—I don't think!"

With swift, vicious precision she struck him with her flat hand on the mouth.

Marriner stood quite still, a gray pallor spreading under the ruddy skin except where the red streak of her swift blow showed the shrewd muscular force with which she had struck. The girl, half frightened yet still defiant, glad, indeed, to have expended some of her resentment and hatred, faced him, breathing hard but with limbs trembling under her. She read in his eyes a great threat, a terrible anger that wrestled with his self-control.

And then, slowly, the blazing rage faded from his eyes and something like admiration took its place. He fell away from the fence, loosing his clutching grip of the rail, and bent his head slightly.

"I'm obliged to you, Miss Bartlett," he said, stiffly. "I reckon I invited that. I'll see you later."

He turned away, walking with that smooth, gliding stride that was peculiar to him, his knee-high moccasins making no slightest sound. He did not look back to see her as she dispiritedly hung the harness on a peg and walked to her cabin.

She went into the bare living room, meagerly furnished and decorated with a couple of Navajo rugs and a deer hide that Marriner had brought her. She looked around her before sinking into a chair before the pine table, her arms outflung. The place seemed forbidding, desolate and cheerless. She felt a great wave of revulsion, a longing for feminine company and sympathy, a desire for lights, table linen, silks and laces, the laughter and chatter of the world she had known.

Another fear was filling her also. She had her profession, on which she depended for a livelihood. Yet that profession called for suppleness and lithe muscles, perfect grace and coördination. In the toil of the last weeks her muscles had been hardening, losing their resilience. A little more of it and her dancing would be a thing to be forgotten!

Forlorn, discouraged and weary, she dropped her head on her arms and wept. She had come here on the wild impulse of some drug-crazed brain! She suddenly realized what it was she had sensed in Denver's appearance that was familiar. She had seen

drug addicts occasionally, giving them little heed, but she awoke to memory now, amazed that she had not guessed the fact before. Blinded by his shield of office and a certain need of her own, she had swallowed the tale whole.

Yet she did not doubt his good faith even yet. He might be a drug addict but she believed that he was an officer and that her search had to do with a criminal. With all her hot and resentful heart she longed for an opportunity to carry out her mission and revenge herself on Marriner.

But the opportunity was not there. He was without any occupation that she knew of and, while that fact was suspicious in itself, without evidence of an overt act she knew that she could do nothing. Helpless, raging, she could only lean on her arms and cry.

He sent Wing down to her. The Chinese came in the door silently and stood watching her as she lay there. Then, with a smile of pity on his smooth, yellow face, he touched her on the shoulder.

"Mr. Marriner invites you to share our evening meal, Miss Bartlett," he said, formally. "He thinks you are lonely here, and he has something to propose to you, in the way of amends for his discourtesy."

"I want nothing from him," said Sylvia, sullenly.

"I understand," said Wing. "Yet he owes you something and it is only fair to give him the chance to pay. You are tired, and we would be happy to have your company."

She was about to refuse, angrily, but a thought checked her. If he was really ashamed and remorseful, perhaps he would be unwary and betray something. At any rate she might have a chance to learn something to his discredit if she met his advances, while if she stood aloof there was no hope.

So she wearily and half-heartedly consented, changed her clothes and brushed her tangled hair. She joined Wing at the door and slowly followed him up a winding, half-concealed path which brought them to the bench and the cabin hidden in the trees.

Marriner met her at the door, bowing formally, showing a certain restraint and yet apparently anxious to put her at her ease so far as it could be done. It was still early and, while Wing set about preparing for the meal, he ensconced the girl in the barrel chair before a cheerful fire and took his seat on a stool beside her. She remained sullenly silent and he did not attempt to win her from her mood. Instead, he plunged at once into what he had to say.

"Miss Bartlett, I'm not going to apologize to you because I know that would do no good. I've been hard on you—and yet, when I think of how you came, I think I was justified in my suspicion that you were not here to farm a homestead. You've been plucky and you've got me believing you in spite of the fact that reason says I shouldn't believe you.

"Now, I don't yet know why you're here but I'm ready to accept your being here. I don't believe that you mean anything wrong against us, at any rate. Since you're here I want to help you. It's a certainty that you can't make a living by farming in these hills, and I think you recognize the fact now."

"You've shown me that," said the girl, wearily. "But you haven't shown me what I'm to do—after fooling me all this time."

"No, I haven't. Well, you don't belong here in these mountains and deserts. That's apparent. You belong back in the cities. Why don't you go back to them?"

Sylvia sneered bitterly. "That's a brilliant question! I'm fairly dirty with money after being up here and investing it in useless tools and stuff. I'd have a fat chance back where I come from with no job and no money, wouldn't I?"

Marriner's lip curled. "A pretty girl can always get along," he sneered.

She was out of her chair with a snarl of rage. "That's the kind you think I am?" she cried. "Well, keep your suspicions to yourself, Mr. Marriner. Keep your advice and your sympathy, too. I don't want it. I've had enough of you and men like you! God help the girl that has to make her way among you!"

She was halfway to the door when he stepped in front of her, moving with a swift certainty that even her agility could not equal. She hardly knew why she stopped. Perhaps it was something purposeful in his face, perhaps it was merely the recollection that her way to vengeance lay in lulling his suspicions and winning his confidence, not by breaking entirely with him. Perhaps it was a mixture of two impulses. At any rate she stood there irresolute.

"I hardly meant that," he said, quietly. "I merely meant that you should be able to gain help and sympathy back with your

own kind. I don't like women and don't trust them—but that has nothing to do with you. Will you sit down?"

Sylvia sat down, angry at herself and far more angry at him. Wing broke into a singsong chant and rattled the pans. Her eyes roved around, seeking something on which to fasten and attract her wandering thoughts. They fell on a satin slipper hanging from one point of a pair of antlers nailed to the wall.

"You don't like women," she said, quickly. "Say, that's a likely tale. You aren't above having a souvenir or two about the place. Where'd you get that?"

Marriner looked at the slipper. "The triumph of hope over experience," he answered, smiling slightly. "I found that. Reminded me of the story of Rhodopis and some lingering spark of romance induced me to bring it along. I don't know who it belongs to."

"Well, I can tell you," said Sylvia, defiantly and carelessly. "It belongs to me. I've got the mate to it in my trunk. I—I lost that."

She broke off in a panic as she recollected where she had lost it and where he must have found it. She had betrayed herself, now, beyond a doubt.

But Marriner merely shrugged his shoulders. "Sounds more like Rhodopis than ever," he asserted. "I find the slipper and then you come down on me from the sky. An eagle didn't bring it but something like an eagle brought you. And how'd you come to lose it down at Welcome?"

"I might ask you how you came to find it there?"

"I rode by in the night and saw it on a fence post. So you were in Welcome City?"

"I told you I didn't know where I'd been," said Sylvia. "I don't know where I lost it or anything about it."

Marriner laughed. It was the first time she had ever heard him indulge in mirth and she found it pleasing.

"I'm not seeking to read the riddle," he said. "Keep your secrets. They can't have anything to do with me and if you want to stick to your story, all right. I told you I hadn't any use for women and it's true. But you've shown me the sort of pluck and nerve that I like in man or woman and I've plenty of use for that. Also, it has been my fault that you've put in time and money up here to no purpose. I might have spared you that. I didn't—and I'm sorry."

"Keep your sorrow," said Sylvia. "It's too late to do any good."

"Perhaps it is. And yet—if you want to go back where you came from and—and study dancing, say——"

"What's that?" Sylvia was again on her feet, frightened and wondering how much the man knew.

"Nothing at all!" he answered. "I saw you one afternoon in the meadow down around the bend. I guess you didn't know I was watching. You were dancing—and I'll admit that you have talent. Maybe you could go back East and study that?"

Relieved she sank back to her seat. "You think I might learn something about it, then?" He did not sense the irony behind her words but nodded.

"I'm not much on such things. Seemed to me you were pretty good though. And, since I've made you waste your money—I'm thinking that Wing and I—we have quite a little and can get more—we might advance you enough——"

"Money! Where'd you two ditch diggers get money?" she answered, her swift mind seizing on the first confirmation of Denver's tale that had come her way. She was eager and tense but she hid it under an assumption of indifference and disbelief.

Marriner went to the bunk and dragged the steel box from under it. He unlocked it and threw back the lid, exposing the buckskin sacks and a pile of notes, besides a couple of bank books.

"We dug it out of the ground," he said, taking the paper money from the box. 'We'd like to make amends, Miss Bartlett. I'll buy your claim and cabin at a fair price, if you say so."

But Sylvia, flushed with triumph, shook her head.

"It isn't for sale," she replied. "I'm here and I'm going to stick. You can put that down as final, Mr. Man!"

Marriner dropped the money in the box and shoved it carelessly under the bunk.

"I was afraid so," he said. "Well, we'll have to go on to the next alternative."

CHAPTER X.

FEAR AND FORGIVING.

"There isn't any alternative," said Sylvia. "I'm going to stay here if I starve. So you may as well give it up and go about your own business. I own that place."

"I don't want to get you off it. To tell the truth, I'm glad to have you here. You're company, although I'd never expected to admit that much of any woman. But you can't farm it and you have to make a living. Now, how about mining! Ever think of that?"

"Mining! No. I don't see what you're driving at."

Marriner motioned to the retorts and beakers on the table. "That's where we get ours," he said and Sylvia totally disbelieved him. "The creeks around here have been pretty well panned out. There never was much in them. But my father was a little more than a practical miner and he taught me what he knew. Also, I had an education which he gave me. There's gold here if one knows where to look for it."

"And I suppose you know," she sneered.

"Yes, I know. There's a block fault on this side of Ibapah. A good many ages ago that broke away and dropped. There was an ancient creek there which got diverted but the bed was left, only it was covered up by talus washed down from the cliff. The fellows that found gold before washed the creeks but it didn't pay. The reason it didn't pay was because most of it was in the old, hidden bed under the fault. That's what my father guessed."

"Well, that shows how smart your father was," said Sylvia, "but it doesn't show me anything. What's the answer?"

"We'll show you where to stake a claim and will rig you up a cradle. You ought to be able to wash a hundred dollars a week out of the place when we've shown you how."

Stunned, doubtful, half disbelieving and half convinced, she looked at the man, wondering if her notions were wrong, after all. Surely this could not be true, yet how did he hope to fool her unless there was gold to be found? And if it was there, was not that the explanation of his presence and his solitude? Still, there was the apparatus which did not seem to her such as a gold miner would use and might well be that of an illicit distiller. Of course, she knew practically nothing about either craft.

Wing cheerfully hailed them to supper.

After the meal was over, both men walked with her back to her cabin. When they had left her she more than ever felt its isolation and the terrors of the night came upon her to fight with the new food she had for thought. Wakeful and weary, she tossed about under the blankets, shivering at the sounds that assailed her.

She felt more than ever lonely and helpless, cut off from her own world and depressed. Somehow, Marriner's steady, half-shut eyes and his tall, lithe frame kept appearing before her. He seemed to have a quality of strength and assurance that was comforting. She felt herself wishing that she might creep to his side and crouch there, sheltered by his strength. She was so tired —so feeble!

A shot rang out in the darkness and she was out of bed on the instant, half paralyzed as an inhuman scream echoed in the still night. Frozen with panic, she clutched for her revolver, grasping it with tense fingers, and crouched in the darkness, facing the door. Her groping fingers found the mandarin coat and dragged it about her. Her heart was pounding excruciatingly.

There sounded a knock on her door and then a voice.

"It's all right, Miss Bartlett. I hope you weren't frightened!"

Trembling and weak, she dragged herself to the door, pulling the mandarin coat about her shoulders. She felt faint and yet enormously reassured at the calm voice of Marriner. Leaning against the wall she managed with shaking fingers to release the latch and open the door a little.

"What—what was it?" she gasped.

Marriner was standing a little way from the door and turned to face her in the moonlight. His rifle was under his arm.

"It was only a lion, monkeying around the corral. I got him and he won't trouble you again."

Sylvia began to sob brokenly.

"I—I've been so frightened," she said, weakly. "I've been so frightened—every night!"

And then she quietly slipped to the floor in a faint.

When she came to she was lying in her bed, tucked in her blankets with a damp cloth on her forehead. The door was open and a fire burned in the fireplace, lighting the cabin, cheerfully. In the open doorway the broad back of Marriner was outlined as he sat on the sill looking outward into the night.

She made some slight sound and he spoke reassuringly. "Don't you worry any, Miss Bartlett. I'm sitting here on the watch."

"You can't sit there all night," she said, feebly.

"Why, you poor little kid, I've been out patrolling this cabin every night for almost a month. If I'd known you'd be scared I'd have told you, but I thought you'd be less frightened if I didn't let you know. You go on to sleep. If anything comes along, I'll blow holes right through it."

She sighed and went to sleep. Once she woke up, to find the fire almost out and the outer door closed although that into her bedroom was still open. In sudden fear that he had gone she sprang upright. The man must have had the ears of an owl for his voice instantly came from outside the door.

"I'm right here. Don't worry. I'm going to stay until morning."

Then she went to sleep finally and restfully, with a sense of security that was infinitely comforting.

In the morning she found Marriner sitting on a log outside the door showing no signs of his long vigil but busy skinning an enormous, tawny beast, the sight of which sent a thrill of fear through her.

"That'll make a fine rug for you," he said with a grin so comradely that she warmed to him for an instant before remembering her antagonism. "They're nothing, really, to be afraid of. They'd run a mile if you threw a rock at one. I'll nail it up on the barn to dry."

When he came back she was preparing breakfast and when she asked him to share it, he assented with a new shyness that was tantalizing and disturbing to her. Somehow she felt that a new factor had arisen between herself and the man, something that forced them even farther apart and yet drew them together.

She tried to thank him for his vigil but he stopped her. "I've been reproaching myself for not letting you know," he said. "I can see that you've had a bad time and it's all my fault again. I have a faculty of blundering where women are concerned."

Striving to break through the new bar to an intimacy she dreaded and yet wished for, she seized upon the words.

"You're always talking about women that way. I suppose you don't think much of us?"

Wally Marriner rolled a cigarette and lit it. "Well——" He hesitated. "I can't say that I know much about them—and what I know isn't any too good."

"If you'd tell me about it, maybe I'd be able to judge better," she said. He did not seem to be asking for sympathy and yet she felt like giving it. Her smile at him was appealing and warm and he flushed a little under it.

"I don't mind telling you," he said.

"My father was a mining engineer. He had bad luck—with my mother. She ran off with another man. That set him on the loose and he went to prospecting. He lived a good many years among the Navajos and Apaches in the Southwest and brought me up there. I've got the signs of it about me in some ways.

"But he taught me what he knew and it was a good deal. Later on, when he died, he left me some money and the dope about this place which he'd worked out when he came in here years ago, after the second opening of the placers. He made me promise to go to college and get an education. I followed instructions.

"I didn't know much about the kind of people I met. They looked on me as a sort of freak. I had one or two rather embarrassing and enlightening experiences however, which didn't give me much of an opinion of them—especially the women.

"When the war came along, I went, with the rest. I was in camp and there were all sorts of girls hanging about. You know how they were with the soldiers, perhaps? I met one. She was a pretty thing, sort of sentimental, all wrought up about the boys going to war and anxious to show how much she thought of them.

"Well, I was going across and she was in a state of mind. I didn't like to see it and—the upshot of it was that we were married at the Y. M. C. A. on the night I sailed. All the time I was across I kept thinking of her and how affectionate and worshiping she was and I was mortally ashamed because I didn't feel half as much in love with her as I ought to. And, at that, I was pretty fond of her.

"I came home and was under orders with a casual company to head up to Boston and be discharged. Before I went I got leave and looked her up. I'd had letters from her and knew where she could be found. I went there to surprise her.

"She was living there with an aviation officer and I found them together. I beat that fellow half to death and went back to face my court-martial. I didn't face it be-

cause the officer didn't prefer any charges. I found out why afterward."

"And so you're married?" said Sylvia, wondering why there was a lump in her throat and her voice sounded dull.

"No, I'm not," and Sylvia's heart bounded suddenly and she felt a desire to smile. "An intelligence officer came along before I got my discharge and interviewed me. This girl, it seems, made a business of getting married to soldiers and drawing their allotments. She had married five before she roped me. They sent her up for eighteen months. I guess she's out by now."

"But," said Sylvia, "surely you don't judge all women by that one!"

"Well, I did until recently. Maybe it wasn't fair but, then, those girls who made sport of me because I was a sort of wild man from the Indian reservations, had sort of spoiled me for fair judgment already and this one just put the finish on it. I concluded that, while there might be nice women, they were not likely to take up with me and the other kind I didn't want to take up with myself. I'd had enough."

Sylvia looked at him thoughtfully. More and more she felt that something new had appeared between her and this man. She was frightened and doubtful. If he was a criminal, as she did not doubt, the new feeling must not be allowed to grow. Sympathy between them would never do.

"I've been thinking over your plan," she said, casually. "Maybe I'll take it up. But I'd like to go down to the valley and see if I can get word to Mr. Stacy first."

"Why, that's easily arranged," said Marriner, smilingly. "It's not more than twenty miles and old Baldy can carry you there nicely. I'll go and show you the way."

"But there's nothing for you to ride," she objected. He laughed again.

"I don't need anything to ride. You'll see."

He went off to his own cabin whistling cheerily. Sylvia watched him, troubled at the doubt which filled her. He seemed to have dropped several years of his age since the day past.

CHAPTER XI.

TROUBLES OF THE SECRET SERVICE.

In the Federal office building the chief of the secret service of the treasury department sat at his desk and drummed on the glass top. Before him strode up and down one of his most trusted field agents, a gray-haired, lean, hard-bitten man who looked more like a bill collector than anything else. He was running over points which were of interest in the discussion.

"We know where twenty planes which the war department sold have gone. That is, we know they all went to Mexico, and that they haven't been used to any extent by either the revolutionists or the government forces. What they have have been accounted for. The rest are in private hands.

"We also know that planes cross the border frequently, making for various destinations in Nevada, California and Arizona. They make long flights and take different courses, to remote regions. We've even been able to get one or two of them, more by luck than design. But they haven't any definite rendezvous that we have been able to discover, except that they fly several hundred miles north, generally to some desert region within touch of a town where gas can be obtained. If they went to one place or two, we could find the place, but they seem to have no definite objective for more than the single trip.

"Consequently, our efforts to stop the traffic are ineffectual. We have nailed one or two young fellows, aviators who find the after-war period too tame for settled industry. They are mere employees, reckless, half criminal, but knowing nothing beyond the demands of their immediate objective, to carry a cargo to a stated place and return. They are highly paid for each trip and the risk and excitement appeal to them. But the stuff doesn't go out from the places where they land it—and yet it doesn't stay there."

"It isn't there and yet it is," repeated the chief, ironically. "Sounds interesting."

"Of course I don't mean that. I mean that it isn't distributed from these casual and shifting caches. In some way it is picked up, taken to a central rendezvous and from there it is sent out."

"Any activity of trucks?"

"None. Besides, the truck would be expensive, in many cases impracticable. Although the places we have discovered are all near to flat, desert country where landings from planes are practical, they are isolated, the routes into and out of them are long and hard. No, there's only one way the stuff can be gathered and conveyed to the rendezvous. That's by air."

"And that means that the stuff is cached by each plane, a central agent notified in some way where it can be found and a flyer who is in with the ring then goes down and gets it. He would probably have a plane of considerable gasoline capacity, capable of making long flights to avoid the necessity of procuring gas. He would land in remote and lonely regions and seldom be seen. That's how you dope it out?"

"It's the logical explanation," replied the subordinate.

"Well, what confirmation have you?"

"Nothing definite. But we have men raking every foot of the transcontinental lines. We first thought they would use the Southern lines and devoted ourselves to them. But we drew blank. Finally we turned north. The U. P. was possible but rather far removed and the P. N. W. was almost out of the question unless they used two relays. That left the P. S. L. as the most likely possibility.

"Now, several interesting facts have come to light along the line. One of them is that there isn't a town on the right of way that hasn't one or more Chinese or Japanese in it, working as laundrymen, section hands and what not. Another point is that, out of Salt Lake and as far as Elko, nearly every town has one or more hopheads in it."

"Your imagination is running away with you," said the chief, dryly. "Show me any town where there isn't a dope or two."

"I can show you plenty," the other answered, warmly. "In dozens of these little places out here there are no men who even know what dope is. A drug addict is a rarity and a curiosity. Even if one should come into many such places he couldn't get his stuff for they don't even have drug stores in them.

"But on the P. S. L. here's a string of towns west of Salt Lake. Not one of them contains more than five hundred inhabitants. Many of them are only way stations. But just look at them! From Salt Lake, going west we have Jordan, Westlake, Camelot, Dry Gulch, Salt Bans, Salduro, Welcome City, Grady, Pioche, Green Springs, Morton Siding, Lago, Deseret and Elko. Between Elko and Salt Lake there isn't a village that one would stop to look at, except Welcome, and you know what a devil's kitchen that place is."

"Well, what's the answer?" said the chief.

"In every one of those towns there is evidence that opium or morphine, and sometimes both, is being procured in some way by one or more people. Generally it's some fellow that hit the booze pretty hard before prohibition. It's easy enough to check up on the distribution end. You'll find some chink operating in most places. In one or two there's a druggist of sorts. But where do *they* get it?"

"That's what you've been set to find out."

"Well, I've narrowed it down. Here and there is an addict or two. They are found all the way from Zion to Elko. But they must come from a center and radiate out along the line. That stands to reason."

"We'll let it stand there for the present," agreed the chief.

"We've been watching the towns closely and we've especially had our eyes on Welcome City as a likely place. We've discovered several interesting things, at that.

"There's a hophead working at the livery stable. There are eight women in town who hit the pipe. The fellow who runs the game at the hotel is a dope fiend. There's a real-estate agent named Denver Stacy who has all the earmarks. He had a girl working for him some time ago who showed some signs of it. A clerk at the hotel and two or three of the shop hands are addicts."

"Seems to be quite a nest of them," said the chief. "But finding the addicts isn't finding the source. Where does it come from?"

"I should say that it comes *through* Welcome City and is relayed west and east from there. Some one is receiving it and sending it out. Therefore, as far as the railroad is concerned, we can assume that Welcome is our starting point."

"All right. What next?"

"It remains to check up on the inhabitants. In Welcome, we have only two or three who can be considered, I think. There is the superintendent of the shops, but he isn't a dope and I doubt any connection of his with it. He's hard boiled but not the type. The section hands and women we can also dismiss, and also the livery-stable employee. They probably don't even know where the stuff they get comes from.

"That leaves the hotel clerk, the gambler and the real-estate agent. The clerk doesn't seem to have the brains and he's too young. The gambler might be it and so might Stacy. Both are addicts, pretty well advanced. Maybe they are working together.

"But even they must get it from some central rendezvous. The question is—where?"

"That's the question," agreed the superior. "What's the answer?"

"We haven't got it. But one or two points have been picked up. There was the girl who worked for Stacy. Well, she left him a few days ago to go to a place south of Welcome and off in the desert called Coyote Creek. Went there, we hear, to go to work in a general store kept by a fellow named Baldwin."

"Can't jail her for that!"

"No, but we can wonder. Why does a young and good-looking girl, presumably a competent stenographer and clerk, and also a drug addict, go off to a remote little village in the desert where she not only can't be in demand but also would naturally have trouble in getting her rations? It's worth considering.

"Then, we've been watching those who come out and go in. Mostly they are the ordinary kind. Only one has attracted any attention. He is a fellow who passes as a miner; name of Marriner. Has a good education, is good looking, young and apparently smart. According to the dope he works some old, worn-out placers out that way somewhere.

"But the important thing is that he takes trips more or less frequently in and out. He comes to Salt Lake every month or so —*and he banks anywhere from two to five thousand dollars each trip!*"

"Maybe he really has a mine," suggested the chief. The other man snorted scornfully. His superior laughed indulgently.

"It's a nice and ingenious theory, at any rate, and well worth looking into. How do you propose to go about it?"

"I'm going to comb the region south of Welcome—and I've got the man to do it."

He went to the door, opened it and beckoned to some one in the outer office. A man who had been leaning against the rail came in. The chief stared in surprise.

"You'd have the whole country watching *him*," he muttered.

"But watching him for something else entirely. He's got a reputation, chief. Lookit! This fellow's been a cattle detective and known as such from California to the Panhandle. They'll watch him in his business of looking for rustlers. The dope runners aren't interested in cattle nor in cattle detectives. They won't be suspicious. Yet a cow dick can go into the hills, snoop around anywhere and listen in on anything. He's the man we want!"

The chief looked the stranger over with a grin which was returned with a mild, half-placating smile. Then he nodded.

"All right! Swear him in and give him his papers. If it doesn't work, it's a black mark against you, Ellis."

Ellis led his recruit out, jubilant.

A week passed without excitement and then the wires into Salt Lake burned with messages. The chief of the secret service, closeted with the inspector of the post office, in charge, swore ferociously and ordered every man available out on the line.

The new Occidental Limited, on the U. P., running over the Lucin Cut Off, was steaming at speed west of Lucin and had entered the desert. It was a mail train and carried express of great value. The division was two hundred miles long without a stop at this point and, for fifty miles, the desert had not a habitation except for one or two water tanks. The Limited made no stops.

But, twenty miles out in the flat desolation, a red light signaled imperatively. The engineer threw on the air and the train came to a stop just in time to avoid being derailed by a pile of ties across the track. A man on either side of the engine stuck up the train crew with revolvers.

The passengers slept, undisturbed. The engine was ordered uncoupled. The brakeman and conductor appearing heedlessly in one of the vestibules were promptly covered and marched to the engine, which was run up the track a short distance. The mail clerk and express guard heard the disturbance and locked themselves in.

With one man guarding the engine, the other two, masked and dressed in nondescript, loose garments, attacked the mail and express cars. Grenades blew in the doors and gas bombs followed as the plucky guardians of the treasure essayed to defend their charges. One was shot dead and the other badly gassed.

Registered mail bags and express packages were dragged out, the safe being blown with bombs. Working fast but coolly, the bandits cleaned the cars out. Then they ordered the disarmed train crew to couple on and run the train westward, suggesting, with ironical jeers, that they keep the whistle going to arouse the country.

For safety's sake, the crew did as ordered and even rent the night air with shrill blasts of the whistle in hope of arousing some isolated ranch. But the bandits had sprung into a small automobile and dashed off into the desert.

That was the tale the secret service and the post-office inspectors had to digest this morning. The public also heard it at breakfast but what the public did not hear was that the mail sacks contained cash and negotiable notes, bonds and stocks valued at over a hundred thousand dollars and that the express car had yielded the bandits an equal amount. In addition there were nearly a hundred thousand dollars in canceled Liberty Bonds of one-thousand-dollar denomination.

With a clerk dead and another dying, with two hundred thousand dollars looted, no wonder the government was aroused. On trains going west went the agents and with them went trailers who had won their spurs in Indian wars and in the days of the cattle barons. The desert swarmed with life at the scene of the tragedy.

Up to a certain point the trail was easy to follow. The tires of an automobile left plain marks on the desert floor and were rapidly run down. The car had headed into the desert, to the north, dodging behind folds of the ground but leaving a plain trail. Finally, about five miles from the tracks, it ran out into a flat salt pan. Here it had circled and dodged drunkenly and insanely, cutting tracks all over the place. Finally it had stopped for a few moments, then had started again and run off to a place where it had struck a clump of sagebrush, veered sharply and upended in an arroyo, where it was found, empty and smashed.

It was a cheap, aged car and every mark of identification had been chiseled from engine or frame. There was no license plate.

Neither in the flat salt pan nor in the desert for miles around was there any faintest indication of where and how the bandits had gone.

But the chief, rising grimly from an inspection of the car and listening to the report of a trailer who said that nothing living had gone out of the flat after the car came in, shrugged his shoulders.

"Take the back trail of the car," he ordered. "You'll probably lose it before long but it's all we can do. We can't follow 'em out of here, that's certain."

An ancient trailer, crestfallen at his lack of success, puzzled and half inclined to blame something supernatural, sidled up to him.

"Aimin' at no offense, captain," he insinuated, "an' admittin' fusthand that it ain't maybe none o' my business, I sure would admire to know how do you reckon them road agents pulled their freight outa this here flat. You-all don't seem so all-fired up a tree as we-all be, somehow."

The chief nodded somberly. "There's only one way it could be done," he explained. "They had an airplane waiting here. Probably you can find tire marks different from those of the car if you look hard for them. But it doesn't matter. That's the way it was done."

The old trailer scratched his head. "By cripes, cap, I reckon you hit 'em plumb center that time. Well, there ain't much call fer sign readers these days and I don't know but I'm as well pleased. Which I kin nose out most anything that sticks to the ground but when it comes to readin' signs up around the Milky Way, I sure aims to pass. With these here new-fangled contraptions, you-all better negotiate with St. Peter fer a passel of angels to do your scoutin'. I'm through!"

The chief looked resignedly at the blue and cloudless sky and sighed. For the time being, he also was through.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GARDEN OF PROSERPINE.

Mounted on old Baldy, Sylvia followed Marriner, who was on foot shod in his high, Apache moccasins. On the saddle hung his rifle in a scabbard. Behind it was his coat and a burlap sack, bulging at both ends.

Heading up the valley, Wally swung into a trot and the horse trotted to keep up with him. He ran easily and loosely, not with the straight-backed pose of the track, with chest thrown out and legs moving pistonlike. Instead, his shoulders were carried forward, almost stooped and his arms swung in front of him. He barely lifted his feet, seeming to let them fall of their own weight in front of him, flat-flooted.

Yet, although it was uphill, he kept the horse at a jog trot all the time. His long legs fell forward in a considerable stride and instead of dragging him with their weight his feet dropped in front of him by

their own gravity. Not handsome running, it covered the ground steadily, rapidly and tirelessly. He breathed as easily as though walking and talked carelessly over his shoulder with the girl.

At first he confined himself to pointing out and naming places of interest or scenery of beauty. There was much of it. Though the way ran through woods for a distance, they generally followed transversely across slopes from which the rolling sweep of foothills could be seen, riotously green under their forest cover of grass and ferns. They headed around gulches, embowered in vegetation, down which ran brawling streams as clear as crystal. The air at this altitude was fresh and bracing and just pleasantly warm.

Sylvia listened to his quiet but appreciative comments and, looking down over the lovely, forest-clad hills and out on to the limitless, yellow and brown plains to the east, she sensed the deep affection and comfort that the man bore for and took in the home he made himself. To herself the place began to appeal in a way somewhat similar. It was as though, after weary years of striving and disillusioning, she had come to a veritable Garden of Proserpine:

> Here, where the world is quiet,
> Here, where all trouble seems
> Dead winds' and spent waves' riot
> In doubtful dreams of dreams;
> I watch the green field growing
> For reaping folk and sowing,
> For harvest time and mowing,
> A sleepy world of streams.

The changeless, deadly peace of the desert on one hand and on the other. Around her, the living peace and warm beauty of the verdant hills! She saw an entire universe, apart from the country of grubbing men; of cities and paved streets, of lights and laughter and jazz; of making and spending.

Into her nostrils crept a memory of the musty scent of boarding houses and the stale perfume of the greenrooms of theaters. On her lips, for an instant she tasted the flat flavor of rouge. The memory was so vivid that she stopped suddenly, staring wide-eyed away from the desert and the forest and up at the frowning, white peak of Ibapah, towering into the heavens.

"What's the matter?" asked Wally, pausing to look back.

Before she could recall her thoughts, she burst out breathlessly.

"Oh! I don't want to go back! I never want——" And then she stopped herself, blushing.

Marriner looked at her keenly. "Were you thinking of going? I thought you had determined to stay."

"I have. But I was just recalling—it doesn't matter, only it is so peaceful and quiet and lovely here!"

He resumed his swinging run, laughing a little.

"You'd better stay then. Of course, I don't mean that you should bury yourself here away from everything. It isn't necessary. But it's an ideal spot for rest and quiet. One can live here and when it grows confining can go out into the world and see what it is doing, secure in the knowledge that, when the world grows harsh and tiresome, he can come back here to rest."

"Yes. That's the way I feel," she admitted. "But I think—I'd like to stay always."

He fell back beside her, running at the stirrup and looking up at her, his hand holding the strap that bound the lariat below the horn.

"Even in spite of the nights—and the beasts?" he asked. Sylvia shivered a little and laughed.

"They frighten me—but it's because I am so lonely. If it wasn't for that it would be lovely."

She flushed warmly as he cast his glance at her, and turned her head away.

But Marriner fell silent, running beside her without comment. She finally looked down again, hesitant and timid. But he was staring ahead of him.

"That's hard, I know," he said, after a while, speaking calmly and impersonally. "But you can feel safer now. I'm out in the valley, prowling around every night like a watchdog. That ought to help."

"It does," she laughed. "But it is hard on you. You must need sleep."

"I've been raised among Indians," he answered. "I need less sleep than most men and I can do without it for longer. Still, I get some. I can doze under a tree and wake on the slightest sound. Then an hour or two in the daytime suffices to keep me fit."

"Still," she said, "I don't understand why you should do it. You were so suspicious of me—perhaps you still are—and you have no reason to be fond of me or put yourself out for my convenience, let alone watching

over me like a mother hen over a lone chicken."

Wally laughed again. "That's about it, I reckon. As for my being suspicious of you, I'm not any longer. I don't know why you came as you did or the rights of it, but that's your affair. We've accepted you, Wing and I, and from now on we'll look out for you like a regular partner. You see, we both needed you."

"Why?" she asked, surprised.

"Well, it's like this, I reckon. Wing and I, we're both men, even if he's a Chinaman and I'm a white man. I'm about half Indian, at that, at least in training. We get along fine together. He's cheerful and amusing and I like to hear him sing those tinkle-tinny ballads he's so free with. Still, we're not in need of any help: we can both take care of ourselves. Wing don't need me and I don't need him.

"But we both need some one who *does* need us. A man living alone the way we do likes to have something dependent on him, something he can be nice to and protect and—and coddle, so to speak. Otherwise he's mighty apt to get to coddling himself and feeling sorry for himself. It's a sort of instinct for affection, I suppose; a species of self-indulgence; an exercise of natural conceit, you might even say."

"In other words, it feeds your vanity to have some one dependent on you and helpless without you?"

"That's right," said Wally, innocently.

"And you think I'm helpless like that?"

Wally chuckled at her indignation. "No—not except in one or two things. Of course it was a joke to see you trying to farm and you were helpless enough. But you had grit enough to do it and could have done it somehow without our help. You didn't need us for that. Fact is, if you'd been just a helpless dependent, I guess we'd have just shipped you back where you came from. But you aren't."

"You're contradicting yourself," she said, severely.

"I know I am. But I'm getting to it. You see we don't want just a clinging vine. They wouldn't stand the altitude out here, and the drought. But we want to feel benignant and superior just the same. Most any man wants to feel that way. That's why men like dogs. It's because the dogs look up to the man.

"Now Wing finds he can exercise his natural, Chinese and princely generosity by casually giving you a coat to wear around the place that's probably worth a good-sized fortune. He likes to feel princely and magnanimous. He's also proud of his cooking and it tickles him to death to see you relishing it. He knows I can't cook worth a cent so *my* appreciation doesn't count. Then, you're young and Wing isn't. He can indulge a sort of paternal interest that wouldn't fit me.

"As for me, I get a fine sop to my vanity by being able to shoo the wolves and wild cats and coyotes and hydrophobia skunks away from you at night and knowing that you'd be scared stiff if I wasn't there and are sleeping secure so long as my strong right arm stands between you and danger. Do you get me?"

"I get you," said Sylvia, gravely. "I see that you need me up here even more than I need you."

"Exactly. You'd be doing us a favor by staying and—and we can see you don't lose by it. There's plenty of gold."

"All right," she replied, with a laugh. "I think I will stay—for some time, anyway."

A short time later they crossed a gulch, climbed the opposite side and turned down it to the west and south. They had passed around the peak and had gained the western slope.

Down the little cañon they went rapidly following a good trail that wound in and out among the trees. After they had covered another mile with the man still showing no signs of fatigue, they came out on slopes that were wider and bare of trees for some distance back from the brook. Here they found stumps of trees which had been cut down, bark scattered loosely over the ground and limbs cut and piled. A small shack, roofed but not sided, was built beside the creek and sawdust floored the ground about it and lay, piled high, to one side. Another shack, with walls and a tin chimney, was near by.

The place seemed silent and deserted and the gas engine that ran the saw was cold and rusty. A slim pile of sawed lumber lay to one side of the carriage and a few logs were on the skidway.

Wally stopped, however and motioned to Sylvia to rein in the horse. They were still in the timber though it was thinner here and did not obstruct their view. He ex-

amined the place carefully, talking in a low voice to her meanwhile.

"I never could figure out why this mill was put in here. They've got two men running it and one's a drug addict if I ever saw one. The other is about half-witted. They came in from Welcome City about six months ago and started the mill. Mighty little demand for the lumber in the valley and on the other side the range. They sell what they saw, but that isn't much. I've often wondered if it hadn't something to do with the airplane. The saw might drown the noise of the engine and the place might be a station where they deliver whatever it is they're bringing in here. It could go out in a load of lumber at any time."

"But——" said Sylvia, and stopped. Doubts were crowding in on her, doubts not only of Marriner's guilt but doubts of her employers' honesty and innocence. Still, she was not in a position as yet to make those doubts felt. She could not explain to Marriner without risking his new-won esteem and trust. Besides, she was not convinced that he was a miner nor that he had nothing to do with these criminal activities himself. About all that she was sure of was that she was not going to deliver him up, in any case. Somehow, if the pursuit got near she would convey a warning to him in time for him to make his escape.

Seeing nothing alive about the place Wally stepped out into the clearing. He skirted the house cautiously, keeping a wary eye on it. When he heard a slight, clicking, spitting sound, he came to a stop, circled the house and paused at view of a window. Beside it hung a sort of grid, something like the ones that are used over camp fires, made of flat strips of metal and heavy wires. A wire dangled from the window and lay on the ground.

He came back to Sylvia's side. "I saw something queer," he said. She asked what it was.

"It *looks* like a small wireless installation," he replied. "But I didn't investigate closely."

"Why not?"

"Might not be healthy," he replied. "It's not my business. I've no desire to have my light blown out for the sake of an unhealthy curiosity. If that fellow wants to telegraph from Ibapah let him do it. So far as I know, he's just sending weather reports."

He took the way again at his tireless run and, after a while, led her out on a ridge whence the valley could be seen below them. He pointed to it.

"Coyote Creek!"

Sylvia saw a winding, narrow strip of yellowing land, not more than two miles wide at any point. It was grass grown and checkered with fields of green alfalfa and ripening wheat. Up and down its length were scattered small houses, of logs or pine boards. A road ran white beside a meandering creek and green strips of vegetation outlined the irrigation ditches. The hollow was bound in to the west by rolling ridges of brown earth, dotted with sage and greasewood. Far away rose misty, bare mountains.

"There's Baldwin's store and post office. That's all the village there is, there at the crossroads where the trail turns off to the mountain. The rest is just farms and ranches."

She nodded. "It was to the store that I wanted to go. I can stop the night at one of the ranches, can't I?"

"Baldwin and his wife take in transients. You can stay here for a few days if you care to or you can get Baldwin to send you back with a team to-morrow. I'm going to Salt Lake for a few days."

"What for?"

He grinned as he answered: "To buy an automobile."

CHAPTER XIII.

A PLANT AND A PLANTING.

Although it was past noon when Sylvia dismounted before the little store that supplied the needs of Coyote Creek, Marriner did not stay on his journey. A ranchman farther down the valley had an automobile, and he waved a farewell to the girl as she drew rein and ran on to negotiate passage to the railroad that same day. She watched his swinging figure as he passed out of sight, now laden with coat and burlap sack slung over his shoulder.

As she turned to the door it opened and a familiar figure showed therein.

"Say!" said Miss McCarthy, in a whisper as though afraid that the distant man might hear, "who's that guy?"

"The fellow I went up to watch," said Sylvia, feeling, somehow, a reaction against the former kindly feeling she had had for the girl. Her breezy, slangy boldness, although now tinged with manifest uneasiness, smote

on Sylvia as a reminder of an existence that had become distasteful to her.

Nellie drew a long breath and her face twitched unpleasantly. "So that's the guy! Believe me, I wish I'd known it before Denver pulled this Queen of Bavaria dream of his! Come on in here and slip me the news."

Sylvia went into the store. The proprietor, a seedy individual with shifty, greedy eyes, came out from behind a counter but Nellie waved him away.

"It's all right, Frank. This is the girl I told you about. We'll go into the back room."

"Wisht you'd go away from here!" he whined, rubbing his hands nervously and looking first at the door and then at the girls. He was evidently suffering from profound apprehension. "I'm sure ready to quit, right now!"

Nellie, also jumpy and furtive, snarled back at him as she dragged Sylvia toward a door leading to a small room off the main store. "Ah! Can the chatter! You ain't pinched yet!"

At the door she turned. "And send Harley in here when he comes!"

The door closed, she turned on Sylvia, who stood wondering at the atmosphere of uneasiness and fear.

"Is that guy coming back?"

"No. He's on his way to Salt Lake City. He won't be back for several days."

Nellie drew a long breath of relief but her face still twitched spasmodically. She tried the door to see that it was locked, drew from her waist a small box, turned her back on Sylvia and addressed herself to some operation or other. Sylvia, although she endeavored to hide what she was doing, saw enough to guess with a sudden pang and shock of horror. If her eyes did not deceive her, Nellie was injecting the contents of a hypodermic syringe above her knee.

She straightened up, drew a long breath and shook herself. "Strychnine," she said with elaborate unconcern. "I got heart trouble now and then and have to take a shot. Believe me, this is the time I need it. What's that guy you came with call himself?"

"His name is Walter Marriner," said Sylvia, coldly. "And, Nellie, you and Mr. Stacy must be mistaken about him. He isn't a moonshiner, I'm sure."

"Well, that's up to Stacy. Maybe he is and maybe he isn't. Only Denver knows what he's doing and if he says he's a hooch runner you can gamble he's something mighty like it. All *I* know is that things are popping. I got to raise Micky mighty quick. Wait a minute!"

She went to a box set beside the wall and opened it. There were a lot of electrical instruments in it. Nellie manipulated knobs and buttons and switches feverishly, objurgating her apparent nonsuccess in language that was not ladylike. But finally she stopped swearing to listen intently. Sylvia heard a crackling, spitting sound coming from somewhere near. Bulbs on the instruments were glowing.

Nellie tapped rapidly on a key and, with receivers clamped on her ears, gave herself to tense application. What she heard apparently did not satisfy her for, with a snort of rage, she rapped out an answer and then tore the band from her head.

"Hophead!" she muttered. "If he ain't there, go get him—and get him quick!"

Then she appeared to calm down somewhat and turned to Sylvia. "Let's hear the dope!" she demanded.

Sylvia, with considerable constraint, told the story of her adventures and Nellie listened to them, frowning. Before she had finished some one entered the store and came toward the room. Baldwin opened the door, ushered in another man and himself remained on the threshold, nervous and ill at ease, watching the outer door constantly.

The newcomer was a young man, fairly well dressed in tweeds, with a shrewd, sharp face and little, evil, cruel eyes. Sylvia had seen the type before. It was one that frequented race tracks, cabarets and street corners in busy cities.

"This is Jim Harley," said Nellie, briefly. "He's one of us. Passes as a drummer, selling goods to Baldwin. Keeps the line open to Stacy. Say, Jim——"

"G'wan! You said too darn much yerself, Nell! Why'n't you hire a hall and invite the dicks to listen to yuh? Who's this jane?"

"Ah! She's all right. She's the broad that Denver tied to in Welcome when he had that pipe dream of vampin' the hick up in the hills. You heard about it!"

The little, evil eyes were sweeping Sylvia in a way that sent a chill through her. The man grinned, his loose, thin lips twisting to show yellow teeth.

"Some broad!" he said. "Pleased to meet you! Well, how'd you get to the come on? Did he fall fer it?"

"Not so's you'd notice it," said Nell before Sylvia could answer. "She says there ain't no signs of hooch up there."

"Hooch!" he seemed puzzled for a moment and then grinned again. "Sure! I remember. Well, I guess this guy's wise, maybe. What's the rest of it?"

"She was just telling me." Nell repeated what Sylvia had related and from that point the dancer went on to complete her tale. Baldwin listened with the others.

When she had finished the men and the other girl looked at each other. A shadow of a wink passed between Nellie and Harley. Baldwin broke in with a whining eagerness.

"Say, if he's gone, and ain't comin' back there's a chance to plant——"

"Shut up!" snarled Harley viciously. "I'll blow the lights out of yuh if you don't button yer lip! Say, dearie! If I get yuh, this guy's got a pack of grands in his chest up there? Is that right?"

"A what? He's got some money and some little bags. I suppose those hold the gold he's been digging."

"And there's nothing but a chink up there? Say, Nell, can you get hold of Micky?"

"Yes, but what about Stacy? He's still in Welcome."

"Let him stay there. Denver can look out fer his own hide. He's the wise guy that has to shove his hop dreams on to us and pull this bright stunt. Whatever made Micky stand for it?"

"Well, believe it or not, I think he stood for it because it was so crazy. He told me things was getting so tame and safe that he'd like to take a chance and see if this fool play wouldn't stir up some excitement. That guy's balmy himself."

"You said a mouthful! Here we was, going along nice and easy, pulling down a few grand a month apiece when he has to let Denver pull this fit! Then, it's him that stirs this last up."

"Can it!" warned Nell, with a glance at Sylvia. Then she turned to the girl. "You must be tired, honey. Wouldn't you want to lie down a while? I got a room upstairs and there won't be anything doing for a while."

Sylvia was not very tired and didn't want to lie down. But she was beginning to think there was something radically wrong with her preconceived notions and, since there seemed to be little chance that these people would talk freely while she was there, it occurred to her that if she went away they might be more open. She had some vague idea of slipping back and listening.

She assented to Nell's suggestion and allowed herself to be guided to a room above the store. When Nell had left her she went to the window and found that it overlooked the road. She crept out into the hall again but when she had made her way back to the staircase from below she was in no better case. The stairway seemed to lead to a sort of storeroom in the rear and adjoining the room she had left. On the chance that it might afford some listening post she crept cautiously down it.

Below, she made her way to a wall and crouched behind a couple of flour barrels. With her ear against the boards she could hear murmured words.

"It wasn't me, I tell yuh! It was Micky and that guy, Oakwood, the tinhorn at the hotel. They cooked it up. Micky was feelin' tired again because he wasn't gettin' a thrill every minute. Says he might as well go to preachin' or runnin' a Boy Scouts' camp. Me, I wasn't kickin' when it looked as if we could make a clean-up and get away with it. But it was Micky's idea. You say Stacy's wild?"

"Wild! You're shoutin', he's wild! He got a message through to me yesterday and he was just shriekin' blue brimstone. Says the place is full of P. O. and treasury dicks and he can't look cross-eyed without lampin' one er more. Says they watch him so close he's ashamed to undress at night. And Oakwood is seen sneakin' in on the right of way at six in the mornin' and they took him in on suspicion."

"That's bad!"

"Oh, they got nothin' on him or Stacy. All they could find would be their own private supply."

"And ain't that a plenty? How long do you guess Oakwood will keep quiet when they've got him shut up and he can't get a sniff? He'll spill all he knows before forty-eight hours!"

"That's all right. Denver saw to that."

"What?"

"Slipped him an overdose! I'd hate to be in Denver's shoes if they grab him! It's the chair this time!"

"Well, don't stutter it! Micky and me ain't any better off. We croaked the guard, didn't we? Listen! That the machine?"

Sylvia heard Nell flutter to the wireless apparatus and the tapping that followed. Then:

"I got him, Jim! It's Micky."

"All right. We got to think fast! Tell him about the fellow leavin'."

"And the box underneath the bunk! Got that?"

"Yes!"

"Tell him to get busy. He can put the chink out of the way and plant the canceled bonds in the box. Tell him about the circus parade down here!"

This was all Greek to Sylvia. But she understood that some plot was toward against Marriner.

"That guy'll be up there to-morrow and I'm not sure he's lookin' fer cattle thieves. But if he isn't he'll be likely to find the box. I'll try to catch him before he starts, though. You got that?"

"Yes," said Nellie. "He's wise. Says he'll probably stick around and help take the guy in. Darn fool! It's like him."

"He won't neither! You tell him as soon as I've killed this Alkali Ike guy, I'm on my way up to him and he'd better have the ship ready to go. I'm on my way south and I ain't going to stop until I get to Mexico. Get that?"

"He says he'll take you there and come back," said Nell. "Say, where do I get off?"

"You steer those guys on to the place. Go on up with the kid and be there when they come in. They got nothin' on you!"

Sylvia heard chairs being shoved back and decided that she had better decamp. She slid up the stairs wondering what it was all about but sure that, whatever it was, it threatened Wally. She found herself thrilling with indignation and determination to frustrate the plot.

Up in the room again, she went to the window looking out over the road, and leaning on the sill sought to puzzle out some logical explanation of the mystery. But beyond the evident fact that her whilom friends and allies were engaged in some very questionable and unlawful enterprise, in the course of which several people had been killed, she was all at sea. That they were going to try to fasten their own crimes on Wally Marriner was the main and outstanding fact and one which frightened and angered her.

As she looked out she saw a man riding up toward the store and, in the surprise caused by his appearance, momentarily forgot her problems. He was dressed as she had never seen any one clothed outside the theater. On his head was a sombrero of blue velours, wide and steeple crowned. It was banded and embroidered with silver and gold bullion. He wore a velvet bolero jacket over a brilliant red silk shirt and the jacket, like the hat, was loaded with gold braid and flashing with rhinestone buttons. A sash of yellow and black silk infolded his waist.

Chaparajos of wide, flapping leather, studded with silver *conchas,* hung like wings on his legs. His saddle was gorgeous with stamping and silver studs. His feet rested under *tapideros* which hung almost to the ground and were likewise ornamented with silver. On his waist crossed two belts and on either hip, strapped low, hung holsters from which peeped the butts of guns. Under the wide hat pushed back on his head Sylvia could see a tanned, sharply handsome face, with mustaches twisted to a point:

She also saw the man named Harley as he stepped off the porch of the store and sauntered out into the roadway. He had his hand in the pocket of his coat and his hat pulled down over his face. Something about the furtive and yet purposeful way he slunk forward and to the horse's head as the stranger drew up and dropped his reins, alarmed Sylvia. She heard Harley's voice, apparently thick with drunkenness:

"Say! They tell me you're a regular detecative! You look more like a picture out of a book to me."

The man had swung from his saddle and half turned away from Harley, apparently utterly indifferent to him. Sylvia saw Harley's hand tilt in his pocket, saw the bulge in his coat and screamed out instinctively.

Her cry was drowned in the roar of a gun. The stranger had, with almost inconceivable quickness, half swung round, dropped a hand to a holster, jerked the butt down and fired through the orifice. Harley jerked upright, whirled round and collapsed, his hand still entangled in his coat pocket.

The resplendent rider strode coolly over to him and with one spurred foot kicked the arm away from the man's side. The hand came out of the pocket still clutching

the automatic pistol he had been about to use.

CHAPTER XIV.

WING RIDES THE DRAGON AGAIN.

The night, whose horror made Sylvia regret even those nights of haunting terror when she had dreaded the beasts of the forests, had passed. With the half-drugged Nellie she had left the place under guidance of Baldwin, the three of them riding out once more to the hills surrounding Ibapah. Her companions were even more agitated than she, the man gray and frightened, the girl pallid and disheveled, her pupils like pin points and her talk loose and vague. She had been using the hypodermic during the night. She had muttered constantly about Harley with many repetitions of "and him the worst gunman in Chi." Sylvia gathered that Harley had had a reputation as a killer which had been badly punctured by the gorgeous rider of the day before.

As for the horseman who had killed the gangman, he had casually purchased some supplies and ridden off to the hills as if shooting a man was nothing to get excited about. Among the ranchers of the valley who had gathered swiftly to the scene there had been talk of him. Sylvia had learned that he was a cattle detective, was known as "Colorao Bill" and was widely respected for his ability with deadly weapons.

As for Nell, she seemed now to have one object only and that was to reach Micky Wilkes without delay and flee with him to parts unknown. Sylvia began to feel that the tragedy had so upset their plans that the scheme to trap Marriner had been given up. She was not at all averse to seeing Nellie escape whatever peril threatened her. In fact, she told herself that she would be glad to have the girl, Denver and Micky pass out of her life altogether. It would leave her, she thought with a thrill of satisfaction, to solitude and peace again with Marriner and Wing.

The three of them made their way to the sawmill where Baldwin and Nell stopped. Sylvia went on, not knowing that Micky Wilkes was waiting for them in the shack which housed the sawyer and his assistant. Therefore she did not know of the excited conversation occurring behind her as Nell threw her arms around the aviator's neck.

"Micky, the game's up! They're watchin' Denver and Harley's killed. He tried to get that cattle dick!"

Micky shook her off impatiently. "Now, don't get wild, kid! What do I care about Harley? The darn fool always had the notion that these gunmen he'd read about were fictions. He was nutty on trying it out and seeing if he wasn't better than they were. He probably knows now whether he is or not.

"Denver's all right. They've got nothing on him if he keeps his shirt on. This guy up here will give the cattle dick something to amuse him if he's after us. Don't think he is, at that. Baldwin says he's been around for two weeks, riding the range looking for rustlers."

"But what about the chinks?"

"D'you ever hear of chinks spilling anything? With Oakwood and Jim out of it there isn't a thing but the plane—and they'll not be able to connect that up. You go on back and get Denver again. Go down to Welcome and sit in with him—and lay low!"

"But where are you going?"

"I've already planted the stuff, while the chink was out. I'll be all right."

"But Micky, d'you know who the guy is?"

Micky profanely did not, nor did he care.

"It's Marriner, Micky—and I'm afraid of him. He'll get you this time. And out here it's different. He won't just beat you up. He's like that Colorao fellow and—and he'll kill you, sure!"

Micky swore quietly but with an evil force that was alarming. His keen eyes were narrowed and blazing with rage.

"Marriner! That's better yet. I'll get the dog! I owe him something, and I pay my debts. I'll spoil him!"

A little later he sent the girl back with Baldwin. The latter, only half reassured, was talking of "pulling his freight" for parts unknown and Micky scornfully told him to go.

Sylvia had ridden on up the plainly marked trail. The landmarks which Wally had pointed out to her were easy to follow and, long before nightfall, she came out at the head of Grass Valley and jogged down the slopes toward the cabin. The sight of it nestling in the aspens and firs was sufficient to send a warm flood of comfort through her. It was as though she had come home after weary wanderings.

Wing was not in sight or hearing, although she called. She made her way up the slope to the cabin hidden in the trees but found it closed and no one about. Slightly alarmed, she pulled the latchstring and entered but everything was quiet and the box was beneath the bunk in its usual place. She dragged it out and made sure that it was locked and showed no sign of having been tampered with.

She had pushed it back and stood brushing her hands together when she heard the tinkling chant of the Chinese as he came along the slope out of the woods. She ran to the door to greet him. He answered her with his cheery smile and shook both his hands, held in front of him as he bowed to her. She noticed that he was muddy and wore high rubber boots.

Sylvia felt like embracing Wing but refrained. He came in and pulled off his boots while she poured out to him the story of all that had occurred. He too went to the box, looked at it and frowned. But the lock reassured him. He had no key to it and could not open it to look inside.

"It is evident that there is a plan to shift suspicion to Wally," he agreed with her. "Now, tell me again how you came to meet these people and what they looked like."

While she elaborated on her original and incoherent story, describing Denver, Nellie and Micky Wilkes, the wise old Celestial sat thoughtfully, smiling. At the close he nodded.

"Certainly, I can guess something of the situation. As it happens, I too have some knowledge of these things which, perhaps, even the authorities have not. It is possible that I may be of use."

"Oh, if you only can do something!" cried Sylvia. "I've been wicked and credulous but if anything happens to him I'll never forgive myself. I—I should die, Wing!"

Wing's eyes twinkled and his ready chuckle broke.

"Maybe you are like that princess whom the dragon brought to the poor young man in China," he said. "I will sing the song to you."

Without waiting for an answer, he burst into a lilting, monosyllabic chant. While he sang he went to his chest and drew from it a small lute which he swept with his fingers in accompaniment. Sylvia could of course make nothing of the song except that it had a tinkling, pleasant cadence.

"What's it all about?" she asked.

"It is about a little princess that a dragon brought to a man in answer to his prayers. I told that story to Wally. This is the sequel to it. It seems that the two were very happy, loving each other a great deal. But, after a time, the young man was compelled to go away on a journey and before leaving he warned his bride that she might go every place but into one cave in the gardens, before which a beautiful lotus grew. To go there would bring bad luck.

"But the princess was curious and curiosity was stronger than the warning. She finally went to the cave and found there a dragon. The dragon promised her that he would make her husband a great and rich man and told her that she should give him tea flavored with lotus leaves from the plant at the mouth of the cave.

"When the husband returned she gave him the tea. A great dragon instantly appeared and carried off her husband, whom she never saw again."

"We have something like that story in English," said Sylvia, smiling. "But ours had a happy ending."

Wing shook his head. "Perhaps this will have," he said, "when Wally comes back."

Sylvia blushed to the roots of her bobbed hair and Wing chuckled.

"You know the story of Rhodopis?" he asked. She shook her head. "But of Cinderella, surely?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, there is the slipper. Maybe Wally is not so despondent about women as he was."

"Oh, be still!"

Later when Wing had set out food and they were chatting over it amicably, he broke off to say:

"Would you be frightened very much if I left you for a few days?"

"Why, where are you going?"

"I am going to try to help Wally. He will, perhaps, be back before me. It will be hard for you, alone with the beasts."

But Sylvia, drawing a long breath and slightly pale, answered bravely.

"I don't care. If you can do anything that will help him, please go. I will take the rifle—and I won't be very frightened."

Both Wing and she knew that this was not true, but he nodded approval. "You

could go to the valley," he suggested, but she shook her head.

"I have got to watch that box," she said. "If any one got to it——"

That night she slept again in the cabin on the hillside. Wing left the house and made his way by devious routes across the ridge between Grass and Kettle Valleys and up the latter until he had climbed through the fringe to a bare, grass-grown, level plateau several hundred yards across. Over this he walked until he came to an outcrop of granite, split into two sections by a wide cleft. Before this he stood and whistled.

A man came out into the moonlight from behind the rocks, and faced him.

"Oh, it's the mandarin," he said with a laugh. "Got tired of hibernating in the hills?"

"I would like to go to the railroad," said Wing, placidly.

Micky Wilkes rolled a cigarette. "Well, the walking's good," he suggested, casually.

"I am going in the airplane," said Wing, as calmly as before.

Micky grinned tolerantly.

"No can do," he said.

"Perhaps you can, if you will reconsider. It is important that I reach my friends promptly. They expect me and will make inquiries if I do not arrive. They would be very angry if they should hear that you prevented it."

Micky looked thoughtfully at the Chinese, his eyes narrow.

"They know where you are?"

Wing smiled contemptuously. "Certainly. And they are somewhat concerned already over certain activities of the lower members of the tong. If that concern should be further aggravated, it is propable that the consequences would be serious—for Mr. Wilkes and his friends."

Micky nodded sullenly. "All right. I'll take you if I must. But I hope we crash."

"That would also be unfortunate—for you," said Wing.

The aviator, his self-assurance gone, went over to what appeared to be a near-by rock. He pulled a tarpaulin off it, revealing a large and powerfully engined plane. This he and Wing laboriously pushed out into the open.

A little later the song of the propeller burst upon the still air and the plane ran out on the meadow and took the air, soaring over the trees and sweeping upward into the skies.

CHAPTER XV.

A BEAR AND A DETECTIVE.

When Sylvia arose in the morning she was not especially bothered by the fact that she had been left alone. But when evening came and Wing did not return, she began to feel uneasy, although she had not expected him. She stayed in the miners' cabin, feeling a little more sheltered and secure in company with its masculine reminiscences.

But during that night her terrors came back to her redoubled. From the doorway she could look down into the ghostly, silver-tinged valley, where her own cabin nestled, gaunt and phantasmal in its surroundings of aspen and fir. It seemed like an abandoned ruin, spectral and suggestive of dead things and ghosts.

She slept finally behind the barred door with the rifle close at hand. Once more she heard the wailing, mournful howl of the wolves, the barking of the coyotes. In addition, late in the night, she was aware of a shambling, tearing noise, a snuffling and snorting as some great beast made free with dead logs and blundered around in the brush.

Her fears had taken on a different quality, however. Acute enough, they were not paralyzing as of old. She listened and she trembled but she clutched the rifle and clenched her teeth, firmly determined that if the peril came close she would meet it bravely. Finally, the last of the noises died away, and after listening tensely for a while, she gradually relaxed and at last fell into a sound sleep. Much to her surprise, when she awoke she found herself refreshed and bright.

That day she heeded the needs of the horse and, after breakfast, set out to explore the vicinity of the cabin on the hill. Timidly she worked her way through the woods, surprised to find that what looked so dense from below was actually open and easily traversed. She did not go very far for, on a bit of well-marked trail, in the dust of the disintegrated granite, she saw boldly marked tracks which even her small knowledge of woodcraft could not mistake.

They were as large as a soup plate, almost as broad as they were long and somewhat suggestive of a gigantic man's foot, broadened out of all proportion. In front of each track but nearly ten inches from it were dots as though some one had poked a semicircle of holes with a sharpened stick.

That a bear had left these signs she had no doubt but she did not know, fortunately for her own peace of mind that the broadness and the dots were infallible indications left by the great grizzly, quite different from the narrower and smaller pads of either brown or black bear, which do not show, or show only faintly and close to the toes, the marks of the claws. Nor could she gauge the gigantic size of the brute from the tracks.

She explored no more, however, and for the rest of the day remained close to the cabins, forlornly lonely. The day dragged slowly to an end.

The night was broken by new noises. Late and toward morning she heard a scream of fearful fright and agony which brought her out of bed in a perspiration, her hair crawling on her scalp. She dragged herself to her feet, summoning her new-born courage, and tottered to the door, rifle in hand.

Looking out, she saw nothing at first. She had heard a snarl and the sound of a heavy blow following that scream. But in the valley, whence the noise had come, all was quiet. As she strained ears and eyes, however, she heard grunts and the crash of wood. The sounds seemed to come from the neighborhood of the corral, which was hidden by her cabin.

She was not foolhardy enough to sally out, and as no further disturbance occurred she finally went back to bed, although she slept no more. When it was quite light she dressed and went out cautiously, reassured by the sunlight and the peace of the familiar scene.

Down at her corral, which she reconnoitered cautiously before approaching, she found the fence broken down and blood staining the trampled ground. Through the gap in the rails something had been dragged. Following the trail she came on the horse, with neck broken and terribly mangled. Around the carcass, on which it had fed, were the tracks of the beast she had seen on the hillside. Still, she did not realize what this thing must be that could drag a horse weighing over a thousand pounds a distance of two hundred feet.

That day she did not leave the valley and it seemed that, unless Marriner returned, her hair must soon turn white. She never thought of Wing, however.

Late in the afternoon, while she was sitting on the doorstep, looking listlessly at the lovely valley she was startled to observe a horseman winding his way down the opposite slope not far from the limits of her claim. He zigzagged back and forth, going slowly and, distant as he was, seemed to be cautiously sizing up the place before he came upon it.

Sylvia ran inside and got Marriner's field glasses. But her half-held hope that it was Wally returning died as soon as she had focused the lenses. The sombrero, glittering with bullion, the glaring red shirt and the velvet jacket were those of Colorao Bill, the cattle detective.

He rode into the valley, dismounted before her door and knocked. Getting no answer, he lifted the latch and entered. Apparently he merely assured himself that the place was empty and came out almost at once. Then he walked about, looking at the ground. The shattered corral and the telltale sign caught his eye and he spent some time over the trail of the bear. But finally he came back to the door.

Here he stood, looking about him and then, to Sylvia's alarm, started walking toward her, keeping his eyes on the ground at first but finally looking up and in her direction. He seemed to have made up his mind where he was going and to have no further need to follow her tracks as she guessed he had been doing. Almost as though he could see the cabin he made his way up the hill until he stepped out on the ledge and confronted her.

His sombrero came off with a sweep and he ducked his head. Uncovered, she saw that he was not a Mexican as she had supposed, but of her own race although burned dark by the sun. Spectacular and picturesque, he loomed as a tall, handsome but threatening apparition.

"I beg yoh pardon, ma'am," he said and his voice was curiously low, drawling and soft. "Name o' Bill Simmons, but mos' gene'lly known as Colorao Bill! Which I'm ridin' to cut trail on some cattle, the same bein' offen their rightful range. Seein' yoh cabin, I looked in, not intendin' no trespass whatever. You not bein' home, I was lookin' round foh the two men who've be'n round hereaways."

"Why——" Sylvia gasped. "Two men! How did you know there were two men here?"

"That's easy enough," he smiled, and his smile was good and reassuring. "The tracks is all about. Anybody't could read sign at

all could read that, likewise the way they came up here. Seein' they ain't home, can I ask you to allow me to——"

Sylvia, dubious as she felt, knew the unwritten law of the range.

"Why, yes! If you'll take care of your horse I'll be glad to give you dinner. But the corral——"

"I see what happened to it. I'll turn this heah Bucephalus o' mine loose soon as I've fed him, ma'am. Old B'rer Silver Tip ain't likely to catch him none, that a way. Thank yuh, ma'am!"

He turned away with a courteous gesture and set to unsaddling his horse. Neither by word nor look had he betrayed either surprise or admiration at Sylvia's appearance. Nor had he the look of the killer. His eyes, while keen and steady, were grave and rather gentle.

He was as casually courteous when he returned and found her at work getting the meal. He did not obtrude his help but in some manner she soon found that he had taken most of the burden of it on himself, reducing her to the rank of a spectator. He talked little, and that indefinitely, casual comments on the place and on the valley folk being the extent of his conversation. He did not seem curious and yet, somehow, Sylvia found herself explaining that she had come there to take a homestead and pointing out her place to him. He looked out the door at it and laughed quietly and she flushed as she read his thoughts.

"Of course I'm green and made an awful mistake. Mr. Marriner finally told me so after I'd worked so hard on the place. Mr. Marriner is a miner, you know?"

"No, ma'am, I didn't know. I reckon he has a mine up here?"

"I don't know where it is—yet. He's going to get me a claim so I can make a living mining where I can't do it farming. He's away now for a few days and I stayed up here because I felt safer than in my own cabin."

"Yes, ma'am. I see how it'd be."

A little later he asked: "You reckon this here Mr. Marriner will know what there is in these hills?"

Sylvia answered readily and confidently. "Oh, yes! He's wonderful that way. He's very skillful at tracking things and knows all about the hills. He's—he's like an Indian, you know."

And again Colorao said:

"No, ma'am, I didn't know."

That night she slept without fear, for out on the bench and before a small camp fire which he had lighted more to reassure her than from any need for it, the capable Colorao slept, rolled in his blankets and tarpaulin. She could look from her window and see his recumbent form not a hundred feet distant.

A month ago Sylvia would have been afraid to trust herself alone with any man in the world away from her fellows. Now she went to sleep in the calm consciousness that, while this gorgeous man slayer was within hearing, she was as safe as in a church. She had been wonderfully comforted by his matter-of-fact statement, made, apparently, as an afterthought, that he "reckoned he'd hang around until this Marriner come home, if she didn't mind. Might learn somethin' from him, and maybe keep her from bein' scared by bears."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CAPTURE.

Marriner, on the long drive from Salt Lake City, around the border of the lake and then out into the desert, finally turned southwest toward the Coffin Range and found himself curiously eager and impatient to get back to his claim. While he told himself that this desire was due to the improvement in the output of the gravel and the approaching discovery of the huge pocket of gold that he was sure was under the talus slope, he knew that he was attempting to deceive himself by that fiction. The culmination of his hopes, after all, did not excite him at all and, in fact, he frequently found himself forgetting them.

On the other hand his thoughts, as he bent over the steering wheel of his new automobile, purchased for greater convenience than the horse had furnished, recurred persistently to the strange girl with her delicate beauty and most amazing strength, who had come down on him from the sky. While he still wondered why she persisted in her fiction of having been brought there without her knowledge, he had dismissed the thought that there was anything inimical to himself in what probably had to do with some other enterprise with which he was not concerned.

The larger and obtrusive fact was that where he had formerly held a morose dis-

trust for women he now was dwelling constantly on Sylvia's presence and finding a comfortable satisfaction in planning as much for her as for himself. The car, for example, although he had long intended to buy it, could have waited, except that he had been thinking how much of a convenience it would be for Sylvia and how it would correct the inevitable and depressing sense of isolation born of their two or three days' distance from the railroad and civilization. With the car the run could easily be made in almost as many hours and Salt Lake City reached in a few more. The machine, in fact, converted their desert refuge into a mere suburban resort.

He had his dreams. Brought up in the waste places, with Indians and prospectors, he wanted to see the world, to go to all the centers of civilization and to observe the works of man in Paris, London, New York. Once he had considered desultory wanderings, alone, but now he found himself considering those same tours in company with a girl with short hair who would be as interested in them as himself.

Thus he came at last to the eastern slopes of the Coffin Range and urged his car up a defile where there was some semblance of a road until he had brought it to a sheltered nook about two miles from the plains. Here he stopped long enough to pitch a tent over it and to store several extra cans of gasoline and oil. Then he set out to climb to the valley where Sylvia awaited him.

He made his way at last to the borders of her claim and looked about for her but saw nothing. Thinking that she had probably remained in Coyote Valley, he sighed and was about to resume his progress to his own cabin when he heard a distant call. A moment later Sylvia emerged from the trees and ran toward him, waving her hand.

They met at the lower end of her fence. Marriner held out both his hands and she placed hers in them. They stood there, his eyes fairly devouring her until the flush of her running deepened into a blush and her eyes wavered and fell, to rise again, timidly.

Sylvia, who had looked upon men as beasts of prey, now trembled like any unsophisticated maiden in the throes of first love. She had felt only that the presence of Wally after the loneliness and the terror was the most comforting and precious reassurance she could have. But when her hands flew to meet his something else came over her which reduced her to confusion and yet filled her with alarming delight.

Like a boy, Wally stammered his greeting.

"And you must see what I have got for you—for us! Get your hat and come along while I show it to you!"

"I don't need a hat," Sylvia said, eagerly. "Oh, I'm crazy to see it!"

They turned and hurried back over the path he had taken, but Wally, the misogynist, the morose and cynical, now felt it necessary to hold her hand to guide her over rough places she was fully capable of negotiating without assistance. And she, the agile, steel-muscled and light-footed dancer, clutched his fingers and clung to him as though she feared an imminent fall at every pebble. They went, laughing and chattering, down the valley and over a ridge to the little bench in the gulch where the automobile was sheltered under canvas.

They stood hand in hand and watched it, both of them fallen silent until Wally finally said:

"I—I thought you'd like it, Miss Bartlett!"

She drew a long breath and answered: "I think it's splendid! And I know how to drive it! A girl I knew one summer had one just like it and taught me how. Why, Wally——"

His tanned face reddened as she used his name in that first, timidly intimate greeting.

"You see—while this place is nice and you'll like it, it's remote and lonely for a girl. If you had to take the stage every time you wanted to go anywhere, you'd feel like you were cut off from all the world. But with the car you can start from here and —look over there!"

He pointed from where they stood in a northeasterly direction out over the intervening hills. Sylvia could see nothing however.

"I'll show you from the peak, later. But there's a range of hills northeast of here, lower than this, which you can see when you get on the flat. If you steer for the northern point of that you come out on the Salduro due south of Salduro. It's nothing but a station, but the agent there will flag any train except the limited for you. And the driving isn't bad to the Salt Lake and from there it's like hitting a boulevard. They

used to hold race meets out there at one time."

"Why," said Sylvia, "I thought we were hundreds of miles from anywhere—and it's only a step, after all."

"It's a bad step, however. It's not more than thirty or forty miles to the railroad across the salt, but, for Heaven's sake, never be caught on it afoot or without water! It's death, if you are."

"If I'd only known," said Sylvia, "maybe I wouldn't have felt so lonely, while you were away. But never mind! I don't feel lonely now."

Somehow, Wing had become so inconsequential that Sylvia did not think to mention his departure and Wally, in his newborn egoism of a man in love, failed to consider the Chinese at all. To each of them the only one who counted was the other. It seemed natural to him that she should be lonely even though there were a dozen other men about.

They turned from the car and made their way slowly to the valley, engrossed in their own interests and in each other.

"You see—Sylvia, the winter comes on and, while there's not much snow and it isn't so very cold, I reckon you'd feel mighty isolated and lonely here. You couldn't stand it in Coyote, either. So I wanted you to feel that you can get out to California or East if you want to. There'll be plenty of money for you if the gravel pans out right. You can go back to New York, if you want to."

"But what about you?" she asked, tremulously. "I wouldn't want to leave you here alone."

"Well—I've wanted to go there—and to Europe again—only, it wouldn't be amusing now—to go alone. You see, I'm used to the desert and—I can stand it. I guess I will just stay here and wait for you to come back—if you want to."

"I would want to," said Sylvia, almost in a whisper. "I don't believe—I want to go at all, unless——"

There was a silence, but Wally's hand tightened on hers. Sylvia was looking at the ground.

"Sylvia!" he said. She raised her eyes slowly. Every trace of the sophisticated dancer, the disillusioned and world-hardened child of theaters and dance halls, had vanished from them. Pure and clear, they looked into his wistful and inquiring.

"Yes, Wally?"

"Would you go—with me?"

She nodded, the flush deepening on her cheeks.

"I—think I'd go anywhere—or stay, with you, Wally!"

He took her other hand and drew her to him. She came without resistance, her face slightly upturned. He stooped over her and kissed her reverently.

She understood his restraint and worshiped it. Their hands fell apart and they went staidly on their way with no further demonstration, but quietly and completely happy.

Thus they climbed the slopes to Wally's cabin and stepped out of the trees to the untimbered ledge on which it stood. The door was open, as Sylvia had left it and there was no trace of any disturbing presence. Wally noted the deserted place and turned with a question just as they reached the threshold.

"Why, where's Wing?"

"Oh!" said Sylvia, "I forgot to tell you." She laughed in joyous confusion. "He went away two or three days ago and then a cowboy came looking for cattle that were lost. He's been camping over there the last couple of nights."

Wally swung about to look at the place she indicated, where Colorao Bill's bedding marked his camping place. There was a dubious frown on his face.

"A cowboy! I'd like to know who it is that's looking——"

"Put 'em up—high!" came a suave, gentle voice from the doorway behind him. "Reach, Marriner! That's right."

Wally's hands had instinctively gone up. Helpless, without a weapon, he knew the caliber of that gentle voice, knew the death that menaced him. Stunned, he heard Sylvia's cry.

"Wally! Wally! Don't move! He'll shoot!"

"That's right," said Colorao, smiling from his stand in the door. "Take it sensible and it'll save trouble. Lady, will you pat him and see if he's got a gun anywheres?"

Sylvia, speechless and distracted after that first cry, could only shake her head dumbly. She had shrunk against the wall of the cabin, half paralyzed, able to think only of the calm and swift finality with which this man had killed the gangman, Harley. What if he should do the same for Wally?

But Colorao stepped forward, ran a hand over Wally's thighs and told him to put his hands down. Then, with gun ready, he walked in front of him and snapped handcuffs around his wrists. Wally had recovered from his first astonishment and his eyes were gleaming with rage.

"What's the idea?" he stormed. "Who do you think I am?"

Bill stepped back and began to roll a cigarette. "I ain't thinkin'," he explained. "I know. You are one Walter Marriner, duly described in this here warrant, issued by the United States commissioner at Welcome City, said Marriner bein' wanted bad fer smugglin' opium, morphine, hero-ine and other deleterious substances agin' the peace and the statutes duly made and pervided. Likewise and furthermore, although the warrant ain't got nothin' in it to that effect, you're wanted quite a plenty fer holdin' up the mail train on the U. P. and beefin' sundry guards an' mail clerks, to say nothin' of liftin' a couple sacks of mail and express. Which I reckon that'll do fer a starter, and we'll search yer record fer other high crimes and misdemeanors later on."

"Good Lord!" said Marriner, in deep disgust. "You're a fine sleuth, Colorao! Maybe you think I murdered the czar?"

"Wouldn't be at all surprised," said Colorao, calmly, " 'nless you got a alibi fer that. You bein' active enough in yer short career to 'a' broke some records, from the looks o' things. Step inside, now, and we'll resume the examination. Lady, you'll excuse me, but you'd better go too. Otherwise, you might be tempted to go herdin' help fer this *mozo!*"

Trembling and stunned, Sylvia crept through the door ahead of them, followed by Wally. She turned her white face over her shoulder to him and was astonished and terrified to find his countenance drawn and a great doubt in his eyes as he gazed at her.

"Wally!" she wailed, clutching his arm. But Colorao spoke.

"Please don't handle the animals, ma'am! You-all just keep about two paces distant from him and then you won't be nowise tempted beyond yer control to go slippin' him a gun."

Wally whirled half around on the man.

"You're making a big mistake and one I won't forget, Colorao!" he said, tensely. "I'll be looking for you when I'm loose."

"Which you may be old and feeble by that time," said the unperturbed gunman. "However, in case it ain't too late in the century, you'll easy find me. I'm used to bein' conspicuous."

Sylvia understood something of the threat and cried out, throwing her arms around Wally's neck.

"Oh, Wally, don't! He's—he's terrible! I saw him kill a man down in Coyote! You mustn't threaten him!"

Bill smiled at the girl. "That's all right, ma'am," he said. "I'm used to threats. But seein' how you're concerned about this hombre, if he ever gits out, which I doubts, I'll promise not to kill him unnecessary. I'll just slap him an' take his gun away from him."

Then Sylvia whirled in a blaze of anger and defense.

"You will not, you coward! You couldn't do it! I—I hope he does get out and—and *kill* you!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ESCAPE.

But Wally's doubts were still with him, torturing and almost driving him mad. He sat down opposite the bunk and looked at Sylvia, pale and half crying, wondering who she was and why she had come. He recalled her lying, recalled the dancing down in the meadow, that dancing which he now recognized with a flash of insight was not the natural grace of an untaught girl but the finished performance of a professional. She was an actress—he made no distinctions. She had acted a part in lying to him about her arrival and her motives for coming there. How much was she acting now? How much had she acted when he had stood with her, hand in hand and eye to eye down there in the valley? Why had she come and who were those who had brought her? Criminals, as he long had known, drug smugglers as he had suspected more than once, the very men whom this fool detective was searching for. Yet they were her confederates, for they had brought her there.

And if they were her confederates, for what purpose had they sent her except for the object of throwing suspicion on him, and diverting it from themselves? He could not—would not—believe it, yet the suspicion thrust itself forward irresistibly whenever he forced it back in his mind.

And Wing was gone also. Was Wing a traitor, too?

Colorao spoke, breaking his torturing thought.

"I'll take your keys," he said, and went through Wally's pockets. He then stooped, dragged out the box from under the bed and opened it. With a grunt of satisfaction, he took from it a large, flat bundle, which had been tied with tape and sealed, but which now was ripped open.

He rifled the leaves of paper it contained, examining several of the sheets.

"I suppose you don't know nothin' about this?" he said, politely.

"No, I don't," said Wally, sullenly. "How the deuce did that get in there? I had the only key."

"Well, I reckon that I'd better ask you that, under the circumstances. However, you can save it and tell it to the judge. Know what these are?"

"I don't!"

Sylvia, her head swimming under the shock, breathed in a half whisper. "The canceled bonds!"

They heard her and Colorao turned with a bow. "Right, ma'am. The ladies is generally correct. The lady that give me the hint these was here was also correct a plenty."

But Sylvia, overstrained, torn by the frightful suspicion glaring from Wally's eyes, had fainted.

Colorao, all concern, lifted her to the bunk but was unable to revive her. Wally impatiently and in a voice from which all semblance of humanity had departed broke in on his ministrations.

"She'll be all right. Playing possum, most likely. Let her alone. And if you don't mind, I'd like to look at that chest."

"Help yourself," said Colorao, as he held water to Sylvia's lips. Wally stooped over the box, examining it with eyes that had been accustomed to note sign so faint as to escape any but an eye trained as was his. He observed, on the lid, faintly outlined against the somewhat dingy varnish, the print of four fingers and the upper part of a palm where Sylvia had rested her hand in shoving the box back under the bunk that day she had drawn it out to see if it had been tampered with. There was no mistaking that little hand print.

Wally straightened up and turned on the detective. His voice was dull and lifeless.

"Take me out of here!" he said. "You've got what you came for."

"What about the girl?"

Wally uttered an oath so vicious that the other man frowned. "Let her alone. She's got friends around. They'll take care of her. She's fooling you. She's an actress, all right."

"Well—I'll take care of her friends afterward, I reckon. They can't get far. I've fixed that. If you're certain sure she's all right——"

Wally laughed, bitterly. "She can take care of herself. Get me out of here! I'm choking to death in this place!"

Colorao rose from Sylvia's side, scratched his head doubtfully and replaced his gaudy sombrero. "I reckon I better! I'll get you safe away and come back. She ain't goin' to cash in."

He led the way outside, whistled up his well-trained horse and set to work saddling it. When his preparations were complete he returned to the cabin to take one last look at the girl. Finally, he mounted and drove his prisoner ahead of him, toward the trail leading to the other side of the peak and Coyote Valley.

When they arrived at the sawmill, now deserted, the cow detective stopped. He had another horse corralled here, apparently for this purpose, and casually explained to Wally that the sawyer and his assistant had been arrested when he first came up.

"I'm glad you got some one, at least, that was guilty," said Wally, snappishly.

"Yeah! And quite a load o' dope along with 'em. Likewise, I found enough gasoline to run this here sawmill engine fer a hundred years. I allow maybe most of it was used fer airplanes and sech and so I jest took it and dumped it out on the ground. When them jaspers come back maybe they won't find it so easy to git away ag'in."

"D'you find where the plane lands?"

"Oh, sure! That was easy. Sign all over the place. They had the mill here o' course, to make a noise like a plane and hide the sound from the valley side. I reckon they didn't care whether you heard it or not. Also, it furnished an excuse to bring up gasoline. Likewise and lastly, it made a station to store the stuff till they could git it to the valley."

He was complacently willing to show his prisoner how much he knew.

"How'd they get it out of the valley?" asked Wally, sullenly. He was now mounted and they were taking the trail at a trot, his manacled hands on his saddle horn.

"Of course you don't know," said Colorao, ironically. "So I'll tell you. Maybe it'll make you more willin' to come through without trouble. Baldwin, the storekeeper, was in on it, and a guy named Harley—some bad, killin' gunman, he was, too—made the place regular, posin' as a drummer. He wasn't exactly convincin', but was the best you all could do, I reckon. I got wise to him fairly early and that put me onto Baldwin. Then I found that they was shippin' in enough gasoline and oil to run a freight line and most of it was goin' to this here mill. Harley was getting the stuff out in his sample cases, of course. I didn't git no confession from him before I had to beef him, but I reckon we can prove it. That leaves only the aviator to gather in."

"Who did you say put you wise to the stuff in my box?" In spite of himself, Wally sought for comfort, some grain of doubt that would justify him in thinking well of Sylvia. But Colorao had talked enough.

"Oh, the lady! Well, I don't know how much that girl's in on it, but I reckon she's pretty deep. Still, she give me that tip, although I was wise to you all the time, and I reckon we can let her down easy on that account. Well, let's move along and not hold so many post-mortems. I ain't tellin' you any news, nohow."

No, he was not telling Wally any news! He *knew*, now, and his heart became a smoldering cinder holding nothing but the ashes of love and trust and a flaming coal of vengeance. He fell silent, locking his rage in his breast, and rode on ahead of his captor.

But he was alert. His despair and apathy had given place to cunning determination. He was going to escape, either now or later; escape if it took him years, and he was going to seek out the fair and treacherous fiend who had done this to him if he had to follow her to the end of the world. He would come back—for she was greedy of wealth and she knew he had a mine. She'd never leave that until she had taken the gold from it. That would give him a starting place and from there he would trail her as never hound trailed its prey since the world began. She should pay!

He fell to thinking in what manner he would visit punishment on her. She would have a lover, undoubtedly. Most probably the aviator that had not yet been captured. He was the only one who answered the part since the man Harley, who had been killed, could hardly be the one. She would have shown more emotion at his death, if he had been the object of her interest. Anyway, aviators, in his experience, were classed alike. One had wronged him before, in league with a woman he had thought he loved, and it was likely that another would do the same.

In any case, he would see. He would get that aviator and kill him before her eyes. If he was the man, all well and good. If not, he would seek other means of reaching her and wind up by wringing her neck.

He spent the entire time to the valley in planning these diversions. He hardly ate supper and when his captor bundled him into an automobile he went without protest, although in the state of the roads a journey to the railroad at night meant many hours. He sat quietly through the weary hours, forgetting to drink even at stopping places. A fever drained his system but he gave this fact no heed.

Late in the night they arrived at Welcome City. The prisoner was locked up for the rest of the night to await the arrival of the eastbound train to Salt Lake City, passing through in the morning. During the entire journey he had been handcuffed and no opportunity for an attempt at escape had been granted him. In the flimsy lockup, also, no chances were taken and his manacles were left on.

In the morning they fed him and gave him coffee. He drank the latter, hardly conscious of his thirst and quite indifferent to it in his obsession with his own sorrows. When the train got in, Colorao led him out to it and got aboard with him. They found an empty seat in the rear coach where there were very few passengers and Colorao, as soon as the train began to move, unlocked one of the handcuffs, letting them dangle from the other wrist.

"You can smoke freer that a way," he said. "I reckon you won't give no trouble here. You ought to know what this desert is. If you git off on it once, you'd soon wish you was back in jail."

"That's right," muttered Wally. He was

inwardly jubilant. What were deserts or death to him? He would win his way across the worst of them to achieve his vengeance. If he died, what difference did it make?

His opportunity came just before they slowed up to pass the station of Salduro, not very far from Welcome. Colorao carelessly got up to get a drink.

He had removed his heavy sombrero and was bareheaded. Wally knew that instinct would lead him to guard his guns and, though the rising figure was turned from him, made no attempt to get one of them. Instead he rose, too, with the catlike silence and swiftness that was his heritage, brought his manacled wrist down with frightful force on Colorao's head and stepped over his falling body with almost the same motion. The man had dropped like a poleaxed steer, striking the seat and making little noise.

But the two or three passengers in the car turned to see Wally, with handcuffs dangling from one wrist, as he sprang into the vestibule and leaped down the steps to the ground. The train, although slowing down, was still going fast and he rolled over and over, but leaped up, apparently uninjured, and fled straight into the salt beds, away from the track.

There was excitement enough, but little planning. The passengers never thought to pull the bell cord to stop. They simply yelled and one or two ran through the train looking for the conductor. When he was notified he stopped the train, but by that time they were passing Salduro and the black figure of the running man was like a dot against the white expanse of salt.

There were no horses at Salduro. When the revived but still groggy Colorao understood this he shrugged his shoulders. Looking out over the deadly, ghastly desert, where the tiny dot had vanished, he shivered.

"That settles him. He hadn't no water. If he makes it back to the railroad, we'll get him. If he don't—I reckon we can write him off the slate, anyway."

"What's he done?" asked the interested conductor.

"Holdup, murder and drug smugglin'," answered the disgusted Colorao. "My fust gover'ment job and the son of a gun gits away! If Ellis had 'a' be'n in Welcome, 'stead of rackin' off after this guy Stacy, and the girl, I'd 'a' turned him over and he'd got the blame. Now I gits it!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEATH ON THE DESERT.

Although his brain was dull from wrestling with his problems and from the effects of a low fever that had burned all night, Wally had the instinct of the desert bred which did not desert him now. Although he fled from the track at a run, intent on gaining a distance that would preclude a shot from the train reaching him, he knew that a maintenance of that speed was out of the question. He realized that he had no water and had not even satisfied his thirst before gaining the blazing desert. That he really hoped to win his way to freedom can scarcely be said. He had merely taken a desperate chance, preferring to die in the open rather than risk prison and, perhaps, the hangman or the rifle squad on a framed-up charge.

He was seethingly determined to strive until death overtook him, madly bent on winning back to the mountains if it could be done, there to take up the reckoning with the girl who had so cruelly betrayed him; but, insane or not in this obsession, he was sane enough to plan coolly to achieve his hopeless end.

Thus, as soon as he had covered a mile, he dropped to a walk until he had recovered his spent breath. Then he noted that, already, his mouth was dry and caked and that his skin was burning and smarting slightly. He rubbed his lips carefully and was not surprised to find that a filmy crust of crystals was forming on them.

The surface, as level as a plate and apparently as hard, glared like a mirror. A million tiny crystals caught the rays of the sun and reflected them in sparkles of red, yellow, green and blue. The heat from the glazed surface beat up against him in shivering waves.

He half closed his eyes, rubbed his lips with a sleeve until the tiny film of salt was off and then ran his tongue over them until they softened. His breath was coming regularly now. He had nearly thirty miles to go before leaving the salt behind and twenty more of sand and sage and cactus before coming to the mountains. There were scattered, brackish springs far to the west but to go that way meant a longer time on the salt. If there was water on his present route he did not know where to find it.

If he had fled across the tracks and north-

ward he would have reached less deadly footing within ten miles or so but he would also have been caught between the two rail lines where he must inevitably have been recaptured sooner or later. His objective was his cabin in the Coffin Range—and Sylvia.

Southward he headed, breaking into his slow, jogging run, effortless, ground devouring. His dragging feet were scarcely lifted, to fall forward again of their own weight. His feet struck flatly, neither heel nor toe reaching the ground first. This was strength conserving, but it had the disadvantage of stirring more of the salt to rise and settle upon him in impalpable dust.

The hard surface did not betray this fact. The tiny crystals were invisible but the air was full of them, nevertheless. They only advertised their presence after some time when the thin crust began to show on clothes and skin, coating eyes and nostrils and lips.

The blazing sun and the radiated heat drew the moisture from his body like a suction pump. The skin dried so rapidly that little thrills of chill ran up and down the body cooled by evaporation. Nevertheless, the moisture was there for a fraction of a second and that was sufficient for it to catch and hold the salt particles to the pores. They sifted through his clothes, gathered on the skin and stung and irritated where the pores admitted them.

The caking of the lips became more noticeable as he plodded on at about five miles an hour. He grimly kept his mouth shut although the sting of the salt had grown to an appreciable pain. To open it meant an instant increase of thirst and a spread of the torture to the membranes of the throat.

With mouth and throat like a furnace of heat, dry and caked, he shuffled on. He tried to set his mind to an indifferent, dull monotony of beating feet, and dragging yards of salt bed unfurled behind him. To think at all merely intensified his suffering.

Yet, at first, he could not avoid thought. Discomfort, not as yet agonizing, could not drive it from his brain. At first he dwelt constantly on the betrayal, recalling again and again the damning facts of Sylvia's lies, her real method of arrival, her weeks of comradely intimacy in order to lull his suspicions, her deliberate acceptance of his love, only to end in the crash of betrayal. The damning evidence of her hand print on the box, showing that she had tampered with it in his absence, the references of Colorao to the girl who had given the hint, all convinced him of her guilt beyond the possibility of a doubt.

Yet, even as the torture of sun and salt increased, gradually and slowly, he found himself seeking a doubt. At first it was a mere fleeting impulse, instantly dismissed in a wave of recurrent rage, but it came back again, insistently. Through half-closed eyes, dazzled by prismatic sparks from the desert, caked by crusted salt, he saw her again, as she had stood with hands in his and held her lips up to be kissed. A thrill of delight ran through him to be banished by the creeping chill of his drying body. Yet that memory had been fiercely ecstatic and triumphant. It was as though to have kissed her had paid for everything he might suffer before the end.

And here and there came other memories. He recalled little discrepancies in Colorao's references to the woman who had betrayed him, little phrases and references which had appeared to apply to Sylvia at the time but now, in the increased clarity brought on by the deadly monotony of suffering and pain, the dull concentration with which he forgot his peril, took on a different meaning. Might they not have referred to another woman? Indeed, could they have referred to Sylvia? Why had he spoken, in her presence, of *the* lady who had informed him if he had referred to the girl before his face?

Yet the fact that Sylvia's hand print was on the box smote him with conviction. There had been no other woman at his cabin. If there had been her tracks would never have escaped his eyes. And he had seen only Sylvia's.

Mile after mile he drifted monotonously on, and mile by endless mile the salt and the sun drained the vitality from his magnificent body. The crust and the cake on his lips became unbearable, and the tongue inside his mouth craved for air as it dried. Moving it became an aggravation. It was like a rasp rubbing the membranes of his cheeks which were now like sandpaper. Slowly, in spite of the instinctive combat of his will, the swollen, stiffened lips opened. The tongue, swollen and hard, rasped over them. The sting of salt bit into it. The crust broke and under it broke the skin in raw, painful cracks.

The crust over his eyes was blinding him gradually. Although to do so added to the

torture, he must run his sleeve over them to clear his sight. That did not help him much for the glare of sun on the salt crystals was now as painful as the bite of the salt on his raw and bleeding flesh. Red and yellow, blue and green, the prismatic rays beat on raw eyeballs, adding another to the series of pains that beset him.

Still he ran on, dogged and tireless, his feet shifting mechanically. The hours were creeping past, slowly oh, so slowly: but every hour meant another five miles gained. And every hour saw the sun mount higher to shine more directly in his face, to blaze more ruddily against the scintillating crystals of the desert floor.

And now, sun and color and stinging salt, bleeding and smarting membranes, all began to merge into one infernal, overmastering torture which drowned and submerged all the others. Gradually at first and then more and more rapidly, the pangs began to sweep him. Intangible, indescribable, like no pain, like no craving, like no suffering that words can delineate, yet with every pain, every craving, every suffering rolled into one, his drained system cried out for water! water! water!

Yet still he ran on and still, dully, instinctively, he kept his mind on other things. And his mind in turn dwelt more and more on one thing alone to the exclusion of all others. That was Sylvia.

Not Sylvia, traitorous and forsworn, hated and despised; but Sylvia herself, Sylvia as she was, dainty and pretty and sweet, standing before him, her hands in his and her lips upraised to meet his kiss. The memory of all else had fled. His brain now clung to its one instinctive, overmastering thought without room for any other.

Blinded, reeling, staggering onward, his stride now became a series of lurches and plunges, his eyes red and raw and crusted, his face drawn and caked, lips split and blackened, tongue gagging him as it protruded swollen and dry from between his lips, he strove with his last fading strength to think of anything but his torture. And he could think of nothing but her.

He fell and rose again. Like an animal, he clung to his direction and staggered on into the face of the sun. Again and again he got up and reeled forward and again and again his limbs refused to hold him upright.

Incapable now of any thought, even of Sylvia, he was governed by blind instinct alone. Tortured, failing, dying, his will drove him on. He could no longer walk, he could no longer stand erect. On hands and knees, the cruel salt cutting and chafing his bleeding knees and palms, he crawled.

After a while hands and knees would no longer support him. He dragged himself on his face.

And then, at last, will and strength and endurance failed him, and he lay still, face downward on the burning, scintillating plain, a gray, dark-stained bundle from which all semblance of humanity had departed.

He had been on the desert for five hours. The railroad lay twenty-five miles behind him and ahead, not more than a mile or two, the salt began to run out into gray dirt, spattered with salt grass in scattered clumps, shriveled and gnarled sage, yellow and desiccated prickly pear.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE VIEW FROM THE PEAK.

Sylvia came out of her faint to find herself lying on the bunk, a cloth over her forehead and the cabin dark. Night had set in while she lay unconscious.

She rose, still in the daze of incomprehension, still feeble from an overstrain of emotion, and lit the kerosene lamp which furnished light. The steel box lay on the floor, its lid thrown back. In it were a bank book, a few bank notes, a few papers. But Wally was gone, thinking she had betrayed him, cursing her as he went.

How she got through the night she could not have told. That she spent a goodly portion of it in a storm of weeping is not to be denied. After that was over a sort of dull apathy settled upon her. But this, toward morning, gave way to a fierce urge for action, an outburst of energy that clamored for satisfaction. What to do she did not know, but her brain pounded out an insistent demand for movement and accomplishment.

She went out with the first light of dawn but the changeless hills, the spectral forests and the frowning cliffs of granite gave her no hints. Restlessly she explored the valley, looking into her own cabin, where the mountain rats were making free in her absence. The reek of the slaughtered horse drove her to the higher bench and the freshness of the woods surrounding it.

She was afraid to meet the bear, but the impulse to act overcame that terror. She

tried to deaden it by busying herself with breakfast, eating although the food almost choked her. But her splendid, athletic strength cried out for exercise, driving her again into the open. She could have cursed her training, longing for the flabbiness of body and mind that would have given relief through collapse and hysterics.

Finally, raging with impatience and the necessity for doing, she thought of the peak. She had never climbed it, but Wally had pointed out the trail and told her it was not too difficult. From the summit she would be able to see for miles; she might get some vision of Wing returning, some hint of what was happening in the world outside the prisoning mountains.

Eagerly she pulled on her hobnailed boots, slung over her shoulder Wally's field glasses, and set out. She went through the woods, following the contour of the mountain until she struck a narrow but well-marked path. Along this she walked vigorously. It was almost level and the going was good.

She swung well around the mountain, ascending easily, at first, always walking through trees that lined the trail. Gradually these grew more open and smaller and the trail began to ascend with steeper pitches ending in stretches of level going.

It began to turn and twist upon itself, at first at intervals of a hundred feet or so but ever more sharply until she was clambering up slopes of twenty-five degrees for stretches of thirty feet and then abruptly facing about to repeat the operation in another direction.

This went on for some time, the trees growing more and more stunted and scattered until, at last, she came out upon bare granite dotted here and there with shrubs and grass. Small, flowering plants grew occasionally. The air was tingling and sharp and puffs of bitter wind bit into her, chilling her spasmodically as her skin dried under it.

Her face felt hot but dry and she was panting with every movement of her limbs. At frequent intervals she had to stop to recover her breath and her lungs labored heavily in the rarefied air. But her blood was pounding in her veins and the cleansing oxygen was running through her like wine.

Clear and crystal, the air she looked through! Blue and deep and fathomless the sky from which the sun blazed! Clean and sweet and biting the wind that sifted about the white bulk that towered above her! She looked out to the eastward and saw the yellow plains stretching into infinity, broken only by yellow mountains many miles away.

Up and up and up she climbed, to win at last to a bare ridge, wind swept and sloping upward on a gentle angle until it culminated in a point of rock on which, many years ago, some explorer of the weather bureau had, for a time, set a station; a circular inclosure of rock which had sheltered his instruments. That was the ultimate peak of Ibapah.

She crept at last into the inclosure, finding a weather-dried and splitting board set on an upended log, which had once done service as a table. On this she sat, while her breath labored, and the chill wind sent the thrills coursing over her body. She was as though set on a steeple, far above the world. For a time she felt uneasy, as though her foothold was not secure and she might be blown off into the tiny, doll's valley far below her.

But this feeling soon passed away and she set herself to searching the landscape with the glasses. It was a magnificent vista on which she looked. To the south, there was not much to be seen except tumbling, tree-clad hills sloping away. The main length of the range lay in that direction and hid the plain. But east and west and north, there was nothing to obstruct the view. The range fell away abruptly on those sides, running out in a low spur that merged with the plain on the north, dropping in giant shelves to the east, falling steeply to the west.

The whole expanse of Coyote Valley and the rolling, grass-covered hills that hemmed it in, were below her. It seemed that she could almost have fallen into the valley. Far off, in Nevada, smoky, yellow mountain ranges poked their grim bulk above the waving earth, misty and dim with distance.

To the east the plain lay, flat and desolate, marked here and there with the checkerboard of cultivated ranches, silver lined with an occasional abortive stream flowing northward. It was brown and yellow and again the misty ranges sprang up from it at vast distances but with no intervening rolling and broken country. They were like lumps of clay set upon a plate.

Northward, the country was level for the most part but rolling here and there. Yet she could see the edge of the salt beds and the more vivid yellow of the grass and wil-

lows growing about the salt springs on their edge. Very far away the sun, now working around to the south, flashed like a heliograph on something she could not actually see. It was the window of the station at Welcome City, although she did not know this. The winking flash seemed to hearten and encourage her.

Fascinated, she swept the horizon with the glasses. She could see, off to the right, the range of mountains Wally had spoken of, lying like a tongue out toward the desert. Intervening lay a flat, cheerless expanse of brown and yellow, dotted with leprous clusters of sage and greasewood. It stretched out northward, gradually lightening to a dull gray and finally fading into a flat, pure white, to stretch like a lake of snow-covered ice as far as eye could follow it.

Yet over it, on the far horizon, hung a wisp of blackish mist against the blue sky. That, she guessed, was smoke of some passing train.

She had thought to bring some cold meat and bread and a canteen of water and now she set herself to satisfy a sharp hunger caused by her exercise and the altitude. After she had eaten she devoted some time to searching out the stage road, in the hope that she might find some indication that Wing was returning. She thought she observed an automobile crawling between two folds of ground but she could not be sure. It was not far from the valley, and the road was hidden.

Then, fascinated, she set out to search the great expanse of salt with the glasses. Inch by inch she swept it, from its first tongue-like beginning to the widening sweep that filled the horizon. It lay there, desolate, bare, and lifeless. On its surface was no break, in its color was no alien stain.

And yet, when the glass had swept back and forth a dozen times, she did observe something—or thought she did. It was nothing but a tiny blur, some stain on the lens, she thought at first. She wiped the glass with her handkerchief and looked again. The tiny, formless dot had vanished. She swept the glass and it came again. Therefore it was not on the lens but was something seen through it.

Carefully she focused, a vague alarm and suspicion growing on her. She had heard Wally say that if ever anything moving was seen on the Salduro, it must be a man because no animal would ever be so brainless as to dare it. If this dot moved, it must be a man.

She was unable to decide whether it moved. She could not see it do so. But she finally bethought herself of a way to test it. She marked the angle the glass made with the point of the mountain jutting out toward the salt beds. The spot was a certain distance from the point. Then she ceased to look at it for fifteen minutes. When she looked again she thought that the thing was farther away from it.

She began to be disturbed by an insistent thought. If this dot moved, it must be a man. If it was a man, he was in deadly danger. If he was in danger, it might be Wally. He might have escaped, might be fleeing for his life into the loathsome, deadly waste!

He *would* escape, she was sure, and he would dare any hazard to win away. If it were he——

She felt a surge of terror. If it were Wally, he would be dying of thirst and torture out on that plain. And it *was* Wally! She was sure of it.

Driven by some blind, unreasoning instinct, she sprang to her feet and turned to the downward path. Heedless of a turned ankle, she scrambled into the trail and began to hurry down. Running, sliding in the loose granite sand and gravel, she recklessly sped down the mountain up which she had climbed so slowly and with so much labor. What had taken her hours to ascend she descended in minutes.

With boots cut and scuffed, ankles barked and bruised, skirt torn, she finally came to the cabin. She rushed into it, her lessons, learned by listening to Wally's tales of perils and privations, seething in her capable little head. She must have water, and plenty of it, food and blankets. The desert was cold at night.

She grabbed up two big canteens and ran with them to the spring but paused halfway. No use to carry heavy water down the mountain! She went back, gathered two blankets, some dried apples and a can of tomatoes and, lastly, the rifle. Staggering under this burden, she went out and down into the valley.

Through this she hurried, burdened as she was, down the gully, over a ridge and into the gulch where the car was lying under its canvas. Without rest she made her way doggedly until she could throw her burdens

to the ground and drag the cover from the automobile.

Being familiar with that make of car, it took her but a few moments to fill the radiator and make sure that the gas tank was supplied. Then she filled the canteens at the stream. Heaving her paraphernalia into the car, she leaped to the seat and started it.

The run down to the level plain was not long but it was rough. Sylvia was not a finished driver but she was plucky and strong and she held the car to its task.

When she had rolled out and away from the rolling land into the desolate plain she found herself able to see for miles. The salt beds were no longer visible but far away rose the dim outlines of the ridge that Wally had told her about. She had only to hold the car in that direction and she could not miss her way.

She was able to make good speed on the flat ground although it was no billiard table. The sage was scanty, the vegetation being mostly bunch grass. There was no trail worthy of the name but she drove as fast as she was able to and hold the car to its course.

For the rest, it was easy. What would have taken a man hours of toil and suffering to negotiate, the sturdy machine traversed in less than an hour. She drove on toward the mountain point, which loomed ever nearer and more distinct.

At last it lay off to her right not more than a mile or two and before her was the gray and white plate of salt stretching away to the north. Here were no gnarly roots and rough hummocks to hold her back and she stepped on the gas and let the car go.

In another moment she seemed to be riding on asphalt or on a concrete boulevard. Smooth and level and hard, the salt was an ideal race course.

She may have run a couple of miles when she decided that she had better look for her quarry. She stopped the car, stood up on the seat and looked about. Seeing nothing, she tried the glasses, but the glare made them almost useless.

Then, lazily and not so very far in front, a black, sluggish thing flapped up from the desert surface and winged its way into the sky. She gasped. That was a vulture—and even a vulture did not frequent the Salduro for nothing.

She sat down and drove the car toward the spot where the bird had risen. In another minute or two she could make out a gray bundle stretched on the ground. In two more minutes she was bending over it, and raising Wally's crusted, shrunken head in her arms.

With water-soaked handkerchief she wiped the crust from his raw face. She knew the procedure, gleaned from Wally's own tales. Slowly she squeezed water, drop by drop, on the swollen, blackened tongue and lips. When the throat contracted spasmodically she knew that he was not dead nor was he going to die.

Then carefully and tenderly she set herself to bring him back to life.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SILVER TIP.

Wally awoke to another day, lying in the tent which had sheltered his automobile. He was well enough, except for aches and pains not altogether muscular but the result of organs and system overstrained from deprivation. His surface ailments were confined to split lips, raw tongue and face red and inflamed. His eyes also were tender and red. But, while not handsome, he was in fairly good shape. Recovery from thirst famine is rapid.

Under him were the seat cushions of the car and over him a blanket and the automobile robe. He recalled something of his rescue, though details were hazy. Sylvia, by some miracle, had known of his plight and had come out to him in the car. In some manner she had gotten him into it and had driven him here. But the journey was, to him, hardly more than a nightmare of fierce craving for water which she had doled out to him in torturingly inadequate doses, stopping every few minutes to meet his demands with tantalizing driplets. Of any coherent thought, any conversation, any explanations, he had no recollection. He dimly remembered that the gully had been reached when night was falling and that she had driven the more dangerous and difficult part of the journey by the light of the head lamps. He had fallen asleep before the tent was reached.

But where was the girl? And why had she come out to get him? How had she known he was there? All of that was a mystery that required solution.

He threw off the blanket and seized a canteen that was beside his couch, drinking

deep. His system still craved fluid. Then he sat up.

His moccasins were beside the couch, crusted still with salt. He beat the caked stuff from them and pulled them on, wincing as his feet stung where the salt had burned them. Then he got up and walked to the tent flap.

Curled in the car, on the hard boards of the stripped seat was Sylvia, her hair tousled, her body shrunk into a coil in an ineffectual attempt to gain adequate cover from his coat. Hugged to her with both arms she held his rifle.

He stepped over to her, wondering. Touching her arm, he found it cold. Then, with sudden pity, he stepped swiftly to the tent and returned with the robe and the blanket. These he spread over her and then gently gathered her in his arms, to wrap the warm coverings about her and lay her down on the grass.

He had not intended to awake her but she stirred, straightened with a little cry of pain and then struggled upright.

"I didn't intend to go to sleep!" she said apologetically. "O-oh! I'm so stiff!"

"I should think so," said Wally.

He was embarrassed and so was she. She glanced at him timidly, but he was looking away as she struggled up to her feet. But he turned again to her and draped the robe over her shoulders. She drew it tight about her with a grateful shiver.

Then he set briskly to work to build a fire before which she sat, hugging the flame until thoroughly warm again. Like himself, she recovered rapidly.

When they had eaten the food Sylvia had brought in the car they were ready to resume their journey to the cabin. Neither had said much. Sylvia was shy, hurt that he had not greeted her with any enthusiasm, had apparently ignored her rescue of him. Conscious of his suspicion and that she deserved it to some extent, she was reluctant to justify herself, from an impulse of pride.

As for Wally, he was driven by conflicting emotions. The pain and anger at her treachery still lived but it was assaulted by doubts and a vague hope that she could justify herself. Even these were subordinate, however, to one outstanding fact which he had come to realize. He loved her, no matter what she had done. Broken and desperate, a fugitive, ruined by her act, yet he knew that his planned revenge on her was abortive, that he could not raise a finger against her. He could not have done it even though she had not done this last service for him. Now that she had saved his life—though to what purpose?—he was doubly disarmed.

Subdued and silent, pitifully at cross purposes, they took up the journey to the cabin. They traversed the upper reaches of the gully, the ridge that divided it from the homestead, down into Grass Valley and through the lush grass up to her cabin.

He was about to leave her there but she turned to him at last, pleadingly.

"What are you going to do?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "What is there for me to do? I'm going to get my pack and strike out north into the desert. They'll be back here after me soon."

Sylvia stepped forward and laid her hand on his arm. "But, Wally, you mustn't! They can't arrest you—or if they do, you'll be let loose! I'll—I'll tell what I know!"

"Tell what you know! Tell that you put the stuff in that box yourself? Why, that'd mean that you'd go to jail yourself!"

Sylvia stepped away from him, wide-eyed, panting, her face as white as death.

"Wally! You thought that I——"

"Oh, it doesn't matter now! I knew you were connected with the gang that was using an airplane—suspected you all along. It was a fair contest, I reckon. I should have been wiser than to let you fool me—but—I guess I'm a hopeless fool with women!"

She stood there, looking at him, stricken to the soul.

"I know I lied to you—about not knowing how I came. You were right in suspecting me. But—they told me—I thought that you were a moonshiner—or something—were breaking the law. I told them you were not. I didn't know——"

Wally turned listlessly away. "Oh, it's all right. I suppose even Wing was in on it. He came the same way. I'm not holding it against you."

"But, Wally! You're not going back—to the desert?"

"Where else?"

She stepped after him, again catching his arm.

"But, Wally, they'll know about it. They can see you for miles! You can't get away."

"What's that?" he asked, startled. "See me! How?"

She clutched him convulsively. "The air-

plane! I didn't tell you. I thought you knew. Yesterday, while we were driving back it flew over us. It landed up there before dark and I haven't heard it leave again. If you go, that man will be able to mark you down out there."

Wally straightened up and laughed.

"So he's come back, has he? You're right! I'll not go, at least until I've had a talk with *him*."

He turned and strode away, grim and determined, the rifle slanting back across his bent elbow. Sylvia stood with drooping head and clasped hands, the tears filling her eyes.

"Wally!" she called, despairingly.

He continued his stride unbroken and then stopped as though struck with a sudden thought.

"I forgot—you!" he said, turning back. "I guess I'll have to change my mind again. They'll be back after you, of course. There's no way you can get away except with him. I suppose that's why he came back."

She could only stare blankly, uncomprehending.

"If you'll get what you want—and go on ahead. He might shoot if I went first, you know, and I'd have to kill him. I've got a word to say to him, even if I let him go!"

Suddenly a great anger swept over the girl. She raised her head and faced him with flashing eyes.

"You—you think, then, that I want to go with him? You think I'm his accomplice and confederate? Answer me, Wally Marriner! Is that what you think?"

He would have reddened if his skin had not already been as red as it could get. Uneasy, sullen and stubborn, he let his eyes drop to the ground.

"I'd like to think anything else," he muttered.

Sylvia turned and marched past him, head up. She took the path up to the head of the valley, a few steps ahead of him, never once looking behind. Wally followed, uncomfortably, but without words.

They had gone only a short distance when a breath of wind brought a foul taint to their nostrils and Wally spoke.

"What's that?"

"Your horse was killed by a bear a few days ago," said Sylvia, shortly, never pausing in her walk nor looking behind.

Wally instantly became the alert trailer, his carelessness vanishing. His eyes began to rove about, keenly attentive to every indication. His moccasined feet became silent and his careless step a glide. He dropped his rifle forward, stopped for a moment while he worked the lever and ejected the shells. Then, counting them, he replaced them and went forward again. There were six cartridges in the magazine and breech. The rest of them hung in a belt upon his cabin wall.

Sylvia, who had not once looked behind her, had walked rapidly and gained some distance before he resumed his progress. She entered the fringing woods some distance ahead of him and was soon lost to sight. Hurrying after her, he yet went with caution, and gained slowly. He could hear her pushing through the underbrush, climbing at an angle to intercept the trail that led from his cabin along the slope of the mountain and afforded easier going to the plateau where the plane had landed.

She gained the trail without mishap and stepped out upon it, as evidenced by the cessation of sounds of breaking brush. Wally also hurried up to it, coming out upon it about fifty feet behind her. But she had vanished behind a bend which carried the trail around a projecting outcrop.

Then he heard her scream!

He leaped forward as if driven from a gun, dashing around the spur, heedless of what might lie beyond. Below, the trees hemmed them in, and above, on the slope of the mountain, the brush grew almost down to the trail, which formed an alley through which they must pass.

Sylvia was staggering back toward him, half facing the other way, looking fearfully over her shoulder. Not a hundred feet away, swag-bellied, vast, yellowish-gray in color, came swaying the monarch of the hills, arrogant, surly and fearless, treading the trail left by man, secure in the knowledge that all living things must give him room.

His shoulders were nearly four feet from the ground, his head as big as the top of a barrel. The little, pig eyes gleamed with red vice and the half-open mouth showed yellow fangs against a red tongue. The great, flat, splay feet, moving with the smooth precision of pistons, were capped with scythes of horn ten inches in length.

A compound of viciousness, ferocity, arrogance and contempt, a half ton of Silver Tip rolled down upon the girl.

Stumbling, looking backward, Sylvia staggered toward Wally. He came on, shouting.

"Down! Sylvia, crouch down!"

Whether she heard and understood or whether her limbs longer refused to support her, she obeyed his command. She sank down to the trail and as he reached her in another stride, reached up and clutched him about the knee. But she was not entirely helpless from terror. Her free hand sought for the revolver she carried in her waist.

Wally had come to a stop, feet wide apart, bestriding her huddled form. He stood like a rock, the rifle raised. But he held his fire. The bear might decide to go about his business and leave them alone.

But the bear had no such intention. The trail was easier traveling than the brush and he proposed to stay on it. Let others dispute his way at their peril! Steadily, with eyes gleaming angrily, he rolled onward without a pause.

The crisis was on them! Wally set his sights and fired.

The shot struck the brute on the head and glanced. But it was sufficient to nearly knock him down, sending him, for all his half ton of weight, scrambling sidewise with nose down.

Cool, Wally waited. The bear reared mightily to his hind legs, roaring thunderously and beating the air in his rage. That was what he had hoped for.

Precisely, without excitement or haste, the man pulled trigger, threw the lever, aimed, pulled again. Like the slow beating of a gong, the shots rang out. Once, twice the heavy, soft-nosed bullets crashed full into the bear's throat as he strode on hind legs toward them.

Then the grizzly sank to all fours, rushing down upon them. Again the rifle cracked and again a ball smashed against the impregnable forehead. Once more the shock and the pain drove the bear rearing into the air.

Again Wally fired into the gashed and bleeding throat. He had only one shot left.

The bear was down again, lurching on, almost upon them. Now he reared of his own accord, striding Titanically down the trail, his mouth wide, the blood streaming from it.

Another shot went crashing home into the neck of the animal. He took a last, blundering step and caved down to the trail like a falling mountain.

Wally relaxed, staggering against a tree. He ran his sleeve over his forehead, covered with cold sweat. Sylvia, dragged herself half upright, holding to his leg, her eyes still frozen to the enormous, twitching bulk that filled the trail not fifteen feet from them.

"Is it—is it *dead?*" she asked, awesomely.

Wally laughed, grimly.

"I hope so," he said, hoarsely, "for there isn't another shot in the gun."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LAST OF THE DRAGON.

Wally had sunk down to a sitting position on the upward slope at the side of the trail, the empty rifle fallen from his hands. Sylvia, beside him, her arms across his knees, bowed her head and buried her face in her arms.

"I wish you'd take me away from here," she said, in a small, tired voice. "I've been so frightened!"

Wally laid his hand on her bobbed hair. Every emotion but one had been burned from him by the stress of the last few moments.

"It's all right, Sylvia," he said, his voice shaking a little. "It's no place for you. I'll see that you get away. And, before you go, there's one or two things I want to tell you."

Sylvia stopped trembling and became very still as though listening. But she said nothing. Haltingly and awkwardly, Wally went on.

"I guess I was crazy, Sylvia! I don't care how you came or what your motive was. If you thought I was a crook, that's all right. If you don't think so now, that's still better. Anyway, no matter how it's turned out, I'm glad you came."

Sylvia's head was raised a fraction of an inch and her face turned imperceptibly.

"I couldn't think straight, at first. But I've been thinking since I started to cross the Salduro and come back. I thought I did it to—to get even with you, but now I know I was coming back because I couldn't leave you. And while I was out there, I kept thinking about you. I thought it out and I think I made up my mind that you couldn't have intended to frame this thing on me."

"Suppose I confessed that I did?" asked Sylvia, in a muffled voice.

Wally drew a long breath.

"I just wouldn't believe you," he replied.

"You lied when you came here with that cock-and-bull story of being drugged. I think you'd be lying again to tell me that."

"You *did* believe it!" accusingly.

"I made myself believe it—for a while. But I don't believe it, now. I wouldn't believe it if I saw you do it!"

"Why wouldn't you?"

"Because—because I kissed you, I guess! Sylvia, you *couldn't* have been the girl I kissed, and have done that!"

"You're late finding it out," sniffed Sylvia.

"Aviators—and women," said Wally, ruefully, "are a combination that get the best of my judgment. They sort of turn my head."

Sylvia remained silent. Presently Wally resumed.

"This fellow, with the plane, will take you away. I don't know who he is but I suppose you do. Then, when this has blown over, you can come back. There's a good mine here, that will keep you from needing anything. And I'll be gone."

"If you're gone," said Sylvia, aggrievedly, "who'll protect me from wolves and—bears?"

"Why, Sylvia!" Wally remonstrated.

"I don't care," she burst out suddenly, raising her head and flaming round on him. "You never think of any one but yourself! You tell me to come back here when I don't even want to go away and you say you're going away so I won't be able to come back anyway for fear of the animals and things. I don't *want* your old mine! I don't want to go away. I want to stay here!"

"But they'll be back to arrest——"

"No they won't! I haven't done anything, anyway, so why should I care if they do arrest me? Neither have you. It was that unspeakable girl down at Baldwin's store that did it—she and Wilkes, the aviator. He must have put the papers in your box before I got back and then I thought it was all right because I looked at the box and it was locked and there was no sign that any one had opened it. I stayed there and watched it for *days* so they couldn't get at it, not thinking they had already done it."

And then she poured out, in tumbling, incoherent words, the sordid story of her plight in Welcome and the way of escape that had been offered her. And Wally listened to it all, wondering and remorseful.

"And if you want me to go," she ended in a blaze, "why did you kiss me, that time?"

Wally did not answer. He caught her as she dropped her head again and lifted her. Sylvia threw her arms around his neck and clung to him, desperately.

"I *won't* go!" she said, determinedly.

"You *shan't* go!" retorted Wally, holding her tight.

"This is all very affecting," said a sardonic voice from the trail on the other side of the bear, "but it's delaying the game. Don't go for a gun, Marriner! I've got you covered."

Wally looked over Sylvia's head at the figure draped in leather coat and baggy overalls gathered at the ankles. A lean, trap-jawed face looked out from the frame of a leather helmet on the top of which a pair of goggles rested.

"So it's you, is it?" said Wally. "I might have known!"

"Just as well that neither of us did," said Wilkes. "I would have shot you or something, long ago, if I'd known. As it is, it's much better to have you arrested for that holdup. Quite amusing, I'll tell the world! And you're still popular with the ladies, I see!"

"You'll see your own finish if you make any more remarks like that!" said Wally, icily, as he half rose.

"Sit still!" Micky Wilkes gestured with the automatic in his hand. "Your other lady friend—she's been out of stir for six or eight months, you know—she's up there waiting for me. Friend Stacy also, Miss Bartlett. We're on our way and in something of a hurry so I can't stop long to gossip with you. Where's your gasoline?"

"What gasoline?" asked Sylvia, stammeringly. Wally slowly grinned.

"I saw you drive a car in yesterday, so I naturally conclude you have gas. I'm a little short, myself, so I'm compelled to borrow. Lead me to it!"

Wally slowly rose, still smiling. The aviator did not object, though he watched him closely. He stooped and picked up the rifle, answering Wilkes' swift movement of suspicion by jerking the lever down.

"It's empty," he explained. "The bear got the last shot. I had intended some of them for you, I don't mind telling you. So you need gas, do you? I remember that Colorao Bill was thoughtful enough to make

away with your cache! Well, that's an interesting predicament!"

"Yours will be more interesting if you don't lead the way to your garage," said Wilkes. "We haven't all day to waste!"

The aviator slanted his gun back and began to bring it down, slowly. If Wally had been armed the delay would have been fatal. But he was not. Nor was Sylvia. Her revolver lay, half buried in the gravel a dozen feet away, where she had dropped it.

She tried to force herself in front of the tall man but he held her away with one iron arm. Then, as the finger of the aviator was tightening on the trigger, a hail came from the trees above them and back along the trail.

"Put 'em up, Wilkes! You're treed!"

Wilkes whirled and began to shoot in the direction from which the voice came. He shot only once, for Wally had whirled his rifle up on the instant and threw it, butt foremost. It crashed against the man's helmet and sent him reeling to the ground, senseless.

Four men and a woman came from the trees and walked down the trail. One of them was Ellis, the government agent, another was his assistant; the woman was Nellie McCarthy, and a third man was Stacy. The fourth was Wing Yow Chiu, smiling benignantly.

"I see you think that the little princess that the dragon brought is a nice little girl," he said slyly. Ellis stooped over the unconscious Wilkes and handcuffed him.

"Wing, you're an old fraud!" said Wally. "Did you bring this gang?"

"I brought them, all right," said Wing.

"D'you want me?" Wally asked as Ellis rose from his task. He held out his hands for the manacles. But Ellis laughed.

"No," he said. "We must have given you some trouble. I hear you had a run in with Colorao Bill and got the best of him. Some stunt, that, crossing the Salduro without water! Never expected to find you alive. And it wasn't really necessary.

"Oh! The chink came racking into Salt Lake and got the biggest guns in Chinatown down at the Federal building. He had a fine young yarn to tell, believe me! We never knew Stacy was in on it at all, nor the identity of Wilkes. They'd have gotten off with the loot perhaps, but Wink put us wise. Seems he's some big man in one of these tongs and he put the screws on his brethren so they came through with the evidence. Regular ring of chinks all across the country through which the distribution was done. We understand that Wing and the other big guns are guaranteeing that it will stop, now.

"Anyway, Wing put us next to the prime movers and told us how they had framed it on you. He guessed it—but it was a shrewd one. No trouble to get the facts from the girl and the man. Look at 'em!"

Ellis had gathered up his prisoners. "By the way, the chink broke the exclusion laws but he has a drag somewhere. He's authorized to stay as a student or something. So that's all right. Can we give you a lift anywhere?"

Wally sat down on the carcass of the bear, at which the others had cast many an admiring glance. He drew Sylvia down beside him.

"No," he said, elaborately casual. "We've got a car over on the other side. We'll head across the Salduro to Welcome and probably beat you in."

When the government agents and their prisoners had gone, Wally lifted the bear's head, weighty and cumbersome as it was. The neck was almost cut in two by the slashing of the mushroomed bullets.

"This will make a pretty good rug for us, Sylvia."

Sylvia flushed and looked down. Then she raised appealing eyes to him.

He rose and held out his hands, smiling. "Wing, come on!" And to Sylvia: "We'd better get along down to the car, dear. It will take three or four hours to get to Welcome. There is a missionary there, although I never heard that he ever made any converts. Shall we go down and give him a job?"

Then she broke into a warm and confiding smile. Wing, chuckling, shuffled off along the path to the cabin. They followed him, Sylvia in the shelter of her lover's arms.

"Perhaps," Wing flung back at them, over his shoulder, as he entered the cabin, "you will now change your mind about that very nice dragon, Wally."

Another story by Mr. Winter will appear soon.

Foolish Finance

By John Lawrence Ward

Author of "An Affair of Dishonor," "Oh, Say, Can You See——" Etc.

A straight road makes hard walking for a man used to crooked paths.

AL HARVEY smoothed down a rich but conservative waistcoat over an imposing embonpoint which had cost him twenty years of good living and much money to acquire. He unfolded a spotless linen handkerchief, dusted a little talcum powder thereupon, and dabbed gently at his pink jowls—jowls that spoke of countless rare steaks and magnums of rarer vintages. He inclined his portly form toward the dresser mirror and gave an added twist to his tightly waxed mustache. He then tossed the few toilet articles remaining on the dresser into an open traveling bag which reposed on a near-by chair. Next a faultlessly formed coat went on the massive shoulders and an expensive straw was carefully fitted to the sleek, black head.

After a long, approving look at the contents of the bag, he snapped it shut, hooked a heavy yellow stick over his right forearm, picked up the bag with his left hand, surveyed his reflection in the full-length mirror set in the bathroom door, and decided he was in form to descend to the lobby of the Hotel Burnham.

STOP! HAVE YOU LEFT ANYTHING?

The little brass warning affixed to the door brought a grin to Al's bold, handsome face.

"I've left but darn little in this burg," he chuckled, and slammed the door of No. 819 after him. "If I could only dope out some way to beat the highjackers who run this boardin' house I'd be the happiest taxpayer west of the three-mile limit. Hotel Burnham! Burn'em is right. Down, boy. Hey!"

Once in the ornate lobby he showed no indication of putting his fugitive thought into execution for he marched up to the bookkeeper's grille and took his gouging as meekly as the lowliest drummer.

"Take your bag, sir?" suggested an obsequious voice in his ear.

"Take nothin'," snapped Mr. Harvey. "Go 'way and lemme alone." He wasn't going to let that bag get very far away from his well-manicured hand.

He waved aside the taxi starter at the door, for the Union Station was but a half dozen or so blocks distant and as his train was not due to depart for at least forty-five minutes, he elected to stroll once more down the main thoroughfare of the city that

had rewarded his modest efforts of the past thirty days so generously.

Thirty prosperous days he reflected as he swung blithely along, fully aware of the admiring glances of the populace. And really no one could be criticized for taking a second survey of Mr. Al Harvey. He resembled a million dollars currency, bales of gold bonds, Broad and Wall, bank directorates and other pleasant knickknacks. His proud carriage and handsome bulk would have suggested to an imaginative eye one of the Cæsars in purple-edged winding sheet, making his royal way from some cozy little Roman punchery to the Circus Maximus, there to lay a few sesterces on his favorite charioteer.

It was this magnetic front that soothed and comforted new-made widows wondering what to do with the insurance money, hypnotized rural gentlemen whose pockets were uncomfortable with the bulge of their wheat returns, and addled the wits of small-salaried clerks who chafed at the conservativeness of sound building-loan associations and solvent savings banks.

His schemes were always rather unique, and because of his supreme contempt for the mentality and courage of his dupes, unusually crude. It is a deplorable fact that the most gigantic and—for the time being—successful swindles have been of such amazing rawness that one wonders in retrospect just how far down on the minus column average common sense registers.

Al Harvey was a coarse and brutal worker. He seldom disguised his bitter pill with candy coating, but depended on his snappy tactics and will-o'-the-wisp movements. His month's sojourn in Midwestern had once more demonstrated to his satisfaction the efficacy of his peculiar and original style. Something over fifteen thousand dollars in his yellow bag spelled Q. E. D. for Al.

The Union Station was in the heart of the business district, something unusual in cities the size of Midwestern. It was an ancient building of red brick, brownstone and ornamental ironwork, distinctly of the "Garfield period of architecture," as some wit has put it. This eyesore was to be demolished as soon as the new station—a chastely beautiful structure of dazzling white stone now under construction alongside its uglier sister—was completed.

Al Harvey, with half an hour to kill, sauntered along under the rough wooden canopy erected over the sidewalk to deflect any misdirected rivets or volplaning brickbats from the sconces of the citizenry, and joined a sizable group of Midwestern's time burners who were, or seemed to be, intensely interested in the trio of Italian Rodins who were chiseling out an allegorical group above the lintel of the main entrance.

In order to get a better view of this operation, and also because he mistrusted crowds, Al crossed to the other side of the narrow street. Directly opposite the Union Station was one of those oddities frequently encountered in the most congested sections of American cities, a vacant lot of goodly size, iron fenced and carpeted with cool luxuriant grass. In the center of this lot was a large, freshly painted sign advising all and sundry that this unexcelled building site was for sale. "Inquire on the ground, at your own broker's, or at Klein & McBride, Realtors, Nos. 310-12-14-16 Natural Gas Building."

Al favored the green lot and its sign with a casual glance and wondered idly why such a centrally located tract had never felt the sting of a pick or the ravening jaws of a steam shovel. He backed himself comfortably against the iron fence and fixed his gaze on the artists above the portals of the new terminal. He saw none of the beauties or wonders of the accomplishment. He merely speculated on the amount of graft incident to the erection of such an edifice.

A small, wiry, carelessly dressed individual, with a cigarette pasted to his lower lip and a huge roll of blue prints under one arm raced across the street and stood for a minute or so at Al's elbow, the while he squinted intently at a huge block of limestone swaying gently in its slings a few feet above the highest course of masonry.

In a prodigious voice he bawled a luridly trimmed order to the operator of the hoisting engine. This person signaled back with his hand and the little man dived into the crowd once more.

"Noisy little bum!" muttered Al. "Wonder who he thinks he's imitatin'?" He resumed his architectural study with one eye on the clock in the station tower.

A sudden, spontaneous activity about the dingy brownstone entrance of the ancient depot indicated that a train was pulling into the shed. Red caps sprinted within with much good-natured jostling and horseplay. Newsies straightened up their bundles of papers and jockeyed for strategic positions.

From the hacking stands came the whine of starting devices and the crack and roar of racing motors, while a line of privileged taxicabs began to creep impatiently toward the curb. Then the new arrivals swarmed out of the station. As is usual the van was made up of snappy, well-dressed men of the traveling-salesman type from the smoker; next came the ordinary folk who patronize the day coaches, and lastly the elegants from the Pullmans.

Along with the last-named contingent came an old gentleman—not so old at that, for aside from the silvery hair discernible under his smart derby and the equally silvery, well-trimmed beard there was nothing about him to suggest approaching senility. His pale, aristocratic face was smooth and unwrinkled, and his bright blue eyes were serene and clear. His garments and linen were of superior quality and although the sprightly movements of his slim body gave no hint of feebleness, he used a heavy ebony cane with a silver knob.

"Shall I git yo' a taxi, boss?" asked the hulking, black porter who was toting his hand bag.

"No, indeed," said the old gentleman decisively. His voice was crisp, resonant and cultured. "I've been cooped up long enough. I will walk to my hotel."

"Yassuh. Hotel Bu'nham, suh. To yo' right boss, seven blocks. Thank yo' suh."

But the little old gentleman did not immediately start off in the direction of the Burnham. His eye had evidently been caught by the building activities next door. He strolled along until he came abreast the hoisting engine.

"Will you be good enough to tell me where I will find the gentleman in charge here?" he inquired politely.

That bedeviled person, the engineer, never took his eyes off a pair of hands flapping wildly, high above his head.

"Last I seen of him he was roostin' agin' that fence 'cross the street," he managed to grunt out of one side of his mouth.

The old gentleman thanked him, picked his way carefully through the traffic and walked to where Mr. Al Harvey lolled in solitary possession of the iron fence. It is not to be wondered at that the old gentleman instantly assumed that this prepossessing figure was the individual to whom the hoisting engineer had referred. He was just about to address Mr. Harvey when his bright, roving eyes caught sight of the "For Sale" sign. He hesitated, read the legend carefully and his countenance assumed a peculiar, calculating expression. He turned, touched the unheeding Mr. Harvey's arm and proceeded, figuratively speaking, to throw a lighted firecracker under that gentleman's coat tails.

"At what figure are you holding this piece of land?" asked the old gentleman.

"Uh? How? What's that?" Al's voice was sharp and suspicious. He didn't like to be startled.

"What are you asking for this lot?"

"What am I asking for this lot?" repeated Al, puzzled. "What am I——"

"Exactly," cut in the old gentleman. "What are you asking—ah—you own this vacant site, do you not?"

Al's face crinkled into the famous Harvey smile.

"Say brother," he boomed hilariously, "say brother, if I—if I—um humph b'rumph!"

He cleared his throat loudly, flourished his handkerchief, mopped the grime off his face and continued, "Say, brother, if I thought you wasn't kiddin' I might talk business with you." A great idea had come to Al Harvey.

"I rarely joke," stated the old gentleman coldly. "I leave that nonsense to the fools with whom I've been associated recently. Come—come. I have no time to waste. What's your price?"

Al gulped, hesitated. He was nearly floored, but not completely. He could see that the little old gentleman was very much in earnest, and because of some queer chain of events, was under the impression that he, Al Harvey, was the owner of the property. Here was a dazzling, incomprehensible stroke of good luck which should lead to a whopping profit for Al Harvey, and already a crude synopsis of a scheme was outlining itself in the back of his brain. Al knew the real-estate game in a rudimentary way, but had never dabbled in it or used it. It was entirely too scientific and complicated for him and it took money to swing. And now he thoroughly cursed himself for having neglected to post himself a bit better regarding this fascinating and profitable guessing game. He hadn't the least idea of what land was worth—any land or this piece in particular. Al gazed helplessly at the old gentleman, who, with an impatient

gesture, turned to go. At this crucial moment one of Al's nimble, faithful wits, which had been frantically zipping around in the purlieus of his subconscious mind, arose to the surface with a vague recollection clutched to its breast. Al dimly remembered a headline in yesterday's paper. It was in the financial section—something about a record price for a small piece of property in Washington's business district—five hundred thousand—the old gentleman was moving away.

"Five hundred grand," blurted Al. "Five hundred thou'—you know—smackers—I mean dollars."

"Five hundred thousand dollars. Um!" The old gentleman pursed his lips and narrowed his eyes.

"Scared him off," groaned Al internally. Aloud he said, "That's a very reasonable figger, a bargain. I tell you what let's do. Let's me and you go back to my hotel and talk this thing over."

He linked his arm through that of his prospective victim and whistled to a cruising hacker. Talking volubly about nothing he hustled his kidnaped prospect into a big, ornate, robin's-egg-blue sedan lined with mauve broadcloth and told the chauffeur to drive to the Burnham. As they crept slowly down Main Street Al got his second breath-taking shock. The old gentleman drew out from an inside pocket a sheaf of letters, telegrams, important-looking documents, a fat wallet and a card case.

"My name is Peppercorn," he announced simply, fishing for a card. Al's massive jaw dropped. There are exactly four names in the United States better known than that of Peppercorn. "Not Henry Peppercorn," chuckled the old chap whimsically. "I'm his obscure brother. I always have to make that announcement to new acquaintances." He presented his card. On it was merely, "Cornelius John Peppercorn, New York."

Al almost suffocated with excitement. He had baited for a gudgeon and hooked a whale.

"Now I'll tell you what I have in mind," went on Cornelius John briskly. "I have had this city under consideration for a long time. In my humble opinion Midwestern is just entering a period of remarkable growth. I have intended doing something here for several years but pressing business elsewhere has delayed me. Now I'm going to be absolutely frank with you, sir. I want that piece of ground of yours. I'm going to put up a hotel on it. A real hotel. The hostelries of Midwestern have been rooking the public too long. I will make them sit up."

"You said a mouthful then," interrupted Al savagely.

"I'm surprised that you haven't been approached by the railroads in regard to that lot," said Mr. Peppercorn, eying Al shrewdly.

"Maybe when they hear what you're gonna do with it, they'll try to buy it from you," countered Al diplomatically. "You could make a good profit on a quick turnover."

"No," said Peppercorn decidedly, "if I buy it, it will be as an investment. I am going to build a hotel."

"Then you will buy it?" asked Al, almost too eagerly. Peppercorn chuckled dryly. "Five hundred thousand dollars is a stiff price, my friend. I'll have to do some thinking before I decide. I'll let you know definitely in a day or so, as my time is limited in Midwestern. A week at the most."

They were at the hotel. Al's brain had been working fast. He steered Mr. Peppercorn to a comfortable chair in the lobby.

"Now, Mr. Peppercorn," he said in a genially dominating tone, "while you're in town I want you to be my guest. I'm gonna put you up here at the hotel and I don't want you to spend a cent. See? I made arrangements with that hacker to be at your beck and call at any time and I want you to have everything charged to your room. See?"

"Why, that's very fine of you," said Mr. Peppercorn, pleasantly flustered. "Very fine indeed."

Al hurried to the desk and signed up for two expensive adjacent suites on the sixth floor. He had an elaborate luncheon sent up, after which, to his secret elation, Mr. Peppercorn admitted to a slight weariness.

"You just go ahead and take a good snooze," encouraged Al. "I got a little business to attend to, and when I come back we'll take a long ride through the country."

Cornelius John composed himself on a luxurious chaise longue and instantly fell asleep. Al Harvey clapped on his straw hat, grabbed his plethoric bag and went into action. It seems almost superfluous to state that he was headed in the direction of the Natural Gas Building.

Now, it becomes necessary at this point

to utilize a trick of the Chinese "chorus" and advise the reader that but for a fortuitous condition existing in the offices of Klein & McBride, Realtors, that day, Al Harvey's little design would have been gently and professionally tapped on the head and this chronicle would end—right here. But we are not concerned with, nor are we going to speculate over what would have happened if either of those cagy manipulators, Klein & McBride, had been on the job. They were not and one F. X. O'Brien was, and so the story goes on.

With his name as a clew, it is not necessary to consult the Almanach de Gotha and the Calendar of Saints to correctly guess his extraction and what the initials F. X. stand for. He was twenty-four, fresh-faced, had smoothly plastered yellow hair and as McBride expressed it "the cheek of the devil himself."

This young man and Miss Irene Martin were in sole possession of Nos. 310 to 316 on that momentous afternoon when Mr. Al Harvey elected to do some business with Klein & McBride. Miss Martin was in No. 310—the entrance to the suite—whanging away at her typewriter, which she had moved within easy reaching distance of the switchboard. Mr. O'Brien, who belonged back in No. 316, had preëmpted No. 312, which was McBride's office, partly because the surroundings exercised a psychological effect on his self-esteem and partly because he could direct tender glances through the open door at the bent, beautifully coifed head of Miss Martin. All of Mr. O'Brien's thoughts and ambition were entwined about Miss Martin's blue-black, water-waved tresses but as yet he had accomplished nothing which would justify him in announcing himself as her future husband.

As he sat at McBride's magnificent, flat-topped desk with his feet on McBride's velours rug, listlessly drawing pin wheels, he wished mightily that some great emergency would arise during his employer's absence which he would handle in such masterly fashion that Klein & McBride would be forced to take him into the firm.

That morning at ten, Mr. Klein had bustled into the office to say good-by. He was off on his first vacation in five years.

"Read that!" commanded McBride, thrusting a telegram at him.

Klein dropped his suit cases and perused the message, while McBride telephoned his wife to pack his bags and send them to the office.

"Well, well. This is good news," said Mr. Klein, "only it comes at a rotten inconvenient time. Can't you postpone it?"

"Postpone nothing," snorted his partner. "Keep the old man waiting at this stage of the game after all the time and money we spent? I guess not. You'll have to postpone your trip till I get back."

"You tell my wife that," suggested Klein grimly. "We leave on the eleven-five. When will you get back here?"

"Read the wire again," growled McBride. "Don't His Nibs say it'll take ten days to put it over? Well then?"

They wrangled loudly and uselessly for half an hour. Klein had to take his wife to Atlantic City and McBride had to go to Washington on business. They both took the eleven-five east. Before they left they laid down some stringent rulings appertaining to Mr. O'Brien's official conduct during the next two weeks.

"Listen to me, Frankie," said McBride. "We're going to leave you in full charge. It's up to you. Now watch your step and maybe if you make good—well, who knows? Eh, Klein? There's room on the door for another name. And don't be pestering me and Klein with telegrams about trifles. If anything comes up you can't handle, stall it till I get back."

Frankie! Mr. O'Brien spat angrily in McBride's polished-brass cuspidor and lighted a cigarette. Why didn't something big turn up? He'd show 'em!

The corridor door opened and Mr. Al Harvey stepped into No. 310. Frank perked up his ears and listened to the conversation that ensued.

"Is Mr. Klein or Mr. McBride in?" asked Al in his great, booming voice.

"Sorry." Miss Martin smiled sweetly at the impressive stranger. "Both are out of the city."

"Anybody here that can talk business?"

Miss Martin bit her lip and glanced archly toward No. 312. "Oh, yes. Our Mr. O'Brien is in. I'm sure he can take care of you very nicely."

Frank pinched out his cigarette and began to paw furiously at a stack of neatly folded leases.

Miss Martin entered, winked mischievously at him and said primly, "Mr. Alton L. Harvey of New York, to see you, sir."

A moment later she told Al Harvey, "Mr. O'Brien is busy just now. He will see you in ten minutes if you care to wait."

Al spent ten hours as he reckoned it, squirming uneasily on the visitor's bench, at the end of which period he was graciously admitted to the sacred precincts. Mr. O'Brien greeted him in his best manner and bade him be seated. Al came straight to the point.

"You people own that vacant lot opposite the Union Station, or are you just handlin' it for somebody else?"

"What difference does it make? We control the property," countered Frank, smiling placatingly to take the curse off his mild rebuke. It was an error. Al was too nervous to bandy words. His face hardened and he leaned forward and tapped the desk smartly.

"It makes a lot of difference to me. Now young fella me lad don't you try to pull any smart stuff on me. You come clean."

Beyond a slight reddening of the prominent ears Mr. O'Brien managed to preserve an impassive countenance, but inwardly he crumpled. Al had thrown a real scare into Frankie and Frankie began to think he had wished too heartily for excitement. If there was one matter in the world that he devoutly hoped would not be agitated during McBride's absence, it was that of the tract on Main Street. Frank was possessed, as the law has it, of "guilty knowledge" concerning that vacant grassy lot, and yet he could not be guided by the information he possessed, because McBride would want to know angrily and profanely how he had learned certain things. Frank was privy to the fact, having an inquisitive disposition and a pair of supersensitive ears, that Klein & McBride, with the aid of a certain personage at the national capital had cooked up a nice little scheme to sell the lot to the United States government for a new post-office site. The amount asked of said government was three hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Frank also knew that two hundred and seventy-five thousand was a fat, juicy price for it, but of course everybody expects the government to pay more than the ordinary buyer. This was the important deal that had called McBride to Washington. Frank knew all this, had gleaned it surreptitiously, but all he was supposed to know was that "the ground was for sale, refer all inquiries to M. C. McBride." He had a bulletin in his desk to that effect. Well, he was on soft ground so he would have to step high, wide and handsome.

"Well?" demanded Al belligerently.

Frank shrugged his shoulders and said, "There's no secret about it. We own the property. I just couldn't see what difference it made. That was all."

Al grunted contentedly. Fixing the young man with a fishy eye he asked, "How much do you want for it?"

Frank placed his finger tips together, and opened his mouth to deliver a polished diplomatic harangue, but Al held up a restraining hand.

"Now listen to me," he ordered and there was no mistaking the finality of his tone. "There ain't a bit o' use of you handin' me any 'who struck John?' I got no time to sit here chewin' the rag, or wait till you talk it over with somebody else. I want action. Got to have it. I don't play with 'em. You tell me the price of that lot and I'll either do business with you or walk out. Shoot!"

Frank's heart missed two beats and he grew rather faint. He was in a tight place, particularly in the light of McBride's parting injunction. He had wished for it, and Fate had promptly placed the buck in front of him—or rather, had thrown it at him. Goose flesh set in around Frank's spine. He wondered if this big, brutal fellow was a spy from the department of justice or some other fearsome tribunal at Washington, trying to smoke out, in McBride's absence, evidence of sharp dealing. Perhaps he would be let off with a light sentence because of his youth. Frank's imagination was fast reducing him to panic.

Once more the big man's voice penetrated the whirling fog that was numbing his brain.

"Well, speak up. How much?"

Then another voice made itself heard. It was a very sweet voice and it seemed to float through the open transom from the outside office.

"I'm very sorry, but Mr. O'Brien is in conference just now. Yes, very important. He can't be disturbed. Will you leave your number? Yes, I will. Just as soon as he is free. Good-by."

Frank shook his head as a diver does on coming up to the surface. His heart ceased jumping around through his system and he found he could clearly distinguish various

articles in the room. His buck fever was passing. He presented Al with one of McBride's choice cigars, and lighted one himself. Then he grabbed destiny by the horns and bulldogged her.

He decided that there was but one course open to him. He would proceed as though he was totally unaware of McBride's secret deal, and to protect himself and his firm—in case this domineering heavyweight was snooping—he would boost the price.

"Four hundred thousand dollars is the figure," he announced crisply.

Mr. Harvey was silent for so long that Frank's trepidation returned. There was no cause for alarm. Al was merely enjoying, privately and silently, his third shock. One hundred thousand dollars profit! And no risk. A straight, clear, legitimate business proposition. He was amazed to discover that honest dealing was more profitable than swindling.

"I'll give three-fifty," he suggested.

"Four hundred," answered Frank indifferently.

Al decided to leave well enough alone.

"Will you gimme an option on it?"

Frank frowned portentously. "For how long?"

"Two weeks." Al knew he would unload the ground in a week, but he safeguarded himself to the extent of seven more days. He bobbled it there, for he could have had thirty days just as easily as fourteen.

"I will," said Frank promptly, almost joyously. In two weeks McBride would be back and in the meantime he could sit on McBride's magic rug and wish that this fellow Harvey would fall down a manhole and break his fat neck or something.

"How much for the option?" queried Al, opening his bag.

"Twenty thousand dollars." Frank never batted an eye as he named this stiff collateral.

"You're askin' too much, son," said Al sternly. "I got fifteen in this bag. Take it or leave it."

Half an hour later he departed from the Natural Gas Building with an optional receipt in his pocket, the virtual owner of the virgin pasture opposite Union Station.

His next stop was the public library, where he requested a copy of "Who's Who in America."

"Nineteen eighteen-nineteen is the latest we have," said the attendant apologetically.

Al took the thick volume to a secluded corner and turned to the P's. As every one knows, there are but two Peppercorns listed in that publication. Over a column and a half on one page was devoted, of course, to the famous Henry. The remaining space told of the more retiring Cornelius John. At that, the less gifted younger brother made quite a showing. Al read his guest's record with complete satisfaction.

Peppercorn, Cornelius John, capitalist. B. New York City 1861; s. Roger Peppercorn and Elviria (Thomas); brother of Henry Peppercorn; ed. Public School, Harvard; m. Margaret Temple, 1895 (died 1897).

Then followed an imposing list of banks, industries, railroads, traction companies, institutions and so forth with which he was connected either as president, director, trustee or what not. Then a list of his clubs, his town and country addresses and the location of his office.

After Al left the library he stopped at the best of the theaters and purchased a box for that evening. When he arrived at the Burnham he found Mr. Peppercorn in the living room of his suite, immersed in a copy of *The Wall Street Journal*. They dined, attended the theater and rounded out the night with a late supper in the Burnham Assyrian room. Al made it a point to avoid talking shop. He had some slight conception of good form.

The week that followed will always loom in Al Harvey's mind as the most strenuous period of his career. Never had he worked so hard. Never had his cunning, fertile brain been called on so often and so unexpectedly to meet rising situations. Never had he vacillated from joyous expectation to abysmal despair and back so frequently in such a short space of time. Not even in the old days, with the police at his heels and the would-be victim turning suspicious, had his nervous system been subjected to such a heavy strain as it was during the week he attempted the perfectly legal procedure of selling that lot to C. J. Peppercorn. Aside from the tremendous amount of patience, eloquence and tact necessary to convince Mr. Peppercorn, he was also burdened with the equally difficult task of keeping the local real-estate operators and the newspaper reporters away from the old gentleman; and what was harder still, of keeping the old gentleman away from the reporters and the real-estate operators. During Cornelius

John's waking hours eternal vigilance was the word. This meant constant diversion and entertainment—automobile trips, theaters, boxing matches, movies. Al was at his wit's end digging up fresh sources of amusement, and his war chest was getting low—low indeed.

There were just two bright spots in the whole affair which enabled Al to carry on. One was the fascinating vision of those one hundred thousand dollars he was soon to play with, and the other was the real pleasure of knowing such a charming character as Cornelius Peppercorn. If Al Harvey ever actually conceived an admiration for a fellow man, Cornelius John was that man. He was of a type with which Al had never before come in close contact. The big, vulgar swindler respected the old man's shrewdness, admired his culture and assured poise, and enjoyed his fresh, whimsical, almost childlike outlook on events as they are. True, there were times during their many intense sessions over the lot, when he cheerfully could have pitched Mr. Peppercorn out of the window, but invariably his suppressed anger melted away before the old fellow's old-fashioned courtesy.

At the end of the week Mr. Peppercorn had not yet decided. Neither did he display any indications of carrying out his expressed intention of departing from Midwestern. Al was distinctly apprehensive. On Saturday morning—it was the twelfth day—he was seated in the lobby waiting for Mr. Peppercorn to come down. The robin's-egg-blue sedan was at the door. Al winced as he thought of the staggering bills he would have to settle shortly. He began to converse with himself. This thing had gone far enough. Either the old man would sign up to-day, or he—Al—would be forced to look for another buyer in order to save his option money.

This decision engendered a new idea. Al marveled that he had not worked it sooner. He waited until they were pulling away from the Burnham, and then he said, very gravely and very convincingly, "Say, Mr. Peppercorn, somethin' funny happened while I was waitin' back there in the lobby. A couple o' dudes callin' themselves Neusbauer and Leadbury made me an offer for my lot."

Mr. Peppercorn sat bolt upright.

"Yep," asserted Al, gazing out of the window.

"How much did they offer?" asked C. J.

"Well, to tell you the truth they didn't raise you a cent. They offered five hundred. I'm just wonderin' who tipped them off to the price. I asked the clerk who they were and he told me they were one of the biggest real-estate firms in the town. He said they did a lot of business on the q. t. for the Transcontinental Hotel Syndicate. Of course I didn't give 'em a definite answer. I'm givin' you first whack at it. They said they would come back this evenin'."

Mr. Peppercorn peered steadily at Al, but the swindler's face was as guileless as a baby's.

"Tell the chauffeur to return to the hotel," ordered C. J. brusquely. Al managed to preserve his poker face and gave the necessary instruction.

Back in the lobby, Mr. Peppercorn walked rapidly to the telegraph desk and without an instant's hesitation hastily scribbled a message on a blank. Before he handed it to the girl he bade Al read it. It was brief and to the point. As Al scanned the magic words a great weight was lifted off his soul. The clouds blew away and he imagined he heard little birds twittering. He felt like doing a bit of twittering himself. He read it again:

JULIUS GULDENTHALER & Co.,
Thirty-thirty Wall, New York.
Deposit immediately to my account Midwestern Bank of Commerce six hundred twenty thousand dollars. Charge to St. Cuthbert's.
PEPPERCORN, C. J.

Julius Guldenthaler! Al suppressed a whistle of surprise. That was the outfit that Morgan borrowed money from. Al wondered what the extra one hundred and twenty thousand dollars was for. He would have to look into that. For a moment the last three words of the message puzzled him and then it suddenly dawned on him that "Charge to St. Cuthbert" was code which assured the bankers that it really was Cornelius Peppercorn who had wired the order.

"As soon as the Midwestern Bank receives a wire from Guldenthaler we will close this transaction, Mr. Harvey," announced C. J. calmly.

"Won't you have to be identified to get that money?" queried Al anxiously. He didn't want any eleventh-hour complications. His time on that option was up Monday at twelve o'clock.

"There will be no trouble about that," assured C. J., smiling serenely. "I know Wil-

lard Symonton, the president of the Bank of Commerce well, very well. We were on the same board at Washington during the war. Now that we have settled on this, let us resume our little ride."

Al enjoyed the ten-mile drive immensely.

At noon Monday Al was once more up to his chin in the soggy morass of despair. Up to that time the vital message from Guldenthaler had not been received by the Bank of Commerce. Al had paced the floor of Peppercorn's suite all morning, while C. J. made fruitless calls on his friend Symonton. For some reason he refused flatly to allow Al to accompany him. At twelve-thirty the old fellow ventured forth again. Al, whose stomach functioned independent of his brain, sent for a boy and ordered a sizable luncheon. Then he lighted a strong cigar and resumed his tigerish pacing. At twelve-fifty-five Mr. Peppercorn returned. He sank into the nearest chair, and passed a trembling hand across his eyes. He appeared to be completely worn out.

"Well, how 'bout it?" demanded Al fearfully. C. J. nodded his head.

"The money is here, my friend," he answered, and his voice quivered slightly. "If you have the necessary documents we can—what's that?" He started up nervously from his chair. There came a second discreet rapping on the door.

"That's the boy. I ordered lunch," said Al. Then he shouted, "Come in," and the door opened slowly.

It was not the boy. Decidedly not the boy. It was more on the order of a delegation. The first to enter was Mr. Whipple, the suave, correctly attired assistant manager of the Burnham. Directly behind Mr. Whipple walked a nondescript individual who was only too well known to Al as Fitchett, the house detective. Al's apprehension at the sight of Whipple and Fitchett changed to puzzlement as the next personage came into the picture.

He was a tall, powerfully built man of middle age, and he possessed a countenance to match his general style of architecture; square jaw, thin, tightly set lips, and sharp, pale-gray eyes under straight, uncompromising brows.

Then followed a gentleman of sixty years or thereabouts. His grizzled, close-clipped Vandyke, intellectual face and formal attire gave him a decided air.

The last person to enter was a slim young man, obviously lower in the social scale than the elderly gentleman, and whose sole bid for the attention of the world at large seemed to consist of a pair of alert, beady black eyes and an unusually developed chin. He it was who, after assuring himself by a quick nose count that the entire party was within, noiselessly shut the door with a swiftness and precision which suggested long practice in shutting doors.

Al Harvey lifted his bulk from the depths of his chair and made a somewhat exaggerated bow, during the upstroke of which he managed to compose his features into a mask of ironic expectation.

"Well, gentlemen?" he asked pointedly.

His attempt at frozen dignity seemed to have no effect on the intruders, for the big, heavy-set man with the Cro-Magnon visage pushed past him unceremoniously and bent over the chair in which reclined Mr. Cornelius John Peppercorn. Harvey swerved around on his heel and his eyes bulged at this extraordinary maneuver.

"Well, Corny, me boy," said the big man in a singularly melodious voice, "here I am. I've come to take ye home."

Mr. Peppercorn arose to his feet, his face bright with pleasure.

"Tom, I'm glad to see you," he said, shaking hands. "And you also, my dear Doctor Davenport. How do you do, James? Well, well, this is delightful. Doctor, I owe you an apology for running off without a word but I really was so pressed for time—I knew you would understand. Yes, yes, Tom, I'm quite ready to go with you, but first I must finish a small piece of business with my good friend Mr. Harvey. Eh?"

"Now, Corny," remonstrated the man Tom in a wheedling tone, "don't be botherin' yer head over sich trifles. What's the use of havin' a gang of expinsive hired min around ye if ye don't make um work? The doctor will tind to yer deal wit' Mr. Harvey while me and you git ready fer travelin'." He threw an arm as thick as an oak limb around Mr. Peppercorn's slender shoulders and gently but firmly drew him into the bedroom and closed the door.

Harvey exhaled a long breath and ran his hand over a moist brow.

The gentleman with the Vandyke beard now stepped forward and presented his card. It was a very expensive-looking card and it served notice on Mr. Harvey that he was in the presence of Henry Carlyle Daven-

port, M. D., L. L. D. Down in one corner were a few significant words in tiny script: "Mount St. Cuthbert's Sanitarium." St. Cuthbert's!

Al twiddled the card in fingers suddenly gone awkward and continued to gaze dumbly at the doctor. He was superficially well informed enough to know that this dignified old party was waiting for him to introduce himself, so he fumbled in his pocket for a card to swap for the other's but a saving thought stayed his hand. To produce a gaudy pasteboard that boldly announced him as a trafficker in dubious stocks might prove a tactical error. He decided to run a verbal bluff.

"My name is Harvey—Alton L. Harvey," he announced gruffly. "I'm a business man from N'York. I came out here to make a deal with Mr. Peppercorn at his request. I'd like to know what the deuce all this means."

"I see," said Doctor Davenport. "Have you, ah—consummated the transaction with Mr. Peppercorn?"

This was a poser and Al's beefy face purpled with wrath, but he wisely concluded that this was no time to advise the doctor that it was none of his deleted business. For once in his life he decided to tell the plain unvarnished.

"No," he answered truculently. "We were just about to sign the papers when you broke in on us."

"Good. Fine! Fortunate indeed!" was the doctor's surprising reply. "Luckily for you we arrived in time to save you much embarrassment, if not money."

"How do you get that way?" demanded Al.

"My dear Mr. Harvey," said the doctor calmly, "our poor friend Mr. Peppercorn cannot transact any business, sign any papers, or enter into any contracts whatsoever."

"Huh?"

"Exactly. He is an incompetent and has been for two years. He is a patient in my hospital and in my charge. It is a painful thing for me to admit, and in extenuation I must say that in institutions of like character such things are bound to occur in spite of most rigid precautions, but over two weeks ago he managed to elude his attendant and leave the grounds. It was only yesterday that we learned he was in Midwestern. The private bank of Guldenthaler & Co., New York, advised us that they were in receipt of a telegram from Mr. Peppercorn dispatched from this hotel. Having a particular interest in and affection for Mr. Peppercorn I decided to come along with Mr. Harrigan, his nurse, and, before his pitiful affliction, his valet and companion for twenty-five years, and James, one of our trusted attendants." Here he waved an introductory hand toward the young man who shut doors. "Naturally upon our arrival we conferred with Mr. Whipple."

Al felt as though he should sit down so he dropped heavily into a chair.

"A daffydill!" he wheezed. "Bugs! Crazy! Well, I'll be damned!" Ugly suspicion clouded his eyes. "Say, listen to me, m' friend. He acts like anything but a nut. Strikes me he's one of the sharpest old fellers I ever met up with."

"Don't mistake me," protested the doctor. "I didn't say Mr. Peppercorn was a raving lunatic. He is merely a common case—a brilliant mind obsessed with an *idée fixe*. Barring that one defect he is as sane as you or I but the law says—well——" the doctor sighed deeply.

"So it's all off, hey?" demanded Al. He was beginning to recover from the staggering blow.

"Of necessity—yes." The doctor nodded.

"Well, it ain't off with me!" shouted Al. "Not much it ain't. I got thousands tied up in this deal. Thousands. My own money. I want it. I'm gonna get it. I'll take it to court if somebody don't settle."

Doctor Davenport was genuinely distressed. "I'm very sorry to hear that, Mr. Harvey," he said gravely. "I was in hopes that you had not sustained any monetary loss. Do you mind telling me how deeply you are involved?"

"Twenty-five thousand dollars," lied Al boldly. "Not sayin' anything about my time and the profit I ought to made."

"That much?" Davenport was shocked. "Why—why——"

"I'll get it," raved Al, working himself up to virtuous wrath. "I'll sue——"

"But, my dear man, you can't sue an irresponsible person," interrupted the doctor deprecatingly.

"I'll sue his estate," bellowed Al.

"He has no estate. Mr. Peppercorn's mind became unbalanced during the bankruptcy proceedings. He is subsisting now solely on his brother Henry's charity."

"I'll sue his brother—I'll sue you—for criminal negligence!" Al thought that last sudden idea was clever.

"I'm afraid you are not conversant with the law regarding cases of insanity," said the doctor. He was becoming a bit nettled himself. "As a matter of business I am compelled to be. I'm afraid you have no redress at all. By the way, what was the nature of your business with my patient? It must have been of some magnitude to necessitate an outlay of so large a sum."

"It was a big deal in real estate——" began Al.

"Ah-h-h!" The ejaculation escaped the doctor with all the volume and pressure of a released air brake. He wagged his head slowly, sorrowfully.

"What's matter?" snapped Al.

"Real estate! Real estate!" repeated the doctor. "His one obsession. Sane on every other subject under the sun but real estate. Mr. Harvey, two years ago our unfortunate friend was worth close to four millions of dollars—all soundly invested. He fell into the hands of a crooked real-estate firm. It was Cornelius Peppercorn's money that backed the infamous Sea Island Syndicate—you probably remember the case. Colter, Price and Duventry went to prison. Poor Peppercorn went to my hospital. I trust that the knowledge of his terrific misfortunes will cause you to feel less harshly toward him. I'm sorry that I have not sufficient means to reimburse you and I assure you on my word that I would rather spend a night with a homicidal maniac than mention the words 'real estate' before Henry Peppercorn."

The bedroom door opened and Cornelius Peppercorn, attired for the street, appeared arm in arm with the persuasive Tom Harrigan. As they approached the group Mr. Peppercorn extended a cordial hand to Al Harvey.

"I'm sorry I have to tear myself away from your delightful society in such a hurried manner, Mr. Harvey," he said as he seized Al's pudgy, unwilling fist. "Mr. Harrigan tells me my presence is necessary in Chicago to-morrow morning. I have a golden opportunity to secure a very attractive lake-front site. I intend to erect quite a sizable hotel on it. So you see I must go. I trust my friend Davenport settled that little matter between you and me to your complete satisfaction?"

Al Harvey's furtive gaze flitted from face to face. He encountered a circle of coldly expectant eyes. He resembled a winded Andalusian bull, bewildered, enraged but instinctively conscious of helplessness before the implacable picadors. He was vaguely aware that for once in his life he was unable to do the things he wanted to do and honestly felt he should do. He had a well-nigh uncontrollable desire to curse, bellow and raise hob generally, but some devilish, incomprehensible influence restrained him. Al Harvey was not given to analyzing the motives behind his actions so he will never know why he did the thing he did do—and it was a rather fine thing in a way.

He tightened his grip on Cornelius John's frail hand and clumsily patted the old gentleman's shoulder.

"Everything's fine, Mr. Peppercorn," he boomed in his sonorous tone, and he even essayed a thin smile. "Everything is very satisfactory and I'm much obliged."

He raised his head and met the semicircle of boring eyes almost defiantly. Whether the admiration he saw reflected in those eyes and the contented expression that swept over Cornelius John's benign face were worth fifteen thousand dollars to Al Harvey, this deponent knoweth not—most likely not, for he turned away abruptly and strode to a window.

The delegation swarmed protectingly around Mr. Peppercorn and in a few seconds Al heard the door close softly.

He crossed to his own rooms and hastily packed. Once more he presented himself at the bookkeeper's window.

"Checkin' out. Mr. Harvey. 600-B," he growled, slamming down the key ungraciously.

The bookkeeper flittered his agile fingers through a filing case and brought forth a large card covered with figures. He scrutinized it carefully, frowned, flittered through the folders once more and produced a second card. Al Harvey leaned heavily against the cage. Premonition dealt him a heavy blow.

"You are to settle for Mr. Peppercorn also?" It was more of an accusation than an inquiry.

"Yeh. Make it snappy," croaked Al. "I gotta grab a train."

The pale, bespectacled bandit behind the grille rapidly computed the mass of figures on the cards. Then he reached in a drawer

below the desk and brought to light a bundle —nay, to Al's embittered eye, a bale of incidental checks. These the bookkeeper expertly sorted. There were dining-room checks, service-room checks, taxi checks, checks from the laundry, the tailor, the haberdasher, the cigar booth, the ticket speculator's booth, checks ad infinitum also ad nauseam.

Eventually the unhappy accounting was over and Al departed from the Hotel Burnham. A few minutes' rapid walking brought him to the Natural Gas Building. He was only too well aware of the fact that he was committing himself to a futile attempt, but fifteen thousand dollars was fifteen thousand dollars and he wasn't going to forfeit it as long as he had a bluff left in his system. A lanky messenger boy accompanied him in the elevator to the third floor. They entered No. 310 nose and nose. Mr. O'Brien was standing close to Miss Martin's chair. He surveyed the man who had caused him two weeks of extreme mental travail, with cold, inhospitable eyes, and reached for the telegram. He tore open the envelope hastily, and glanced at the inclosure. He swallowed twice and read it again. The typed words danced crazily:

Deal closed. Home to-morrow. McBride.

It was the end of the world for Frankie. He felt sorry for himself. Through no fault of his own the nutcracker of Fate had made a decided mess of him. Wearily he turned to Mr. Harvey.

"I'd like to get an extension of time on that option," stated Al in a most confident manner.

Mr. O'Brien straightened up as though a whiplash had been curled around his legs.

"I'm very sorry, sir, but that is impossible," he said very firmly. "Quite impossible."

Al devoted half an hour to Mr. O'Brien but the young man was adamant.

In the corridor Al made a hasty but accurate audit of his cash on hand. He was not at all surprised to find himself in possession of two dollars and ten cents. The fare to New York was thirty-eight sixty-seven, not including Pullman and sustenance en route.

His hand crept to the really fine diamond that scintillated against the lustrous blue of his knitted silk tie. His fumbling fingers unfastened the safety catch and he slipped the pin into a waistcoat pocket.

"From now on, Al," he growled, "you stick to good old honest swindlin'. Straight business is too darn chancy and crooked."

He stepped out into the glare and bustle of Main Street and trudged stolidly on toward the station. A few blocks farther down the street he turned into a dirty, disreputable thoroughfare given over to mean shops catering to the foreign element and the very poor.

In the middle of the block he halted, threw a furtive look over his shoulder and dived hastily into one of these shops. The "low-descending sun" projected on his broad back the shadow of the insignia of the ancient Lombards—three golden balls.

A month later a sign painter relettered the doors of Nos. 310 to 316 Natural Gas Building. Three other incidents of more or less importance also occurred that day. The firm lost a crack stenographer, the new member gained a fiancée and McBride personally lost a velours rug of which he was rather fond. It took Mr. O'Brien one whole forenoon to talk the magic carpet out of No. 312 into No. 316.

Look for more of Mr. Ward's work in early issues.

TOO MUCH LAW

CHARLES Y. CRICHTON, the real-estate man of Cleveland, Ohio, never misses a chance to make fun of lawyers. Last spring he was kept away from his business for four days by having to serve on a jury, an absence that cost him more money than he cared to lose.

"By George!" he exclaimed when, late in the evening of the fourth day, he got back to the desk. "I'm so full of law that it's hard for me to keep from cheating somebody."

A Bet on Captain Gaston

By Clarence L. Cullen

Author of "With the Governor's Regards," "A Voice from Ethiopia," Etc.

Just an everyday episode of the racing game, yet it left its mark on more than one life.

THE bookmaker's grand-stand runner, summoned imperiously by a group of hard-eyed, betting-mad women the instant he appeared from the ring with the opening odds, was sidling swiftly past the projecting knees and outthrust feet of seated people to his nearest impatient woman "client," when he was stopped by a very slight touch upon his arm.

"Tell me, please——"

It was the hushed timidity of the voice, amid that harsh gabble of gambling women, which caught the ear of the hawk-beaked, rat-eyed runt with the betting odds. Glancing downward at the seated owner of the voice, he beheld a young woman whose exterior promptly congealed, for him, into the word "hick;" a "hick" being, of course, something that could be, and of right ought to be, trimmed.

"Tell yuh wot, miss?" he asked her, rattling his odds-scribbled program by way of indicating that she would have to work fast to hold him.

"What horse do you think will win this race?"

The runner's basalt features curved into one of those furtive grins that says: "Soft! Soft!"

"Captain Gaston'll cop in a glide," he answered offhand. "Pipesky. Skinch." Catching sight of a corner of the ten-dollar bill which she was clutching tightly, he appended to his display of prescience this clinching fillip of complete conviction: "Captain Gaston could fall down and still run rings around all them other plugs."

The young woman bent eagerly forward in her seat, face flushed, eyes akindle.

"Do you really think so? I liked that name too! Captain Gaston—it does sound dashing, doesn't it?"

The runner, nodding, gulped as from sheer incredulity. Ten dollars picked up so easily for himself as all that? "Soft" couldn't begin to describe it—it was jelly in the jar!

"Is Captain Gaston the—er—the——"

"Favorite?" he helped her out. "No'm. Favorites ain't going to git nothing to-day. Long shots'll grab all six in a row. Captain Gaston's three hunnered for one."

"Three hundred to one!" Though subduedly, the young woman fairly gasped the words. "You mean that——"

"You git back three hunnered bucks for every bone you bet on Captain Gaston—that's it," the runner rattled off.

"But if everybody hears that Captain Gaston is going to win——"

"I ain't told nobody but you that the Captain's as good as in," he interrupted, scrutinizing her keenly out of the tail of his eye as if still incredulous that she could possibly be swallowing the soft-for-him tip. He decided to press this a little. "And I won't, neither," he added. "I'm slipping this hot one to you because—well, because you don't look like you belong here, and——"

"You, Joe! Come here! I seen yuh first and I gotta get a bet down——"

It was one of the stone-eyed women betters, hoarse from talking horse, irately ordering the bookmaker's grand-stand runner to her side.

"Attend to her and the others," nervously suggested the young woman who had been keeping him from his "reg'lars," "and then come back—please."

Grinning—perhaps at that "please" without precedent in his grand-stand experience—the bet taker clambered to the group of cockatoo-voiced women of his regular staff of habitual and hopeless losers. The young woman who "didn't look like she belonged there" sat back in her seat, her hands restlessly fumbling the racing program in her lap, her gaze riveted unseeingly and with a suggestion of profound and fevered worry upon the soft, young green of the infield.

This present narrator, from the grand-stand press box, directly back of which, in the first row of seats, the young woman sat, had been watching the incident from its beginning—watching and even listening, without, it is hoped, any undue effect of inquisitiveness. The young woman, in fact, had attracted his attention because of the arresting unusualness of her appearance amid such surroundings, before the bookmaker's runner had been detained by her quick impulsive touch upon his arm.

The girl—she looked a scant twenty—was distinctly shabby in a brownish, well-worn suit of shoddy material that could not fail to proclaim itself homemade. Her dark turban was weather warped and shapeless. Her fingers were out of her cheap gloves, which nevertheless showed the stitches of frequent mending. As well as she could she kept her shoes hidden under her skirt. But to the eye of one whose business it was to note details the shoes were seen to be not merely going but virtually gone. In a grand stand made kaleidoscopic by the collective color effect of women whose raiment, in style alone, not to speak of lavishness, was practically up to the moment in which they had donned it, the young woman's shabbiness was almost grotesque: the more so because, even to the most casual eye, she was uncommonly lovely. The extraordinary contrast between the actual pitiableness of her investiture and the really striking beauty which its clear evidence of poverty could neither dim nor hide was something to arouse both curiosity and commiseration.

The horses were on their way to the post when the grand-stand runner, having jotted down the bets and scribbled the tickets of the racing-obsessed women who literally clawed at his arms and dragged him about in their frenzy to place their money, forcibly detached himself from them for his sprint to the betting ring below. But, with all his needful hurry, he did not neglect to pause at the seat of the racing-green young woman whose ten-dollar note, wagered under his encouragement on a three-hundred-to-one horse that had no seeming chance in the world to win, would fit as well in his own pocket as in the heavy wallet of his bookmaker employer.

"They're at the post, lady," he said urgently, keeping himself poised for the resumption of his race for the betting ring. "They'll be off any second now." He relaxed slightly his ready-to-run rigidity to bend over her. "I didn't tell none of them other dames that Captain Gaston's a copper-spiked moral. But I'm still telling *you*."

Her clutch loosened on her ten-dollar bill and, spreading it out, she handed it to him. He scrawled a note on his little pad, then dashed off the horse's name and some figures on a buff-colored cardboard ticket.

"Captain Gaston, three thousand to ten," he rattled off, dropping the ticket into her outstretched hand and gathering himself to crush past the knees and feet that still barriered his path to the betting-ring stairway. The young woman, her carnation-tinted face suddenly white, stretched out a trembling hand to detain him when he was on the very point of starting.

"But my change——" she cried out throttledly.

In the strained hush which falls upon a race-track grand stand when the horses are careering before the starting barrier her choked cry caught many ears. Keen for

fresh grand-stand incidents, men in the press box squirmed around in their seats to see what had evoked it.

"I am betting only a dollar, not the ten dollars—my change!" they heard her, now in a tone almost of anguish, call after the betting-ring runner. Pretending to be out of hearing, he jostled his way to the head of the stairway and dashed down the steps three at a clip.

It was of course a very ordinary, every-day incident in which a thievish grand-stand runner, by taking advantage of the excitation and the confusion of mind of a woman palpably unfamiliar with the horse-betting game, had stolen her money. This present narrator, having watched the incident from the start, and succumbing to a certain up-bubbling of wrath at the spectacle of a woman, obviously unable to incur such a loss, being robbed in that ever-so-common methodical way, was about to hustle down to the betting ring for the purpose of collaring the runner and forcing him to disgorge his last grand-stand "client's" nine dollars change, when a glance at the girl's face stopped him.

Her expression had become one of frozen consternation bordering upon panic as she gazed, straight ahead and so fixedly that she seemed not to be in control of her own volition, apparently at something or somebody in the press box. The writer turned to see what or whom that something or somebody could be.

The somebody, it quickly was seen, was Jack Druff, the youngish press-box telegrapher. Jack, about half drunk—which he had been rather constantly for a month, to the extreme jeopardy of his job, for the retention of which he was even then on probation—was standing beside his chair, with his back to his key. On his normally agreeable countenance, which was fast becoming a whisky ruin, was a scowl, and the pin-point focus of his liquor-popping eyes was fused with the clear and beautiful but deeply troubled gaze of the shabby young woman back of the press box whose repressed cries after the thieving runner, in the grand-stand's momentary quietude, had caught the telegrapher's ear and pulled him around and out of his chair at the key to see what was going on.

Soon the girl, apparently unable longer to withstand, eye to eye, the really malignant glare of the press-box telegrapher, rose hastily from her seat, made her way swiftly to an exit stairway and left the grand stand, Jack continuing to scowl wickedly after her until she disappeared.

Hardly had she left the grand stand before the horses were off. Captain Gaston, the impossible three-hundred-to-one shot, appearing first time on a New York track, won his race with ludicrous ease. The teller of this tale recalls how extremely glad he was that the young woman holding the winning three-thousand-to-ten ticket on Captain Gaston had not remained in the grand stand to see the horse victorious in the commonest kind of a canter: glad, because had she seen the horse win, she might naturally, for a little while at least, have considered herself three thousand dollars to the good, when to the practiced eye in such grand-stand incidents there seemed at least three hundred thousand chances to one that the runner never had got that bet down.

The narrator remembers also how, when young Jack Druff was fired from his press-box telegrapher's job for drunkenness before the races were over that day, he wondered, at odd moments, what possible reason that singularly dissipated young man could have had for attempting to transfix the lovely, shabby girl with so ugly a glare out of his rum-reddened eyes.

It is hoped that such readers as have little use for or interest in the days of antiquity will not be too grievously disappointed when informed that the just-described incident took place a little more than twenty years ago.

II.

The passage of eight years, with the lymph of Time ceaselessly at work in filling up or obliterating the memory cells of sentient beings, so dimmed that race-track grand-stand occurrence in the mind of its relator that it became one of those things that is only remembered through what is called the association of ideas. But it came back sharply enough, and still wearing its aura of mystification, when the association of ideas which recalled it became operative. And that came about in this way:

The most noted bookmaker in the game, a gambler who had become a multimillionaire through long years of skillful odds laying, retired, an oldish man, from the betting ring. The heaping up of horse-wagered money had become monotonous to him. He

was sick at last of the race-track atmosphere. He had developed a penchant for very fine modern paintings and intended to keep himself busy and interested in adding to his collection. So he announced that the betting ring would see him no more, and he stuck to that announcement; to the last day of his life, though he lived for many years after quitting the game, he never once visited a race track even as a spectator.

For a turf writer there was good picking in this old-timer. For a full generation he had been perched at the very head of the "big business" end of the bookmakers' line at the most important American race tracks. He had seen and laid odds on or against the most celebrated horses of their day, he had known the vagaries and superstitions of the most famous racing plungers of his long epoch. He was a shrewd, liberal, humane, experience-mellowed man.

A short time after his retirement this narrator, by appointment, spent a few hours with the retired dean of all the bookmakers in the library of his lavish New York home. The purpose of this visitation was to pick talk—later to be printed as a full-page "story" in the Sunday edition of a New York turf newspaper—out of the old-timer with regard to such unusual betting-ring occurrences of his own long experience as he might care to enlarge upon. He proved both responsive and amenable, knowing, as he did, precisely what was wanted of him.

At the very end of the session he made, most casually, an arresting remark.

"I could tell you," he said, "an odd story of welshing and of an uncashed ticket. You remember, of course, the race that Captain Gaston won at three hundred to one?"

Welshing! An uncashed ticket! Captain Gaston!

The moribund old memory cells stirred, the association of ideas began instantly to work like a motor hitting on every cylinder. The relator hereof did not even have to close his eyes to see, clearly imprinted upon the back drop formed by an old haze, the creamy, carnation-tinted face of the shabby girl in a race-track grand stand eight crowded years before; he saw, too, the slinky, sidelong appraisal of her by the rat-eyed runner, and the fierce, prolonged, drunken scowl wherewith Jack Druff the press-box telegrapher—who from that very day had dropped utterly out of the sight of all who had known him—had sent the poorly clad girl hastily down an exit stairway from the grand stand. With these pictures movieizing before his memory's eye, the present writer nevertheless merely nodded to indicate that he remembered the Captain Gaston race; the idea being not to disturb or divert the old-timer's flow of recollection.

"It was eight years ago last spring that that extremely commonplace horse—Captain Gaston, I mean—fluked home, at the big odds, ahead of a field of even worse ones," went on the retired stool man. "I remember the race especially, not because the poor plug's victory damaged me, as it did many of the other layers—I happened not to have a single Captain Gaston bet written on my sheet—but because a ring employee who had been with me for a number of years, a grand-stand runner by the name of Joe Leeds, disappeared, vanished completely from view, from the very hour—I should say the very moment—that Captain Gaston won that race."

The old-timer's auditor with his memory still movieizing, easily remembered what a perfectly valid reason Joe Leeds had had for vanishing so quickly after the Captain Gaston race. But there would have been no sense in breaking in upon the veteran's current of ideas by mentioning that reason then.

"Joe," the ex-layer went on, "never even came back for his week's pay, which was due him that day. It was puzzling. There was no way of figuring him a welsher. When I missed him, after Captain Gaston's win, from his usual place in front of my slate from which he should have been getting the odds for the next race, I sent scouts through ring and grand stand for him. But he was not to be found. Bob Pinkerton, the race-track detective chief, came alongside my stool and told me he had seen my grand-stand man hustling out of the gate directly after Captain Gaston had won. 'He wore the welsher's look,' Bob added in my ear, but I didn't stop him because I couldn't somehow figure you as employing a man who'd take a welshing chance.'

"Concluding, naturally, that Joe had taken a fair-sized bet on Captain Gaston at the enormous odds from somebody in the grand stand, and, viewing it as an absolute impossibility that that horse could win, had pouched the bet for himself, I waited for the grand-stand somebody to appear in my pay-off line with a whopping ticket to be

cashed on Captain Gaston. But nobody with a Captain Gaston ticket appeared. You'll say, I think, that that was pretty baffling. If my man hadn't scribbled a ticket on Captain Gaston that he hadn't got registered on my sheet for the race, why had he laid himself open to the imputation that he was a welsher by running away? Not on that day, nor on the next, nor during the next week—nor yet!—was any ticket on Captain Gaston presented to me for payment.

"I disliked to lose Joe. As a human being he of course amounted to nothing whatever—you know his type!—but, being a bit old-fashioned and disliking change, I had become sort of used to him. I put on another grand-stand runner at once, however, and Joe Leeds, who from the day of his disappearance was not seen again on a New York race track, passed out of my mind.

"One night two years later—six years ago, that is—I was called up at my home here by a New York hospital.

" 'There's a gunman here by the name of Joe Leeds who wants to see you,' the voice over the telephone from the hospital informed me. 'Joe's got a bullet in his stomach—a policeman put it there—and he's going to die to-night. Do you care to see him?'

"My chauffeur had me at the hospital within ten minutes. Joe, with a couple of cops guarding his bed—he had killed one of their mates a few hours before—was pretty weak, but he was perfectly conscious and could talk.

" 'I'm sorry I done you that time, boss,' were his first words to me. 'I'm going to croak, they tell me, so I thought I'd send for you so's I could say I was sorry I done you.'

" 'How come, Joe?' I said to him. 'Your mind isn't wandering, is it? How did you do me? You quit on me pretty suddenly, of course, but that was your own business, and——'

"He had been staring pretty hard at me, and he broke in on me there.

" 'You needn't try to make it easy for me, boss, just because I'm kicking off to-night,' he said. 'I know what I done, and so do you. It's that Captain Gaston bet I'm talking about—that three-thousand-to-ten ticket that you had to cash because I pouched the ten.'

"I had to gather myself to speak convincingly then.

" 'Listen, lad,' I said to him. 'I see it all now. I believe you. You really did, as you say, write a three-thousand-to-ten ticket on Captain Gaston for somebody in the grand stand that day——'

" 'Peachy-cheeked girl—nice-looking girl,' the poor devil broke in on me again. 'It was dirty of me—dirty! You wouldn't have give a dime for all the clothes she had on, and yet she had a face like a—well, like things I've seen in florists' windows. And she didn't know no more about betting than I know about astronomy. I say it was dirty of me because, down and out as she looked in them bum duds she wore, I meant to sting her—coaxing her to play a plug that nobody'd have given a million-to-one chance to cop, and then grabbing her whole ten-spot when she only meant to gamble one bean. Dirty was no name for it. It doesn't let me out a nickel's worth that it worked out different and that Captain Gaston win that chunk for her. But I'm glad now—me laying here, all through—that she win her three thousand, though I'm sorry I done you that way, boss.'

"I've regretted since that I didn't let it go at that—that I didn't let the poor chap believe, for the little time he had left, that this girl who had made the wager with him, and who seemed to have hit his imagination a belt, really had profited finely by the bet which he had urged upon her solely for the good of his own pocket. But, had I done that, he still would have felt badly over what he would have considered my losing end of the transaction. So I told the truth.

" 'Joe,' I said to him, 'no such ticket as that three-thousand-to-ten one on Captain Gaston that you're talking about was presented at my pay-off line.'

"He would have sat up in the bed to stare at me the harder, but he was too weak and fell back.

" 'The ticket wasn't cashed?' he said in his quavery, weaker-growing voice.

" 'Not cashed,' said I. 'Nobody showed with any such ticket.'

" 'Then,' the wounded man groaned through chattering teeth, 'I needn't have made a welsher's get-away at all? But how could I have knowed that ticket wouldn't be cashed? But it wasn't—it wasn't! And me, because I couldn't know it wouldn't be, taking the welsher's run, and hiding away from the ring, and then, because I couldn't make

a living away from the tracks, taking up with the gangsters and finishing this way. Darn it all, I never had a day's luck in my life!'

"He turned his head sidewise on the pillow. His eyes closed. There was a rattle in his throat. A young interne who had been standing a little distance away came and looked at him.

" 'He's dead,' said the interne, and I came away."

The old-timer remained silent for a space. Then, rising to indicate that he was about through for that séance, he added:

"So I've got three thousand and ten dollars of some woman's money. I don't like to owe anybody anything. My obligation to pay that money is just as great, from my point of view, as if the bet had been registered on my sheet. I was—as I remain—responsible for the action of my employee. Just why a woman with a ticket worth three thousand and ten dollars did not present it for payment at the time, and hasn't presented it to this day, is the nub of the story, to my way of thinking. What could have happened to her that she didn't?—a young and beautiful woman, too, according to poor Joe Leeds' story. Well, you're going to print this incident, aren't you? I hope that results in the holder of the Captain Gaston ticket, whoever she or he may be after the lapse of eight years, will bring or send it to me for the cash. I'm a little fussy about such matters and when my hour comes I don't want to owe a human being one penny."

The story, in essence as here given, was printed as part of the old-time bookmaker's reminiscences. The writer of that story and of this often saw the retired layer after that—saw him frequently up to the time of his death. When he was failing and close to his end he mentioned the missing Captain Gaston ticket again.

"Your newspaper story of that affair," he said, "never produced the owner of that ticket. So I'll have to go to my grave owing three thousand and ten dollars to some woman whom I have no means of paying because I don't know who or where she is, if she's alive at all. But I'm going to have a clear account of the business in a codicil to my will, with a provision that the three thousand and ten shall be paid by my executors to whatsoever person appears with or sends in the uncashed ticket. That the piece of pasteboard with Joe Leeds' speed-style penciling on it will ever show after all this time is about as long a shot as the distance in inches between here and the planet Neptune. But there never was nor will be a chance so long that it couldn't pop!"

III.

Charge off twelve more years. That brings the thread to the spool's end.

The narrator, driving southward through northern Florida, toward sunset on a crystalline October day, unwisely decided to ignore a deep hole in the road which he was rushing upon at too great speed. Coming out of the hole the car had the inevitable forward sag, the front spring having smashed down practically horizontal with the axle; no great tragedy, but, with darkness near, inconvenient. St. Augustine, with its always-open garages, lay too far behind for an attempted return there with a broken spring. A few miles to the southward lay a little town—on the edge of the fortune-making Irish-potato region of northern Florida, of which Hastings is the center—where the one garage might be open as late as sundown even if the winter tourist season had not yet begun. The car was sent limping for this small spud-made town.

But the garage was closed for the day. There was nobody in sight up or down the town's one street. Even the agent of the railroad station across the way had locked up and gone. The sun was dipping below the tops of the pines and palmettos. Dusk soon would be gathering.

The car's driver floundered joylessly in his seat. Night ready to swoop. Busted spring. Garage, barred and bolted, as blank as a mausoleum. Hungry, and no restaurant visible. Dog-tired after more than two hundred miles of driving that day—most of it in southern Georgia!—and no hotel to be seen.

Language! Language no less vivacious because its utterer imagined himself to be alone with his turbulent despair.

But he was not alone. One of those large, silent, expensive touring cars, muffled down to absolute secretiveness, had drawn up, with the perfect reticence of which it was capable, back of the far less taciturn disabled car, the chattering motor of which had rendered impossible any hearing by its driver of the other's arrival at the rear. So

the language still was in process of emission when a calm voice stopped its flow.

"Helps sometimes." An understanding smile went with this. "Engine trouble?"

"No. Busted spring."

He was a spare, well-kept man of forty-five or so, very neat in a fresh business suit of gray with a cap to match. He examined the broken spring.

"Lucky not to've had to be towed in, with that," he said tranquilly. "Take only an hour or so to have a new spring clapped on, in the morning."

He was standing beside the driving seat of the disabled car, the motor of which had been shut off to make possible the exchange of speech, and now for the first time, as it seemed, he glanced at the narrator's face. His eyelids, already slightly pinched by the glare of the Florida sun—which also had bronzed his features to a Seminole's color—became more close pressed than ever. For fifteen seconds he regarded the writer with an unwinking contemplative gaze.

"Curiously familiar to me, your face," he said then.

"That goes two ways," he was told. "Your face seems to whisk back from some long-ago somewhere."

"New Yorker?"

"Yes."

"May have run across each other up there. But 'long ago' would be right, seeing that I quit New York for Florida twenty years ago and have lived here ever since." Then, after a pause: "Your car'll be safe here for the night. Nobody'll touch it."

"Nobody'll touch it, presumably, if somebody's seen to be sleeping in it," was the reply.

"You won't have to do that," he said. "I've a place near here. Plenty of room. Be glad of a New York man's company—especially one whose countenance, to put it that way, somehow seems natural to me."

There had been as yet no exchange of names. The narrator, leaving his own car standing in front of the garage, got into the driving seat with the hospitably disposed owner of the big silent one. Nothing much was said during the ride to the westward of the little town, the road, having been deeply rutted by heavy potato trucks, being one that called for careful driving. A couple of miles of this picky steering carried the car out of that rut through the white-arched gate of its driver's immense potato farm, the beautifully level roads of which were top dressed with coquina rock. The car stopped before the post-colonial columns of a big white house, set amid an acre or so of well-mowed St. Augustine grass, with the rich land of the spud ranch extending almost as far as the eye could see in all directions. His "place!" He had said that as if it had been a stuffy bungalow, and it was a superb estate! His guest, scrubbing and changing in a handsome room with a luxurious bath on the second floor, could note with what perfect taste the entire house was furnished.

The dinner—a memorable meal for a man ahungered!—passed with the interchange of perfunctory talk. The host plainly was an abstainer from garrulity and the guest could be excused from gabbling on the ground of road fatigue. Oddly enough, there still was no exchange of names. It just happened that way.

But in every human situation the presto!—change! potentiality lies cocoonwise, ready for the swiftest metamorphosis! Rising from that well-appointed table, host and guest passed to a lounging room which, with its deep, wallowy chairs, padded stool rests for the feet, everywhere-at-hand smoking stands and so on, patently had been furnished by a student of the male at ease.

On the wall, directly opposite the room's entrance, hanging over a table on which rested a huge cloisonné vase containing a great wealth of fragrant freshly exfoliated white oleander blossoms, was a large framed photograph, enlarged manifestly from a snapshot, which quickly engaged the interest of the teller of this tale: the interest first, then immediately the intent searching back for a clew.

The woman, white clad, stood at happy, smiling ease beside a giant white-flowering oleander. She was, at a guess, thirty-five and astonishingly lovely. Probably just before the snapping of the photograph she had tucked in the cluster of oleander blossoms which adorned her dark hair. The massed blossoms in the vase placed below the picture seemed designedly to be exhaling their fragrance in memory of what suggestively at least had been the woman's favorite flower.

Elusively remote yet uncannily insistent, the face of the pictured woman demanded, almost as with a voice, identification if by the sheerest feat of memory on the part of this present writer. Still——

"My wife," subduedly said the host, somber-eyed. "She is——" He halted at the word upon his lips, then went around it. "She is no longer with me."

From a hard, coquina-paved road close to the windows came the sound of galloping hoofs—one of the farm negroes, no doubt, going, horseback, on an errand.

Eyes bent, with a supreme effort of memory searching, on the woman's pictured face, then the sudden hoofbeats in the night—so a flash of light struck through the fog of years! Old Time crumbled into deliquescence, the association of ideas worked like a swift chemical precipitation in a crucible. This narrator could speak with certainty, and he did.

"When I saw that lady in the grand stand of a New York race track one afternoon a good many years ago—twenty years at least, it must be—I didn't know she was Jack Druff's wife, though I now recall that Jack was regarding her intently just before she left the stand," he said to his transfixed host. "Glad to see you again, Jack."

His features twitching with amazement, Jack Druff, both muscular hands extended, fairly leaped for the writer's hands.

"Didn't I know I'd known you!" he broke out, hoarse. "Why, of course you're——" he uttered volleyingly not only the writer's proper full name but, doing it over, prefixed thereto the nickname by which his guest had of old been known in the press boxes of New York race tracks. A sort of hysteria of recognition had been roused within the man who up to this moment had been so markedly reserved.

"You saw her that day—the only time she ever visited a race track? Why, man, it's a miracle!" he went on in a storm of feeling. "And isn't it magnificent to meet somebody—an old friend—that saw her so long ago—why, she wasn't much more than a girl then——"

He had to fetch up short to crowd back a surge of emotion, then went on:

"Say, listen! Where are you bound? Miami? Never mind Miami! Stay here with me for a while anyhow, will you? Darn it, I tell you I'm a lonesome man! Your having seen her on that day, of all days, makes a sort of bond—— Lonesome, I tell you!—do you know what it means to *ache* from lonesomeness? Why, there's never been an hour since she went——"

It was a long time before, taken clear out of his self-imposed dormance by this chance meeting, Jack calmed down. Then, in the main, he spoke collectedly. He began, naturally enough, considering his auditor's reference to it, with the day, twenty years before, when he had lost his job as a New York race-track telegrapher. In every reference to himself, as he had been at that period of his life, he was merciless.

Jack, drinking and disregardful, had left the squalid little New York flat early on the morning of the day he was to lose his press-box job at a key. An hour after his departure the installment-furniture people swept into the flat and took every stick of furniture away, leaving Jack's wife in bare, dark rooms, with not even a chair to sit upon. An hour after that the janitor knocked on the door, got Mrs. Druff into the hall on a pretext, then deliberately locked her out of the flat.

Jack, all of his money going for the drink and the ponies, had neglected for quite a while to pay the installment-furniture folks and the landlord. So his young wife, a girl well reared on a good Connecticut farm, was homeless.

A few days before this her only living relative, a widowed aunt who conducted a boarding house in Jacksonville, Florida, had mailed her, in response to an appeal, a sufficient sum of money and a little over to carry her to the far Southern city, where she had made up her mind to go until her dissipating young husband regained—as he might under the shock of her leaving him—his decency and a sense of responsibility.

Loving her husband despite his slip into apparently hopeless soddenness and his consequent mistreatment of her, she went to the race track to see him once more before taking the train for Florida. Not to talk with him nor to tell him her purpose. Just to see him once more, herself, as she hoped, unseen. She knew he would be angry at the sight of her in a race-track grand stand. He had never once taken her to a race track, having a boyish idea that his wife mustn't mingle with the kind of people that bet on the horses. "As if my own treatment of her," sorrowfully remarked the middle-aged Jack in mentioning this, "gave me any possible justification for taking such darned highfalutin' ground!"

She purposely took the seat in the grand

stand directly back of the press box. She wanted to see Jack for the last time before going away. There he was, working at his key! He was of course facing the track and there would be little likelihood of his turning around and seeing her. He seemed to be sober. How he could pound that key! She hoped he would be a good boy when she was gone. If only he would be, of course she would come back to him. But now, of course, having no home——

All around her the women were betting on the horses. They seemed so fiercely excited about it. Well, it would be nice to have one of those beautiful horses, now having their preliminary gallops around the track, win a lot of money for one! Especially when one was so terribly in need of something just tolerably decent to wear, instead of such awful rags—she noticed people looking at her queerly! Perhaps the risk of just one dollar——

Somebody had dropped a racing program just at her feet. She picked it up. Just then the rat-eyed grand-stand runner had come along.

The reader is in possession of that part of the story.

Jack, hearing his wife's voice back of the press box, had whirled around in amazement. He was not so sober by half as he had seemed to her. His wife! In a race-track grand stand! And betting on a horse! Having some kind of an altercation with one of those triple-blanked grand-stand runners!

So Jack, utilizing the husband's Heaven-bestowed right to glare at his wife when glaring seems to be the number called for, transfixed her with his scowl. He had been glad that the scowl had frightened her into leaving the grand stand. Served her right for coming there!

But when he went to the flat that night, to find it locked and the furniture gone and no sign of a wife anywhere to greet him and to be told that he had lost his job for drunkenness, he had promptly become a sobered Jack—with his accumulation of dead alcohol, that already had wrecked his nerves, now, with the clearing of his head, building up its intolerable burden of remorse in his heart!

She wrote to him from Jacksonville. He wrung the money from somebody, as a borrow, to follow her there. He found her in charge of the boarding house of her aunt, that old woman having dropped dead of apoplexy on the very night of Jack's wife's arrival at the place. Jack's wife was overjoyed to see him again, with his face cleared and the rum all out of him. They would start life all over again. And they would be happy. And they did, and were.

Jack, leaving his wife to run the boarding house in Jacksonville, went to the little potato town about fifty miles south of there where this narrator found him twenty years later. He had grabbed the job of station-agent telegrapher there and he got right down to business.

The region was just then becoming known to outsiders as one of the richest little market-beating, early-potato-growing belts on earth. Jack, himself farm raised, saw the possibilities. The land which now is practically priceless was then comparatively cheap. He saved every cent and put it into potato-growing acreage. His wife, a manager and a money maker when she had the chance, was doing extremely well with the Jacksonville boarding house. Her savings were chipped in with Jack's for more potato ground. Three years after his arrival in Florida, Jack Druff—this lad who had been a drunken key pounder at the New York race tracks!—quit his job as station agent, employed a couple of negroes to help him, and plowed, harrowed and planted his first crop of spuds. He just happened upon a great spud year, and the crop marketed in New York for as high as seventeen dollars a barrel!

From then on, with his wife beside him, it was fast climbing. Jack got into the seed-potato game in a big way. He arranged with the right people up in Aroostook County, Maine, to sell him their seed spuds by carload lots. By careful direction, this grew into a monopoly for Jack. He became rich.

"Then we built this house," said Jack to the narrator. "She planned and furnished it. We'd won out. We had everything we needed. I'd got straight—never took a drop from the day I was let out of my track job for drinking. She was enjoying every minute of her life—a woman of superb force, of an unconquerable optimism, of a fierce loyalty, of a tender-heartedness toward the suffering of others that I can't even think about without—— Yes, and growing more

beautiful—you see that picture!—every day she lived.

"Suddenly—still a young woman, with everything to live for!—on Christmas Eve, five years ago, she——" He halted again upon the word, and strode up and down the room. "Of some kind of heart trouble that she'd never mentioned to me, but that she herself knew all about, as she told me—with her last breath as I held her in my arms——

"There's something unfair about it—unfair! Yet you see it everywhere. I'm a case. A woman, by sheer fineness and force of character, takes hold of a slipping man, enforces an inhibition upon his old mistakes, builds him up, makes something of him, makes of him a man among men, and then, having accomplished this all but impossible thing after years upon years of patient self-effacing effort, and with the sun just beginning to shine—why, my God, she dies—dies in the very flower of her life! Dies, and leaves the man she has made with her very hands—I tell you, that woman literally molded me as a sculptor models clay—leaves him to—oh, well, you understand. Unfair!"

A week later, when this narrator was making early for bed to get a good night in before starting on the southward drive through Florida at dawn, he was called into Jack's room. Jack had a rather yellowed envelope, woman's letter size, in his hand.

"Been wanting to show you this," he said. "Let me explain, first," he went on, "that I never knew, because I never asked, what horse it was that my wife had bet on, on that one visit of hers to a race track the day you saw her. She left this world without ever knowing that the one bet of her life was a winning bet. I myself would never have known it had I not come upon the ticket, thrust into this envelope among her papers, when she was gone. As an old-time turf writer, familiar with what is called the maturity of chance and the ring gambler's way of computing odds, you'll see what an extraordinary thing it was that a woman, visiting a race track for the first and only time in her life, should have chanced to bet on——"

"On so impossible a proposition, even at three hundred to one, as Captain Gaston," he was interrupted, "and that, instead of getting a ticket merely for three hundred dollars against the one dollar that she really meant to bet, she drew, against her will and desire, a Captain Gaston ticket calling for three thousand dollars to ten!"

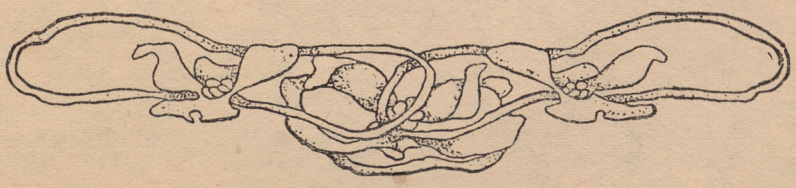
In Jack's utter baffledness the buff-colored ticket—"Cap Gaston, $3000-10" in poor Joe Leeds' swift but legible handwriting—fluttered from the envelope to the floor. The writer hereof picked it up and examined it with a justifiable curiosity. More than twenty years before he had seen that ticket scribbled by the hand of a man who, more or less directly because of that very piece of pasteboard, had died a violent death. Twelve years before the selfsame ticket had been brought again strangely to his recollection by an old bookmaker who had gone to his grave without plumbing the mystery as to why it never had been cashed. And now here, on a spud ranch in Florida, was that buff-colored Captain Gaston ticket lying in the palm of the narrator's hand! Those patternized precisians who, cloistered away as they must be from all contact with actual life, rail against what they call "the long arm of coincidence——"

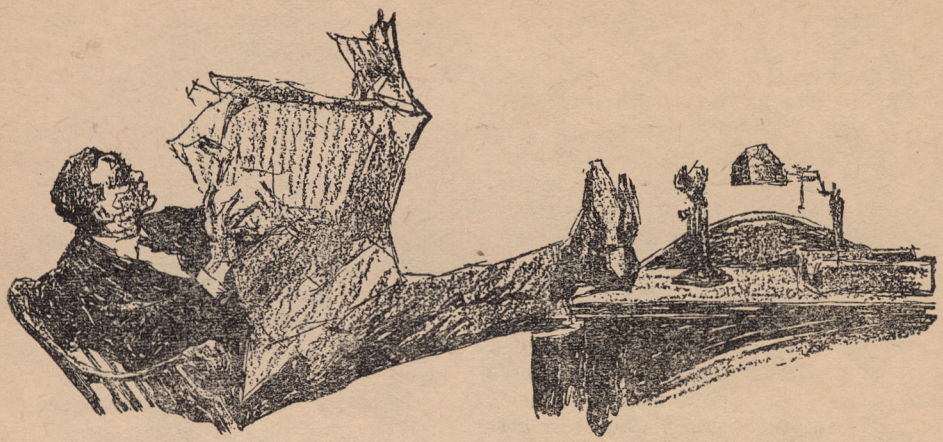
Jack Druff had to be, and was, told all that the writer hereof knew about the Captain Gaston ticket. That recital of its history was capped by the statement that the executors of a certain bookmaker's estate in New York would pay three thousand and ten dollars for the piece of buff pasteboard any time it was presented to them.

"I'll never need three thousand and ten—three million and ten, for that matter!—so bad that I'd part with this souvenir of her."

He slipped the ticket on Captain Gaston back into the yellowed envelope.

Another story by Mr. Cullen will appear in the next issue.





The Sleep Mixer

By Henry Francis Granger

Author of "Moonshine Madness," and other stories

One moment was enough for the nondescript little man with the short mustache. Neither scientists nor sleuths could guess the secret of his soporific magic—and his victims never remembered anything. Stark caught him red-handed—and woke up the next day in a hospital bed. Whereupon Haggarty narrowly escaped apoplexy and Ann Annerley, the rebel school-teacher, began developing an "absurd" hypothesis.

(*A Two-Part Story—Part I.*)

CHAPTER I.

THE morning papers featured the latest sensational robbery upon the front page:

HYPNOTIZED AND ROBBED.

MYSTERIOUS THEFT ON UPPER SEVENTH AVENUE.

Sixty Thousand Dollars in Cash Besides Jewels Stolen—Wealthy Importer and Chauffeur Asleep in Car.

Money and Valuables Gone.

About six-forty-five, last evening, Patrolman Adolph Shults, walking his beat south on Seventh Avenue, noticed a large touring car standing in the middle of the block between One Hundred and Thirty-ninth and One Hundred and Fortieth Streets. The car was headed north and stood about halfway between the east curb and the center of the avenue. The top was raised, head and rear lights burning.

The policeman says he noticed the car because it stood so far out from the curb that northbound cars were swinging into the southbound line of traffic to pass. It was too dark to distinguish the occupants from the sidewalk, but as the drivers of passing cars paid no attention, except to swing around it, the officer concluded it was only a temporarily stalled motor, and passed south on his beat.

At the corner of One Hundred and Thirty-ninth Street the officer stopped and looked back. The touring car still stood in the middle of the block. Officer Shults says he stood on the corner for a couple of minutes, expecting the car to start on. Then he retraced his steps to warn the driver to pull over to the curb. As he stepped into the street opposite the car he could make out the form of the chauffeur at the wheel and that of a man in the rear seat. The policeman called to the driver to move on. The occupants of the car paid no attention. Shults crossed over, stepped on the running board and seized the chauffeur by the shoulder. The man's body slipped forward and sagged limply over the steering wheel. The startled officer turned to the man in the tonneau. He half reclined in the rear seat directly behind the chauffeur. He was breathing heavily and seemed to be asleep. The officer tried in vain to arouse the men. He says there was no smell of liquor, no marks of violence. Both appeared to be in a heavy sleep.

By now several cars had stopped and a small crowd was collecting. The officer kept the curi-

ous back and blew his whistle for assistance. The call brought Officer Black and Roundsman Flannery from Columbus Avenue. The police lifted the chauffeur into the tonneau beside the other unconscious man and a volunteer from the crowd drove the sleeping men and the two patrolmen to St. Joseph's Hospital. For several hours all the efforts of the hospital doctors failed to arouse them. Doctor Townsend, of the hospital staff, says the occupants of the touring car did not appear to have been drugged and their symptoms were not those of persons under the influence of any known anæsthetic. They appeared more like men in a hypnotic sleep.

From the papers found upon the man in the tonneau he was found to be Aaron J. Gorgeson, the senior member of the well-known importing firm of A. J. Gorgeson & Co., and the other man was James Nash, his chauffeur. The family were notified and Mr. Gorgeson's wife and son drove at once to the hospital.

Nash, the chauffeur, was the first to respond to the efforts of the hospital physicians. A half hour later the doctors succeeded in arousing Mr. Gorgeson. The importer at once inquired if his money was safe. This was the first intimation the police had that a robbery had been committed. Later, Mr. Gorgeson recovered sufficiently to tell his story to the police.

The firm of Gorgeson & Co. occupy the first three floors of the Gorgeson Building on lower Fourth Avenue. Mr. Gorgeson said that yesterday afternoon he remained late at his office arranging for the customs release, the first thing this morning, of a valuable importation of merchandise. Sixty thousand dollars in currency had been drawn from the Trader's Bank just before closing yesterday. This money, in bills of large denomination, was placed in a heavy envelope and secured by a rubber band. The package of money had been placed in a small safe in Mr. Gorgeson's private office.

Mr. Gorgeson and his manager, Henry Hoffman, remained working in the private office after the other employees had left. The only other occupants of the premises were Michael Murphy, a porter, and Peter Hogan, a private watchman. The chauffeur, Nash, brought the car down about five-thirty and was waiting in front of the building. It was Mr. Gorgeson's intention to drive direct from his home in the morning and release his goods before the banks would open.

The importer says it was about six o'clock when he and Hoffman finished their work. When they were ready to leave Mr. Gorgeson took the package of money from the safe, placing it in the breast pocket of his coat. He wore a light overcoat, and both coats were buttoned. The importer also carried a heavy gold watch and wore a valuable black pearl in his tie and a diamond ring on the little finger of his left hand. Gorgeson and Hoffman left the building together. Hoffman walked west toward Broadway and Mr. Gorgeson got into the waiting car. The chauffeur drove north on Fourth Avenue to Thirty-second Street, turning over to Fifth Avenue and continuing up Fifth Avenue to One Hundred and Tenth Street, where they crossed over to Seventh Avenue. Mr. Gorgeson says they were driving rapidly and had passed several cars going north on Seventh Avenue.

From here on Mr. Gorgeson's statement was corroborated by that of the chauffeur. As they approached One Hundred and Thirty-ninth Street the Gorgeson car was directly behind a small runabout, and the avenue for a block ahead of the runabout was clear of cars traveling north. After passing One Hundred and Thirty-ninth Street Nash opened up to pass the runabout. At the same time the driver of the runabout veered sharply to the left, cutting across in front of Nash, who had to brake sharply to avoid a collision.

When Nash, who had brought his car almost to a standstill, got under headway again the runabout was zigzagging from side to side apparently out of control. Chauffeur Nash drew over to the east side of the avenue, driving very slowly. About the middle of the block the runabout veered to the right and came to an abrupt stop with both front wheels jammed against the curb. The runabout stopped at right angles to the avenue and directly in front of Gorgeson's car.

As the importer's car turned out to pass, the driver of the runabout sprang out and walked toward them. Both Mr. Gorgeson and Nash remember the stranger was smiling and seemed in no way disturbed. They described him as a smallish man with a close-cut mustache. It was too dark to distinguish his features clearly, but he seemed to be about thirty-five years of age and Mr. Gorgeson says he spoke in a cultured voice. As the unknown crossed diagonally in front of the importer's car Nash was obliged to come to a standstill to avoid running him down. The stranger passed to the left of the car and spoke to Mr. Gorgeson. He explained that his steering gear was acting badly, an old trouble that he could quickly remedy, but he had forgotten his flash light. He asked to borrow a light, explaining that it would take him but a minute to make the adjustment.

Mr. Gorgeson was leaning forward, his left hand on the door. He expressed regret that there was no portable light in his car. At this moment another car darted past, barely clearing the Gorgeson car. With a startled exclamation the stranger sprang on the running board of the importer's car, striking sharply against Mr. Gorgeson's hand. The car flashed by and the stranger stepped down with an apology to Mr. Gorgeson. Then the unknown asked Nash for a couple of matches and the chauffeur produced a paper folder of them. The stranger fumbled the small package in his gloved fingers and it dropped on the chauffeur's lap. Nash recovered the matches and passed them back. The stranger thanked him, apologized for delaying them and again passed in front of the Gorgeson car toward his own. Nash opened the throttle, but before he could start the car the stranger had turned back and was searching the roadway in the glare of the headlights.

"I've dropped those confounded matches," he called.

That is all either Mr. Gorgeson or Nash remember. Officer Shults says when he first saw the importer's car there was no runabout in the vicinity, and that when he returned to the car

the engine was not running. The officer says he allowed no one near enough to rob Gorgeson. When Mr. Gorgeson was received at the hospital no package of money was found, and he wore neither watch, scarfpin, nor ring.

So ended the account of one of those mysterious robberies with which Providence from time to time sees fit to torment both ourselves and the police.

CHAPTER II.

Jamison Stark's office was shining with newness and the buckram-bound volumes of his working library had accumulated little dust when the war broke out. He had turned the key on it with regret—his castle of dreams—and gone to the first Plattsburg camp.

"His clients would not suffer." He had grinned at the thought, then had grown suddenly serious. The dream people, the important clientele to come, were almost as real to twenty-four as Mary Cassello, who was seeking to recover fifty dollars of back wages, and the few other matters of like moment that made up his present docket. To leave all this! For the moment it had dimmed his patriotic ardor. But the lure of the great adventure held him and, in the time that followed, the budding law practice became a thing of vague memories, jumbled up with security, dry feet, palatable food and the personal comfort of some previous incarnation.

Jamison Stark had gone overseas a second lieutenant and had come back with a wound stripe and a captaincy—had come back to the little office grown dim and dusty and had attempted to carry on from where that different boy had stopped nearly three long years before.

He found that he did not fit in. The old ambitions seemed trivial things, dry as dust. He had trampled his old standards of value into the mud of Flanders. The "Big Interests," which he had once aspired to guide round the rocks and shoals, had dwarfed into insignificance in the eyes of the man who had taken part in thwarting the wild ambition of kings.

"As well be a battlefield guide to the bunch of rotters who played it safe and are now swarming over to see what we did——"

His lips twisted into a hard smile. He believed he had suffered some unnecessary things in France because of certain of those same big interests. But that was over. He wanted no more of it. But neither did he seem to want anything which the year and a half since his return had offered. The old world had become a very unsatisfactory dwelling place for Jamison Stark.

It is at this time that we take our first glimpse of him.

The day was a hazy October one—the sort of day that in the country epitomizes the joys of summer and binds them in a vague regret. In town one is mainly conscious that it is still uncomfortably warm. Jamison Stark sensed the rising temperature but his mental barometer was down and falling. He came downtown late, wasted the morning, lunched alone and expected to waste—he called it "kill"—the afternoon. Tilted back in a chair, his feet on the desk, he opened an afternoon paper. He knew nothing about it but right there Fate rang the bell and life changed for Jamison Stark.

He opened the paper at the sporting page and read back to the beginning. The State had a new boxing law and Jamison Stark was interested in boxing. He knew what the game had done to keep up the morale in training camps and back of the lines in France. For weeks he had been reading press prognostications of what the new law would do for the sport and he realized, as did every thoughtful person, that public opinion favored clean boxing to a decision. And this day he read of the decision of the boxing commission to place its own interpretation on the statute and bar champion heavyweight performers.

"That will do for the sport, all right," he muttered wrathfully. "Now if they will decide to race only white horses weighing less than eight hundred pounds and cut home runs out of baseball, the country's safe!"

He tossed the paper aside in disgust. But he picked it up again. And as he skimmed over the news he saw it stated that more than one hundred thousand thefts and seventy-four murders had been committed in the city during the previous twelve months.

"A population that survives that condition of affairs should get awfully peeved if two heavyweights were allowed to box!" Stark grinned at the thought and turned to the first page of the paper. And there he read the account of the Gorgeson robbery.

Holdups and robberies had grown to be of daily occurrence. Jamison Stark had grown so accustomed to lurid tales of crimes that

he no longer read the details. There was a tiresome sameness of detail. But the headlines of the Gorgeson affair prompted him to read farther. Here was something new. Guns and sandbags were common. But now —hypnotism. The affair struck Stark as a joke. He mused over it with whimsical persistence. "Suppose some Eastern adept of mass-hypnotism should saunter into police headquarters and put the whole bunch to sleep?"

Suddenly Stark swung his feet to the floor. The Gorgeson robbery had been committed in Haggarty's precinct. He would call Tommy up and chaff him a bit. Detective Sergeant Thomas Haggarty, had been Jamison Stark's top sergeant in France. He had been efficient and Stark liked him. Since their return they had become firm friends.

The station reported Detective Haggarty out on duty. Leaving a message for Haggarty to call him up, Stark's feet went back to the top of his desk. He had lost interest in the Gorgeson affair; in fact, he had lost interest in pretty much everything.

What the matter was Jamison Stark did not know. He did not suspect that anything was the matter with himself, but he was quite certain that times were generally out of joint. Thousands of men all over the world were suffering from the same malady. You cannot exalt men to the pinnacle of strange emotions, keep them straining there for weeks and years, and expect them to react to normal at a word. None of them will ever be the same men again. Many of them become totally different men. The lump of iron cools into steel, while men with moral fiber of small tenacity break to worthlessness. Had they never strained to war's demands they would have remained average citizens. Now, they have changed to unclassified types—types whose mental and moral reactions are not yet understood.

This is a reason for the increase of lawlessness and provides one explanation of the failure of established police methods to cope with the situation. The police understood the old criminal mind and were familiar with its methods. They knew the types and the individuals. Prevention and detection of crime had been developed into something of an exact science. They are no less faithful, no less competent—along the old lines—than they ever were, but their knowledge has suddenly become useless, their methods obsolete. When the winds carried the first German gas over the allied front, war changed. When the war ended, the world had changed.

Jamison Stark was dozing in his chair when the telephone bell aroused him. Haggarty was on the wire.

"Have you caught the Gorgeson robber yet, Tommy?" asked Stark.

"What do you know about it, captain?"

"That is a good Irish answer, Tommy, and I'll give you the mate to it. You'll not catch that chap in a hurry."

"We'll have him in a week," snapped back Haggarty. "That's an inside job."

"Old stuff," jeered Stark. "You chaps date back before the war."

"Can you meet me at Fourth Avenue and Fourteenth Street in half an hour, captain?"

"All right—sure."

Stark hung up the phone. Anything was better than idling in an empty office waiting for work that could no longer interest him if it came. A sunny nature and a highly imaginative mind had once combined in him for contentment, but grim experiences had effected a change. Whether it was the mental reacting upon the physical, or the physical reacting upon the mental, must be left to the doctors and the psychologists. Certain it was that the Jamison Stark who left for Plattsburg was a different man than the Jamison Stark who returned from France. Physically different, in things apart from the normal change of time and wounds and altered habit; and mentally different in outlook and conception. He had mustered out physically sound. His wounds were not of a nature to effect permanent disability of any sort, and functional organs and general health had stood the strain without damage.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered, narrow-waisted chap, with thick, brown hair and an angular-featured face. His nose was large, bony—the dominating, aggressive type—but angled off, rather than rounded at the end; his chin long and square across from straight jaw lines. A face a painter could outline with a few bold strokes. But the painter must needs be skillful to get the eyes and the mouth. Wide, gray eyes that had the trick of smiling and the faculty of sudden, steely glare, cold and merciless; a mouth that twisted up in comradeship with the smiling eyes and snapped to a straight, hard line to mate the merciless ones. Jamison Stark was a good man to tie to, an uncompromising enemy; a skeptic with faith, a dreamer with the energy of accomplishment; he pos-

sessed imagination coupled with cold logic, and audacity that could counsel with caution. He was born something of all this, he had become all of it, and he was still unspoiled.

As he rode uptown to meet Haggarty he was brooding again over the unsatisfactoriness of things in general and his own incapacity in particular. And then his thoughts drifted, with something of amused sympathy, to that which the press termed a "crime wave." His attitude toward this development would have aroused consternation in the Jamison Stark that was. He appreciated the fact but it did not bother him. Not that he felt sympathy with wrong, but he had stopped judging human actions by old standards. The corners of his mouth bent upward as the thought came that he had been robbed by practically every one from his tailor to his landlord, since his return.

They were all out to get theirs while the getting was good, keeping within the letter of the law while giving full scope to the spirit of banditry. Not always keeping within the letter, as numerous Federal indictments of fat merchandisers of eminent respectability testified. These other bandits, entirely outside the law, they had less finesse and more physical courage. Therein lay the difference.

To the soldier returned from the war, the fat proprietor who gouged his unrighteous profits from the stomachs and backs of the masses was vastly less heroic and not morally less guilty than the man who in turn took the plunder from them at the point of a gun. Without knowing anything about it Jamison Stark had reached the decision Fate intended him to make.

Detective Haggarty was talking to the officer on fixed post when Jamison Stark reached Fourteenth Street. He saw Stark first and met him at the curb.

"Now, what do you know about this Gorgeson business?" was his greeting.

"Not a thing in the world, Tommy."

"Then why your interest?"

"Did you ever read of Stalky, Tommy?"

"Who was he?"

"Chap in one of Kipling's yarns. I felt it my duty to emphasize your uselessness, sergeant." Stark grinned cheerfully.

"Huh! Been reading the fool newspapers," growled Haggarty. "They don't hand us nothing for what we do—only give us the devil for what they think we don't do."

"Very clearly stated, Tommy," laughed Stark. "Keen fellows those newspaper men. Even a bunch of big advertising, millionaire deputy commissioners can't keep them quiet on 'The police have a theory' and 'The police have a clew' stuff. You have reached the point where you must show them something. They are printing statistics now, Tommy—paralyzing crime statistics."

Sergeant Haggarty glared at his former captain, his face purpling.

"We've got the jails full! Yeggs, petermen, strong arms, dips—all kinds."

"Suspects, Tommy," said Stark sweetly.

For the moment Haggarty was speechless.

"Sus-sus-pects," he stuttered. "They've got records, all of 'em!"

"Of course," said Stark. "You are rounding up the old-timers. They have done nothing, so they are not hiding out, and you go and gather in a lot of ex-criminals every time something new is pulled off. The men who are raising heck to-day are not old-time criminals, Tommy, any more than D'Annunzio was a soldier, or Lenine a statesman, before the war. To-day's criminal is a new development. To-day you must learn a new psychology instead of studying old finger prints, Tommy." Stark thrust his arm through that of the puzzled Haggarty. "Where to, Tommy?"

"Chief sent me down to see Gorgeson."

"Fine. I'm your friend Watson. Lead on, Sherlock."

"Sure, I'll take you along, captain." Haggarty was all detective again. "This was an inside job. Just watch me tie this guy up."

It was a short walk to the Gorgeson building. Without delay they were ushered into the importer's private office.

"I'm Detective Haggarty, —th precinct." He flashed a badge in the palm of his hand and thrust it back into his pocket.

The importer bowed gravely.

"I want the facts about this robbery business." Haggarty began.

"If you gentlemen will be seated I can tell you what I have already told the police and the press."

"Tell us the facts," snapped Haggarty.

Mr. Gorgeson looked surprised but made no comment. He retold the story.

"Who brought the money from the bank?" asked Haggarty.

"My secretary, Mr. Hemmingway."

"Where is he?"

Mr. Gorgeson pressed a button and a sallow young man came through a rear door. "This is my secretary, Mr. Hemmingway."

The detective eyed him with a scowl that slowly spread into a grin. "So—this is your secretary." The sneering insolence of the remark stiffened Stark in his chair. He burned with indignation at what he believed to be an unwarranted insult. Then he relaxed with relief, blended with sudden sympathy for the secretary. He saw that Haggarty knew the man—knew something to his discredit. Gorgeson was watching in amazement.

Haggarty lolled back in his chair with an air of amused satisfaction. "So you don't know me, Hemmingway?" he taunted.

The secretary had gone white but his eyes held the detective's face steadily.

"I suppose you didn't know that Mr. Gorgeson was going to carry that money home last night, Hemmingway?"

The secretary turned to his employer, ignoring the question.

"Am I suspected of knowing something about this robbery, Mr. Gorgeson?"

"I—I did not know that you were." The importer was plainly distressed.

"You don't have to answer if you think it will tend to incriminate you," insinuated Haggarty.

The secretary snapped around, his eyes blazing in a face white as chalk. "I'll answer any question you ask, Mr. Detective."

"Beginning to remember me now, are you?" sneered Haggarty.

"I remember you."

The voice sounded ominously quiet to Jamison Stark who watched the white, drawn face and flashing eyes in steadily growing sympathy. In spite of the insinuations of Haggarty and the disquieting admission of previous acquaintance with the officer, Stark was on the side of the secretary. He wanted to warn him to be careful what he might say. In his sudden sympathy for this stranger he was willing to give battle to his friend. And the knowledge that this was so held him quiet. He was there on Haggarty's invitation. That officer was his friend and he was doing his duty as he saw it. Interference was unwarranted. So the visible Jamison Stark sat quietly in his chair, while inwardly he fumed to consciousness of the decision he was to make. He had found work that would interest him —the first thing that had seemed worth doing since he returned from France.

"Are you going to answer my question as to whether or not you knew Mr. Gorgeson intended to carry that money home?" Haggarty was a one-idea man and he was sticking to his point.

"He did not tell me he intended to. I did not think about it particularly." The quiet tone was strangely at variance with the steely glint of his eyes.

The detective took him over every moment of the preceding twenty-four hours, striking back with apparent irrelevance to previous months and years until he had covered the entire five years of Hemmingway's employment by Gorgeson & Co. And Hemmingway answered every question in the same quiet manner that contrasted so strangely with the tension of his physical poise. He seemed to be watching for something—something apart from the examination into the Gorgeson robbery.

At last Haggarty seemed to have exhausted the subject. In the opinion of Jamison Stark nothing had been disclosed that even remotely connected the secretary with the robbery, or from which knowledge could be presumed.

"That's all." For a long minute Haggarty had been staring in silence at the secretary. "But, if you're in this, Hemmingway, I'll pin it to you, this time."

With a cry of rage Hemmingway sprang forward.

"There never was any other time—or any time you could pin anything discreditable on me!" he raged, standing over the officer with clenched hands.

The better type of policeman is a cold proposition in a crisis. Haggarty never even glanced up. "Maybe not. But stand back, Hemmingway, or I'll take you in now." He spoke softly, without emotion.

For a moment the man hesitated, then he turned silently and left the room.

"I should like to ask you a few more questions, Mr. Gorgeson. What do you know about this man Hemmingway?" Haggarty clamped an unlighted cigar in his teeth and sat forward in his chair.

"I know all about him." Mr. Gorgeson answered in some heat. "He has been with us for five years. Could not get into the army because of physical disability. He came to me from Solomon. I know all about that, too, and I know, as your office does,

that he was not implicated in the Solomon affair."

Haggarty's face relaxed in a grin. "Just the long arm of coincidence, I suppose?"

For nearly an hour the detective took the importer over the old ground. Mr. Gorgeson had opened the envelope and counted the bills, sixty thousand dollars, before he placed the package in the pocket of his coat. He had buttoned his coat and then drawn on his overcoat and buttoned that. At all times he had felt the bulge of the package of money under the pressure of his right arm. No one but Hoffman knew he had the money with him. Nothing had happened until the strange car zigzagging in front had brought them to a stand. He was certain the car had not traveled any great distance in front of them. He described the car as a "flivver." He could give no better description of the man than he had given at first. He was slightly below middle height and wore a short mustache.

Mr. Gorgeson ridiculed the idea of hypnotism. The stranger had spoken but few words and had little more than glanced in his direction. As the man approached the car the importer had leaned forward and grasped the top of the door with his left hand. He thought of the package of money and drew his right arm close to give the bundle a reassuring squeeze. He was not alarmed or even suspicious of the man, but he was armed and ready for any untoward move.

He was startled when the man sprang to the running board. For an instant he had not understood the reason and he held the stranger covered by an automatic in his right-hand overcoat pocket. When the man was searching the roadway for the dropped matches the importer remembered turning the ring on his finger because the hand smarted from the impact when the stranger had struck against it. The next thing he remembered was waking in the hospital.

The only new fact disclosed was that Mr. Gorgeson was still slightly affected by whatever thing or influence had caused him to lose consciousness the night before. There was a numbness in his fingers and feet.

CHAPTER III.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked Stark as he and Haggarty reached the street.

"Nothing to it. Inside job, just as I said."

Stark smiled incredulously. "You still imagine crime must run true to old form?"

"Sure it does. Some one inside—I say Hemmingway—knew the old man was going to carry that wad home. They had been ready for the first time he might carry anything worth while. Hemmingway tipped the other fellow off and he stopped the car and got away with the swag."

"How did he do it?" asked Stark.

"Used chloroform, or knock-out dope of some kind. You see, captain, fellows like Gorgeson don't give you the real facts. They think they're wise. They don't give you the right dope when they slip up somewhere themselves—never say anything about where they played into the other fellow's hands. They'd rather lose than have any one think they're easy marks. As he tells it, looks as if it was nothing Gorgeson could have prevented. Fact is, he made a sucker play, somewhere. Maybe the chauffeur is in on it. The office is getting the dope on him."

"You may be right, in part, Tommy, but Hemmingway had nothing to do with it."

"That's where you're wrong, captain. Hemmingway's a crook."

"No," disputed Stark.

"Say! That man Hemmingway was with Solomon! The slickest crook ever in Wall Street. We landed Solomon in stir for a ten-year bit. And that was on a minor count in the indictment. If it hadn't been he overlooked one little matter—probably never was called to his attention—we'd never got him. He fleeced people from all over the country—though none of his own kind; Solomon always stood high with his own people. Well, they got some of the money back, prorated something like twelve per cent. A big wad never was located. The newspapers said Solomon got away clear with over ten million. That was just newspaper talk. But the police know Solomon hung on to over two million. We never could find it. He made a fight to get away through all the courts but that little oversight held him.

"Then his friends tried the sympathy gag. Said he was not morally responsible. Said he was the victim of a legal technicality. Then they said he was being persecuted because he was a Jew. They never let up for a minute. Somebody was always out with a petition. I suppose a lot of 'em honestly thought he was a martyr. Nothing to it."

"What was the outcome?"

"Solomon got sick. Lot of big doctors said he had tuberculosis and would die if they didn't let him out. Finally, the governor pardoned him when he had done less than three years. Say, captain, that T. B. stuff was the bunk. That guy might have everything else, but he'll never have consumption."

"What became of him?"

"He's still around Wall Street. He's a little fellow, only five feet two; but he's got fat—so fat he's bigger around than he is high. And he's got a big head—biggest head I ever saw. He's as bald as a teacup on top, with a fringe of curly hair low down that sticks out over his collar. Say, that guy's got more chins than you could count in ten minutes. He's got one of those blue faces that guys with heavy black beards have, and when you see him close up you spend all your time wondering how he manages to get shaved in all those folds. Then he has a hook nose and big eyes.

"Them eyes don't match him, some way. If they was little and foxy you'd have his number in a minute, but they are big and mild looking. He's a fox just the same. But he ain't doing nothing crooked now—he don't even have an office. But he's downtown every day—trades all over the Street. They say he can read a tape and tell just what's going to happen next. He trades with some of the biggest houses—sits in one place for an hour or so and then moves over to another. From ten till three he just travels around that way and then a car comes down and picks him up on some corner and takes him home. And say, a tip from Solomon is money in the bank. He's tipped off a lot of people, and a lot of them have made killings. But not me. I'm watching that bird."

Stark smiled quizzically. "Here is a suspect made to order, Tommy. Why bother to look farther?"

Haggarty frowned. "He's too smart to go in for any strong-arm stuff."

They walked some distance in silence, Haggarty buried in thought. "No," he said at last. "Solomon's a con man. He ain't got the guts for rough work. But Hemmingway has. We couldn't get the goods on Hemmingway before. Now he's with Gorgeson when this thing's pulled off. These things don't just happen."

"It is stranger than that, in that it did happen." Stark was serious now. He had enlisted in behalf of Hemmingway and the countless unfortunate ones ever struggling in the web of circumstance.

There was something like suspicion in Haggarty's face.

"What do you know about Hemmingway?"

"Everything, Tommy. Everything he told me a few minutes ago. I saw everything you were too busy to see."

"There's nothing in that sympathy stuff, captain. Crooks are hard eggs. You can't guess them. You got to know 'em."

"You've said it, Tommy. You have pointed to the spot where the police fall down. With you fellows a man with a criminal record, or even one suspected, is always guilty. You figure that you know them. You have classified them as a distinct breed. When suspicion points in their direction you say, 'guilty,' and start in to round up enough corroborating misinformation to make your notion stick. It worked, to a degree, when most premeditated crime was committed by professional criminals. Amateurs are operating to-day, Tommy, and they play without rules."

"That's all theory, captain."

"It's new truth, Tommy. And like old truth it is not influenced by what a person was or what you think he is. Truth is a moral element. You can mold it but you cannot decompose it and no sophism can effect any alchemic transmutation of error into truth. You may get something that looks like the real thing—a fool jury may even hang a man on it—but it will not stand the real test. You are a nice lot of chaps, you cops, but you suffer from chronic suspicion that has atrophied your imagination. I am going to take a hand in the game, Tommy. I'm going into criminal practice."

They had been walking uptown as they talked. Haggarty stopped in his tracks. "You'll throw in with a sweet bunch of crooks!" he said.

"Suspects, Tommy. If you catch a real one, I'll keep clear."

CHAPTER IV.

Thereafter Jamison Stark spent much time around the criminal courts. He arranged to take assigned cases and one or two judges who knew him personally were having considerable quiet amusement over the hopeless assignments given him. But

Stark was working earnestly with renewed interest in life. He had found something that appealed to him as worth doing and he was studying to do it well.

Several weeks passed without further developments in the Gorgeson case. Several times Stark had chaffed Haggarty over his failure to materialize his chief suspect, the secretary, Hemmingway. Haggarty believed the jewelry would ultimately bring about the apprehension of the robbers. The money could not be traced, but black pearls of the size and quality of the one stolen from Gorgeson were not common. And the watch —Haggarty contended that only a fool would have taken that watch. "Some day, the watch or the pearl would land Hemmingway." Haggarty was profanely positive as to this. Then one day Haggarty phoned Jamison Stark. They had caught a girl who had Gorgeson's jewelry. Haggarty met Stark at the entrance to the police court.

"We've got one of them."

He pushed into the crowded courtroom, Jamison Stark following closely behind.

The girl had just been brought in. With a wild glance around the crowded room she turned to face the court. She was quietly dressed and her face, more bewildered than frightened, bore the stamp of refinement. Stark caught but a flash of her features as she turned but he classified her unhesitatingly—a gentlewoman.

"Are you represented by counsel?" asked the court.

"Counsel?" she repeated vaguely.

The judge was examining the information.

"You are charged with grand larceny and robbery from the person." He peered, not unkindly, over his glasses. "Have you a lawyer."

"I—I have no lawyer." The words came with a gasp and the girl swayed on her feet.

"Theatrical stuff," muttered Haggarty in Jamison Stark's ear.

"You are charged with grave offenses. You are entitled to consult with counsel before you plead. In a matter of this moment this court only sits as a committing magistrate. I——"

"Tell me," the girl broke in, "what shall I do?" Her gloved fingers were tightly clasped together but she made no gesture. She held her body erect and still, but her voice broke with a sob.

Jamison Stark stepped forward. "If the court please, I should be glad to represent the—this lady, until she may make other arrangements." He handed his card to an attendant who passed it up to the judge.

The magistrate nodded. "Are you willing Mr. Stark should appear for you?"

The girl raised her eyes to Jamison Stark's face and when she spoke again her voice was steady.

"If you please," she said simply.

The next case was called and the mill of justice worked over its sorry grist while Jamison Stark and his new client walked aside, talking softly.

"Tell me your name, please," he began.

"My name——" The girl hesitated and the quick color flowed back to the pale face

"At least the name you are known by here." He spoke casually, paying no heed to her evident embarrassment. "I hope you have not thought it necessary to give your real name, yet."

"I gave my professional name. No one there knows me by any other."

"By there, you mean——"

"The place where I board—from where they brought me."

She was gaining confidence now and indignation, choked back by fear, crept into her voice and gleamed in the eyes she raised to Stark's.

"Honest, intelligent eyes," he thought. And he was more vaguely aware that they were blue.

"I am known as Ann Annerley. I—I am on the stage."

Involuntarily she lowered her voice at the admission but Stark caught a note of defiance in the whispered words and shrewdly guessed that she had chosen contrary to the wishes of some one. But he only nodded gravely.

"Now tell me all about this trouble?"

"Why—I do not understand about it myself. We had a rehearsal this morning and when I came back home there were two men in my room, and Mrs. Ainslee—that's the landlady—was there, and they had been searching through my things. They had a man's watch and a diamond ring and a pearl they said they had found in my bureau. They did not belong to me. I never saw them before."

There was the ingenuousness of a child

blending with the direct force of honest womanhood in the simple statement. Jamison Stark found himself wondering how old she was.

"Have you a part in this play, Miss Annerley?" he asked abruptly. A second later he cursed himself for his caddishness. The girl had caught the implication. The color blazed in her face. But as quickly she thought, "If I move or speak, he will think I am acting." She fought the indignation, fear, and sudden great loneliness that swept over her, and the color ebbed and left her white and drawn.

"I am only in the chorus," she answered patiently.

Stark's regret held him speechless. He felt himself a clumsy boor. The first glimpse of her face had convinced him of her honesty. His was the intuitive understanding, stronger than reason or argument, often more reliable than evidence. He had learned to trust it in dealing with the men of his command and it had rarely failed him in the end, even though sometimes long contradicted by apparently incontrovertible fact.

He understood that sixth sense which is more common than we realize. Every one has it in degree. In animals we term it instinct. It is the flash from the inner batteries of the mind which we only half define when we call it intuition. But it must be accepted on the instant. If we try to argue or analyze, it is gone.

As Jamison Stark believed Hemmingway innocent so he believed Ann Annerley. His faith in the girl never wavered, even when in the course of his examination she developed an unaccountable reticence which stiffened into absolute refusal to answer questions as to her antecedents, or her life immediately preceding her arrival at Mrs. Ainslee's boarding house.

"Surely, Miss Annerley, you have relatives or friends somewhere who can testify to your previous good character. We must look at this thing impersonally. You and I know. But we have the court to think of, which is bound to consider evidence, not personal impressions."

"There is no one, Mr. Stark," she insisted stubbornly. "I am utterly alone in this, unless you help me."

"I shall help you all I can."

He marshaled the ugly facts as they had been brought out by such answers as she had made to his questionings. He pointed the danger. "Personally, I do not believe you know as much about the Gorgeson robbery as I do," he said. "But the police believe you are implicated, if not actually a participant. They have, you say, seen a man entering your room, which you say was locked; and following him they find Gorgeson's watch, diamond ring and pearl, hidden away. To them, this is complete proof of your guilt. Actually, it is nothing. It might have happened to any one. Presuming these are all the facts in their possession, it resolves itself into an annoying but commonplace incident.

"The police find a man, whom presumably they have followed, dodging into your room. You may have inadvertently left the door unlocked or he may have had a pass-key. You are not there and for some hours previous you have been at rehearsal—facts admitted or easily proven. Forcing the door to follow the man, they find the room empty. There is a fire escape outside a window. Presumably this man dodged into your room to escape his pursuers and finding them so close at his heels, he thrust the jewelry into the first available place and made his getaway through the window. All this does not imply knowledge upon your part. Quite the contrary. He left those things there on the remote chance that they would not be found and he could recover them again—or maybe in the belief that they would be found and cast suspicion on an innocent person. At any rate he would not be caught with them on his person.

"In the light of reason the facts testify to your innocence. But the police will not give you the benefit of the doubt. It is their business to hold you if they can. It is the business of this magistrate to weigh both the alleged facts and the reasonable probabilities. With one or two people who can testify to your previous good character the case against you dissolves and blows away. There is no reason why you should hesitate to call upon your friends in such an emergency. They cannot blame you. I believe, Miss Annerley, you are jeopardizing your liberty because of mere morbid sensitiveness."

"I am very sorry, Mr. Stark, but there is no one I can ask," she repeated.

Jamison Stark decided quickly. He would ask for an immediate hearing before the police could reënforce their case. It was an even chance that the magistrate would not

hold the girl. With assurance he was far from feeling he comforted her. "It will be all right, Miss Annerley. I will get you out of this."

To Stark's demand for an immediate hearing the assistant district attorney, assigned to the magistrate's court, demurred. Stark insisted.

"My client has been brought here without a warrant and is being held upon a serious charge. We ask for an immediate hearing."

"Is it not possible that an adjournment would be to the interest of your client?" suggested the magistrate.

"Not for an innocent person before this court," replied Stark evenly.

The magistrate frowned judicially. "I will hear the case," he decided.

Two plain-clothes men and the landlady told their stories and before they had finished, Mr. Gorgeson, who had been telephoned for, arrived and identified his property.

The evidence disclosed that the proprietor of a pawnshop on Sixth Avenue had telephoned the police that a man was attempting to pawn an unset black pearl that the pawnbroker suspected to be the Gorgeson pearl. A clerk, recognizing the pearl as of unusual value, had taken it to the proprietor in a rear room for valuation, and while the proprietor telephoned the police the clerk held the customer by telling him, "Only the boss could put a price on it and he is out for a few minutes." The man waited for some time and then becoming restless or suspicious, demanded the pearl back and made for the street. Two detectives arrived before the man with the pearl had gotten out of sight. The pawnbroker's clerk pointed the man out to the officers but the street was crowded and the clerk was not certain in his identification. Before the officers could reach the man believed to be the one who had attempted to pawn the pearl, he had crossed the street and was walking rapidly uptown.

The police, taking the clerk with them, followed. They followed the man to a boarding house in the West Forties. It was a respectable place of the better class. Not until the man turned, after fitting his key to the lock, did the pawnbroker's clerk see his face and identify him positively. The officers rushed forward but the man opened the door and it locked behind him. A maid opened the door to their ring. She had seen no one come in, but Mrs. Ainslee, who appeared, suggested after hearing the officers' description that it might be Mr. Jackson, an insurance broker who occupied the third floor front.

The police rushed upstairs. They reached the third floor just in time to see a man disappear into a rear room. They rapped on the door. The landlady had followed closely.

"That's not Mr. Jackson's room," she protested.

She knocked on Jackson's door. There was no response. One of the detectives continued to pound vigorously on the door of the rear room.

"No use rapping there. That's Miss Annerley's room and she is never in at this hour," cried the landlady.

"But a man just went into this room. Is there a Mr. Annerley?" the officer had asked.

"Indeed there is no Mr. Annerley. No man has any business in that room," snapped the landlady.

An officer threw his weight against the door.

"Miss Annerley always locks her door when she goes out," the woman cried fatuously.

It was a cheap lock that would open to almost any sort of key, but without further delay the police forced the door. The room was empty. There were two windows, the one opening on the fire escape was unlatched. One of the men threw it open and looked out. There was no one in sight. One officer went out on the fire escape, the other rushed downstairs. The maid and cook were in the front hall, leaving the rear of the lower floor unoccupied. They had seen no one. The police searched the premises but finding no trace of the man returned to the third floor. The landlady had remained there and they made careful search of Miss Annerley's room.

In a bureau drawer, thrust under some clothes, they found Gorgeson's watch, ring and pearl. The pawnbroker's clerk identified the pearl as the one the man had attempted to pawn.

At this point, Miss Annerley returned. She denied any knowledge of the articles. No one else, so far as she knew, had a key to her room. She had been at rehearsal at the Royal Theater, which is on the same block, for the previous two hours. She

called the stage manager of the Royal on the phone and one of the officers talked with him. He said she had left there only a few minutes before. The police asked her to go around to the court with them and she had gone without protest. Then the formal charge was preferred against her.

Jamison Stark's spirits rose as the examination progressed. With no diminution of faith in the girl he nevertheless feared that some untoward circumstance would develop that would justify the magistrate in holding the girl for the grand jury. He feared particularly some question as to her antecedents, her real name—the things she was so determined to hide, and the hiding of which might so readily be misconstrued to her prejudice.

Miss Annerley testified that she had never met the man Jackson, had never seen him, to her knowledge. This was corroborated by the landlady, who testified further that Miss Annerley had no men callers. There was no proof that the man followed to the house was Jackson, although it was shown that all the other male boarders were elderly men. The police had also searched Jackson's room, but nothing incriminating was found, and no money was found in either room.

Jamison Stark summed it up tersely.

An unknown man had attempted to pawn a pearl which was part of the loot obtained from Gorgeson. The police had followed him to a boarding house which happened to be the home of Miss Annerley. He had let himself in with a key. Subsequently the police had glimpsed the form of a man as it disappeared through the doorway into Miss Annerley's room. The man locked the door behind him quite as easily as he had evidently unlocked it. It was a type of lock that almost any key would open. Granting the man was the boarder Jackson, the evidence showed that Miss Annerley had no acquaintance with Jackson. If it was Jackson, he knew there was a fire escape outside her window and it might be presumed he was aware of the fact that Miss Annerley was generally away at that hour; or he could have knocked and made certain the room was unoccupied.

Also, if it was Jackson and he had taken refuge in his own room, he would have been captured, for the only means of egress from there was by the door. It may be presumed the man had no knowledge he was being trailed until he glanced around as he was about to enter the house. It is probable he then recognized the pawnbroker's clerk as one of the men behind him. Rushing upstairs, he made his way into Miss Annerley's room to reach the fire escape. With pursuit so close behind him it was merely the part of self-preservation to get rid of the loot on his person. He thrust the articles into the first available place and went out by the window. "I ask your honor——"

"Case is dismissed," the magistrate interrupted wearily.

Ann Annerley gave a little gasp, turning to Stark a face on which relief, wonder and appeal strangely blended. Stark smiled down reassuringly.

"It's all over now," he said.

"Oh, Miss Annerley, I'm so glad! I never had such an awful thing happen in all my life!" The landlady fluttered forward incoherent with conflicting emotions.

"Silence in the court!" thundered an attendant.

"Come outside," whispered Stark, turning the agitated landlady toward the door.

In the corridor outside the girl went suddenly limp. Stark threw a supporting arm around her and for a little she hung heavily upon him. The close contact thrilled him. Instinctively he drew her closer and as instinctively she reacted to the subtle change from protective to caressing pressure and struggled free. A faint color tinged her face.

Jamison Stark was a man's man, and such men are apt to revere womanhood as a creation beyond them—a thing finer than their comprehension. In such minds the individual woman is never entirely disassociated from a nebulous conception of spiritual essence. Desiring, they shrink from unwarranted contact with a sense of profanation. Stark was as quick to catch the girl's thought as to sense the impulse to gather her in his arms. Both troubled him, and manlike he turned gruff. He straightened the girl up with something very like a shake.

"Buck up! It's over now, Miss Annerley."

"I—I didn't mean to be silly, Mr. Stark. I did not realize how awful it was, until we got outside." She was making a brave effort to be calm.

"I guess I'll realize it when I see the papers full of it to-morrow, or more'n likely

to-night—me who's kept a respectable place for more'n fifteen years! Not that I——" The worthy landlady was set full speed ahead but the girl broke in.

"Will it be in the papers, Mr. Stark?" Greater fear than she had shown in court rang in her voice.

"It is possible," he admitted. "But that is of no great importance. I mean it cannot seriously affect either of you. But there may be some police surveillance for a time that may be annoying. Perhaps we'd better consider possible contingencies. I would suggest that you both come to my office tomorrow, say three o'clock." As he fumbled for a card he waited eagerly for the girl's answer.

The landlady reported a lengthy list of duties that must be attended to on the morrow, but at the end it was decided they would come. Reluctantly, Stark turned back to find Haggarty.

"Didn't I tell you, captain, that pearl would land 'em?" began the sergeant.

"Perhaps it will, if you ever catch the man who had it."

"Ever catch him! Why, we know who they all are and where they are now."

"Something turn up since I left?" inquired Stark.

"Say, captain, quit your kidding. You know we have the right bunch marked down now."

"I see nothing of the sort. But then I'm not a detective, Tommy."

"You bet you ain't, or you'd never have fallen for that skirt," jeered Haggarty.

"Suppose you try to be sensible." Stark's tone had grown chilly. "I am just as anxious to see the thief who robbed Gorgeson, and any accomplices, caught and convicted as you are. I've no particle of sympathy for that sort of thing. That includes the man who tried to pawn the pearl and later planted the stuff in Miss Annerley's room. But Miss Annerley is not connected in any way with that man, or with the real robber."

"Time will tell."

When Stark replied it was with all his old friendliness. "You stick to your theories, and I'll stick to mine, Tommy. I want you to land the Gorgeson robber, if you can, and I'll help if possible."

"That's fair enough, only don't blame me, captain, if I get the goods on some client of yours."

"Blame you, Tommy! I'll thank you!"

CHAPTER V.

There was a considerable gathering in the smoking room when Jamison Stark dropped in at his club that evening. The late afternoon papers contained accounts of the examination in the magistrate's court and reviewed at length the details of the Gorgeson robbery, renewing the speculation as to the probable cause for the condition in which the importer and his chauffeur were found.

There was also an interview with a noted physician who was successfully practicing induced somnambulism in the treatment of physical and mental disease; and another interview with an Eastern visitor, recently arrived with the avowed intent of establishing some sort of supercult of veracity. The Easterner had grasped the opportunity the reporter presented to explain his doctrine that the world is fed with little truth and many lies; that we absorb so many lies and blind follies mixed with the essential verities that the first duty is to sacrifice everything in a general intellectual housecleaning.

To him the known was wrong and the unknown right. He saw nothing strange in the suggestion that Gorgeson might have been hypnotized in an unusual manner, and talked learnedly, if confusingly, of mass hypnosis. As any other hypothesis must lead to a commonplace explanation, he most naturally inclined to the unusual and ended in complete indorsement of the theory that Gorgeson and the chauffeur had fallen victims to some superadept.

But the American physician vigorously disputed this theory. In his opinion, if the facts were correctly stated the men could not have been hypnotized.

The gathering greeted Stark with jeering good fellowship. The Gorgeson case was the topic of conversation as he entered. The newspapers had mentioned his name, and that fact rather than any particular interest in the affair had started the talk that was veering round to an academic discussion of the phenomena of hypnotism. Billy Waddingham interrupted the man who was the center of interest for the moment, by shouting, "Come over here, Jimmy." And then, as Stark approached, "Well, Jimmy, did she slug old Gorgeson or just nail him with her hypnotic eye?" he asked.

Jamison Stark drew up a chair. "She knows nothing about it."

"Never knew but one lawyer who had a guilty client," drawled Waddingham.

Stark smiled but said nothing.

"Tell us about it, Stark," urged Burke Frasier.

"I know nothing more than you have read in the papers."

"What was the matter with Gorgeson and his driver?" persisted Frasier.

"That's a problem for the doctors," said Stark.

"Doctor Cooper was just going to tell us something about that," broke in Waddingham. "By the way, Jimmy, have you met Cooper? Just joined up with us—Jamison Stark, Doctor Cooper."

The men shook hands.

"I should like to hear your opinion, Doctor Cooper."

"Doc was about to explain how the men in the car might have come under hypnotic influence," explained Waddingham.

"Not as strong as that, Waddingham," protested the doctor. "I only suggested that it was not impossible for it to have happened."

"Same thing," Waddingham muttered.

"Billy is in the insurance business, Doctor Cooper. Words mean nothing to him, except as a means to an end," Stark explained gravely.

"I was just saying, Mr. Stark, that we know little about hypnosis. We sometimes get an effect, just as we get an electric spark. We understand the mechanical arrangement through which it functions, but we know little of the how or why. By employing various methods we induce hypnosis. This implies a mind condition in which the mental action is under the control of the one who has induced the state. It is scientifically explainable on the supposition of duplex personality. It is believed a secondary consciousness controls such mental phases, of which, objectively, we know nothing. We know positively of greatly varying results. There are well-authenticated reports of more astounding results obtained by Old World adepts. I only contend that in dealing with unknown forces any result is possible. In the case of these two men several eminent doctors have stated that they are unable to explain therapeutically the cause of their condition. Something caused it. Then, why not hypnotism? This is all of my argument."

There was a pause, and then, before any one spoke the doctor added, "I have lived long enough to know that anything is possible."

It came explosively, more as an outspoken thought than as a direct remark. It struck Stark as being the unpremeditated disclosure of a personal creed—the sort of intimate conviction one rarely voices. The doctor had straightened in his chair and his eyes stared beyond the little group gathered around him and his face molded into an expression of grim purpose that yet held as much of sardonic satisfaction as of determination. And then he settled back in his chair and became again a neutral-colored little man with voice and smile of inoffensive pedantry.

But it also seemed to Jamison Stark that the entire group relaxed at the same moment and that all were as conscious as he that for a moment something dominant had appeared—a thing both physically and mentally bigger than the little physician who remained. And then the voice of Burke Frasier shattered the impression.

"Can you hypnotize a fellow, doc?"

"I believe it is claimed that every person of average intellectual capacity can hypnotize some other person. I have never tried to do it."

The conversation became general. Two or three of the group drifted away. Doctor Cooper was one of the first to leave.

"Queer duck that," said Waddingham, as the doctor went off.

"What do you know about him, Billy?"

"Never met him until he joined up here a few weeks ago. Know another chap who was in his class at college. He says Cooper is well known among the research sharks. Then Walt Harrowell ran across him in some hospital in France. Says Cooper doped out the best treatment for mustard gas."

"Does he come here often?"

"Two or three times a week," said Waddingham. "Mighty interesting talker, but he's queer. Most of the time he's a tame little cuss, and then he will flash up for a moment, hard boiled as the devil."

CHAPTER VI.

Jamison Stark rose earlier than usual the following morning, but he consumed more than the average time over his toilet and he dawdled over his breakfast. For him the day would not really begin until three

o'clock, the hour of Ann Annerley's appointment at his office. He wasted considerable time in speculation over the mystery in which she chose to shroud her past life, and the probable cause that had led up to her engagement in the chorus of Richenstein's much heralded new production.

"Did she dance or sing, or was she a part of the flesh background exotically undraped to the legal limit of stimulus to the sybaritic mob down front?"

The latter possibility brought a nauseous protest that was immediately swallowed up in a great certainty. "She was not that sort."

Warmed by this inner assurance Stark finally started for his office in a spirit of greater contentment than he had experienced for many months. He moved with the crowd but in complete mental disassociation, and his progress was still the automatic movement of long familiarity, when the revolving door at the entrance to his office building caught with a jar as he pushed against it.

He glanced up and saw a man slightly under medium height who struggled to release a tan bag caught between one revolving section and the door frame. Stark drew back and the other reversed the door sufficiently to release the bag and again started through. For a moment, as they moved in opposite directions, the man with the bag faced Jamison Stark squarely with a scowl of annoyance that flashed to startled dismay. It came and passed so quickly that afterward Stark could not be sure that he had seen aright, for the man again met his glance with the indifference of an utter stranger and hurried through to the street.

"I know that fellow and he knew me." Stark stopped midway between the door and the elevator, groping in his mind for identification. Where had he seen him before. He sought to revisualize the face he had just seen for a second through the glass partition of the revolving door, but the only feature he could recall was a stiff, close-cropped mustache. This did not help him any. He remembered no acquaintance who wore that sort of mustache. He had not noticed the color of his eyes or any other detail of his appearance, except his general size, but the man's face remained vaguely familiar and Stark was certain the unknown recognized him.

Jamison Stark's office was on the eighth floor. The Exchange Trust Company occupied the entire ground floor space, while the upper floors were crowded with the usual miscellany of the financial district. More than half the space on the eighth floor was occupied by a Stock Exchange firm and there were two or three smaller concerns and a couple of lawyers besides Stark. The express elevators ran without stop to the tenth floor. Tenants below the tenth floor were dependent upon the local elevators, and during rush hours these were always crowded and it usually took as long to reach the eighth floor as to make the twentieth by express.

Stark wedged his way into a packed car. He got off at his floor and started down the long corridor that led toward his office. Outside the door to the customers' room of the Stock Exchange firm an excited group of men and boys gathered around something on the floor hidden from Stark by the milling feet of the shifting crowd. As he came up an excited man in his shirt sleeves and with a green shade over his eyes pushed into the crowd, thrusting right and left to reach some one in the inner circle.

"Where's the bag?" he demanded breathlessly.

"Don't know, Mac, I ain't seen it. Did Fred have it?"

"Did he have it? Hell! Of course he had it!" The man in the green shade was almost frantic. He thrust wildly through the group, demanding of every one in general, "Have you seen a tan bag? Tan leather bag—good size bag, with handles?"

And the crowd turned with the usual helplessness of a crowd and each gazed suspiciously at his neighbor while they continued to mill about and jam more obstructingly toward the common center.

But Jamison Stark had followed through the opening forced by the man with the green shade until he stood at the side of a form prostrate on the stone floor. It was that of an elderly man dressed in the blue uniform of a messenger or bank watchman. The man lay stretched out breathing regularly as though asleep. There was nothing stertorous in his breathing, his color was normal; he appeared simply a healthy, elderly man asleep. A man knelt on either side of the prostrate form. One continued almost constantly to shake the sleeper, calling, "Fred, Fred—wake up, Fred!" While the other repeatedly thrust a bottle of household ammonia under the sleeper's nose. The

man with the green shade thrust his way back to the sleeper's side, followed closely by an elderly man with a gray beard.

"The bank phoned that Fred left with the bag, and they have guards stationed downstairs at every entrance," Stark heard the latter say to him of the green shade.

"Well the bag ain't here now. Fred didn't have it when Joe first found him, and I've looked everywhere."

Jamison Stark touched the shoulder of the man with the gray beard.

"My name is Stark. Office on this floor," he began tersely. "Was it a long, tan-colored bag with double handles?"

"That's it—that's our bag!" broke in the man with the green shade. "Where is it?"

"I met a man with such a bag, going out as I came in a few minutes ago. I swung the door too fast coming through. The bag caught in the door and we were tangled up for a moment or two. I noticed the bag particularly. The man was smallish, with a short mustache."

"That's it—some one has stolen the bag!" The man with the beard was now as excited as he with the green shade. "Which way did he go?" He had caught Stark by the arm and dragged him out of the crush.

"He went through to the street. I didn't notice which way he turned. What was in the bag?"

"Half a million in it—bills and bonds!" cried he of the green shade.

Jamison Stark galvanized into action.

"When the police get here, tell them what I've said. I'm going down to see if I can get any trace of that man on the street. It isn't many minutes since he went out, but there is no second to lose." He caught an elevator down and made his way hurriedly to Broadway just as several policemen crowded into the entrance.

Stark's first impulse was to stop one of the officers and tell his story so that they might get on the trail without further loss of time. But he had learned something about the police mind during the past months. They would probably insist upon taking him back upstairs for identification and questioning. If there was any hope in following the bag it lay in the immediate discovery of some clew. He let the police pass without speaking to them while he cast about for a point of beginning. Luck would have to play a considerable part in the game if he ever glimpsed that yellow bag again. He began to reason out the man's probable movements. He decided at once that the man would not carry the bag openly any farther than he was obliged to. It made him too conspicuous. Once the search began—as the thief would know it would almost at once—it would be directed to the discovery of that bag.

Then came to Stark, recollection of Gorgeson's description of the man from the stalled flivver. "A medium-sized man, in his late thirties, with a short mustache."

"By Jove, it's the same one!" he exclaimed, and as quickly decided that just as there was a car then, there was a car somewhere now. A robbery of that magnitude would not have just happened. It would have been planned out. Most particularly would it have been planned to get the bag out of sight as quickly as possible. A car would afford a hiding place for the bag and speedy means for getting out of the neighborhood. That other time the man was alone. It was an even chance he was alone this time. If so, the car was parked somewhere as near as possible, but in a place where it would not be disturbed or investigated and where the man could get to it without leaving a trail behind him.

And then Stark caught sight of the newsboy at his stand at the right of the entrance, midway between the door and an uptown subway entrance. He was there when the man with the bag passed out; he might have noticed him. Stark described the man and the bag and the boy recalled him at once. "Sure. That guy bought a paper and went down in the subway."

Jamison Stark followed down the stairs. As he deposited his ticket in the box, he questioned the ticket chopper. Had he noticed such a man with a bag, in the last few minutes? The ticket chopper had.

"Man like that went through here a short while ago," he replied. "Asked if these trains ran to Bronx Park. Wanted to know how far it was, how long it took, all about it. Talked like some kind of a wop."

Stark's heart beat high with an elation that quickly subsided as he stood on the platform. Many trains had passed since the man with the stolen bag stood there. Where had he gone? The man carrying out that robbery did not need any last-minute information as to his destination. Neither was he thoughtlessly leaving a trail any one

could follow. Why had he stopped to buy that paper and question the ticket chopper? Any one closely following the man with the bag was almost certain to question the newsboy, permanently located within view of the main entrance to the building. And any person planning to get away by the subway would pass that newsboy and the ticket chopper as quickly and quietly as possible.

Pacing up and down the platform, Jamison Stark restrained the impulse to hurry and reasoned it out. He would follow what seemed to be the logical course. The result was on the knees of the gods. Logically there was but one explanation. The thief had done these things with the deliberate intent of creating the impression that he had escaped by the subway. This conclusion confirmed Stark's belief that there was a car waiting somewhere. Where was the nearest place convenient to a subway station?

Jamison Stark knew the downtown section intimately. If he were using a car for just such a purpose and if he were seeking to throw off pursuit and reach the car with the least chance of detection, where would he park the car and how would he proceed?

Suddenly he got the answer. Between ten and three there were always a number of cars parking along the north side of Bowling Green, in the triangle left by the diverging Broadway trolley tracks. If one came early enough they would be certain to find parking space there. Stark decided this was where he would leave the car. And after accomplishing the robbery—what then? Stark studied over this considerably before he reached a conclusion. He would take a subway train uptown, get off at the Brooklyn Bridge. This was a crowded station with throngs of people hurrying in every direction; it was not at all likely that he would be noticed. He could cross over and catch a train back to Bowling Green. He would then be but a few steps from the parked car. Once in the car he could swing around through Battery Place, go north on West Street, and soon be out of the danger zone, with his trail covered.

Might that not be the plan adopted by the thief? Anyway it was a chance. He would follow it through. It was as likely to succeed as any other.

Then came the thought that sent Stark bounding up the subway stairs to the street. If the man with the bag had followed this course, it would take him fifteen minutes, possibly longer, to reach the bridge station and return. He might yet beat him to Bowling Green. He rushed across Broadway and caught a southbound trolley. On the short ride down he again searched his memory as to where he had seen the man before. He had certainly known him some time—or some one strikingly like him. Then doubt crept in. Might he not be carrying a mental image created by Gorgeson's description? He had pictured the man to himself from this description and when he met the original it recalled the picture clearly enough to suggest previous acquaintance. Then, again he doubted. The man had recognized him. He had shown it in that first, unguarded instant.

But the trolley had reached the point of the triangle of Bowling Green Park. At the same time a small runabout drew out of the line of parked cars, swinging to cross behind the trolley. The man with the close-cropped mustache was at the wheel. Stark sprang to the street. The runabout had completed the half turn and headed south. Stark darted across in front of the car, turned, and sprang on the running board.

The trolley car had stopped at the corner and several passengers were getting off. The driver of the runabout kept on and in violation of the traffic rule passed the standing trolley and turned into Battery Place. He had never even glanced at Stark on the running board. A few yards west of the corner a jam of trucks brought the runabout to a standstill.

A lap robe lay bunched up on the floor in front of the vacant seat at the driver's right. Stark leaned over the door and snatched up a corner of the robe. A yellow bag lay underneath. At the same instant the driver of the runabout grasped his wrist. Stark dropped the robe, wrenching his hand free.

"I want you! Will you do as I say, or shall I call the police?" he demanded breathlessly.

"For what reason?" the man inquired calmly. He spoke with a pronounced foreign accent. His calmness disconcerted Stark. What if he were mistaken and the man was but carrying his own property?

"A tan bag, containing a large sum of money, has been stolen in the building from which I saw you carrying this bag," Stark explained. The man's manner and the polite wonder in his face made him feel ridiculous.

"That is strange. I will drive back with you."

Leaning over the man unlatched the door. "Won't you get in?"

Feeling an utter fool, Jamison Stark took the vacant seat. The man drew aside the bag and robe, making way for his feet, and the car started slowly forward. It took some time to turn the car in that tangle of traffic but the man accomplished it and they headed back toward Broadway.

They were passing between Bowling Green Park and the customhouse——

Jamison Stark opened his eyes. A man in a white coat and a nurse in uniform were bending over him.

"What is it?" he asked.

The man in the white coat smiled reassuringly.

"Am I hurt, doctor? Where am I?"

"Apparently not, and you are in the Brooklyn Hospital."

"How in the world did I get here—from Bowling Green—without knowing it?"

"Is that the last thing you remember?" questioned the doctor.

"Why, yes. We were driving around Bowling Green, to turn up Broadway. Did some one run into us? I do not understand why I should be here."

"There is considerable about it we do not understand either, Mr. Stark," the physician admitted.

"You know me?" said Stark wonderingly.

"I guess every one does, now," replied the doctor. "Half the police force and all the reporters have called to see you. I should not wonder if there were half a dozen of each downstairs now."

"Tell me what you know," begged Stark in utter bewilderment.

"That is little enough. A policeman found you, apparently asleep, in Prospect Park, about noon yesterday. Unable to wake you, the officer called an ambulance and had you brought here. You have since slept continuously in spite of our efforts. There is nothing else the matter, so far as we can determine."

"There is one other thing, doctor," grinned Stark. "I'm hungry."

"We have effective treatment for that, Mr. Stark, but just a moment first, please. Have you any pain, any peculiar sensation?"

"No. I seem to be perfectly right. Yes, there is one thing, though. My toes feel a bit numb and my fingers are fuzzy—sort of cocktailish—if you remember, doctor." A whimsical smile spread over his face. "And, I should like to eat a square meal and get out of here."

"You shall have the meal, directly, but you'd best remain as you are at least until morning. We must be certain that there will be no immediate recurrence of the—the condition."

"How do you account for it, doctor?"

"We were hoping you could suggest a clew as to that?"

"I was riding in an automobile with a stranger. I was in the car for perhaps three minutes, covering less than two blocks. We reached the point between the customhouse and Bowling Green Park. I remember all that clearly. But nothing from that point until a few minutes ago."

The physician stood in scowling perplexity.

"Did you ever lose consciousness before?" he inquired.

"Once. In France. But I was bashed over the head then and shot up a bit, as well."

"Ever faint, or suffer from amnesia?" questioned the doctor hopefully. "Since your injuries in France, have you experienced any unusual or peculiar sensations—dizziness, loss of memory—anything that might suggest a possible explanation for this last seizure?"

"Not a thing, doctor. Except for the little mess-up over there, I have always been fit. Never was sick a day in my life."

Faith is a recognized factor in therapeutics. When the patient begins to question the infallibility of the physician or the potency of the medicine it injects an antidotary element quite apt to neutralize the effect of the treatment. Jamison Stark believed himself to be physically and mentally sound; nevertheless, the physician's inability to account for this condition was becoming vastly disconcerting.

"Surely, doctor, there is something about my case that suggests a possible cause," he urged anxiously.

Again the doctor shook his head. "Nothing in the pharmacopœia." He turned abruptly away, speaking a few words to the nurse who hurried off.

Stark sat up. "I must get up. I have work to do."

"No, not yet." There was no lack of decision in the doctor's voice now. "Comes a time to all of us when work must needs wait. You are fortunate, Mr. Stark, to find it a comfortable time. Better make up your mind to enjoy it a little longer." He smiled with the calm finality of his profession. At the door, he turned back. "The nurse is getting you something to eat, and I believe there is a friend of yours, a Mr. Haggarty, downstairs."

"Let Haggarty come up, please," Stark called after him.

"Good old Tommy," thought Stark. Once before Haggarty had waited outside—waited while the doctors probed and sewed and the outlook appeared dark for Jamison Stark. Now, memory of that other time came back vividly in the drug-tainted air of a similar environment.

CHAPTER VII.

There came a tap on the door and a probationer opened it, standing aside as a man entered. Haggarty came hesitatingly forward.

"Tommy, you're a joyous sight!" cried Stark, stretching out an eager hand. Which remark illustrates the complexities of our tongue, for Detective Sergeant Haggarty drew near with the face of a man approaching a deathbed. He took the outstretched hand gingerly, but it grasped his own and jerked him forward with hearty strength that brought a wide grin to the gloomy face.

"You're all right now, captain?" he inquired anxiously.

"I shall be as soon as you tell me all about what has happened."

"Well," began Haggarty, settling himself comfortably in his chair, "somebody got away with a bag of about a half million iron men—money and stuff the same as money. Got it away from Knott, Elliott & Mead's messenger, while he was bringing it up from the Exchange Trust Company's vaults to their offices on your floor. Messenger carried the bag on the elevator. There was the usual crowd. He didn't notice anybody particular. He got off with the bag at their floor and started down the hall to the office. He didn't see any one else around. Remembers getting pretty close to the office door, and that's all he knows.

"Fellow coming out of the office finds him asleep on the hall floor. Bag's gone. Couldn't have been more than a minute from the time he left the elevator until they found him. But you know all about that."

"Only part of it, Tommy. Go on."

"That's about all there is to that. We heard you came along about then and said you'd seen a man carrying a bag going out the street door just as you came in. Then you rushed off and disappeared. Some one told what you said the man looked like and the police followed up that clew. We got track of the thief, all right. Guy at the news stand outside and a ticket chopper remembered him. But he grabbed a subway train for Bronx Park and made his get-away. We phoned ahead to the stations and rushed out the reserves all along the line, but we haven't got him yet. They'll get him though. He ain't got a chance."

Jamison Stark's eyes sparkled. "Yes, I knew they would do that, Tommy. Then what?"

"Well, headquarters men hung around your office all day waiting for you to come back. You see, they had a good description of the bag but they didn't have any picture of the guy that grabbed it, except that he was smallish and wore a short mustache. That's all them two men who saw him could tell about him. They wouldn't have noticed him at all if the fool hadn't talked to 'em. Nobody else but you saw him. Well, along in the afternoon, that Annerley girl came down to your office. The dicks grabbed her, but she wouldn't talk, so they took her up to the Old Man."

"The unconscionable asses!" groaned Stark in fury.

"That's what I say." Haggarty returned complacently. "That girl's too slick to spill anything. You got to leave her turned loose and watch her."

Jamison Stark nearly choked with rage but he suppressed any outward sign and managed to ask evenly, "What then?"

"Well, I guess the chief didn't get anything out of her. Anyway he turned her loose, with a couple of fellows watching her. Say, captain, that boarder, Jackson, never come back to his room."

"Perhaps he is the man with the bag," sneered the unhappy man in the bed.

"No, that guy's tall, with red hair. But he's one of the gang. They're a slick bunch, believe me!"

Just then the nurse came back with a tray. When the cover was off, it disclosed

a single poached egg on a small piece of toast and a glass of milk.

"And that doctor said something about a meal," groaned Stark.

The nurse smiled noncommittally as she left. The egg and toast disappeared before she reached the door and then Jamison Stark lowered the half-empty glass from his lips. "Go on, Tommy," he said resignedly.

"Well, when you didn't show up, along about five o'clock somebody remembered I knew you, and phoned for me. We hunted around for you all night. I got mighty afraid they'd bumped you off, captain. The morning papers were full of the robbery and your mysterious disappearance. About nine o'clock this morning some one phoned headquarters that they had you here. I hustled over. A cop had found you asleep on a bench in Prospect Park, about noon yesterday. You've been asleep ever since and the doctors have been doing everything to wake you up. Say, captain, the same gang pulled this that got Gorgeson."

"Yes, and I know just as much about what got me as Gorgeson does," Stark growled in disgust.

"Don't you know anything about what happened to you?" the detective asked in amazement.

"I remember perfectly what happened up to a certain point, then everything stopped for me, until a few minutes ago. I wonder how he did it?" Stark closed his eyes, concentrating all his mental force in the effort to recall every incident of the few minutes that elapsed between the time when he sprang on the running board of the car and his last conscious moment. "He did not touch me but once—when he grabbed my wrist and I jerked it away. I watched every movement he made and he was not even looking at me then. That's all, Tommy," he concluded wearily.

The nature of the force that had so conclusively demonstrated its power in his person loomed ghostly in the haze of mystery. To have been shot or bludgeoned would have been unpleasant but understandable. But to have been practically obliterated without warning or sensation, in broad daylight, on one of the busiest spots in the city—— Why, he could as easily have been dropped in the river, or left on a blind curve for the first train to mangle, as to have been set on a bench in a public park. He shuddered at the possibilities. And then, the natural sanity of the man asserted itself and he turned to Haggarty with a whimsical smile.

"He's a benevolent devil, Tommy, but I'll land him next time."

Haggarty's bewilderment was ludicrous. "I—I don't get you, captain."

"Of course you don't. Wait until I spin *my* yarn." He began at the catching of the yellow bag in the door and related his entire experience. As he explained how he arrived at the conclusion that he might find the man at Bowling Green, Haggarty interrupted.

"Say, captain, you didn't really expect you could pull that Sherlock Holmes stuff, did you?"

"I thought I might," Stark admitted, inwardly chuckling at the confusion that would soon be Haggarty's. But when he told how circumstances vindicated his theory and he found the man at Bowling Green, Haggarty spoiled the edge of his satisfaction.

"You sure made one lucky guess that time, I'll tell the world. You should have grabbed him and called a cop. There, you actually had him—and the bag of dough too! And you fell for that soft stuff, like you did for the girl."

"But what did he do to me?" asked Stark plaintively.

"Do! He got away from you!" For a time, that fact outweighed everything else with Detective Sergeant Haggarty. To a policeman, to lose a prisoner is the unpardonable sin. Haggarty had thrust an unlighted cigar in his mouth and now he huddled in his chair chewing the cigar fiercely from corner to corner between twisting lips, muttering in savage staccato, "On Broadway —cop every thirty feet—half a million gone blooey—right in his hand—soft stuff—hell of a mess!"

"Come out of it, Tommy. We can hold the post-mortem after the hand is played out. The man is still alive and he still has the money. Our job is to catch him."

Haggarty grabbed the ruined cigar from his teeth and suddenly leaned forward, his lips parting in a hard grin, but before he could speak Stark snapped, "Cut it out, Haggarty! I got the man! Under the same circumstances you would never have glimpsed him again after he went through the door. Call it a guess if you want to, the fact remains. The thing to determine

now is, how did he dispose of me? If we can answer that we have something to work on." Haggarty's grin became apologetic.

"I didn't mean to get rough, captain." Haggarty grinned apologetically. "His getting away like that kind of got my goat for a minute."

"That's all right, Tommy." The old friendly smile came back to Stark's eyes. "But the man has better than twenty-four hours' start, since I have been here. What now?"

Detective Haggarty did not respond at once. To carry on without first explosively relieving the mental pressure induced by his disappointment was difficult. If he could have, to use army parlance, "crawled Stark" for his carelessness, his natural, heavy optimism would have more quickly asserted itself.

"What did he do to me?" Stark repeated the question.

"That isn't the point, captain. We'll find out about that after we catch him."

"We must know about that first, in order to catch him," insisted Stark.

"Nonsense, captain. That's putting the cart before the horse." Haggarty's fog of annoyance was clearing. "We have a description of the man, the car and the bag. Be dead easy to follow up that combination. I'll get in touch with the chief. The thief keeps that car somewhere. We'll——" He broke off abruptly. "Did you get his number?"

Stark shook his head. "What did I want with the number when I had the man and the car?" he asked wearily.

"Well, that's all right. We'll comb every garage in town. Not many men of his description out with flivver runabouts yesterday morning. He's probably shifted bags and chucked the yellow one out, but he had to have a package of some sort with him. Couldn't hide that wad under his coat."

"Suppose he uses a private garage?" queried Stark.

"Man on the beat would know that." Haggarty's good humor was entirely restored. "You see, captain, it ain't like looking for a taxi when you don't know the number or what the driver looks like. Those birds all look alike. But here's a neat, little man with a short mustache and a flivver runabout and a big yellow bag—or anyway a bundle. The fellow driving a taxi for a bunch of holdups figures on somebody's seeing him. But they can't tell whether he's tall or short and he looks like a hundred others. If he once gets out of sight he's gone.

"But this guy didn't figure on being seen. You happened to lamp him almost on the spot and then you stumbled into him again in his car. That wasn't to be expected. He got rid of you, then what'd he do?" Haggarty was in his element now. "He's either sneaked that car back where he keeps it or he's made his get-away out of town in the car. Neither won't do him any good. We'll find out all about him when we find out where he keeps his car. You see, captain, he's in a funk. You seeing that bag caught in the door and having an office on the same floor with Knott, Elliott & Mead, and then chasing down to Bowling Green wasn't to be expected. He ain't a rough guy or he'd 'a' bumped you off instead of dropping you on a park bench. After leaving you there that way he's just sure to run right into jail. He'll get the car back and hide and we'll smoke him out in a week."

"Aren't you inconsistent, sergeant?" queried Stark gently.

Haggarty frowned. He had reason to be suspicious when Jamison Stark spoke in that tone.

"Am I?" he said truculently.

"What about the gang?" asked Stark. "If this holdup person is one of a gang, as you have insisted, isn't it possible that some other member of the fraternity, some one entirely dissimilar, poses as the owner of the car? That might account for his strange consideration for me—or for his lack of consideration. If he only had to get rid of me and then drive back to headquarters where the loot could be hidden, while some one else drove the car to the garage, there would be no reasonable excuse for murder. There would be only a small man with a mustache, unattached to a car, to hunt for. Then, if he shaved off the mustache, he would be mighty hard to find, Tommy."

Detective Sergeant Haggarty was a stubborn man but he could not fail to remember that he had advanced the gang theory from the first and he realized that he was now arguing upon the theory that the small man was acting alone. He thought harder during the next few seconds than he was in the habit of doing. From much familiarity with its quality, he disliked the idea of drawing the cork on the captain's sar-

casm. One thing he decided right then, he would avoid detailed explanations during the rest of this investigation. But it was necessary to say something and he determined to stick by his guns.

"Never get anywhere in this game, captain, if you choke yourself up with 'ifs.' You got to follow the rules. First thing to do is to locate the man with the car. First step is to search the garages."

"Very well, Tommy. That is your opinion. If you are interested, here's mine."

"Sure, I'm interested."

"In the first place," began Stark, "the known facts are only sufficient to confuse us. Two robberies have been committed, widely separated as to time, place and conditions. But there are connecting links. In each instance appears a small man with a mustache. It is a meager description but to me it is as illuminating as though he were described as having a wooden leg, a blue and a brown eye and a lisp. Still from that description alone it would be practically impossible to trace the man. I could not make any one else see him as I see him. We may be sure it was the same man in both cases. He was seen by Gorgeson and his chauffeur before the first robbery and I saw him after the second robbery. So far as we know, no one actually saw him commit either robbery. There is no actual proof that this particular man committed either robbery. Suppose you caught this man today, Tommy, and Gorgeson, his chauffeur and I all identified him as the man we saw. That fact alone would not hold, much less convict him."

"We'd hold him all right," Haggarty broke in. "It's the district attorney's job to convict him."

"Now consider the second link or circumstance," continued Stark. "The victims of both robberies were similarly affected. This again is not conclusive. But when later I ran into the man and became affected in like manner the correlation is strengthened. Here you have a strong circumstantial case connecting the man directly with the production of a peculiar effect—the effect under which both crimes were committed. But all this does not help us to find the man. All the direct assistance we get from this is that he is a small man, wears a mustache and exercises some strange power."

"That's enough to start on," insisted Haggarty. "That and the car and the tan bag."

"But suppose he disposes of the bag and abandons the car?" Stark asked. "That leaves you again with only a man, a mustache—and a mystery."

"We'll find where such a man left that sort of a car and we'll trace him from there." Haggarty held tenaciously to his plan. Then in sudden recollection, "You said he spoke with a foreign accent, captain."

"Easy to assume, Tommy. But granting it was real—it was French—that leaves you a smallish Frenchman, with a mustache and a mystery. You are stubbornly refusing yourself a fair start, Tommy. Search for the man and the car, all you please, later. But now devote every energy to clearing up the mystery of what happened to us four men who were found so strangely asleep. When we understand that, we have something to work on. Pump the doctors, question the nurses. You are a police officer. They will talk more freely to you than to me or the press.

"Doctors are always reticent with a patient. If they are at a loss as to the cause, or if they are undecided as to two or more possible causes, they will be reticent with the newspaper men. A professional man instinctively dislikes to go on record as having been ignorant or doubtful about anything relating to his profession.

"But they will talk to you, and the time to investigate is now, while every incident is fresh in their minds. They have been studying me closely, they may have made blood tests. I am convinced they have reached some conclusion. Just a moment more, Tommy," Stark insisted, as Haggarty attempted to interpose his old objection. "I believe but one man is concerned in these robberies. He got sixty thousand dollars from Gorgeson and half a million from the messenger. He is no piker. He landed two big things. The man who got Gorgeson's money never concerned himself about the paltry articles of adornment on his person. Gorgeson was stripped of those things after the real robber had finished with him. There was plenty of opportunity, both before and after the police arrived, for some cheap dip to filch those things.

"That some one attempted to pawn the pearl, while its description was fresh in the mind of every pawnbroker, establishes this theory. Would a man with sixty thousand dollars in his pocket take that chance?

"Now, why do I say this man acted alone?

Because we know he possesses some means or is able to exercise some power whereby he renders the proposed victim innocuous. Secure in the secret of that power he needs no assistant. This man is a specialist, Tommy. He was a specialist in something else before he became a specialist in crime. When we have found out what he does we have narrowed the field to be searched from world-wide dimensions to a comparatively narrow strip of special attainment. A small man with a mustache—easily removed, a French accent—probably assumed, conveys little to the uninterested mind. Even if you find where a man of this description once kept a flivver runabout, the information will only lead you down a blind alley. This man is no fool. When he turned his special knowledge to unlawful use he planned carefully." Stark locked his hands behind his head and surveyed his friend with a quizzical smile. "He did not attract the attention of the newsboy and talk with the ticket chopper because he was a fool, Tommy."

Haggarty twisted uneasily in his chair. But Stark kept on, determined to make Haggarty see with his eyes. It had become a personal matter with Jamison Stark. This man had outwitted him once, but as sure as this had happened there would be another time and a different outcome. Haggarty working with him would be of great help, but Haggarty following his own line of reasoning would be wasted.

He continued doggedly, "If a possible physiological or psychological explanation suggests itself to the trained minds of the physicians who have been studying my condition for the past twenty-four hours, we may work out a tenable hypothesis."

"Huh!" exploded Haggarty.

Stark laughed. "In plain English, Tommy, was it a narcotic, an alkaloid, some chemical agent, or hypnotism? If we can find out what the doctors have decided about this we can look for a man skilled in one or another science. Many persons know every specialist. Then, when we identify him closer and give his apparent age, we have turned from the search for something hard to find to a search for something difficult to hide."

"Well," said Haggarty, in the tone of one unconvinced but resigned to the inevitable, "I'll pump these guys, all right. But——"

Again the probationer tapped at the door. "There are several reporters downstairs who have been waiting a long time to see you, Mr. Stark."

"Careful what you say to those birds," cautioned Haggarty.

"We may as well have them up and get it over with, Tommy."

The reporters came in eagerly. It was getting late for the afternoon editions. Stark retold his story briefly, but neither to the reporters nor to Haggarty did he mention his impression of having met the man before.

"I want to ask you men a question, now," said Stark as the storm of questions thrown at him by the reporters subsided. "What did he do to me?"

"No one seems able to answer that, unless you can, Mr. Stark," said one.

"From the moment I jumped on the running board of his car, as long as I was conscious of anything, I watched every move he made. All the time I more than half expected him to go for a gun and I watched his hands particularly. He took his hands from the wheel only to open the door and change gears—except when he grabbed my wrist when I pulled up the robe, and that was a natural move for him to make under the circumstances. He never made a suspicious or suggestive movement. He never even looked at me directly."

In the general discussion that followed it appeared the reporters had questioned all the doctors and nurses. No one had been found who would hazard an opinion as to the cause for Stark's condition. It did not suggest the action of any known opiate or lethargic gas. It was more suggestive of hypnotic control.

CHAPTER VIII.

Yielding to the doctor's insistence Jamison Stark spent that second night in the hospital. He was nervous and wakeful. Failing, by all sorts of mental gymnastics, to induce sleep, he at last prevailed upon a nurse to fetch him a book. It was a commonplace story, but he read it through, then tossed restlessly until day.

Earlier than usual that morning he was at his office. In the familiar surroundings of his workaday world he shook off the unreality of the preceding hours. The question, "What had happened to him?" no longer obsessed him to the exclusion of other interests. What had happened became of

vastly less importance than the problem of how again to strike the trail of the mysterious robber.

Life would be vastly more interesting if we opened our eyes. It was considerably later when Jamison Stark awoke to this fact. Romance, adventure, things bizarre, are the commonplaces of existence. They pass us by because we have grown to look for only routine affairs. The age of chivalry is not swallowed up in a dead past. It lives, deathless, but we are too huddled en masse to see. The paladins of Charlemagne still stalk abroad, though unrecognized, and reincarnated Guinevere and Sir Lancelot are but sorry scandal. Nothing more impossible has ever happened than is constantly happening. What we call the impossible occurs as often as the expected.

Jamison Stark came back from France to a deadly monotony of humdrum existence. So it remained until he opened his eyes to see. Now, a problem that would have seemed hopeless a year before was only enticingly difficult. That he would solve the mystery of the man with the mustache became as certain as any other expectation of the immediate future.

Stark opened his mail, dictated a few letters, and phoned to Ann Annerley.

"Oh, Mr. Stark!"

It was an unmistakable cry of gladness that came over the wire. It surprised Stark into a more intimate reply than calm thought would have prompted. When she answered again there was a subtle change in tone quality. "I have been horribly distressed over your dreadful experience," she said. "I feel almost that I am to blame."

"And I that I am directly responsible for your more trying experience—when you called here the day before yesterday."

"It was rather harrowing," the girl admitted. "There is another matter, Mr. Stark, if you—if you are——"

She hesitated. He sensed her difficulty and hastened to assure her.

"I am perfectly all right again. In fact, nothing happened but a good sleep."

"Well, then"—her sigh of relief came clearly over the wire—"the house here is under constant surveillance by the police. Mrs. Ainslee is frantic. Can it not be managed more considerately?"

"I think it can be arranged. Suppose this time I call upon you—this afternoon at three?" It required an effort to make the suggestion sound casual. Stark had not known how much he wanted to see her again until this opportunity presented.

"It's awfully kind of you," she called back gratefully. "This afternoon, then, at three."

That day was a busy one for Stark. There was almost a procession of reporters and plain-clothes men, and twice Haggarty phoned. Systematic inquiry was being made at all public garages, and patrolmen as they went on tour were instructed to investigate every private garage on their beats. It was evident the department indorsed Haggarty's idea as to the proper method of procedure.

"Possibly they are right," admitted Stark to himself. "But I am going to find some one who can give me a reasonable explanation of what might have happened to me—whether it might have been some drug, known or unknown, or whether it must be called hypnosis. When I know which seems the more reasonable theory I'm going to look for a medical man or a hypnotist who resembles the little man with the bag."

As Jamison Stark went up the steps that afternoon to Mrs. Ainslee's door, a man accosted him.

"Looking for any one in particular, mister?" he asked.

"I'm looking for you," scowled Stark, "but I didn't expect you to appear so promptly."

"Well?" said the man uncertainly.

"My name is Jamison Stark. I'm Miss Annerley's attorney."

"I've heard of you." The man grinned in friendly fashion.

"What the devil is the sense of this watchdog stuff?" stormed Stark.

"You'll have to see the chief about that."

"I suppose so," Stark admitted. "I'll see the chief, you may be sure of that."

Stark bounded up the steps. Before he could ring, Miss Annerley opened the door.

"I was watching for you." He grasped the warm little hand she extended. Mrs. Ainslee was close behind. They ushered him into the boarding-house parlor with the solicitude of women for one convalescing from serious illness.

"But I am not ill," he expostulated.

"You must be, poor man, after your dreadful experience," insisted the landlady, tucking a fat pillow, with an Indian-head cover, behind him.

"Much too pretty to muss up," said he,

dragging out the pillow and depositing it carefully on an empty chair. "I don't know what you have heard. Something ridiculously exaggerated no doubt. But your experience was worse than mine—and mine was due to my own folly."

"Men are all alike," cried the landlady. "When poor Ainslee was alive he would never let me do anything for him; even when he took down with his last sickness. There the poor man——"

"Won't you tell us what really did happen, Mr. Stark?" Ann Annerley interposed.

He told of his experience as briefly as their eager questions permitted.

"Now, what do you think of it all?" he questioned the girl.

She was sitting forward, her locked fingers clasped over one knee and a frown of concentration drew a double line across the smooth forehead.

"You shouldn't scowl like that—it makes wrinkles," warned the landlady.

Stark waited in silence. He had the impression that here was the unusual woman, a woman who could think constructively, and he waited eagerly for her answer to the question he had asked half banteringly.

When she spoke it was without preamble.

"This man is not a criminal. I mean, he is more than a criminal, the crime is incidental. He has special knowledge that he is turning to criminal use. He might have hypnotized you. You were watching his hands intently, and your fixed attention created a favorable condition, but it was not so with the men who were robbed. I have read everything printed about those cases—particularly that of the messenger. He saw no one. His attention was not focused in any degree. To have hynotized him under the circumstances would have required power greater than we need yet concede. The alternatives are gas or drugs. Leave out the gas for now, because the messenger from the time he received the bag until he lost consciousness, was surrounded by others who must have been similarly affected had gas been employed.

"This leaves drugs. You took nothing internally, so it draws down to something that might have produced slumber by being sprinkled on the skin or pricked into the circulation. Something of this sort could have been done to all of you. Is there any known drug or substance that could have produced such an effect? This is the first thing to be sure about. If no such substance is known to the medical fraternity, then you must find a medical man who has been in the East, or a physiological chemist." She started up with sparkling eyes. "Oh, Mr. Stark, I do so want to help you find this mystery man!"

Her sudden new mood of vivacity was so at variance with the intent thoughtfulness of a moment before that Stark looked at her in wonder. Where did this girl from Richenstein's chorus ever hear of physiological chemistry, and how could she manage such instantaneous transformation from thoughtful deduction to an enthusiasm for adventure?

The girl plumped herself down beside Mrs. Ainslee.

"We'll go sleuthing—not through slimy slums but in the lair of the scientist! I can make up for that part. I've had advanced chemistry and just enough physiology to ask questions no one can answer. We've a double clew—hypnotism or drugs. Drugs looks the best road. We will try it first, clear to the end; then, if necessary, we can travel the other one. Somewhere along the way we will find the little man of the mustache and the weird power. Oh, I just know it!"

"You're an extraordinary girl."

The man voiced the thought as impersonally as he would have characterized any natural phenomenon. For the time, recognition of her scope and capacity overpowered him. Most men are afraid of too clever women. To enjoy possession one must supply a need. An absolutely self-sufficient person would be sexless. At the first sight this girl had appealed to Stark, and his intuitive recognition of class heightened the appeal. Physical and moral qualities combine in the æsthetic; but pure mentality is something different—like too much salt in the soup. The fact that this girl reasoned the matter out as he had done and indorsed his idea as to the logical procedure left him lukewarm to the whole proposition. He was in the frame of mind of the man who goes to the patent office with a new and original invention and finds his claims covered by half a dozen predecessors. Instinctively he turns to criticize.

"If Tommy Haggarty is right, you and I, Miss Annerley, are not detectives. He says the first thing to find is where the man keeps his flivver."

It is doubtful if the girl heard. She answered to his mood in a voice strained and sharp.

"You must not take this away from me! It's my chance! All my life I have longed for an adventure. My mother did too. She told me so. Mother never found one. Why, Mr. Stark, our people consider the very word adventure immoral. Life is just dreary, dreary, dreary. 'Vanity, vanity, all is vanity,' leaves one less satisfaction than an animal. Life is as horrible as my people's heaven!"

All the gayety was gone now, with all the calm thoughtfulness and here was a woman, half distraught, battling for something she held precious.

"I don't think I quite understand," said Stark. But in his heart he did understand and through his sympathy he again felt the lure of the girl and he was willing not only to share, but to follow where she might lead.

"How could you understand?" she cried breathlessly. "You fought in the war, were wounded. Oh, I know!" She answered his unspoken question. "You risked something and gained much—very much more than you realize now. While I stayed home—with the children. I was a woman and could have no opportunity to feel life—to become a part—I could only go on living. A man can never know the difference between life and living." There was a sob in her voice. "I don't expect you to understand. I have never been able to make any one understand. But I want to tell you and I want you to do as I ask without understanding."

She had regained much of her first calmness. She groped for and found Mrs. Ainslee's hand. The landlady had been too amazed to speak. But this drab little woman understood the girl and she held the nervous hand tight.

"You have had one opportunity, Mr. Stark," went on the girl, "to help do something that needed doing—something out of the ordinary—something that had not been arranged for you to follow. You were free to seize the opportunity. I was not. Now opportunity comes to me when I am free to grasp it." She straightened up defiantly. "I made it! I did, I did! I would not remain the passive victim of blind fate. True, I was caught up in this affair, but I came here—I put myself in the way of it. Here is a man, in his own fashion, as much the enemy of society as the kaiser. He is possessed of extraordinary power and he has turned this power against constituted authority. He may do an incredible amount of harm. This man must be apprehended. The world must know the secret of his power. You and I, Mr. Stark, have been curiously caught up in the mesh of his intrigue. We owe it to ourselves to untangle the mystery. But more, and this you may not understand, it brings to mere living, the thing out of the ordinary—the thrill that is life. Oh, I don't want a seat off at the side. I want to play the game!"

She was again the irresponsible child filled with the joy of living.

"I understand what you intend to do," she continued. "You are not concerned about stupid police theories. You plan to see it through in your own way. Won't it be sport!" She came soberly to his side. "Please count me in!"

"With all my heart!" cried Stark. "No one could refuse such an ally. But I have no plan. In fact, about all I have is the desire to get even."

"But you have a theory?"

He smiled up at her questioning face. "You have expressed it clearer than I could."

"Then you think—we think the same?"

"Exactly. But where does that get us? I see no place of beginning."

"That's simple," she answered. "To begin is just to start. Any place will do, so long as we know what we are trying to do. There is a hymn that expresses the idea—'One step at a time.' I've done that before. I'm doing it now." The blue eyes were wistful. Then, she was standing squarely in front of Stark, emphasizing each direction by beating one slim finger upon the palm of the other hand. "The first move is yours. Get the best possible expert opinion as to what might have caused the condition in which you were found. If there is no known drug that could have caused it, is there any valid reason why there should not be such an unknown substance? Unless the drug theory is physiologically impossible, we'll start on that. If there is some reason why it just couldn't be, we'll follow the hypnotic clew."

Stark laughed up at her. "Yes, teacher," he said meekly.

The girl's face flamed scarlet. "Oh, how horrible!" she cried. And then to Stark's utter bewilderment she turned away quickly, dropped into a chair, and burst into tears.

With a bound he was at her side, patting her bowed head, trying to apologize for something, he did not know what.

But Mrs. Ainslee took the sobbing girl in her arms, "She's just all upset over this dreadful business. What with police courts and awful men watching the house and questioning every one who comes in, it's no wonder. I'm just ready to scream myself."

The girl struggled free, furiously dabbing at her wet cheeks with a crumpled handkerchief. "I'm so sorry. Please, Mr. Stark, forgive me. I promise never to break out like this again." She smiled with misty eyes.

"Surely—you understand. I would not say——" he attempted.

"Of course you would not, and you did not," she interrupted vehemently. "We are partners and we will always take good fellowship for granted." Boyishly she thrust out her hand. He took it eagerly and would have held it regardless, but she drew back, continuing as if there had been no interruption.

"When you are satisfied which lead to follow—I think it will be the road of drugs—we will lay out a systematic plan of procedure. I have considerable time to spare. We will get a list of the scientific and research societies," she paused for a moment with half-closed eyes. "How easily the police department, with its resources, could follow this up. I believe, if they went about it right, they could find that man in a week."

"Shall I try again to set them straight?" asked Stark.

"No, no!" she cried. "That would spoil everything. Let them follow the trails the mystery man can cover, and don't you say a word." She shook a warning finger.

So they planned it out, while the little landlady yawned behind her hand and questioned anxiously of the dinner arrangements going on below stairs.

"I'll drop in at the club this evening," said Stark at parting. "A lot of medical men belong and they will talk to me without reserve."

CHAPTER IX.

Back at his apartment, Stark filled a pipe and settled down in the most comfortable chair. His thoughts were of the girl, not of the little man with the mustache. In his mind he associated her with sunshine and shade over deep pools. He had never met another like her and he doubted if another such existed.

This has been the attitude of lovers from the beginning, but Jamison Stark was not aware that he was in love. As yet, he was only conscious that this girl was desirable and interested him as no other had. He wished to be her close friend. He *was* her friend, her protector. She herself had said there was no one else. He thrilled at memory of this. And then he tried to recall just what he had said that caused her to cry. Suddenly it came to him and he laughed aloud—laughed, not in amusement but in deep satisfaction. He called her "teacher." It cleared up all her little mystery in a moment. She *was* a teacher. This explained the advanced chemistry, the power to reason clearly, the ability to set forth her deductions.

His pipe went cold as he fell to constructing her life up to the present. He saw her smothering under the narrow orthodoxy of a provincial town, this girl—who all her life, as her mother before her, had longed for adventure—doomed to a life of schoolteaching. "Poor little kid," he muttered. "And she said, life was 'as horrible as their heaven.' I know the kind," he was growling under his breath. "Predestination, foreordination and eternal damnation, or the pleasant alternative of innocuous desuetude. And she jumped it all and landed in Richenstein's chorus. No wonder she would not give her name or call upon her family."

And a great joy came to him that he had come upon her when he did. He dedicated himself then as more than her friend, as her guardian. In watchful care, he would take the place of those who had guarded her in the narrow way of their own provincialism. He would do this without shutting her away from the joy of life.

What a game kid she was. In these events that must have shaken even her indomitable soul she saw her dream of adventure. She should have it. Together they would run down this man of mystery, and he would so work as to subordinate his efforts to hers, leaving to her the unspoiled thrill of accomplishment.

He dressed and went to the club for dinner. They seized upon him as soon as he appeared. He was the current sensation. In his enthusiasm Waddingham hugged him.

"Mighty glad you got out of that mess, Jimmy. Just what did the chap do to you?"

Stark shook his head. "That's what I came over to-night to find out."

"Find out here?" questioned Waddingham.

"You see, Billy, I could get no satisfaction out of the hospital doctors," Stark explained. "A lot of medical-school men belong here. Some one of these fellows will tell me what I wish to know."

Waddingham glanced around the room. "Haven't seen any one to-night, except Cass Richardson. You remember him, Jimmy."

Stark nodded, his keen eyes searching the room.

"By the way, have you had dinner?" asked Waddingham.

"No."

"Go in and grab a table. I'll hunt up Cass and any other medico I can find, and we'll dine together. I want to hear the whole yarn."

Waddingham hurried away and Stark turned toward the dining room. Every second man he passed stopped to shake hands and question. Twice, before he could pass on, a small group collected, and so when Stark reached the dining room he found Waddingham waiting and with him Cass Richardson and Cooper.

"I've cornered two pill rollers for you, Jimmy," he shouted.

Stark knew Richardson well, but this was only the second time he had met Cooper. The four men sat down at a corner table. When the waiter had gone with the orders they fell into desultory conversation. Waddingham squirmed under the restraint that seemed to have fallen upon the group.

"Say, you fellows, this is supposed to be a talk fest, not an autopsy. I want to hear Jimmy's story, and he wants to ask you wise men a question."

"We are consumed with curiosity, even as you are, Billy, only we have better manners," laughed Richardson.

Doctor Cooper said nothing. Waddingham's efforts failed to advance the subject that was on his mind. It was not until after the coffee came and cigars were lighted that the talk drifted naturally around to the question that finally brought the story of Stark's experience. He told it all, except that again he did not mention the impression of having met the man before.

"He put it over on you, rather, Stark," said Cooper with a chuckle. He had not taken his eyes from Stark's face as he told the story and this was his first comment.

"He certainly did," admitted Stark. "But just what did he do?"

"Hypnotized you," said Cooper bluntly. "It has been called to my attention that watching the man's hands so intently created a condition favorable to hypnotic control. But you see, mine is not the only case. The same thing happened to three other men, and in those instances the conditions were not so favorable. Particularly, in the case of the messenger who was hemmed in by the crowd and noticed nothing in particular."

"You have my opinion," Doctor Cooper replied stiffly.

"And I have no wish to dispute it." Stark's tone was conciliatory. "But is it not possible that the same effect could have been produced by a drug?"

"From a medical standpoint, such a supposition is absurd." Doctor Cooper was plainly irritated. "The layman forever concedes the impossible and rejects the obvious," he sneered. His tone was so studiedly offensive that it aroused the placid Waddingham.

"We're not trying to break any of your toys, doc. We're just asking questions."

"Then ask sensible ones," snapped Cooper.

It was Doctor Richardson who broke the strained silence.

"No drug taken internally could produce such a condition, Jimmy. Cannabis indica —Indian hemp—produces slumber that lasts for hours or days, but the victim awakes to what might be termed a subconscious state—he cannot think. It is more or less so with every sleep-producing drug. There are too many symptoms spoiling a normal picture." Richardson's smile invited either question or argument.

"Cass, is there any known drug that, sprayed on the skin or administered hypodermically, would produce that condition?" Stark asked.

"The skin is permeable to certain substances, but I know of none that would produce normal sleep. Morphine and scopolamine will produce twilight sleep. This is not in its symptoms a natural sleep. If this fellow has anything of the sort, he has gotten hold of something new, Jimmy."

"Why speculate on absurdities, doctor?" broke in Cooper savagely.

"What's the matter with you, Cooper?"

Richardson smiled in unruffled good humor. "You're the research shark, not I. You're the last man to call any speculation absurd."

"It's more than absurd when people get talking about something of which they know nothing," growled Cooper.

"As to that, Doctor Cooper, perhaps we average a glimmer of understanding." Stark's eyes were coldly challenging.

Cooper pushed back his chair. "You will pardon me, if I prefer a brighter light," he said with careful insolence.

Stark's steely eyes searched the man's face. He had never noticed him particularly before. The three were silent, awaiting Cooper's departure. But Cooper kept his seat although his eyes avoided Stark's.

It was Cooper who broke the silence, grown oppressive.

"Oh, well, go on with your foolishness," he said with an embarrassed grin.

Without comment, Stark turned to Richardson. "What is the sleep center, Cass?"

"The sleep center is not definitely known, but is supposed to be in the floor of the fourth ventricle of the medulla."

"Is it not possible that there is some substance that, if injected into the circulation, would act locally upon the sleep center of the brain?"

Stark noted, as he asked the question, that Doctor Cooper was listening intently.

"Lord bless us, Jimmy, who can say what is possible and what impossible? We know something of the physical composition of the brain tissues and considerably less of its functions. I'm only the common or garden variety of doctor, known as a general practitioner. Now, Cooper is a specialist. If he didn't consider our brains of such inferior substance he could tell us a lot." Richardson was making a good-natured attempt to bring his confrère into the discussion.

Doctor Cooper did not respond to the friendly overture. Stark was impressed with the idea that the man remained unwillingly, in response to some stronger urge.

"Different parts of the brain control different movements of the body, don't they, Cass?" asked Stark.

"Yes."

"Is there a physical difference in the composition of the different brain sections?"

"Certain sections of the brain vary in chemical composition, as well as in color and substance. For instance, some parts of the brain are fibrous and others very soft. Then there is the locus cerulius—the blue spot. The medulla is known to contain a high percentage of sugar, as well as lecithin, phosphorus, et cetera."

"I don't want to bore you to death with questions, Cass, but I should like to ask a couple more."

"Go ahead, Jimmy, I'm enjoying it."

"Brain lesions affect local functions, don't they, Cass?" continued Stark.

"Yes."

"Now, this is my last question," Stark promised. "Is it not possible that some substance may have been found that will produce a temporary effect similar to that of a lesion—something with an affinity for some brain substance—for instance, something like the sugar in the medulla—and thus act locally upon the sleep center?"

"Well, I should not like to say that it was impossible, Jimmy, but I should consider it highly improbable."

Stark's eyes swept Cooper's face, twisted with some ill-suppressed emotion. "School's over!" he cried joyously. No one of the four made any move to leave.

"What say to more coffee?" suggested Waddingham. As no one objected he beckoned the waiter, who brought fresh coffee. "Well, I'll say, it was a darn, queer experience, whatever caused it." Waddingham carefully counted four lumps of sugar into the fresh cup. "Would you know that fellow if you saw him again, Jimmy?"

Stark evaded a direct answer. "There was nothing peculiar or uncommon about him. I don't know how he would look without a mustache."

"A mustache more or less doesn't make much difference. Now, if he wore a bunch of spinach, like Cass, and cut that off, his own mother wouldn't know him. But tuck a mustache on Cooper, here, and he would look about the same." Waddingham stared at Cooper with an appraising grin.

Cooper stood up. "I'm about fed up on this foolishness. I bid you good evening, gentlemen."

When Doctor Cooper had left the room Waddingham settled back in his chair with an exaggerated sigh. "Every once in a while something makes me think of the chap who said, 'The more I see of men, the better I like dogs.'"

Stark, lost in speculation, scarcely heard. He was striving to gather a variety of nebulous impressions into coherent decision. His

legal training left him at a disadvantage when it was necessary to act upon vague, circumstantial clews. He sometimes overlooked the immediate while striving to see the end.

Doctor Richardson broke in on his meditation. "Cooper is a strange man. Wonderful intellect, with what might be termed an inconsistent personality."

"I could give it a better name than that," drawled Waddingham.

"I have met more delightful people, but still he interests me. What is his particular line, Cass?"

"I should say he was strong on the offensive," Waddingham threw in before Cass could answer.

"Cooper is a specialist," said Richardson, "but in the broad sense. He is an authority on disease of the brain and at the same time he has done valuable research work in other fields. He is called in consultation pretty widely. And he is a wizard on blood tests. Somehow he has never enjoyed much of a private practice."

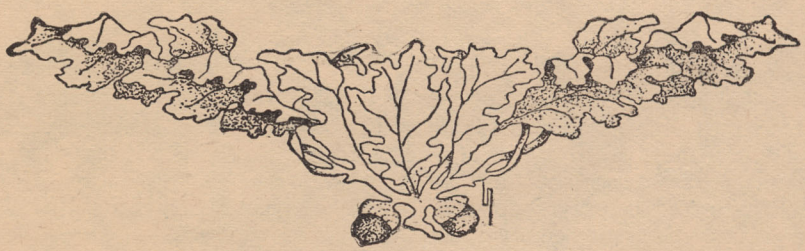
"I can understand that part, all right," observed Waddingham. "Still, in a way, it's too bad; for at his hands even a dying man would try to rouse up, if only to hand him one last punch."

"He seems to have peeved you particularly, to-night, Billy," said Stark, grinning.

"He always does," Billy admitted. "Only, to-night, there seemed less reason for his scratchiness. The man gets my goat even when he only rocks back and taps his confounded fingers together and purs. Somehow he reminds me of a cat."

Whereupon, Stark suggested a game of billiards, to which all assented.

TO BE CONCLUDED.



POISON OR MEDICINE?

NEWS comes that the Noah Tobacco League, an organization that has branches in six Middle-Western States is going to start a campaign of education against the use of tobacco. Of course there is a division of opinion among the members of the medical profession as to the evil effects of tobacco using, but it seems certain that a large proportion of present-day doctors do not regard the damage done by the weed as serious. Still it is doubtful if many of them will agree with the opinion of John Archer, physician to King Charles II. of England, who told his patients that "tobacco purifies the air from infectious malignancy by its fragrancy, sweetens the breath, strengthens the brain and memory, and revives the sight to admiration." This same John Archer, by the way, seems to have been the granddaddy of all the present-day tobacco boosters, for he advertised that a certain mixture that he sold possessed special virtues "to be perceived after taking one pipe."

Be medical opinion favorable or otherwise, a goodly part of our male population likes to smoke and intends to keep smoking, regardless of campaigns of education against the habit. But legislation is a more serious matter and smokers should remember that in several States antitobacco legislation has been introduced—in a few cases becoming law—and the fellow who likes his pipe, cigar or cigarette should be on the alert to see that "reformers"—no matter how well meaning—do not make him a passenger aboard the same boat that is carrying a doleful cargo of people who didn't see any sin in drinking a glass of wine or beer. It is easier to keep unfair legislation from becoming law than to get unpopular laws off the statute books.

Buck Varney's Friend

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "Dare, Dare, Double Dare!" "The Trail of the Spider," Etc.

What he needed most was what Buck Varney found.

THE three men rode slowly, scanning the southern mesas with more interest than seemed necessary, for they were in unfenced country, barren of landmark, uninhabited—a vast empty plain carpeted with short-stemmed grasses and innumerable tiny flowers. Far to the south rose an indistinct ridge of hills, a low, sand-colored mass reaching across the horizon from Lopez, a railroad town, to Vandergrift some eighty miles due west. The morning sun was high, the wind-swept sky cloudless, the air fresh with the tang of recent rain. A ripple of wind ran across the mesa. The grasses seemed suddenly pressed down by an invisible hand. Varney, the youngest of the three riders, reined in and sat gazing at the wavering grasses and the dancing flowers. His companions, Davy and Blacklock, pulled up their horses.

"What do you think you see?" queried Davy, a hulk of a man with a seamed and battered face.

"A crook," said Varney, turning quickly and gazing at the other. Blacklock laughed. "Make it two—and take a look at me," he said, his thin, weathered face set in a hard grin.

"Goes without saying," declared Varney easily. Then he gestured toward the south. "Forty miles to the Pass—and forty miles to Lopez. I've changed my mind about going to Mexico."

"We haven't," said Davy quickly.

"Which makes it all the pleasanter for me," declared Varney. "I'm going to risk staying in this country. I like it."

"You've got by on your looks more than once," said Blacklock. "But this trip looks don't count. Handsome "Buck" Varney is in the hole just as deep as we are."

"Deeper," said Varney, "but you wouldn't understand that."

"Mebby not. But I understand one thing—we travel together. You don't get the chance to work any State's evidence game on us, this journey."

"Oh, if you feel that way about it," said Varney, and the three moved on across the mesa, riding silently, Varney between the others as though he were a prisoner. Yet this position was his own choice. He knew Bill Davy was treacherous and that Steve Blacklock would think no more of killing either of them than he would of shooting a gopher. Buck Varney's own reputation had been good—three years in the Texas ranger service, with considerable to his credit—until an unfortunate quarrel with a companion ranger and a shooting affair had

placed his name among those of the "bad men" of the border. He had drifted up from Texas, working occasionally as a cow hand on different ranches through Arizona and New Mexico, but always dogged by rumors of his discharge from the ranger service, his inclination to quarrel, his uncanny ability with a six-gun. It was a case of "Give a dog a bad name."

Finally Varney grew tired of trying to prove up as a quiet, inoffensive citizen, and decided to play any game that offered. His association with Blacklock and Davy began with the robbing of the Puente bank, a successful operation so far as they were concerned. They had divided the loot, some three thousand dollars apiece, and had agreed to head for old Mexico. They had been riding three days and as yet there had been no sign of pursuit. However, they had not found each other especially companionable with no stimulus of excitement to draw them together in a common purpose. Varney's declaration that he thought of staying in the country had, he knew, caused Blacklock and Davy to show just where he stood with them. He had made his declaration lightly, yet with sincerity. Now, as they plodded across the wind-tossed grasses of the high mesa, Varney realized that he must either go with them or risk a fight. And, smiling to himself, he reiterated his intent to stay in his own country.

Slowly the wind died down to a faint breeze. The warmth of the sun struck down swiftly as though it had been waiting the chance. Davy took off his coat and tied it back of the cantle. Blacklock, who wore no coat, glanced across at Varney, a swift and significant glance in which the ex-ranger read a warning. Blacklock could not have expressed himself more clearly had he said, "Take off your coat, Varney, and before you get your right hand through the sleeve I'll get you." So certain was he of this that Varney casually unbuttoned the upper button of his coat, meanwhile watching Blacklock's hands out of the corner of his eye. Blacklock's right hand, resting lightly on the saddle horn, remained where it was and just as it had been, but the fingers of his left hand tensed ever so slightly on the reins. Varney unbuttoned the second button.

Blacklock's horse, sensitive to the slightest tension on the reins, had dropped back almost a full step. Varney's hand moved down to the third button. Blacklock's horse did not drop back any farther, but maintained its steady stride.

Varney caught the significance of this in a flash. If he took off his coat, Blacklock would pull and shoot, with Bill Davy just out of range on the other side. Varney did not know whether or not it was a preconcerted plan, but he knew that if Blacklock did shoot, Bill Davy would whirl and fire on the instant—and not at Blacklock.

"Pretty work," said Varney, tugging at his shirt collar and easing his shoulders.

"What's pretty work?" queried Davy.

"The silver conchas on Blacklock's bridle. I've just been admiring them. Where did you steal them, Black?"

Blacklock may have made some answer, but Varney did not hear it, for just then Davy's horse reared and jumped sidewise as a half-torpid rattler moving slowly across a bare spot on the mesa showed grayish-yellow against the sand-colored rock. In spite of his customary good seat in the saddle—for Bill Davy was an old hand on the trails—he was thrown, and one foot hung in the stirrup. His horse, jumping sidewise, broke into a run. There was but one thing to do, and Davy did it. He grabbed for his gun and hunching his shoulders forward, fired once, twice, three times. At the third shot the horse stumbled, went to its knees, sank down, quivering. Davy kicked his foot loose from the stirrup, rolled over and got up. It was significant that he had punched the shells from his gun and reloaded before Varney and Blacklock reached him. He limped round the horse, cursing as he stooped and uncinched the saddle. Neither Varney nor Blacklock spoke. Davy dragged the saddle from the dying horse. His carbine had jolted from the scabbard and lay somewhere in the grass behind them.

"See anything of my rifle?" he asked, glancing up at his companions.

"It's back there, where you got piled," said Varney.

"Why didn't you pick it up?"

"Ask Blacklock."

Davy glanced swiftly at Blacklock. Then he started to walk back toward the spot where they had seen the rattler. Varney reined his horse so that he faced Blacklock. "I wouldn't go back for it," he said quietly.

Davy hesitated, turned and strode over to Blacklock. "You'll have to give me a lift," he said, blinking at Blacklock significantly.

Blacklock shook his head. "Varney's horse is stouter than mine."

"How about it, Buck?" queried Davy.

"It's forty miles to Lopez. I've had to walk farther."

"You going to throw me down, Black?" queried Davy, turning back to the other man.

"You throwed yourself," said Blacklock, and as he spoke he jerked out his gun and fired at Varney. Varney was on the alert for such a move and went for his own gun at the flash of Blacklock's hand; but the mesa breeze, lifting suddenly had fanned a corner of his coat across his holster. Blacklock's shot cut the cloth from his shoulder. Varney's horse shied. As its rider tightened rein, it reared. Blacklock fired again, the bullet cutting through the horse's neck and severing the spine. Varney kicked his feet loose and jumped. As he hit the ground he dropped to his side and rolling over, fired at Blacklock, who leaned forward and spurred his horse into a run. Varney leaped to his feet and covered Davy, who seemed dazed and was fumbling at his shirt collar.

"Hit?" queried Varney.

Davy's hat was on the ground and a trickle of red ran down his forehead. "He creased me," mumbled Davy.

Varney strode over and disarmed the dazed man. "Now we'll walk," he said. "Get your canteen and grub."

The homestead fences were new, the rough board shack was new, a raw yellow in the sunlight. A pile of slate-colored earth and stone showed where the well had been dug but recently. The well, still without a curb, was covered with heavy boards. A bucket and coiled rope, a shovel, sledge and drill told of heavy and patient labor to arrive at the first essential—water. Some forty acres of mesa land had been fenced, the posts of juniper, hauled from the distant hills. On a shelf beside the kitchen a row of bright new milk pans shone in the sun. Back of the shack was a small corral and a lean-to stable. A cow grazed placidly in the pasture lot. A spring calf in a pen near the stable thrust its head between the boards and bawled at its disinterested mother. A shaggy sheep dog curled in the shade of the shack got up, shook itself and padded over to the calf which immediately ceased bawling and licked the dog's pointed nose.

In a tiny garden plot, fenced with rabbit wire, a girl was carefully hoeing a row of ambitious young corn. Her round young arms, bare to the elbow, were tanned a healthy brown. Her face, shaded by an old straw hat, was intensely alive with interest in her work, for the new homestead on the great mesa west of Lopez meant everything to her. She loved the quiet vastness of the mesa, the vista of distant hills, mysterious and inviting, the early flowers, the wavering grasses that looked like rippling green water, and the very soil itself, soil that had never been turned until she and her father had essayed new fortunes in making a home far enough from a town to afford the contentment of freedom—near enough to afford the slender necessities of their kind.

Presently the girl straightened up and stood gazing out across the mesa toward Lopez. She turned and glanced at the sun, now halfway between noon and the western horizon. Her father had gone to town for provisions and what scanty mail there might be for them. He had left at daybreak that morning and would return before the evening stars grew bright. Suddenly her attention was attracted by the dog which ran to her, nosed at her ankles and then ran to the gate, where he stood sniffing the western breeze.

"Coyote?" she said. But the dog's actions replied that it was not a coyote. The girl walked over to the gate. Far out on the mesa she saw two figures, men on foot, plodding toward the ranch. Had they been riding she would have paid less attention to them, especially had they been coming from the direction of Lopez. But they were on foot, trudging wearily, following no trail but crossing the trackless mesa. As she watched them approach she recalled a similar circumstance when she had lived on her father's ranch in Texas. At that time also, she had been alone and had observed two men on foot approaching the ranch—a Texas ranger whose horse had been killed in a border fight, bringing in a prisoner. The coincidence of two men on foot where no man walked unless he were fugitive or had suffered an accident; the fact that she was alone, even the time of day—— She had not forgotten the ranger, who had stayed at the ranch that night, taking his prisoner to town in the buckboard next morning. And later, when he had again stayed at their place—— Her father had teased her about

the frequency of young Ranger Varney's visits. But that had been three years ago. Much had happened since then. The Texas ranch had been sold, the money invested in oil stock, their small fortune lost with the small fortunes of many others—and rumor had said that Ranger Varney had been discharged from the service.

She quieted the restless dog as the two men drew closer to the fence. She saw them turn at the fence corner and follow along down toward where she stood. Although alone she was not afraid, neither was she incautious. Stepping back to the house, she entered, took her rifle from the wall and stood it just within the doorway. Then she stepped out again just as the men stopped at the gate.

For a second she did not recognize the man who spoke. Then she felt a peculiar apprehension, a sensation of uncertainty, and withal a vague sense of relief. It was Ranger Varney, older, less sprightly, and peculiarly unlike the man she had known. The other, she noticed, had been wounded. His forehead was streaked with dried blood. He was disarmed, while Varney's gun was in its holster. Moreover, Varney did not seem to wish to recognize her, although he had—she knew that by his expression. She invited them in and placed towel and soap on the bench beside the kitchen door, and filled the washbasin. The older man washed the blood from his forehead and hair, straightened up and gazed round the yard. Then he walked round to the low porch and sat down. The dog backed away from him, growling. Varney washed his face and hands and then with fresh water, washed out the stained towel and hung it in the sun. The girl watched him, her brown eyes puzzled.

"What's wrong, Buck?" she asked.

Varney gestured toward Davy's broad back. "Had a little trouble—one man got away."

"But—you are not surprised to see me, here in Arizona? Father has gone to Lopez. He'll be back this evening. What happened?"

"More than I can tell you, Jane." Varney glanced round. "Any chance of getting a couple of horses? Mine was shot from under me, this morning."

"My horse is here, in pasture—Starlight. But you can stay till morning. Father will be back with the team and you can take your—your friend in to Lopez."

Varney shook his head. The girl stepped close and put her hand on his arm. "Buck, is it true——"

Varney laughed. "Yes. We're both in wrong. He isn't my prisoner, this time. I tried to make it look that way, at first. If it had been any one but you, Jane, I might have got away with it."

"What was it—a killing?"

"No, the Puente bank."

"Oh! But a posse rode from Lopez over to the Pass, day before yesterday. Father heard about it from a sheepman over at Indian Wells. And they know in Lopez. You can't cross the border, now. Buck, take Starlight and ride west, to the Tonto."

"And leave you here with that—that hulk there?" and he gestured toward Davy. "He'd shoot you down, if he couldn't get a horse any other way. No. I'll keep my eye on him till we're far enough from here to make it safe for you. If you could let me have some chuck—enough for a couple of days——"

The girl interrupted him with a gesture. "Of course I will. Buck, did you know that we were in Arizona?"

Varney hesitated. His tanned face flushed dully. "Yes, I knew. This morning I had made up my mind to quit the game I was playing and ride in to Lopez."

"You knew we were—last summer?"

"Heard you were. I didn't know you were out here, ranching it."

"Were you going to give yourself up?"

Varney hesitated. The girl's questioning eyes held him. "No," he said finally. "I hadn't made any plans. I just decided to quit my crowd."

"Buck Varney, ranger!" The girl's eyes flashed sudden scorn. Varney's eyes wavered from hers. He felt as though he had been struck across the face with a whip—and was helpless, could not retaliate. Yet he knew that her terse rebuke was justified. She was a Texan—would always be, at heart, no matter where she lived.

It cost him a tremendous effort of will to withhold the explanation which he wished to make—to justify himself in her eyes for having left the service—for his discharge was merely a formality; yet even so, no explanation would justify his present position as a hunted man, an outlaw, a bank

robber. He raised his eyes. "You're right," he said quietly.

Her anger melted instantly. "Take Starlight, Buck. You can cross to the Tonto to-night."

Varney shook his head. "Not while he is around here." And Varney again indicated Bill Davy who sat on the end of the porch floor, his huge shoulders humped forward, his heavy hands hanging listless between his knees.

"But he's your prisoner! Didn't you take his gun from him?"

"Yes. But that was a little private affair. We were in this deal together. I've got a right to quit him, any time. But I sure won't turn him over to a posse. And I wouldn't turn him loose without his gun, when he's afoot. He's got a right to make a fight for his life, if a posse rides him down. And if I do give him back his gun and tell him to travel, he'll hang around here and try to steal a horse—and he'd get you or your dad, if it came to a show-down."

Davy, apparently gazing at the ground was watching the girl and Varney, with a sidewise glancing of his little, restless eyes. He was waiting until she came between him and the other man, for he knew that there must be a rifle or six-gun in the shack, and it was but a matter of a sudden jump for the doorway—a chance worth taking. He had seen the black horse grazing in the far pasture as they approached the homestead. Familiar with the habits of homesteaders, Davy had immediately realized that the wagon and team were away somewhere—that the man of the place was absent. He surmised that Buck Varney's good looks and manner had made an impression upon the girl, that he was trying to persuade her to let him have the horse. Their conversation had been low-voiced. Davy had caught but an occasional word. And now, as Varney ceased speaking, she turned and stepped from the kitchen doorway, gazing out across the mesa.

Davy's bulky frame lunged up. He jumped for the front doorway, gazed round the room, saw the rifle standing within reach and grabbing it up ran out toward the gate, turned and fired at Varney, who had seized the girl's shoulder and thrust her into the kitchen the instant Davy leaped up. The shot, fired hastily, whistled past Varney's head. He jumped back into the shelter of the house. Davy turned and ran toward the open, dropped behind a boulder and lay watching the house. A bullet spattered on the rock and whistled off at a tangent. Davy did not return the fire, not knowing how many cartridges were in the magazine. Keeping his head down he wormed his way back to the shelter of a shallow arroyo from the edge of which he could still command the ranch yard and buildings. He had the advantage of the rifle, while Varney had nothing but his six-shooter. No one attempted to come from the house. Even the dog had disappeared from the yard.

Jane, white-lipped, turned to Varney and pointed toward the faintly tracked road east of the homestead. "Father," she whispered as the bay team and the green body of the wagon showed clear in the low-slanting sunlight. Slowly the team plodded down the long stretch of cleared land just outside the north-line fence.

Suddenly Varney swung round and faced the girl. "Davy will get him—sure! I've got to stop that. Adios, Jane. Here's Davy's gun, if I don't make it. Keep in the house, whatever happens. If Davy tries to get in, kill him—like you would a wolf." And before Jane realized what he intended to do Varney flung his arm round her shoulders, kissed her and sprang through the doorway.

Sheltered by the house he managed to get to the lean-to stable; Jane watching him breathlessly. But the stretch from the stable to distant fence along which her father's team was plodding was cleared land. And to signal to her father before he came within range of the outlaw's rifle meant that Varney would have to cross that stretch of open ground. As she watched she saw the ex-ranger dash from behind the stable and run. Perhaps twenty yards, and Davy's rifle spoke. Varney stumbled, recovered himself and lunged on. Jane could hear him shout "Keep back! Keep back!"

Again Davy fired. Varney spun round, staggered to his knees, heaved himself up and began to run again, but he ran heavily. She saw the team stop. Still Varney struggled on, his voice coming fainter and fainter as he tried to warn the unsuspecting rancher of his danger. Then, as her father got down from the wagon she knew that he understood there was something wrong. Varney was staggering forward, his strength all but spent, his eyes blurred, the side of his shirt blotched with red. He sank down. A

spurt of dust lifted as Davy fired again. Jane saw the glint of sunlight on steel as her father knelt and crawled through the fence. She knew that he was approaching that prostrate figure with the caution of long experience on the range. She knew that her father's first thought had been of her. She wondered if he would recognize Varney—if Varney were too badly wounded to explain: or if—she shuddered, hoping that her father would not come any nearer to him.

Again Davy fired—this time at the tall, stalwart figure striding across the open ground with the deliberation of Fate. Then, with that same deliberation her father knelt on one knee and leveled his rifle. Jane could see it swing in his hands as though he were following some moving object. She realized that the outlaw in the arroyo must have shown himself. Then the heavy report of the rifle sounded across the still air. Her father got to his feet, walked over to where Varney lay, and stooped over him.

She saw her father carry the inert figure to the wagon—imagined that she could see him loose the brake and take up the reins. Without other evidence than his actions she knew that the other man, the man whom Varney had called Davy, was lying out in the brush somewhere, powerless to harm her or her kin.

Bill Davy, finding the rifle empty, had dropped it and rising had started to run down the shallow arroyo. Old John Halliday, Jane's father, had killed running deer at twice the distance. Moreover, it was a straightaway shot. Struck between the shoulders, Davy dove headlong, twisted sidewise, and lay, his face in the warm sand.

Jane stepped from the kitchen doorway and hastened to open the ranch gate as Halliday drove up. She said nothing while he carried Varney into the house, but busied herself getting water and bandages. Varney was alive, but hit hard. After Halliday had come from the bedroom, as he was washing his hands, Jane asked him if Varney would live. Halliday shook his head, noncommittally. Then she told him all she knew of the circumstances connected with Varney's arrival at the ranch. He nodded.

"Heard about it again—in Lopez. The posse got Blacklock, just this side of the Pass. They're on their way out here, about now. Reckon I got the other one. He went down like he was down to stay. Was that your rifle he had?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Saw it was missing when I came in. Know anything about this?" And Halliday stepped into the bedroom and returned with a blood-soaked money belt. "Judging by the feel, there's considerable money in it. If Buck was after them outlaws, he was taking big chances of losing a lot of money. Just put it away, safe. I'm going out to see how far the other man got."

The gaunt, grizzled old Texan turned to leave the room. Jane checked him. "Father, I guess you don't understand. Buck came in with the other man, about three, this afternoon. They were on foot. The other man—Davy, he said—had quarreled with him. Buck had taken Davy's gun, but Davy wasn't his prisoner. I've got to tell you. Buck said he was in as deep as the rest of them."

"And you believed him!" cried Halliday. "Why, Buck Varney was born in Texas! He was a Texas ranger. And him hand-in-glove with trash like Bill Davy and Blacklock! Did it look like it when Buck came across that field to warn me? Cool down, Jane. I never knew you to get fooled so bad before."

"But, father——"

"You just catch up Starlight and saddle him. Somebody's got to get a doctor here, quick."

Jane Halliday knew that it would be futile to try to change her father's mind as to Buck's integrity as a Texan and a ranger. Her father was stubborn and would listen to nothing against a man he liked. She stepped to the bedroom door, as her father left the house. Varney's face was ghastly. His eyes were closed. She tiptoed out to the stable, got Starlight's bridle and hardly realizing what she was doing, walked across the pasture to the horse, which she caught and bridled without any difficulty. Back at the corral she saddled him and led him round to the front of the shack. Her father came from the house.

"Found another of them money belts on the man out there," he said, "stuffed full of bills. Reckon you better cache it with Buck's till the posse get here. They ought to show up before sundown. Said they was going to head out this way. I'm going to ride to Lopez, right now. Most like I'll meet 'em. Can't tell. They might cross the ridge most anywhere. You can tell 'em

where to find the man they want. I'll have a doctor back here before morning."

Jane did up a package of food for her father, thrust it hastily into his hands, kissed him good-by. He attributed her peculiar manner to most natural causes, under the circumstances, yet he gazed hard at her just before he left. "You ain't afraid, Jane?"

"No."

The brief twilight was gone. She lighted the kitchen lamp and going to the bedroom took the two money belts from her trunk. She tiptoed out and spent the next few minutes in counting and recounting the money —some six thousand dollars in bills. She smoothed the bills into neat packages and managed to tuck them all into the belt her father had found on Davy. Then she made a fire in the stove and burned the belt found on Buck Varney. It was a slender chance that her father might not meet the posse on his way to town. In that event they would have no word that Varney was at the ranch. And if she could prevent their knowing, she would. If not——

She hid the filled money belt in her father's cot in the front room. Taking the lamp she stepped to her own room. "Buck!" she said, "can you hear me?"

Varney's pallid lips moved as he whispered "yes."

"There's a posse coming. Father has gone for the doctor. If he doesn't meet them, they won't know you are here. That man that you called Davy is dead. And the other man—he was killed this side of the Pass. I took the money from your belt and put it with the money that Davy had. When they come, I am going to give it all to them. I'll try to get them to leave as soon as they have rested their horses. Do you understand?"

Varney's whisper was barely audible as he told her that he understood. Then he asked for water. She fetched it. He drank and closed his eyes.

She had just closed the bedroom door behind her when she heard the distant hoofbeats of horses. From the sound she judged that they were near the corner of the north and east fences. The dog, bristling in the doorway, growled. She quieted him, and turning to the stove began to make coffee. She had placed a plate, some bread, a pitcher of milk and a cup and saucer on the table when some one called from the gateway. She stepped to the yard and answered. "Halliday there?" some one asked.

"No. Didn't you meet him?"

"That you, Miss Halliday? I'm Fletcher from the sheriff's office. No, we didn't meet your father. Saw him in Lopez, this morning."

"He expected to meet you," she said, walking toward the gate. "A man was killed here, to-day. He was shooting at my father——"

"What did he look like?"

She described Davy, telling the little group of riders outside the gate that he had come to the house, had taken her rifle, and after running out to the arroyo had begun firing at her father when he drove down along the line fence.

"And your dad got him?"

"Yes."

"Good work! That saves us a job. Where'd you say this man Davy is?"

"In the arroyo, over there. Wait! I'll get a lantern."

"See any one else around here?" queried Fletcher.

But she had turned away and was hastening toward the house.

"Got nerve!" declared a rider.

Jane returned with the lantern, and directed the men where to search. When they had left she hurried to the corral, led the two work horses to the lean-to stable and harnessed them. She had backed them to the wagon and was hitching up when the men returned, one of them walking and leading a horse that bore a ghastly burden. They came into the yard, dismounted, and their leader walked over to the wagon. Jane anticipated his question.

"I knew you'd want the wagon, right away," she said. "Of course you'll feed your horses, before you go back. There's some loose hay in the lean-to. Then you must come in and have some coffee. I——"

"That's all right, Miss Halliday. The boys won't object to a little hot coffee. We don't aim to bother you, none. You say your dad has gone back to Lopez?"

"He said he expected to meet you, when he left."

"Sure! He wanted to tell us he got the man we was after. Now don't you go to no trouble. And thanks for hitchin' up that team. We'll throw a little hay to the horses, and start back in about an hour."

"I'll get the coffee ready, right away," said Jane.

The four men declined her invitation to enter the house, but squatted outside the kitchen doorway, smoking and talking. She fetched them coffee, bread and butter, milk. When they had finished she told them of the money and brought Davy's money belt to the kitchen. Curious, the posse entered and watched Fletcher count the bills.

"That makes nine thousand," he said, finally. "Six that Davy had, and they found three thousand on Blacklock. Tallies with what was took from the Puente bank. The sheriff in Puente telegraphed that they were three men in the deal, but didn't know the name of the third man. Anyway, we got all the cash, and we got two of the men. Guess we can call it a day's work."

Somewhat over an hour later they were on their way back to Lopez. "Mighty fine girl, that Miss Halliday," said one of the posse who rode beside the wagon.

"That's right!" declared another. "Only it struck me as kind of funny how she hitched up that team so quick. Looked like she wanted to get rid of us, pronto."

"Course she did!" said Fletcher. "She's had what you might call a pretty trying day, for a woman. And I reckon she'd rather be there alone, than knowing that this stiff here in the wagon was laying around somewhere, even if we was there. What I'd like to know is where the third man got away."

"Thought you said we'd call it a day's work," suggested the man spoken to.

"We can, at that. Reckon Miss Halliday thinks so, too." And Joe Fletcher, realizing that his men suspected nothing of the presence of a wounded man in Jane Halliday's bedroom, smiled grimly to himself in the dark. Aside from the fact that he had noticed the tiny dark spots on the kitchen floor, when he entered the house—spots that apparently led from the outer door to the closed door of the girl's room, he had seen a pair of silver-mounted spurs hanging on a nail near the doorway—a pair of spurs that he had given Buck Varney when they were rangers together, in Texas. He knew he could not have been mistaken. The spurs were of a peculiar pattern. Moreover, as he left the kitchen he had purposely waited until his companions had filed out, that he might look at the spurs more closely. The silver conchas on the leathers had "B. V." engraved upon them.

Just before daybreak, the posse heard riders approaching from the direction of Lopez. Fletcher told his men to wait and he spurred ahead. He met old man Halliday and the doctor. They talked together, their voices low. Then they drew apart, Fletcher calling to his men to come on—Halliday and the doctor passing them swiftly.

"Who was that with old man Halliday?" queried one of Fletcher's men.

The riders expected Fletcher to answer, but as he did not, no one ventured a spoken opinion. Some of them thought they had recognized the bulky figure of Doctor Warner, of Lopez.

Three weeks later, Buck Varney was lying dressed, on a cot which old man Halliday had moved from his room to the north side of the ranch house, that the invalid might not suffer from the heat of an early summer season. Varney lay propped up, enjoying the comparative coolness of the veranda. It was late afternoon. Jane, in from helping her father, sat on the edge of the veranda, fanning her flushed face with the wide-brimmed straw hat which she wore when in the fields. The tedious days of waiting on the wounded man were about over—tedious to her because she knew they were to him. Varney was recovering rapidly, would be able to travel soon.

While Halliday had in no way indicated that he thought Varney connected with the recent robbery, it was significant that the old man, learning that Varney had decided to go to Lopez, had suggested that it would be no particular trouble to hitch up and drive him south, to the border town just beyond the Pass. And in the suggestion Varney read the old man's thought. Halliday would not admit that his young friend could be guilty—yet he was planning in his offhand way to take that young friend to a district where he would not be questioned.

As Jane sat gazing at the ex-ranger's wasted cheeks and hollow eyes, eyes that returned her gaze with a serious alertness, she leaned forward swiftly. "Buck, you must not go to Lopez. I know why you want to go. I think father knows why you want to go. Of course he knows about the other—now. Doctor Warner explained his visits here to the Lopez people by telling them that I was ill. No one else knows—and the money has been returned." Her eyes appealed, as well as her voice.

Varney frowned, and drew his thin hand across his eyes. "That's all right," he said finally, "but there is some one else that knows—knew I was here that night when the posse rode in. And he didn't let the boys know, because, well, he thinks a lot of you, Jane."

"You mean Joe Fletcher?"

Varney nodded. "Joe lost his job in the ranger service trying to cover up my tracks—that time. That's why he is up here. And no one can tell me that Joe stepped into this house the other night and didn't see something that would tell him there was some one in that little room. Why, I saw my spurs, on the nail beside the door, when your dad brought me out, yesterday. And Joe gave me those spurs."

"But Buck, if you do go to Lopez——"

"I know," he said, nodding. "Chance of a long term——" Varney raised on his elbow. Jane turned her head. A rider had just turned the eastern corner of the ranch fence and he was coming at a lope. Jane jumped to her feet and turned to Varney.

"If it's a friend," he said, "it's all right. If it isn't, I couldn't get in without him seeing me." Varney stared at the oncoming figure. "I don't know the horse—but I know the man."

Jane had also recognized the tall, lean figure of Fletcher, who pulled up at the gate, dropped the reins and strode up to the veranda. "Evenin', Buck," he said casually, after raising his sombrero to Jane.

Then he turned to the girl. "Your father is coming across the field, lively. I just rode over to say that there'll be visitors here, right soon. That's their dust, yonder. If you'll get Buck into your room, Miss Halliday, I'll talk with 'em. Shouldn't wonder, now——"

Old man Halliday came swiftly round the corner of the house. He stared at Fletcher, then at the others. "It's all right," said Varney.

"You mean Joe is all right—but that dust up the road ain't. I don't know which side you're on, Joe, but you can make a quick choice. Nobody gets into this shack without my say-so."

Jane stepped over to Varney and helped him up. He leaned heavily on her arm as she helped him into the house. Halliday followed, reaching down his rifle from the rack and standing it just inside the doorway. Joe Fletcher sat on the veranda edge, his back against a post, his long fingers curling a cigarette. The oncoming horsemen—Fletcher knew that there were four of them—drew up to the gate. The leader nodded brusquely to Fletcher. "Beat us to it, eh?"

Fletcher lighted his cigarette. "I came down here to call on Miss Halliday. Any objections?"

"Nope! But we want Buck Varney."

Old man Halliday appeared in the doorway. "Evenin', boys," he said quietly. "Want to see me?"

"We want Buck Varney. He's here—been here goin' on three weeks. We don't want trouble with you, Halliday, but we aim to get our man."

"You mean you would be searching my house?" queried Halliday.

"If you don't send him out."

"Then come right in!" said the old man, swinging his arm back and bringing the rifle to his hip.

Jane, watching through the window, saw that Joe Fletcher, who had not made a movement during the talk, now held a cocked six-gun pointing, rather carelessly, in the direction of the posse.

"Yes," invited Fletcher, "come right in. I told you I come down here to call on Miss Halliday. Seems you ain't believing it."

The four riders at the gate sat with their hands on their saddle horns, motionless. They heard the click of the hammer as Halliday cocked the Winchester. "If you ain't coming in," said Halliday, "just move on. You're spoilin' my view."

Fletcher was watching the posse. He knew each man—and knew that they meant business. He thought he knew which man would go for his gun first, in case they decided to shoot it out—and Fletcher determined to get that man, from where he sat. Halliday, a swift and deadly shot, would get another.

A shuffling step sounded in the house, and a muffled exclamation. Buck Varney touched Halliday's shoulder. "Let me talk to them," he said. And before Halliday could express his surprise, Varney crowded past him and stood out on the veranda. Even then, none of the posse knew him—had never seen him before. "I'm Buck Varney," he declared. "I'm the man you want—but Mr. Fletcher was a jump ahead of you. I was going into Lopez with him, tomorrow morning."

"Wondered why you were in such a sweat," said Fletcher, addressing the posse. "You have heard him say he is my prisoner."

"We heard it. But it happens you both hail from Texas. How do we know——"

"By the way we shoot!" bellowed Halliday. The Winchester boomed. One of the riders felt a twitch at his hat. It jumped from his head and spinning dropped to the road. Indecision is fatal. Mechanically the posse drove their spurs into the sweating horses. They pattered down the road.

Joe Fletcher rose and stepped over to Varney. "Which way are you heading, Buck?"

"Lopez," said Varney.

"I knowed you was square!" declared old man Halliday, reserving to his stubborn self his own interpretation of the declaration. He would not give in. Jane, realizing what Varney meant, stepped close to her father, and, her head against his massive chest, she sobbed, clinging to him. He patted her shoulder. "Don't cry, Jane," he whispered. "It may come out all right."

Out on the veranda, seated on the cot, Varney was looking up at his old friend, who leaned against a veranda post with all the languid nonchalance in the world. "And they can't hold you long," Fletcher was saying, "because they can't prove you was in the deal. The money has been returned. I reported finding six thousand in Davy's belt. The other three thousand was on Blacklock. So far as the Puente folks are concerned, the deal is closed. That posse was ridin' a little ahead of their brains. Two weeks ago I telegraphed the sheriff in Puente that you got shot up bringing in Davy. He telegraphed back his regards. I didn't tell the boys that. I'm the only one that knows the how of it—and I'm heading back to Texas in the morning. There's nothing here for me." Joe Fletcher smiled. Varney gestured, as though irritated. "Once you got your feet clear of the rope," continued Fletcher, "don't run back into it. Miss Jane knows you're square. And you could stake out a homestead alongside of this one, and prove up—both ways. I'm ridin' through Lopez on my way south. I'll have a talk with some of the folks—and I reckon no one will bother you."

"I'll stay—and try it," declared Varney.

"Sure! And if you get to feeling lonesome, just imagine them plow handles is the handles of two six-guns. They're about the same shape."

You will find stories by Mr. Knibbs in early issues.

THE CAREFUL HUNTER

CHARLES M. CAMPEAU, the railroad man, has for years been a mighty marksman in the rifle galleries, but it was only last season that, as a member of a party hunting deer in the Canadian woods, he got a chance to try his skill shooting at big game.

"Say, Dick," he asked one of his fellow Nimrods as soon as he caught up with him on the way back to camp at the end of the first day's hunting; "are the guides out of the woods yet?"

"Yes," Dick told him; "just a little bit ahead of us."

"All three of them?"

"Yep; all three."

"And all three safe?"

"Yes."

"You're sure, absolutely sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Then," said Campeau, his chest swelling, "I've shot a deer!"

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THE FORTY-FIVER?

THE latest mortality alarm that has gone out is that while we have been busy saving the babies, and thus reducing our death rate to a point below all record, we have disregarded the astonishing fact of cultivating in our hygienic midst a steadily rising mortality in elderly life, which might be said to be peculiar to ourselves.

That is, at the very meridian of life, between forty-five and fifty years of age, we die too frequently. Prevalence of progressive diseases of the heart, the blood vessels and kidneys is held to be the cause of our high middle-age death rate. But what is the cause of these diseases? The doctors tell us that overwork, nervous strain and improper food are generally the chief factors in these troubles.

But, with all due respect to medical opinion, we think we could diagnose the case in a word, as it were: *lack of play.*

Now, by play, we do not mean spending several afternoons a week on the golf course, nor swinging the racket on a tennis court for hours at a time, nor getting into a good game of handball every evening. These measures of health are as obvious as they are excellent.

What we mean is cultivating, rather, an attitude of mind as well as an activity of body. Do not spoil your golf game by fretting afterward about the shots you could have made and didn't. Do not nullify the oxygen riches gained in your tennis match by passing the evening in worry over office matters. Do not counterbalance the good of the handball sweat by quarreling with your wife about the fried potatoes.

They tell us, the learned fraternity do, that brain poisoning threatens every middle-aged man. It is also called "auto-intoxication." A physician told us that you might say, in describing the trouble, that it was insufficient cleansing of the cells and tissues of the body. "Middle age is the great age of the brain," he said, "but the melancholy fact must be recorded that this golden period of mental power is too often the age of brain poisoning. A clean, clear, mature brain is swift and daring. It is constructive. It is sure. A poisoned brain is slow and hesitating. It cannot construct. It cannot be sure. Frequently, such a change is seen in a brilliant brain. How lamentable! Recklessness, vacillation, stubbornness to carry out ill-conceived ideas are signs of the breakdown. Brain poisoning or auto-intoxication is the most subtle and to-be-feared enemy of the middle-aged man."

Saving babies is all right, but contrasted with the problem of saving the middle-aged man from himself, reducing infant mortality is easy. If we could somehow only transfuse the baby's love of play into the forty-fiver's veins, they would not harden so quickly, nor would his brain absorb toxins for his untimely destruction, and his main blood pressure would be solely the result of laughter.

The average American does not have to learn how to work—it seems born in him—but he does have to learn how to play.

PINS AND PENNIES

MILLIONS of pins are lost each year, and no one seems to care, and nobody has ever satisfactorily figured out what becomes of them. Though it is supposed to bring good luck if you pick up one, the superstition seems to have little hold on the imagination.

But with copper cents, it ought to be different, yet we are informed by no less person than the director of the mint himself that between five and ten million one-cent pieces apparently disappear each year. Other coins vanish, too, we hear, but the penny is in a class by itself in the disappearing act.

Such a thing is unheard of in any other country, of course, and it must be taken as a commentary on our extravagance. Think of it, from fifty to a hundred thousand dollars annually thrown away! It might pay some one to go hunting this treasure.

Pennies are easier to lose than ever these days, we are told, because they are employed in more than half of the small cash transactions entered into by the average person. The department stores in their bargain prices call for innumerable copper cents, and the traction companies in fifty-nine large cities require them in their fares, which range from six to nine cents. Cigars and cigarettes are generally sold at prices that involve the exchange of pennies. Indeed, the fluctuating costs of living, going up or down in small decimals, have put a strain on pennies all round.

To keep the people supplied with enough copper cents to meet all demands is one of the most worrisome tasks of the director of the mint. He admits it. In spite of the enormous total of 3,750,000,000 pennies minted in a year, the cry is for more of these elusive coins. The maker of pennies is often at his wit's end to supply the insatiable demand. From time to time, proposals are made to offset the trouble by coining two-cent and three-cent pieces, but these are not encouraged for the simple reason that coins of such denomination have also the habit of disappearing from mortal ken!

THE CENTENNIAL OF BRAZIL

GREAT preparations have been made for the hundredth anniversary of the independence of Brazil, to be celebrated with due splendor at Rio de Janeiro during the months of September, October and November, and possibly later. The principal countries of Europe, as well as the Spanish-American nations are taking part in the gala ceremonies, and it is with pride that we learn that the United States is well represented. Brazil has always been a warm and admiring friend of ours, and whenever we had a fair or exposition was among the first and most generous supporters of our festive projects.

Congress voted a million dollars to be expended upon American participation in the Brazilian Centennial, and our architects and engineers did excellent work on our buildings and exhibits at Rio. The "American Building" not only will house our products during the exposition, but is planned to be permanent, and will become the official residence of the United States ambassador to Brazil, an excellent doubling up of beauty and utility. Money raised here is to pay for the gigantic Goddess of Friendship, which, like her sister goddess, the Statue of Liberty, will stand at the entrance of a magnificent harbor. American experts will be also responsible for the electric-light effects. These, we are told, will be particularly noteworthy and mark an epoch in so-called festivals of light.

Only in the most general way do we Americans know anything of our subequator neighbor, and it is to be hoped that her centennial may open our eyes to the really wonderful land of Brazil, which in extent is larger than the United States, and which is developing a civilization founded upon untold natural resources. Most of us regard Brazil as a land of mystery and romance, where diamonds and gold may be found in valleys of death, and where anacondas lurk to crush you in their slimy coils. Mingled with the vision of gold and snakes are deadly fevers and brown-skinned natives who greet you with poisoned darts. All of these things may be in Brazil, but they are no more representative of the country than hookworm and gunmen and coal would be of our own country.

There is a very practical side to Brazil, as is witnessed in her fine cities and growing industries. And it is her practical side that we Americans must think about, if we wish to be of the highest service to our southern neighbor. The Brazilians like us, and we can be of first importance to them, especially in helping them to build railroads, which they need more than any other one thing. Brazil has only 16,000 miles of railroads. Compare this with our own approximately quarter of a million railroad mileage. Some idea of the service may be gotten from the fact that between the capital, Rio de Janeiro, and Bahia, the third largest city, there is but one passenger train a week.

Brazil wants to be developed, but not exploited. There is all the difference in the world in those two words. Hitherto she has been exploited and is naturally suspicious of the friendly stranger. Both the British and Germans are envious of the grace and place in which Americans are held by the Brazilians, and it is up to us, as the elder democratic sister of the Western Hemisphere, to keep and foster that esteem.

HEADS AND TAILS

DIGGING into the ruins of ancient Sardis, American archæologists unearthed in April thirty gold coins dating back to the reign of Crœsus, the last of the Lydian kings and the first of international bankers. These rare coins, known as "staters," are twenty-five centuries old, and are reported to be the earliest examples of gold currency. Crœsus, indeed, is held to be the father of the gold basis for international exchange and stability of money value. These staters are of pure gold, and are stamped with the head of a lion on one side and the head of a bull on the other. It is conjectured from marks on the coin that the impressions of lion and bull were beaten in the metal on an anvil. The lion on the stater has his ears laid back and his jaws are open as if to seize prey. The bull presents his horns as if for combat. We take it that the expressions of the animals symbolize the fierce and terrible nature of the Lydian government.

Coins, old and new, have that in common with the staters of Crœsus—they tell a tale to those who can read their significance. One of the oldest Greek coins shows the figure of an ox, suggesting that agriculture and wealth were synonymous. Later, Athens put an owl, for wisdom, on her metal money. Bœotia, the land of wine making, adopted the sign of Bacchus for its mintage, while Macedonia, the warlike, expressed itself in a buckler. When the Romans were proud of their seamanship, their favorite coin, the as, had on one side the head of Janus, the two-faced god, and on the other the prow of a vessel. Boys of Rome, playing at the game in which coins were tossed, used to cry "heads or ships" instead of "heads or tails."

Christian religious sentiment became involved in the minting of money in the Middle Ages, when the popes of Rome exerted their enormous influence over both monarchs and people. This accounts for the origin of the "ducat," which was first minted in the kingdom of Sicily. On this coin was impressed the following Latin inscription: *"Sit tibi, Christe, datus, quem tu regis, iste ducatus,"* which translated means, "May this duchy, O Christ, over which you rule, be devoted to you." The last word of the phrase, abbreviated, gave the coin its popular name.

The origin of the word "shilling" is of interest. In the beginning, the British shilling bore the mark of a heavily indented cross, which permitted the coin to be broken into halves or quarters. Hence, the verb *"scylan,"* to divide, gave the coin its name, corrupted into "shilling." The names of "franc," "sovereign," and "crown," tell their own story of royal kingdoms.

Our own eagle has lately suffered a transformation. On the old silver dollars he is rampant, screaming with rage, and holding a bundle of arrows in his claw. On the new "peace dollars" he has folded his wings and offers an olive branch.

Future archæologists, digging into the ruins of our civilization, and finding these two dollars of opposite emotion, ought to be able to draw their own brilliant conclusions.

THE GREAT FALL GAME

IN the amateur sport of the country one game in particular has more and more, of late years, been supplying a public exhibition comparable, in a way, to those of ancient Rome's Colosseum. In mid-November, to this or that point where the more important football matches are played, the tide of spectators flows in its many thousands. A world's series crowd is almost small compared to that which gathers annually in the greater football stadiums for the big games. So great indeed has public interest in these contests become that college presidents have begun to feel and express real alarm lest the effect of so much interest should be the overshadowing of the real purpose of athletics in a university. And undoubtedly some evils have crept in. To win the "big game" appears to have been more of a desideratum than the good derivable from playing it and the preparing for it and the staging of it have come to demand so much organization and attention from those concerned that it is a question whether the sport is not really being somewhat overemphasized, after all. So feelingly have certain university officials spoken, indeed, that many of the public have begun to wonder if intercollegiate football was about to be abolished.

For the comfort of the legions to whom one or other of the greater gridiron contests is the big entertainment thrill of the autumn it scarcely seems likely that the game is as near death as all that. For those in control of the game a word to the wise will likely be quite sufficient. For that matter, already the reaction is apparent. In protest against the tendency to overextend the game the Yale undergraduate organ, the *Daily News,* has only recently advocated cutting from that university's schedule all other "big" games than those with Princeton and Harvard. The corresponding Princeton organ calls for the support of alumni in discouraging that proselytizing of promising athletes by well-meaning but too-loyal graduates, which, while the exception, has not been as rare an occurrence in the colleges as it might be. And, touching on football's having come to be taken too seriously, Professor Mendell, graduate chairman of the board of athletic control at New Haven, assures us that any one watching football practice there this fall will find a new spirit pervading the play—a spirit of being out there playing for sport and not as men going through necessary "drudgery" for the mere sake of winning championships. A healthful manifestation going to the root of the matter. For, after all, this or any other amateur game is primarily for the amusement and benefiting of the players and not just for "glory"—or, for that matter, for the amusement of the thousands of spectators of the big matches, much as one trusts that there will always be good games to see.

As to the value of football and collegiate athletics in general it is of particularly timely interest to note that after tracing the career of every academy athlete over a period of thirty years a board of officers at Annapolis has found that athletes were slightly better students than the other midshipmen and after graduation showed a far greater permanency in the service. A recent official investigation at Harvard likewise led to the conclusion that sanely conducted athletics by no means interfere with studies. Sanity, indeed, is the watchword in all such athletics. Doubtless we can safely trust those most nearly concerned with them to preserve theirs—and their game.

POPULAR TOPICS

UNCLE SAM is the proud father of a brand-new island, Kingman's Reef, in the Pacific discovered by Lorrin A. Thurston, a newspaper proprietor and yachtsman of Honolulu. This new possession is nine miles long and five miles wide—at low tide. It becomes less important as the tide comes in, and at high tide is only one hundred and twenty feet long and nine feet wide. Maybe it will grow.

THE busts of five more great Americans were unveiled recently in New York University's Hall of Fame. Those whose memories were honored were: George Washington; Edgar Allan Poe; Mark Hopkins, the founder of Williams College; Maria Mitchell,

a pioneer American woman in the field of science and professor of astronomy of Vassar College from 1865 to 1888; and Gilbert Stuart, an artist whose portraits of Washington are accepted as authoritative and who won for himself a place among the great portrait painters of all time.

THIS is how Chief John Kenlon of New York City's fire department pictures the probable methods of fire fighting fifty years from now: An automatic radio alarm will be installed in every building. On the outbreak of fire the alarm will be given without human assistance. Then helicopters, rising vertically from rooftops, will carry the apparatus to the blaze, which will be extinguished quickly by some gas harmless to life but deadly to fire.

ANOTHER suggested improvement in the field of city service is that the streets be cleaned by motor-driven vacuum cleaners. The elimination of disease-breeding dust and the saving of hundreds of thousands of dollars are among the advantages claimed for this up-to-date method of making our cities as spick and span as Spotless Town.

TWO Atlantic City women recently had an out-of-the-ordinary sort of controversy. A maid, while preparing her employer's dinner, ate one of the clams she was opening and was almost strangled by a large pearl that it contained. Her mistress dislodged the pearl for her and then claimed it. The maid consulted a lawyer and now her employer is minus one pearl, one clam and one maid.

ANOTHER novel controversy came to light when a Chicago girl sued a theatrical promoter for damages caused by learning to dance in the modern way. She said that as a result of his teaching she was suffering from diarthrosistis and that the sound of jazz music "incites her involuntarily and unconsciously to wiggle and revolve."

IF you happen to be a reader of a certain sort of "modern" fiction you perhaps have an idea that serving in the army is only a little better than serving a term in prison. Old soldiers don't seem to feel that way about it. Not long ago the Twenty-second Infantry regiment of the regular army was ordered to move from New York to Georgia. For reasons of economy most of the men were to be transferred to other regiments. That didn't suit the soldiers. The Twenty-second was their outfit and they wanted to stay with it so much that they offered to pay their own transportation to its new station. Army officials are trying to find some way to meet their wishes. Perhaps after all "Soldiers Three" is a better picture of real soldiers than "Three Soldiers."

EVERYBODY knows the traditional plight of the shoemaker's children, and that good doctors call in a brother medico when they are ill. Apparently psychics feel the same way about their powers. In Kansas City a professional seeress, who makes a specialty of finding lost articles, recenty lost her watch and got it back by placing an advertisement in the "Lost and Found" column of a newspaper.

ONE of the things we always have envied the Prince of Wales is his large, varied and gaudy wardrobe. Therefore it was a shock to learn that the heir to the British throne had almost been forced to miss attending a royal garden party given in his honor in Japan, because he didn't have a frock coat. The invitations had stated that frock coats must be worn and the Japanese officials were polite but firm—gentlemen not wearing frock coats would have to stay outside. The prince got around the difficulty by wearing a naval full-dress uniform.

Me and Slane

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Story of Gombi," "Vanderdecken," Etc.

What Buck Slane didn't know about the fate of Tawela didn't worry him.

IV—IRON LAW.

IF you want to study psychology go to the wilds. The minds of civilized men and women are so covered with embroidery that the true texture is almost hidden; their faces have been used so long for masks that form and expression cannot be relied on. Among savages you come sometimes upon the strangest facts bearing upon the structure of mind, facts that lose half their significance in the atmosphere of New York or London, yet which, all the same, are not unconnected with our processes of reasoning and conduct.

I was sitting with Brent in the house of Ibañez, the agent of the Southern Islands Soap Syndicate, an institution that turns coconut trees and native labor into soap, mats, margarine, dollars and dividends, beats up the blue Pacific with the propellers of filthy steamboats and has its offices in San Francisco, London and New York. We were sitting, to speak more strictly, on the veranda; the southern night lay before us and a million stars were lighting the sea.

Tahori, a native boy, and one of Ibañez's servants, had just brought along a big tray with cigars and drinks and placed it on a table by us. I noticed that he wore white cotton gloves. Brent also had noticed the fact.

"What's wrong with that chap's hands?" asked Brent.

"Tahori's?" replied our host. "Nothing—only he must not touch glass."

"Taboo?"

"Yes. He only helps occasionally in household work when Mauri is away. I got over the difficulty of his waiting upon me by giving him gloves in case he accidentally touched a tumbler or bottle. Even with the gloves on he will not handle anything in the way of glass knowingly—the cook puts the things on that tray and when he takes it back to the kitchen she will clear it."

"I thought all that was dying out," said Brent.

"So it is, but it still hangs about. Tahori is a South Island boy. I don't know why the taboo about glass came about; makes it awkward for him as a servant."

"No one knows," said Brent. "I've seen chaps that were under taboo preventing them from eating oysters and others that daren't touch the skin of a shark or the wood of such and such a tree, no one knows why."

"What do they suppose would happen to them if they broke the taboo?" I asked.

"They couldn't," said Brent.

"Couldn't?"

"No, they couldn't. I'm talking of the real old Islanders whose minds haven't been loosened up by missionaries and such, though I'm not so sure it wouldn't hold good for the present-day ones too, and I'm saying that a chap like that couldn't break his taboo, not if he wanted to, not if his life depended on it. Beliefs are pretty strong things but this is something stronger even than a belief. Maybe it's the mixture of a custom and a belief, and that makes it have such a hold on the mind, but there it is—I've seen it."

"Seen a man unable to break his taboo?"

"Seen the effects, anyhow, same as you might see the wreck of a ship lying on a beach. I doubt if you'd see the same thing these days, though there's no telling, anyhow it was away back in the early nineties and I'd just come up from the Tongas to Tahiti, getting a lift in the *Mason Gower*. She was an old trading schooner the missionaries had collared and turned into a Bible ship and I lent my hand with the cooking to pay for my passage.

"I'd had a quarrel with Slane and parted from him, taking my share of the money we had in common and I hadn't seen him for six months and more. I hadn't prospered either, losing nearly every buck in a blackbirding venture I ought never to have gone in for.

"I hadn't more than ten dollars in my belt when I landed at Papeiti, but I'd saved my dunnage and had some decent clothes and the luck to fall in with Billy Heffernan at the club. Billy was one of the Sydney boys, he wasn't more than twenty-five but he'd seen more of the world than most and lost two fortunes which he'd made with his own hands. That was the sort Billy was, and when I struck him at Papeiti he was recovering from his last bust up and had got the money together for another venture.

"His first fortune had been made over Sing Yang opium which isn't opium no more than Sam Shu is honest drink. Then he'd done a deal in shell and pulled it off and lost the money in copra and now he was after precious coral.

"When I met him in the bar I said 'Hello, Heff—what are you after down here?' and he says, 'Coral.'

"'Well, you'll find lots of it,' says I, thinking he was joking, and then I found it was precious coral he was talking of. You see there's about a hundred different sorts of coral. Coral's made by worms. If you go on any reef and knock a chunk off between tide marks you'll find your chunk has got worms hanging out of it. I've done it often in different parts and I've been surprised to find the difference in those worms. Some are a foot long and as thin as a hair, and some are an inch thick and as long as your finger, some are like snails and some are like lobsters and prawns in shape, some are yellow and some blue. Above tide marks you don't find anything, just solid rock. Well, there's just as many different sorts of coral as there is worms, and there's only one sort of precious coral and it's a pale pink, the color of a rose leaf and that's what Heffernan was after. He'd heard of an island in the Paumotus which isn't very far from Tahiti and by all accounts it was a good fishing ground for pink coral and more than that it was said the queen of the place, for it was run by a woman, had a lot of the stuff for sale—Tawela was her name.

"Ships keep clear of the Paumotus on account of the currents that run every which way and the winds that aren't dependable. Heff had his information from a whaling captain who'd struck the place the year before and had talk with the Kanakas. He was on the beach broken down with drink and gave the location for twenty dollars. He said he didn't think they were a dependable lot but they had the stuff and if Heffernan didn't mind taking risks he might make a fortune. Heff asked the old chap why he hadn't gone in for the business himself and he answered that he would have done so only he had no trade goods, nothing but whale oil, and the Kanakas didn't want that—they wanted knives and tobacco and any sort of old guns and print calico and so on.

"Heff didn't know where to get any such things as these and hadn't the money if he had known, nor a ship to lade them into, but next day, by good luck, came blowing in the *Mary Waters* owned and captained by Matt Sellers, a Boston chap who'd come round to the Pacific in a whaler out of Martha's Vineyard, skipped at the Society Islands, not liking the society on board, and risen from roustabout to recruiter and from recruiter to captain and owner. He'd brought a mixed cargo from Frisco on spec'

to the Marquesas, couldn't find a market and had come on to Papeiti, couldn't find a market and came into the club for a drink, fell into the arms, as you may say, of Heffernan and that did him.

"Sellers hadn't been talking half an hour with Heff when he sees clearly that the hand of Providence was in the business, and that a sure fortune was waiting for him if he'd only take the trouble to pick it up. His trade goods were just the things wanted to buy the stuff and he only had to put out for the Paumotus to get it. That was the way Heff mesmerized him. Then they had a talk as to the profits and Sellers agreed to give Heff twenty-five per cent commission on the deal.

"I blew into the business, as I was saying, by meeting Heffernan a few days later —day before the *Mary Waters* was due to sail—and seeing no chance of doing much in Papeiti I joined in with them on second officer's pay, but without any duty, only to lend a hand if there should be a dust up.

"Next day we started, steering a course almost due east. We weren't long in finding out we'd struck the Paumotus, tide rips everywhere and reefs, then you'd see coconut trees growing out of the sea ahead and presently you'd be skimming by a beach of coral not ten feet above the sea level, with coconut trees blowing in the wind and Kanaka children shouting at you. Very low freeboard those atoll islands have, and I've heard of ships being blown right over the beaches into the lagoons. We passed a big island like that and then, two days after, we raised Utiali; that was the name of the island the whaler captain had given to Heffernan with the latitude and longitude. It wasn't down in the 'South Pacific Directory.' They've got it there now, but in those days there was no mention of Utiali though the whaler captains knew it well enough, but a whaler captain would never bother to report an island; if he'd struck the New Jerusalem he wouldn't have done more than log it as a place where you could take on milk and honey. Whales was all they cared for, and blubber.

"We came along up and found the place answering to all descriptions, lagoon about a mile wide, break to the east, good show of coconut trees and deep soundings all to northeast and south, with another island not bigger than the palm of your hand to west running out from a line of reef that joined with the beach of Utiali.

"If the place had been painted blue with the name in red on it, it couldn't have been plainer.

"We came along to the eastward till we saw the opening and got through without any bother just on the slack.

"It was a pretty place to look at. I've never seen a stretch of water that pleased me more than that lagoon. Maybe it was the depth or something to do with the water itself, but it was more forget-me-not color than sea blue, and where it was green in the shallows or the ship shadow, that green was brighter and different from any green I've ever seen.

"Maybe that's why precious coral grew there; since the water colors were so clear and bright, the coral colors following suit would hit on new ideas, so to speak; but however that may have been there was no denying the fact that Utiali was a garden, and the native houses on shore seemed the gardeners' cottages—had that sort of innocent look.

"We dropped the hook in twenty fathoms onto a flower bed where you could see the sea anemones and the walking shells as clear as if there wasn't more than two feet of water over them instead of a hundred and twenty, and before the schooner had settled to the first drag of the ebb that was beginning to set, canoes began to come off with Kanakas in them.

II.

"They came along paddling under the counter, waving their paddles to us, and then having gone round us, like as if they were making a tour of inspection, they tied up and came on board led by a big Kanaka Mary, a beauty to look at, with lovely eyes —I remember those eyes!—who gave herself a bang on the chest with her fist and said 'Tawela.' That was how she presented her visiting card.

"We had a Kanaka with us who could talk most of the Island tongues and we had him talk with Tawela to extract information from her and it came up in chunks.

"Tawela by her own accounts was anxious to trade anything from coconuts to her back teeth. She wanted guns and rum, which we hadn't got, but she said she'd try to make out with tobacco and beads. She said she had plenty of pink coral and would we come

on shore and look at it, also would we come to dinner and she would give us the time of our lives.

"Then she went off ashore, us promising to follow on in an hour or so.

"I was talking to Sellers after she'd left when Sellers says to me, 'Look over there, what's that?' I looks where he was pointing and I sees something black sticking from the water away out in the lagoon. The tide was ebbing as I've told you and the thing, whatever it was, had been uncovered by the ebb; it didn't look like the top of a rock, it didn't look like anything you could put a name to unless maybe the top of an old stake sticking from the water. 'Go over and have a look,' says Sellers, 'and find out what it is.' I took the boat which had been lowered ready to take us ashore and me and Heffernan pulls out.

"'It's the mast of a ship,' says Heff who was steering and no sooner had he given it its name than I saw plain enough it couldn't be anything else.

"It was, and as we brought the boat along careful, the ship bloomed up at us, the fish playing round the standing rigging and a big green turtle sinking from sight of us into her shadow.

"She lay as trig as if she was on the stocks, with scarcely a list and her bow pointing to the break in the reef. Her anchor was in the coral and you could see the slack of the chain running to her bow. She'd been a brig. The topmasts had been hacked off for some reason or another and pieces of canvas, yards long some of them, showed waving from her foreyard and it was plain to be seen she'd been sunk with the foresail on her and the canvas had got slashed by fish and the wear of the tides bellying it this way and that till there was nothing left but just them rags.

"I'd never seen a ship murdered before and said so.

"'Yes,' says Heffernan, 'it's plain enough, she's been sunk at her moorings. Look at the way she's lying and look at that anchor chain. Well, I never did think to see a sunk ship at anchor, but I've seen it now.'

"'It's the chaps ashore that have done this,' said I.

"'Sure,' said Heffernan. 'Done in the ship and done in the crew. We've got to go careful.'

"We put back to the *Mary Waters* and reported to Sellers.

"'Skunks!' said Sellers. 'Tawela's queen bee of a proper hive. Well, we must be careful, that's all. Keep our guns handy and give word to the Kanakas to be on the lookout.'

"The *Mary Waters* had a Kanaka crew as I've said, and having given the bos'n the tip to be on the lookout for squalls we got rowed shore, sending the boat back to the schooner.

"Tawela's house was the first of the line of houses that ran east and west along the beach. It was the biggest, too, and there was only her and her son at the dinner; the rest of the tribe had gone off in the canoes right across the lagoon to the opposite shore to gather shellfish on the outer beach. Our Kanaka boy that acted as interpreter got this news from Tawela and it lightened our minds a lot, for if any killing had been meant the tribe wouldn't have gone off like that.

"It wasn't a bad dinner, take it all round. Baked pig and oysters and sweet potatoes and so on with a palm salad that Tawela never invented herself, that I'll lay a dollar, and said so.

"'Oh, she's probably made the cook of that brig show her how to do things white-man style before she murdered him,' says Sellers.

"'Curse her,' says Heffernan, and there those two sat talking away, she listening but not understanding; it was better than a pantomime.

"Then the son gets up and brings in some palm toddy, best I ever struck, and Sellers opens a box of cigars he'd brought with him, and we all lit up, Tawela included.

"I remember, as plain as if it was only ten minutes ago, sitting there looking at the sunlight coming in through the door behind Sellers and striking through the blue smoke of the cigars, and then the next thing I remember is waking up with my hands tied and my feet roped together, lying on my back in a shack with the morning light coming through the cracks in the wall, Heffernan and Sellers beside me.

"It was plain enough what had happened, we'd been doped. I heard Sellers give a groan and called out to him, then Heffernan woke and there we lay admiring ourselves for the fools we'd been in falling into that mug trap. We'd each landed with a revolver strapped to his belt, but the revolvers were gone.

III.

"We hadn't been lying there cursing ourselves more than half an hour when, the sun having got over the reef, a chap comes in, catches Sellers by the heels and drags him out just as if he'd been a dead carcass.

" 'Good-by, boys,' cries Sellers as he's dragged along the ground, and good-by it was, for a few minutes after we heard him scream.

"He went on screaming for fifteen minutes, maybe more, and I was fifteen years older when he let off and the silence came up again with nothing but the sound of the reef and the jabbering of those cursed Kanakas.

" 'If I had a knife I'd stick it into myself,' says Heffernan. 'Lord! What have they been doing to him?'

"I couldn't answer, more than just by spitting, and there we lay waiting our turn and watching the sun striking fuller on the lagoon.

"I could see the schooner lying there at anchor, but not a soul could I see on board her, the crew were either down below or had been murdered. As I was looking at her I heard Heffernan give a grunt, then I saw that he was sitting up and that his hands were free. He'd been working away, saying nothing, and he'd managed to get the cocoanut fiber rope free of his wrists. A minute after, he'd got his feet loose, then he turned to me and it didn't take more than five minutes to make me a free man like himself.

"That being done we set to work on the back wall of the shack, pulling aside the wattles and tearing out the grass binding till we were free at last and out into the thick growth, which was mostly mammee apple and cassia mixed up with pandanus and coconut trees.

"What made us bother to break free from the shack, Lord only knows. There was no use getting free, seeing we were on an atoll and would be hunted down like rats once Tawela and her crowd got wind that we were loose; anyhow we'd worked like fiends and just as if our lives had depended on it, and now in the bushes we were crawling along as hard as we could go to put as big a distance as we could between ourselves and that crowd—as if it mattered!

'We worked along taking the line of bushes toward the reef opening and all the time to the left of us we could hear the breaking of the swell on the outer beach while to the right of us we could see bits of the lagoon now and then through the branches.

"The strangest feeling I've ever felt was being stuck like that between the free sea and that locked-in lagoon.

"Prison on one side, so to say, and an open road on the other.

"Well, there we were, the sun getting higher in the sky and the Kanakas sure to be beating the bushes after us as soon as they found we'd broke loose, but we didn't say a word on the matter, only went on crawling till we'd reached the last of the trees and thick stuff. From there the coral ran naked to the break in the reef.

"We hadn't more than reached so far when a hullabaloo broke out behind us and we thought they'd found we'd escaped, but that wasn't so, as we discovered in a minute, for chancing to look toward the opening, we saw the top canvas of a schooner away beyond the northernmost pierhead. We reckoned she was two or three mile off, and, crawling along the coral till we'd got a clear view of the sea, there she was right enough, making for the break, the light wind spilling and filling her canvas. She hadn't much more than steerageway.

"Then we looked back. We couldn't see the village because of the trees but we could see the *Mary Waters* lying there at anchor out in the lagoon and canoes all about her and chaps swarming on board of her.

" 'See that,' said Heffernan, 'all that hullabaloo wasn't about us. I doubt if they've found we've escaped yet.'

" 'What are they doing round the schooner?' says I.

" 'Lord knows,' says he, 'but we'll soon see.'

"We did. Those devils were used to the game of sinking ships and slaughtering sailormen; they'd most likely got all the trade goods they wanted off the schooner by this and now we saw them passing a tow rope from the bow to one of the canoes and we heard the noise of the winch picking up the anchor chain.

" 'They're not going to sink her at her moorings,' said Heffernan, 'too shallow. Look, they're towing her to a deeper part of the lagoon.'

"That was so, and as we watched we saw she was getting deeper in the water even as she was towed; they must have begun the

job of sinking her the minute the schooner was sighted, forgetting like fools that the chaps coming up would have been sure to sight her spars or maybe risking even that rather than have the newcomers see the bloody work that had been done on deck. You can sink a ship quicker than clean her sometimes.

"Well, there it was and suddenly the old *Mary Waters* gave a dive, and dipped her bowsprit under. I saw her shiver like a dog and then the stern went, the main hatch cover blowing off from air pressure as soon as the decks were awash. After that she went like a stone till there was nothing left of her but a case or two floating about and a bit of grating.

"Then we crawled back among the trees and held a council of war as you might say, but we couldn't fix on anything to do but lay still and wait our chances. We reckoned the fellows in the schooner were sure to come ashore armed and we'd have time to warn them before they were set on. Our worst chance was that the Kanakas might find us before the schooner was in or the chaps come ashore, but there was no use bothering about that and there we lay waiting and listening till the fore canvas of the schooner showed at the break and in she came riding the full flood, every sail drawing to the wind that was freshening up.

"When I saw her full view I nearly leaped out of my skin. She was the *Greyhound.* Buck, as I found afterward had put into Papeiti, heard of our expedition and me being with it, and, the old whaling chap offering to give him our port of destination for two bottles of whisky, closed on the offer and lit after us. He was anxious to pick up with me and make friends, and maybe he was anxious to have a hand in the coral business as well, no knowing; anyhow here he was bulling along across the lagoon and evidently making to drop his anchor close to the village.

" 'Come on,' I says to Heffernan, 'follow me.' We made back through the thick stuff, taking the track we'd come by and we hadn't more'n reached the sight of Tawela's house through the trees when we heard the anchor chain go.

"I reckon the darn fool Kanakas had been so busy with the sinking of the schooner and then the *Greyhound* coming in that they'd forgot to look to see if we were still safely tied up. Anyhow the whole crowd were down on the beach to meet the boat that was coming off, and making sure of that, I took a peep into Tawela's house to see if there was any clubs or spears handy for arming ourselves, and there I see Tawela's son hiding a long knife under some matting. We went in, he was too scared to yell and shoving him in a corner we stripped up the matting and there were our revolvers, a couple of knives and half a dozen short stabbing spears, all bloody with the blood of Sellers.

"We kicked him out before us and with the guns in our hands down we marched to the beach.

IV.

" 'Buck' Slane had landed, he and four of his men, and every man with a Winchester.

"Tawela and her crowd were round them all friendly as pie and so busy pretending to be innocent and God-fearing Kanakas they didn't notice us till we were almost on them; for a moment I thought they were going to show fight, but when they saw the guns in our hands they boiled down.

"I clapped my gun to Tawela's head and called Buck to tie her hands behind her—we hadn't time to say good day to each other, just then—and Buck, tumbling to the truth of the matter, whips a big pocket handkerchief from his pocket and one of his men does the binding. As he was binding her he says, 'Look at her hands' and there sure enough was blood dried on her hands, the blood of Sellers calling out for revenge.

"Then while the crowd stood quiet I gave Buck the facts in four words. He made a signal with his arms to the schooner and off comes another boat with the mate and four more Kanakas, all armed.

"Then Buck took command and, leaving Tawela with a chap and orders to blow her brains out if she so much as sneezed, we drove that whole crowd along the beach right to the break of the lagoon and left them there with four gunmen covering them. Then we came back.

"We searched round and found what was left of Sellers among the bushes, then we set to.

" 'They're unfortunate heathens,' says Buck, 'but they've got to be taught,' and with that he set fire to Tawela's house with his own hands. We burned every house, we smashed everything we could smash and we broke the canoes to flinders; fishing gear and

spears and everything went, so there was nothing left of that population but the people.

" 'That will learn them,' says Buck. Then he collected his men and bundling Tawela into a boat with a parcel of pink coral we found in a shack back of her house, we pushed off. Ridley, the mate, was for shooting her—seeing the evidence on her hands —and slinging the body in the lagoon, but Buck said he was going to give her a decent trial when our minds were cool and there was lots of time, anyway, after we'd put out. Buck, ever since his business with Sru, had been against doing things in a hurry, specially when it came to killing, so she was had on board and given in charge of two of the Kanaka crew. Then we got the hook up and out we put.

"The Kanakas were still herded at the end near the break and as we passed through, knowing we'd got their queen on board, they all set up a shout, 'Tawela, Tawela,' like the crying of sea gulls and that was the last we heard of them.

"Then, with the ship on her course and the Kanaka bos'n in charge of the deck, we got down to the cabin and started our court-martial.

"She deserved hanging, there were no two words about that. And I reckon it was more superstition about killing a woman than humanity but maybe I'm wrong, anyhow Buck brought out his idea, which was to take her to Sydney and have her tried there.

"We'd been going at it for an hour or so when the mate was called on deck and comes back in a minute or two in a tearing rage.

" 'That wild cat,' says he, 'has been asking for food and won't eat bully beef; says anything that comes out of a shell is taboo to her, turtle or oysters or shellfish, and she reckons canned stuff is the same since it's in a tin shell. I expect she's had lots of experience in canned stuff seeing all the ships she's wrecked. What's to be done with her?'

" 'Give her biscuits,' says Buck, 'and there's lots of bananas on board.'

"Off the mate goes and back he comes to the conference, but we could fix up nothing that night, Buck still holding out for a proper trial at Sydney, and we pointing out that English or American law would be sure to let a woman escape. It stood like that till next morning when Buck, coming down to breakfast says 'Boys, I've got an idea.'

V.

"He'd struck an idea in the night of how to dispose of Tawela. Buck had a fine knowledge of the Kanaka mind and when he'd explained his idea to us I allowed it was a peach, if what he said was true.

"Have you ever heard tell of the Swatchway? The Scours, some call it. It's an island, or more truly speaking a big lump of reef with half a dozen coconut trees on it, lying south of the Australs about four hundred and fifty miles from the steamer track between Auckland and Tahiti. It's got reefs round it all spouting like whales and ships' captains give it a big, wide berth.

"Well, Buck's plan was to land Tawela on the Scours—there's water there according to the 'Pacific Directory'—and Buck said he wasn't going to maroon her without grub. He'd give her six months' grub—canned. Bully beef and so on with biscuits in tins. If she starved herself to death in the middle of plenty then it wouldn't be our fault. He said he'd come back in six months and if she was alive he'd take her back home, said she was only an ignorant Kanaka and he reckoned six months' punishment would fill the bill, and if she chose to kill herself, why then it would be Providence not us that did the business.

"Ridley, at first go off, flew out against this till Buck quieted him, asking who was master of the schooner, and whether he wanted to be logged for insubordination. The course was changed to sou'-sou'west and two days later we raised the Scours.

"There were six coconut trees there, all bearing, so we cut them down and brought the nuts on board, then we landed Tawela and her provisions, with a can opener, showing her how to use it. There was a freshwater pond in the coral so she wouldn't want for water, and there we left her.

"We made for Suva and sold that coral, not getting near the price we thought to, and then we ran a cargo to Auckland. I'd noticed for some time Buck wasn't the man he used to be and one night it come out. 'I've got something on my mind,' he says. 'It's that darn Kanaka. Can't help thinking about her. My conscience is clear enough,' he says, 'for she deserved her gruel, but I can't help thinking of her—wonder if she's dead.'

" 'Oh, it's ten to one she's either broke her taboo or some ship has taken her off by this,' I says to ease him, for I saw that being

a good-hearted chap, and imaginative as most Irishmen are, the thing was hitting him as it never hit me.

"Buck shakes his head and falls back into himself and says no more, and time goes on till one day when we were on the run to Papeiti with a mixed cargo, seeing that the chap was making an old man of himself over the business I says, 'S'pose we run down to the Scours now instead of on the voyage back as you'd fixed and see what's become of that woman?'

"His face lit up, but he pretended to hang off for a while, then he falls in with the idea and we shifted the helm, raising the place four days later and dropping anchor outside the reefs four months and eight days from the time we'd left it.

"There wasn't a sign to be seen of any one on the island, so Buck tells me to take a boat and look, he hadn't the heart to go himself and said so, plump, and off I put leaving the boat's crew with the boat on the beach and tramping across the coral on the lookout for signs.

"I found the canned stuff. There had evidently been a big wind that had blown the stuff about and I found it here and there, but not one empty can could I find or one that had been opened. Then, in a dip of the coral I found a skull, the black hair still sticking to it, and a backbone and ribs—the birds make a skeleton of a corpse in no time on a place like that. I reckon I could have found the whole skeleton if I'd hunted but I didn't. I put back for the schooner and came on board laughing.

"'Well,' I said, 'she's done us. You and your talk of Kanakas not breaking their taboo; why half the tins are opened and empty and she's gone, took off by some ship.'

"'Thank Heaven,' says Buck.

"That lie of mine lifted the black dog right off his back, and to his dying day he never knew he'd killed that woman as sure as if he'd shot her with a gun. He was as cheerful as a magpie all the rest of that voyage, and so was I. You see I'd heard Sellers screaming while those brutes were doing him in and Buck hadn't.

"That's all I know about taboo, but it's firsthand knowledge, personal experience as you might say."

He ceased and through the night came the voices of fish spearers from the reef and the far rumble of the surf, and from the back premises the voice of Tahori singing some old song of an island world whose brilliancy breaks sometimes to reveal the strangest phantoms from the past.

"The Story of Billy Broke," the fifth of the "Me and Slane" series, will be in the next issue.

SENATOR HARRISON'S MISTAKE

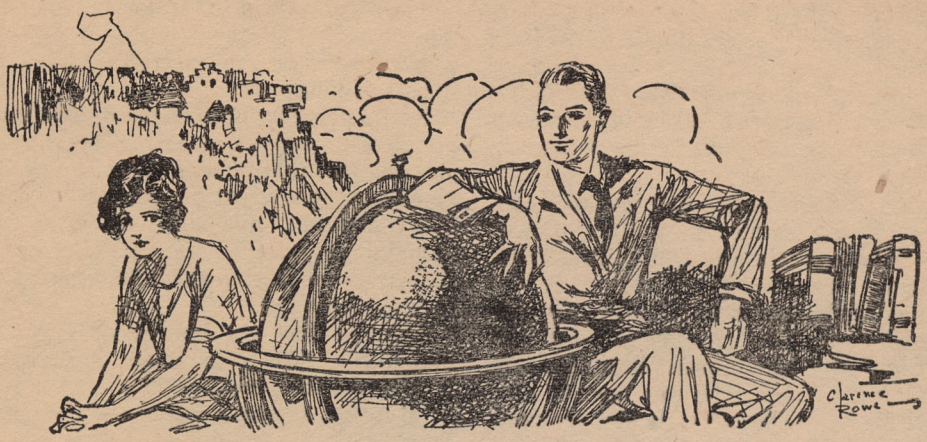
SENATOR PAT HARRISON of Mississippi, to whom the Democrats in the "upper House" have given the gadfly job of criticizing and belaboring the administration and all its ways, has an incisive sarcasm, a searing satire and a subtle wit. On a trip to New York recently he went into a dingy-looking restaurant and ordered a lamb chop.

Harrison worked his way through college as a waiter and he knows to the minute how long it takes to cook a chop. The waiter's unnecessary delay augured the worst. Sure enough, when he did reappear, he bore a plate on which reposed a dab of potatoes rather smaller than a special-delivery postage stamp and a frightfully overdone chop which, though so small as to be hardly visible to the naked eye, was attached to an extraordinarily long and slender rib.

"Hi, there!" the senator called to the rapidly vanishing waiter. "I ordered a chop."

"Well, sir, there it is," said the waiter.

"Ah, so it is," retorted Harrison, bending over to peer at it closely. "I thought it was a crack in the plate."



The Thunderbolt

By Howard Vincent O'Brien

Author of "The Green Scarf," and other stories.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Barnaby Lamb held that those human attributes commonly described as "sterling qualities" were all the business equipment a young man required on the road to success. Strong in this belief he learned the advertising business by correspondence and placed his services at the disposal of Watts & Walpole. He was twenty-eight and the grateful recipient of a handsome weekly stipend amounting to some thirty-odd dollars when he awoke to the fact that he had not become an indispensable fixture in the firm. He was fired. It was a telling blow. If intelligence, competence, industry, loyalty, be worth anything, Barnaby had proved himself a business pearl of price. Yet he was the first to be let out when hard times pinched the purse of Watts & Walpole. He told Peggy Whitredge his troubles that night, and she sympathized sweetly —like a sister—which only rubbed salt on Barnaby's wounds. Even Peggy, he found, wouldn't promote him beyond a very minor position in her heart—in spite of his sterling qualities. Whereas one, Douglas MacKenzie, whose chief claims to distinction were an unspeakably superior manner, a college football record, and a father as wealthy as Peggy's, appeared to bask in the light of her favor. Hurt and disheartened, Barnaby turned from Peggy to his extraordinary old friend, Peter Wye. And Peter revealed to him the secret of the lightning—which is the key to success. Adopting the philosophy preached by old Peter, Barnaby forthwith assumed the rôle of human thunderbolt. Like a stroke he descended on Jim Bullitt and Daniel Wegg, both powers in the field of advertising, and ripped his way in a flash to a five-thousand-dollar-salary-and-bonus contract—just as a starter. Immediately following which he struck, dazzled, and bewildered J. Andrew Smith, the down-and-outer, who stuck a gun in his stomach on a dark street. And having hypnotized this genial individual, Barnaby bought him a cup of coffee and took him into the lightning business.

(A Four-Part Story—Part II.)

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW STAR IN THE HEAVENS.

BARNABY laughed himself to sleep that night. From colorless rationality his life had suddenly become as fantastic as any tale from the "Arabian Nights." Instead of a worthy and unsuccessful clerk, he was now a whimsical caliph, finding beggars in the byways and elevating them with a wave of his hand to an eminence equal to his own. The unsubstantial quality of it all, coupled with a singular reality, staggered him. He had at one time dabbled in philosophy, and had been piqued by the ideas of Bishop Berkeley. It startled him to see how easily one might become the victim of hallucinations. Peter Wye

had spoken of the inferiority complex. Barnaby wondered if, in freeing himself from that, he was not presently to be overtaken by the omnipotence complex. Toward the end, his chuckles ceased and he fell to speculating seriously on the possibility of his own madness.

When he awoke, however, it was to a conviction of his complete sanity. Daniel Wegg, indeed, might be mad. He himself indubitably was not. Or if he was, it was a most satisfying madness. His doubts vanished and he whistled cheerily as he walked downtown to his appointment with John Andrew Smith. Whether he was mad or sane and whether his fantastic house of cards might presently tumble about his ears or solidify into a reality was, he reflected soberly, of small moment. Like the working friends of Messrs. Marx and Engels, he had nothing to lose but his chains. His progress might well be considered as merely an experiment in practical psychology. As such, it was most entertaining!

John Andrew Smith, obviously full of skepticism, was waiting for him on the predetermined corner. "I never thought you'd come," he observed candidly. "But I'm not busy in the daytime, so I took a chance and came anyway."

"You thought I was crazy, of course," agreed Barnaby. "That's to be expected. Men with ideas that are both large and new always *are* considered crazy. But just wait."

Together they went to a clothing store, a little away from the district in which high rentals found their reflection in high prices, which announced by a sign of great candor: "Come upstairs and save ten dollars." The place was well filled and there seemed no great desire on the part of the personnel to interest itself in the shabby Smith. Normally, Barnaby would have waited, patiently and respectfully, for the attention of a clerk. But the rôle he had assumed was fast crystallizing into a habit.

"Here," he called sharply to a floorwalker. "How about a little service?"

The effect was immediate.

"Here!"

The floorwalker snapped his fingers and called a clerk in a tone borrowed from Barnaby, with interest added.

"Attend to this gentleman!"

The salesman hesitated, made a quick decision and left a frail little woman with three children to wait a trifle longer for attention.

"Yes, sir," he said suavely. "What will it be this morning?"

Smith proved quite ready to express his preferences when once he had accepted the amazing fact that he was expected to express them. A ruddy brown, with a figure not too restrained, was what he wanted, he thought. The clerk agreed and pointed out the cut of the lapels, which he declared were "snappy."

Barnaby was not impressed. "No," he said firmly, "it'll be a blue. A dark blue. A conservative blue."

"But for a *young* man——" began the clerk.

"Julius Cæsar," declared Barnaby with decision, "might look better in a cutaway; but he couldn't wear one. All the world's a stage, my friend, and you've got to dress for your part. It'll be a blue."

The same process was repeated when they got to shoes; and the results were the same. At the end of their shopping, John Andrew Smith retired with his outfit to a dressing booth and presently reappeared for Barnaby's inspection.

The latter was highly gratified. "There," he said, "you look like what you're going to be. Left to yourself and these clerks, you'd look like a third assistant bookkeeper. Now, there isn't a thing on you anybody would remember. That's the way it should be."

Smith grinned, surveying himself in a mirror. "I look like the Bank of England. Well—what are you going to do with me now?"

Barnaby scratched his head and a look of perplexity flashed over his face.

"I—I'm going to try and cash you. You're perfect. There's only one thing lacking."

"What's that?"

"The signature. That is to say, you've got to reason from the specific to the general."

Smith looked his mystification. "I'm willing to do anything, but——"

"It's easy enough. You've worked at storekeeping. You know how to be a clerk, don't you? All right, now what you've got to know is the mental action of *all* clerks. In short, you're a merchandising expert. Do you understand?"

Smith shook his head dubiously. "I—I don't think I do."

Barnaby made a gesture of impatience.

"Of course you do. Listen. If I asked you how you'd go about selling a cake of soap over the counter, you could tell me, couldn't you?"

"Sure, but——"

"Well, and if I asked you to tell me what kind of soap you sold easiest and how I, the maker of the soap, could help you sell it, you could tell me, couldn't you?"

"Yes, but——"

"All right. Just assume that every other retail clerk in this great land is exactly like J. Andrew Smith. You know the habits, the methods of reasoning, the strength and the weakness of retail clerks. In short, *you*, John Smith, are the epitome of all the clerks of all the world. You are *clerk* incarnate! You are therefore, I repeat, a merchandising expert. I might add that I shall try to make you *the* merchandising expert!"

"For the love of Mike!" exclaimed Smith.

"Don't worry," said Barnaby cheerfully. "I've known experts who were never in a store in their lives, except to buy goods. You'll get by. I ask only one thing—don't blush at what I may say about you—and don't, for the love of Heaven, *deny* anything!"

Smith shrugged his shoulders. "Do as you like, buddy. I'm a good soldier."

Twenty minutes later they were in the outer office of Daniel Wegg, Incorporated, an appointment with the head of the business having been arranged by telephone.

"You wait here," said Barnaby to Smith, as the girl held open the door to the inner sanctum. "And for the love of Heaven," he added in a fierce whisper, "look *indifferent!* Smoke, spit, put your feet on the table, stare at anybody that looks at you!"

"Sittin' on the world? I get you!" answered Smith with a wink.

When Barnaby found himself closeted with Mr. Wegg his courage almost deserted him. But by an effort of will he managed to take out his watch and frown as he replaced it.

"I've only got a minute," he said. "But I ran into something I thought I ought to tell you."

Wegg, impressed by the tone, closed the door.

"Confidential?" he asked.

Barnaby pursed his lips. "In a way—yes. Fact is, I've been thinking a good deal about that Bradley account."

"Naturally," said Mr. Wegg approvingly.

"It has great possibilities for development—*enormous* possibilities. With the proper handling, those people can be built into advertisers on a huge scale."

Mr. Wegg nodded wisely. "I think so myself."

"What they need is merchandising—good, sound, thoroughgoing *merchandising!*" In emphasis, Barnaby brought his fist down on Mr. Wegg's desk so vigorously that the carafe rattled on its tray. "Watts & Walpole lost that account because they tried to get by with copy and pretty layouts. I tell you, Mr. Wegg, presentation alone will never hold that business, to say nothing of developing it. What it needs is brass tacks!"

"Exactly," agreed Mr. Wegg. "Brass tacks."

"Why, with a good market analysis, properly presented, there's no reason why those people shouldn't spend three—four—*five* times their present appropriation. Their potential business is simply *staggering!*"

"It's a great concern," said Mr. Wegg, rubbing his hands.

Barnaby sat down, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"As I was saying, I've been giving the problem a lot of thought ever since I decided to come with you. I see, naturally more clearly than you can see, exactly what the difficulties ahead are. I—I don't mind admitting, Mr. Wegg, I was just about desperate!"

"Desperate?" Mr. Wegg's tone revealed his astonishment.

"Yes—*desperate.* It's the only word. I realized the vital thing we lacked."

"What d'you mean—vital thing?"

"Merchandising."

"Oh, come. We've got good merchandising men. Why, I myself——"

Barnaby waved the protest aside. "You don't know Bradley the way I do. The ordinary thing won't go with him."

"Ordinary?" Mr. Wegg was slightly offended.

"Not in that sense." In just what sense he did mean it Barnaby did not trouble to explain. He had intended merely to convey the intimation that the Wegg organization was not quite equal to the demands he was about to put upon it, and having conveyed it successfully he took the next step on his program.

"It just happened," he went on easily,

"that when I was most discouraged at the outlook who should I run into but J. Andrew Smith himself." He paused, as an actor after a good line, waits for the handclapping.

Mr. Wegg realized dimly that something was expected of him. "Is that so," he said with an effort at animation.

Barnaby's face expressed enthusiasm. "Yes, sir, the very man—J. Andrew Smith in the flesh!"

"Yes," repeated Mr. Wegg blankly. "J. Andrew Smith."

"I suppose he's the greatest merchandising expert in the world to-day," went on Barnaby meditatively. "Well, the fact is, he only just got out of the army. It seems there were a lot of loose ends connected with the disposal of surplus property, and his merchandising ability was so well recognized—even in the army—they just wouldn't let him go. Now he's out; and with a little persuasion I think he could be made to locate here."

"I don't just seem to remember him," Mr. Wegg finally brought himself to say.

Barnaby smiled tolerantly. "Well, practically all of his work has been done with a few concerns—sort of a consultant, don't you know. I was so familiar with his work, particularly in connection with—I can't just remember the name. Anyway, it was a big concern down East. I took it for granted you'd know him too. The point is, however, he's got several things he's considering and it occurred to me——"

He paused, deliberately, hoping that Mr. Wegg would react on his own initiative.

But Mr. Wegg was a literal man. He merely asked: "What occurred to you?"

Barnaby hesitated. Now that he was at the final barrier his artificial courage all but deserted him. The utter absurdity of his behavior was appalling. It came over him that he had gone too fast and too far. It might have been better to have toned the colors somewhat in the picture he had painted of the putative J. Andrew Smith. But he had gone too far to turn back. Success was his or it was not. He had to play the final card.

"Well," he said finally, "to be frank about it, I think we ought to have Smith in here. He'll supply just what is necessary to hold the Bradley account and build it. And he'll be useful on other business, too, of course."

Mr. Wegg looked pained. "Good Lord, Lamb—our overhead's big enough, now!"

Barnaby nodded. "I realize that. And I've played my cards with Smith pretty carefully. He's been in the army for a long time; and he—er—was out of the country—in South America, I believe—quite a while before that. He's rather out of touch with things, you see. He—he's anxious to get back, and——" Barnaby stopped. His ideas were all exhausted.

What could he say next? He took out a cigarette and lighted it, racking his brain in the interval the process gave him to think of a new line of attack.

"You see," he went on, "he has money enough to live on. He doesn't absolutely *have* to get a job. In fact, he really had no thought at all of going back into business when I saw him. Money doesn't interest him—his tastes are simple. But when I told him of the problems we were up against, he got interested. He's an unusual sort of chap. I—I never knew any one just like him. I—I think I could persuade him to join us—in a sort of advisory capacity, don't you know—for, oh, as little as two hundred dollars a month."

Mr. Wegg was thoughtful. "I hate to spend the money," he said sourly, "particularly when I don't know a darn thing about the man."

Barnaby dismissed the objection as of no consequence. "Look at it as if it were insurance," he said earnestly. "If he doesn't do a thing but help to keep Bradley in line, he'll be worth the investment. And as they grow——"

"I've got to take your word for it all," objected Mr. Wegg.

"Well—do you know anybody that understands the Bradley situation better than I do?"

"No—no, I guess not," admitted Mr. Wegg. "Still——"

"You're doubtful—naturally," said Barnaby sympathetically. "Well, take him on for six months. You don't risk much—and it's a big stake."

"I suppose I could do that." Mr. Wegg chewed an unlighted cigar thoughtfully. "If he's what you claim he is, we'll be getting him pretty cheap."

"He works for the love of it, more than the money," responded Barnaby airily. "He realizes it's an experiment, just as we do. Later, of course, he may want more."

"Probably," agreed Mr. Wegg ruefully.

"But see here—I'd like to meet the fellow before I hire him."

"Oh, naturally. That's why I asked him to come with me. He's waiting for me outside now." Without waiting for the suggestion Barnaby reached for the telephone and asked the girl at the information desk to bring in Mr. J. Andrew Smith.

The interview which followed was brief.

"I—I understand you've had a lot of merchandising experience," said Mr. Wegg, following the introductions.

Smith hesitated and Barnaby's heart sank. "Yes," he said finally, "I was brought up, you might say, in a retail store."

"That's good," said Mr. Wegg. "That kind of experience is mighty valuable these days."

"Yes," continued J. Andrew Smith, "I'm what you might call the incarnation of the retail clerk. I know his habits, his methods of reasoning, his strength and his weaknesses. I know how he sells and what he sells."

Barnaby's jaw hung aghast. Here, indeed, was the perfect pupil. If Smith experienced any embarrassment he betrayed none. In his neat blue suit he was a distinctly presentable figure; and as he crossed one leg over the other and lighted a cigarette he was the very embodiment of the indifference which had been asked of him.

"I'm sure," murmured Mr. Wegg weakly, "we'll find you a very valuable man in our organization." In a word or two they came to an agreement about salary.

Barnaby could no longer contain himself. He took out his watch and simulated great agitation. "I'm ten minutes late!" he muttered as he rose.

J. Andrew Smith rose likewise. "I have an appointment myself," he said smoothly. And then he added, to Barnaby's utter stupefaction: "I've been looking over some of the agencies in town. But frankly, Mr. Wegg, I haven't seen one that appeals to me the way yours does. I know quite a bit about it, of course, from Mr. Lamb."

Mr. Wegg smiled his gratification. "And when will you be able to get on the job, Mr. Smith?" he asked.

J. Andrew hesitated for a moment. "Well, I've got things pretty well cleaned up. I'm just about ready now."

"Fine," said Mr. Wegg. "Could we count on seeing you Monday? The Bradley list is coming up shortly for next year and they're going to have their sales convention. You could be a lot of value there, couldn't you?"

"Oh, absolutely," responded J. Andrew Smith with a confidence that almost prostrated Barnaby.

"On Monday, then," said Mr. Wegg, holding out his hand.

"On Monday," repeated J. Andrew Smith.

Safely on the street, Barnaby gave vent to his feelings.

"Oh, J. Andrew—you were immense!" he cried.

"Didn't I do what you told me to do?"

"You did—and then some! It's unbelievable! Am I dreaming? Or have I gone stark staring mad?"

Smith looked down at his new suit. "It isn't likely that we'd *both* be dreaming, is it? Oh—it's a devil of a world!"

"What's the matter now?" inquired Barnaby in alarm.

"Good heavens—doesn't it strike *you* that way?"

"No," responded Barnaby quietly. "It just strikes me as screamingly funny."

"Well, it doesn't strike *me* that way," growled Smith. "Not by a big sight, it doesn't. Here I try my best to get a decent job in a decent way and all I succeed in getting is a job as a stick-up artist. And then you come along, stage a fake with all the trimmings—and presto, I have a job with more money than I ever dreamed I'd earn. It's all wrong, I tell you. I—I wonder how long it will last?"

"It'll last just as long as your nerve does," answered Barnaby earnestly. "I've made up my mind that people don't get paid for their brains; they get paid for the ability to use what they've got. Look at this mob" —he jerked his thumb in a disdainful gesture at the crowds hurrying by—"it's full of smart people who are willing to let other people make a profit out of *their* smartness. They don't know their own value. They sell themselves at a loss every day they live."

Smith laughed. "I don't know yet whether you're bughouse or not—but you've certainly got a way with you!"

"Listen, my friend," said Barnaby, in a burst of confidence. "A week ago I was a miserable, downtrodden little clerk, with less nerve than a rabbit. I got thirty-five dollars a week and earned every penny of it. Last night you were a down-and-almost-out bum. What's changed us?"

"We haven't changed, I guess," said J. Andrew Smith, soberly. "We only think we've changed."

"Not at all," cried Barnaby. "We've made other people think we've changed. It isn't what we are, that counts—it's what the world *thinks* we are!"

"Good gravy—is the whole show a fake?"

"I don't know," answered Barnaby with profound bitterness in his tone. "But some of it is, that's sure."

"We'll get found out," suggested Smith, evidently still perplexed.

"Some people don't until after they're buried," replied Barnaby. "And besides, did it ever occur to you that there might be nothing to find out? It isn't at all impossible, for instance, that you really *are* a merchandising genius!"

Smith laughed. Then his scarred face grew serious. "No," he said thoughtfully. "It isn't impossible at all. That would be the biggest joke of all, wouldn't it?"

"Mr. Wegg's betting his good money on it," said Barnaby with a sardonic laugh.

CHAPTER VII.

A TRIAL OF JEALOUSY.

Barnaby and J. Andrew Smith took their places in the organization of Daniel Wegg, Incorporated, without the development of any unexpected difficulties. So far, so good, said Barnaby, with no great enthusiasm. He should, he knew, be filled with elation. But he was not. The fact was that the success he had had along one line had merely whetted his appetite for more along another. In J. Andrew Smith, who had taken lodgings in his boarding house, he found a satisfactory repository for most of his confidences. But even to him he could not, as yet, bring himself to speak of the matter which reposed always closest to his heart.

He was obliged to wait until Peter Wye came to the city on one of his infrequent trips for supplies and material. Then, over the coffee cups, at a little restaurant, he unburdened himself.

"She hasn't a thing against me," he cried bitterly. "And that's fatal!"

"Quite," agreed the old man, puffing at his pipe.

"She—she takes me for granted!"

Peter nodded. "The way Mr. Watts did?"

"No—worse!"

The old man took a sip of coffee. "I'm afraid you aren't carrying through, laddie."

Barnaby frowned. "What do you mean by that?"

"You tried high tension on Mr. Wegg and it seems to have worked. I'm afraid you're still trying to make Miss Peggy's wheels turn with low voltage. From what you've told me of her, it can't be done."

"There you go on that voltage stuff again! This—this is different. I can't swindle *her!*"

The old man smiled. "It's been my experience that the superficial differences in human nature are tremendous. But in fundamentals——"

"I think you have an idea," cried Barnaby eagerly.

"No," responded Peter. "Not an idea. But do you recall that poem of Kipling's—I never can remember anything but fragments—that winds up: 'and man through jealousy?'"

Barnaby laughed. "Oh, Peter—if you only knew her."

"It is one of the oldest expedients," continued the old man quietly. "It is also one of the most efficacious. My boy, what have you learned thus far? Hasn't it been the value of *contrast?* Haven't you deliberately *shocked* people into giving you due regard? Have you ever attempted to shock this young lady? No, you have not. To her you are as unchanging as the city sky line—and as monotonous. Suppose, without warning, you were to do something *different?* It might shake her placid acceptance of you, perhaps be displeasing to her sense of equilibrium—but would it not suggest, inescapably, your capacity for still other radical departures? I think it would."

Barnaby was thoughtfully silent. As always, Peter's quaint fancies were sparks which ignited unsuspected and explosive volumes of thought in his own mind.

"Peter," he said at length, "it's an odd thing, but when I *cared* enormously about getting ahead and doing the right thing and having the regard of my betters, I didn't get ahead at all. It wasn't until I got so blue and discouraged and angry that I didn't give a hoot about anything, that other people seemed to give a hoot about me. It's very odd."

"In a world full of pushing, climbing, pleading people indifference is as marked as a drop of ink in a glass of water."

"I've cared more about Peggy than anything else in the world. All my ambitions really had their source in her—though she doesn't know it, I suppose. But I don't think she cares any more about me than she does about her pet dog."

Barnaby laughed. Then his face clouded and a hard line slowly formed around his mouth. "Peter—you're right. There's no question about it. I've tried too hard. I haven't moved an inch since I started; and I never will. The best I can hope for is to be an usher at her wedding. No, Peter, I haven't a thing to lose. But I have everything to win."

"Ideal gambling conditions," said the old man softly.

"You're perfectly right. She's never seen me except at low pressure. Well, by thunder—she's going to see some sparks. I'm going to be at her wedding in the leading part, or I'm not going to be invited!"

The old man rose and placed his hand on Barnaby's shoulder.

"In matters of business," he said with a curiously far-away expression on his face, "my advice is not very valuable. But in affairs of the heart—well, laddie, I—I think you may find it useful. None knows alcohol like a drunkard."

Barnaby laughed. "Why, you incorrigible old bachelor—what are you talking about?"

There was no answering smile on the old man's lips. "I am old, laddie—that is true. But I am not a bachelor. I'm a—a sort of —widower."

It was not long before Barnaby had an opportunity to put his new plan into action. The Hartley Bells were giving a small dance at the Arcade Club for their débutante daughter Miriam. Barnaby had not yet entered Miriam's life, but her older sister, Margie, upon whom nature had smiled but indifferently, cherished pleasant recollections of Barnaby's kindly treatment in her own rather painful débutante days, and so he was invited.

He had not cared to go. He knew relatively few people in the exalted circle graced by the Hartley Bells; and his evening clothes were obsolete and shabby. He guessed, rather shrewdly, that an acceptance of the invitation carried with it an obligation to make himself attentive to the unfortunate Margie, who, among other shortcomings, danced atrociously. But Peggy was an intimate of the Bells and, although somewhat beyond the age limit, would in all likelihood be present. He pondered the matter carefully. And then, following his luncheon with Peter Wye, wrote a note of acceptance.

He was surprised, the following morning, to receive a note from Peggy, inviting him to dinner the night of the dance. His amazement gave place to a dull anger. She had asked him, he decided, in a spirit of sweet charity. She knew that it was perhaps the only dance to which he would be invited. He fancied her saying to herself that she must "do something" for him. He writhed at the thought.

In bitterness, he tore up her note and his lip curled. He seized a piece of paper. He began:

DEAR PEGGY: Thank you very much for your kind invitation, but——

He paused reflectively. If he said that he was otherwise engaged or made an excuse of that nature, she would merely be-

lieve him. He realized, with a grimace, that he could invent nothing too flimsy for her credence. If he wrote in a spirit of cold formality, she would simply attribute it to self-consciousness. He was helpless before her firmly fixed opinion of him. Until that was shaken he could do nothing. With a muttered oath, he threw the unfinished note into the wastebasket and wrote another of polite acceptance.

"I'll bite," he growled as he sealed the envelope, "if she tries to pet me!"

He arrived at the Whitredge residence in ample time for the dinner. But he walked slowly around the block until he was sure he was thoroughly late—not politely late, but impolitely so. By the time he rang the doorbell he had worked himself into a fury.

His attack was frontal and immediate. To Peggy's smiling reproaches for his tardiness he replied indifferently that he had been "talking to some fellows and forgot all about the dinner."

A little later, when he had maneuvered her out of earshot of the other guests, he looked at her with a puzzled, slightly derisive, expression in his eyes.

"What's the matter now?" she demanded a trifle irritably. She was still smarting under the rudeness of his greeting.

"Oh, I was just wondering where you got that gown."

"What's the matter with my gown?"

"Oh, nothing. Only I—I'd never seen anything quite like it."

He was interrupted by the announcement of dinner. He had said nothing. And yet he had contrived to intimate a great deal. It was evident that his interest was not admiration. As a matter of fact, the gown *was* a trifle bizarre and Peggy knew it. It was not the fact that he had commented upon it that annoyed her. She would have been annoyed had he *failed* to comment upon it. But there was just enough of a suggestion of ridicule in his raised eyebrows to infuriate her. He had succeeded in making her conscious of herself and she hated him for it. He would have been surprised and delighted had he known how successful his sally had been. Her smile gave him no intimation of the truth, however. It merely piqued him to further effort.

He was pleased to find himself placed at Peggy's right, with Douglas Mackenzie on her left. At his own right was Margie Bell.

He had the bit in his teeth. He turned blandly to Peggy.

"You haven't introduced me yet to Mr. Mackenzie," he said, and was delighted with the glare he received in response from that gentleman.

Peggy laughed vivaciously, to cover her wrath, and at the first opportunity whispered sharply to Barnaby: "For goodness' sake, Binny—remember your manners!"

He chuckled savagely. "Pearls before Mackenzies!" was his answering whisper.

"What did you say about pearls?" broke in Miss Bell. "I just *love* pearls, don't you!"

Barnaby sighed. Then he turned to Margie and smiled resignedly. "Indeed I do. But isn't it dreadful the way they're making them artificially?"

Miss Bell's simple eyes grew round. "Are they really? Do tell me about it!"

"It's a dull subject," said Barnaby. "Too dull, when there's *you* to talk about, Margie!"

"Oh, Barnaby—you old flatterer!"

And so the dinner passed. Several times Peggy essayed to secure Barnaby's attention; at first, she told herself, from a sense of duty; and presently, when still unsuccessful, from a growing sense of annoyance. At the end, she was definitely and unreasonably angry.

Afterward, when the ladies had retired and Margie Bell whispered to her that she thought Barnaby was "just a dear—and *such* an interesting talker," she found it difficult to control herself.

"Isn't he!" she managed to reply. "And such nice manners!"

She raged to see how utterly the sarcasm was lost on Miss Bell. "I think he's one of the nicest-mannered men I ever met," was the latter's solemn response.

"I'm awfully fond of him," agreed Peggy, with a mechanical smile. "Are you ready, dear?"

Arrived at the dance, Peggy found herself momentarily alone with Barnaby. "You seemed much taken with Margie," she said sweetly.

"Who wouldn't be," was his blunt response. "Look at her father's income!"

Before she could answer this astonishing remark Miss Bell appeared from the dressing room and Barnaby, without a word to Peggy, stepped to her side.

"The first—at *least*—is mine," he murmured suavely. With a smile and an artful drooping of her eyelids Miss Bell suffered herself to be led away. Peggy, open-mouthed, watched them vanish in the maze of dancers.

"What *has* come over that boy?" she asked herself, almost aloud.

Mackenzie came to claim her, presently, and she danced with him. All her characteristic vivacity was with her and she made the necessary replies to his rather heavy conversation. But to her own bewilderment she found her eyes in constant pursuit of Barnaby and Margie Bell. Again and again, with angry words uttered only to herself, she struggled to leave the chase. But again and again she came back to it.

Others cut in on Mackenzie. Her conversation changed with her partners. She was gayety itself. But her eyes never left the pair they followed in their rather awkward course around the floor.

No one came to Barnaby's rescue until the fourth dance and it did not please Peggy to see the obvious reluctance with which Margie allowed him to leave. As for Barnaby, she was positive that he was acting; but, indubitably, he acted well. He manifested every evidence of hostility for the man who had superseded him and he did not rush away with the appearance of relief he must unquestionably feel.

Peggy waited. The music had ceased. It was the right moment. Barnaby would never have the courage to cut in while she was dancing. But he would come now. She wondered just how she could best express her displeasure with him. But she was not called upon to put her plans into execution; for Barnaby did not put in an appearance. Presently he passed her, dancing and chattering animatedly with a mere chit of a girl she did not even know.

For an instant her gayety deserted her and she frowned. Then, as her partner held out his arms, she laughed. "Let's sit out this one, Billy," she said, a trifle unsteadily. "I—I'm a little tired."

The person called Billy made valiant efforts at conversation. But they proved uniformly unsuccessful. Peggy said nothing, her interest seemingly confined to the dancers. Suddenly she tapped her companion's elbow.

"Who's that girl in blue and silver?" she asked.

Billy followed her discreetly pointed finger. "Oh—that's Sally Bigelow's niece, from St. Paul. She's knocking 'em all over. Who's the chap with her?"

Peggy caught her breath.

"The man? Oh, I—I didn't notice," she replied, and relapsed into silence.

If Barnaby had not asked her to dance at all, she might have ascribed his neglect to shyness and so derived some solace to her pride. But he came to her at last, when the evening was almost spent, in time to dance a measure or two before the music ceased.

"You at least have some manners left," she observed, tossing her head with an anger impossible to conceal.

He smiled blandly. "My attentions never stirred you. I thought I'd try neglect. It appears to have succeeded."

She stamped her foot. "Don't be utterly silly! Of course I was annoyed when you didn't even ask me to dance with you. I was your hostess, if nothing else. It was unpardonably rude!"

"But I *have* asked you," said Barnaby with an inward chuckle.

"I suppose you made an idiot of yourself over that St. Paul flapper just to make me jealous!" Peggy curled her lip in an excellent imitation of disdain. But Barnaby declined to accept it as genuine.

"Yes," he replied smoothly. "And it seems to have succeeded."

"Binny—you're impossible! What *are* you trying to do? You—you've changed terribly."

He agreed. "I'm glad you recognize it. You ought to. It's largely your handiwork."

"*Mine?*"

"Yours. I offered you my love—a poor thing, perhaps, but after all, mine own. You—shall we say—spurned it? Very well, why complain if I—well, offer it elsewhere?"

"Margie?"

"You're observing. Well—and why not?"

Peggy concealed her emotions by a show of sarcasm. "Why not, indeed! She is rich and not very popular and—— Barnaby Lamb, you're absolutely impossible! I don't like you at all!"

"On the contrary," said Barnaby thoughtfully, "I've made more of an impression on you to-night than I made in my whole life before."

Before she could make a reply to this outrageous statement—if she intended to

make any—the music had resumed for the last dance and she was being claimed by a new partner. The last she saw of Barnaby he was picking his way across the floor to make his adieus to Mrs. Bell and her daughters. It was not lost upon her that he was smiling quizzically. That smile angered her profoundly—and then she was doubly angry that she *could* be angry.

Barnaby, as he breasted the cold wind from the lake, on his way home, would have been better pleased had he known the extent of her wrath. As it was, he was more than a little doubtful. He still smiled, at intervals, but the smile was somewhat rueful.

"It's getting so darned easy," he muttered. "Pretty soon it won't be acting at all. And then what? Suppose I want to go back?"

The thought frightened him.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE LION'S DEN.

Barnaby's attachment to the organization of Daniel Wegg, Incorporated, hung by the slender thread of his representations regarding the Bradley account. No one knew that better than himself. No one else, however, suspected how flimsy was the foundation upon which those representations reposed.

Nothing occurred, for several weeks, to reveal the truth. Mr. James Bradley was out of town and Barnaby's relations with subordinates proceeded smoothly enough. J. Andrew Smith was introduced to the main aspects of the situation; and by looking wise during the day and by being feverishly active with Barnaby at night he progressed with astonishing rapidity in the acquirement of understanding. In the jargon, at least, of advertising, he was soon letter-perfect.

It delighted Barnaby beyond words to hear the owlish solemnity with which Smith gave expression, during conferences, to Barnaby's own ideas. But it delighted him no less when he began to perceive J. Andrew giving expression to ideas of his own. They were singularly sound ideas, too, laid down with the simplicity and clearness that comes only of personal contact with a subject. And they were illuminated with flashes of obviously authentic anecdote.

"You're going big!" cried Barnaby one evening, after a particularly successful conference. "I heard Wegg quote you verbatim to a prospect the other day."

"Of course I go big," replied Smith placidly. "Why shouldn't I? When one of these guys with horn spectacles asks me what I think about some merchandising scheme, old J. Andrew Smith just turns the question over to Johnnie Smith, clerk in Kugel & Hoffman's general store—and the answer's got to be right, hasn't it?"

"You're safe as long as you don't put on airs," said Barnaby.

"Don't worry about that, Barney. I take my orders from you. When you tell me to go upstage, I'll go—but not before."

Barnaby often marveled at the singular docility with which his protégé followed his every suggestion. It puzzled him because Smith was in temperament by no means docile.

"What's the answer?" Barnaby asked one evening, following a long discussion of type faces and his own insistence upon the unrivaled beauties of Caslon Old Style. "I've told you my true story and still you keep on acting as if I were a sort of magician."

"I don't think you're a bit better than I am," declared Smith, helping himself to one of the cigars which Barnaby's new-found affluence had provided.

"You let me boss you, though—without any complaint."

"Well," said Smith contemplatively, "I guess I've doped it out this way: in the army I used to snap in and snap out for young shavetails that weren't dry behind the ears and——"

"They'd been to training camps," suggested Barnaby.

"Training camps, my grandmother!" snorted Smith. "The training they got you could put in your eye. No, it wasn't that. It was something—I don't know just how to put it—but it always seemed to me there had to be two kinds of people in the world—the leaders and the followers. It isn't a question of smartness. Why, we had a top kick in our outfit that knew more soldiering than all our officers from the skipper down. But he couldn't command a platoon to save his neck! It took a young kid of twenty-odd to do that."

"Confidence?"

"Yes—and something more. I don't know what it is. You tell me to march—and I march. You tell me to halt—and, darn it, I can't move. Sure, I'll get by. I'm just as smart as most of the boys at the office and I've had an experience—clerking—that

I can cash in on. I'm not four-flushing. I can deliver the goods. But you're always behind me, doing the shoving. If you stopped, I'd stop too. I'd go right back to sticking 'em up—or clerking."

"Nonsense!" cried Barnaby with a secret gratification. "I'm not as important as all that."

"You ain't as important, maybe, as you think," observed Smith shrewdly.

"You *what?*"

"I mean, you *aren't* as important as you think. I'll never get anywhere without somebody like you to do the pushing—that's certain. But you ain't—blame it, I mean you *aren't* going to get anywhere yourself without you have people like me to push."

The memory of that conversation remained with Barnaby a long time. The more he thought of Smith's analysis, the shrewder he realized it to be. The world was made of two sorts of people: those who did its work and those who contrived to make others do it for them. Well, so be it! He had been of the first and largest class long enough. Now, he had tasted of leadership and he liked the flavor. It would require no small obstacle, he said to himself grimly, to cast him back into the crowded ranks of those led.

Thus matters proceeded, with J. Andrew Smith learning a great deal from Barnaby and Barnaby learning not a little from J. Andrew. Observing from above, Mr. Wegg was, on the whole, pleased with his new acquisitions, although in his mind complete conviction waited upon events.

Then, one raw, disagreeable day in early December, the crisis came. Barnaby's first intimation of its arrival was a summons to Mr. Wegg's office.

"That damned old fool's on the rampage again!" was the latter's cheerful greeting.

"Which one?" asked Barnaby, grinning.

"The king of them all—Bradley, of course. He's just gotten back and he's begun the fireworks by ordering us to stop the run on those dealer broadsides."

"But we can't stop them," cried Barnaby. "They are on the press now!"

"Oh, my glory!" exclaimed Mr. Wegg, feeling for his handkerchief.

"I suppose that isn't all?"

"Oh, no! He's canned all the consumer copy—isn't sure he'll use the *Post* this year—and——"

"But the plate for the first one's in Philadelphia now! It's scheduled for January twenty-third!"

"Oh, my sainted aunt!" repeated Mr. Wegg, sinking lower in his chair. "This is awful!"

Barnaby's heart sank. The day of reckoning had come at last. But he had known it was coming and, by day and by night, he had done his best to be prepared for it. He had even rehearsed the language he would use. But most of the speeches he had prepared deserted him now. For a moment he stood tongue-tied, the very picture, had he known it, of the old Barnaby Lamb. And then, with a tremendous effort, he managed to say casually: "the situation was identical when we lost the account at Watts & Walpole."

"Oh, my glory!" said Mr. Wegg. He was so low in his chair that he appeared likely to slip off. "What *can* we do?" he mumbled helplessly.

Barnaby had at last regained control of himself. "Do?" he repeated calmly. "Why, I'll step over and set the old rascal right."

A gleam of hope came into Mr. Wegg's little eyes. "Do you think there's a chance?"

Barnaby dismissed the question with a wave of his hand. "My dear man, it's serious—I won't deny that. It'll take a lot of handling. But just you watch." He paused, and swallowed hard. "I—I don't suppose I ought to say it, but I doubt if there's another man in the United States who could save that account."

Mr. Wegg pulled his heavy frame from the chair and seized Barnaby's hand. "Lamb, if you can pull the fat out of the fire, I—I——"

Barnaby waited. "Yes?" he said questioningly. "You'll——"

Mr. Wegg was taken aback. He had not expected such literalness. "Why, I—I——" He stammered helplessly.

"I should say it was worth about—well, say a thousand a year, eh?"

Mr. Wegg gave way under the strain. "Good heavens, Lamb—you're a hard guy!" he exploded. "You—you haven't been here more'n a couple of months!"

Barnaby lit a cigarette. "No," he admitted judicially. "That's true. Perhaps I'm not worth what I'm getting. Perhaps you can do without me altogether. Perhaps," he suggested, as if the thought had

just occurred to him, "perhaps *you* could go over and save that account."

Mr. Wegg was literal. "Don't be an ass, Lamb," he complained. "Of course I can't do anything with that bird."

Barnaby inclined his head. "You want to keep him of course. It's merely the price that bothers you, eh?"

Mr. Wegg sank back limply into his chair. "Oh, go on," he moaned. "Every minute you put it off makes it that much worse. He —he was just *boiling* over the phone!"

Barnaby nodded, smiling. "It's a dreadful sound, isn't it!" Mr. Wegg's only reply was a shudder.

If the offices of Daniel Wegg, Incorporated, were the highest expression of luxury indentured to business, the sprawling plant of Bradley Brothers—a monochrome in Venetian red—was very nearly the lowest.

Tucked away in a region of mean streets, paved with cobbles and resounding all day long with the clatter of trucks, it was a perfect flower of modern industry, with a perfume that was an irony. But it was the irony of alchemy; for the laboring creatures who stirred the great, evil-smelling caldrons of fat were really the priests and vestals of cleanliness—and so first cousins, at least, of godliness!

But Barnaby's mind, as he treaded his way through the clamorous traffic of the streets, was not intent upon the paradoxes involved in the manufacture of soap. More vital matters concerned him. Despite his easy assurances to Mr. Wegg and the braggadocio with which he had exacted his price for what he purposed to accomplish he was far from confident of success.

He comforted himself, however, with repeated assurances that he had nothing to lose and he reiterated, with the endlessness of a formula, that by confidence alone could he succeed.

A sudden thought struck him and he dropped into a cigar store to telephone his office.

"Mr. Smith, please," he asked of the information clerk and, when J. Andrew responded, he said, "Get your helmet on, old dear, and take a seat near the brass pole. Have a taxi ready. When I give the word, hurry over here. Maybe I won't need you. But if I do, oh, J. Andrew, I'll need you badly! It's my life and yours that hangs in the balance, my lad!"

"Sounds risky, Barney," was Smith's reply. "I'd rather come right away and wait outside."

"That's still better," replied Barnaby. "I'll let down the barrage and you can follow it up."

"Cheer-o, buddy—here I come. Don't let him scare you."

Barnaby smiled wryly as he hung up the receiver. He was so thoroughly scared that his knees shook and his lips were dry. And when, a few minutes later, he sent in his name to Mr. James Bradley his voice almost left him. But the will to conquer remained strong in his breast and when at last he stood before the coldly inquiring gaze of Mr. Bradley he was, outwardly at least, master of himself.

"I asked Mr. Wegg to come over here," began Bradley, with an unpleasant emphasis on the name.

Barnaby gave a careless nod. "In the first place, Mr. Wegg was too busy," he said with all the insolence he could inject into his tone. "And in the second, *I* am handling this account."

Bradley flushed a deep crimson. "Oh, is that so? Well, I don't fancy it will trouble you much longer."

Barnaby sat down, partly from weakness and partly by design. With deliberate indifference he crossed his legs and leaned back. He said nothing.

It was evidently not at all the reaction that Bradley had expected. "Your—your service has not been at all satisfactory," he said and there was a trifle less acerbity in his tone.

"You haven't seen enough of it to judge," was Barnaby's blunt reply.

Bradley's eyes widened. He turned a deeper red and reached for a pile of proofs on the slide of his desk. "Look at this stuff here——" he began.

Barnaby shook his head. "We'll come to that later," he said calmly. "Let's finish this question of service, first. Despite the fact that you've been away practically ever since we assumed charge of the account, you appear to have acquired very definite opinions regarding our handling of it. Frankly, I'm puzzled."

"Our advertising manager is not satisfied, either," growled Bradley.

Again Barnaby shook his head. "That isn't true. You merely have him so thor-

oughly frightened that he tells you whatever he thinks you want to hear."

Bradley was a man in the middle fifties, with close-cropped gray hair and an expression, partly the consequence of an attack of smallpox in his youth, that seemed to signify habitual discontent. His countenance aroused fear in weak people and antagonism in the strong. His voice was in keeping and its natural harshness was intensified as he snapped, "You seem to be pretty cocky, young man."

"Cocky is hardly the word," mused Barnaby.

"If you can do nothing more than contradict my statements, I see no reason why this interview should continue." Bradley was manifestly angry.

"But I can do a great deal more," answered Barnaby.

"Well—why don't you?"

"I was merely waiting until you asked me."

Bradley was frankly nonplused. "This is too absurd! You act as if you thought I didn't know my own business."

"That is only partly true," was Barnaby's placid rejoinder. "I think you know *manufacturing;* but——"

Bradley's severe features suddenly dissolved in a smile. "Implying that I'm weak in selling, I suppose?"

Barnaby did not smile. "That is precisely what I mean. Or, if you have any knowledge of selling, you don't know how to make use of it. You exhaust your time and your energy in footless detail and ignore the main problem."

"You seem to have made a study of me and my ways," interrupted Bradley sarcastically.

"I have," answered Barnaby. "Would you care to know its result?"

Bradley cut off the end of a cigar. "Yes," he said. "I think I would." Barnaby thought he detected irony in the reply, but he was not certain.

"Well—you're notorious for——"

"Notorious?" Bradley's astonishment was unconcealed.

"Yes. More than one good advertising man has broken his heart on you. Watts & Walpole are not the only ones."

"They were in the wrong!" growled Bradley.

"On the contrary—*you* were. You were arbitrary, unreasonable, ignorant of the facts, ignorant of the principles of advertising, absolutely——"

"Go on—this is an extraordinary performance!"

"It's extraordinary because I'm the first man who's cared enough about you—or himself—to tell you the truth. Listen to me carefully, Mr. Bradley. Your reputation is so well established that the rules for conduct with you are codified. Since you are assumed to be a trifle mad, you must be humored. Whatever the folly you propose, it must be agreed to. Since you are the victim of your own whims and since relations with you are the essence of instability, whoever enjoys your favor must make the most of it while it lasts. Shall I go into the details of that?"

"No—but go on." Mr. Bradley had grown strangely quiet.

A gust of inward panic almost swept Barnaby off his feet. But he forced himself to continue. "I shall speak frankly, Mr. Bradley——"

"Evidently!" was the grim interruption.

"My position with Daniel Wegg depends upon my holding your account. When your not unexpected outburst took place, there were two courses of action open to me. One was to agree with every mad whim you might express, to struggle—only with the idea of yielding in the end; in short, to try to 'sweeten' you—cost what it might in self-respect or common honesty. Back in my office, that is what they think I am doing. But you guessed rightly, Mr. Bradley. I *have* been studying you. And I have made up my mind about you."

"Really? And to what decision have you come?"

"Every man that has had anything to do with you has flattered you. And every man has lost in the end."

A shrewd smile twinkled in Bradley's eyes. "There is more than one kind of flattery, young man."

Barnaby answered the smile with another. "Precisely! All the others staked their success on the belief that you wanted an echo of your own ideas. I am going to stake mine on the conviction that you will listen to honest opinions, even if they differ with your own."

"In other words, it is your ingenious idea to flatter my strength rather than my weakness?" Bradley was smiling broadly now.

"That is just what I mean," answered Barnaby. "Am I wrong?"

For several moments Bradley was silent, watching the smoke rings ascend from his cigar. Suddenly he leaned forward and his expression had lost all of its severity.

"You've been very frank, Mr. Lamb—dangerously so. Well, I shall be frank, too. You're the first man of your profession that ever dared to call me by my right name. To all the rest, the money they could get out of me was worth more than their self-respect. Consequently, I despised them all. That is why I've been obstinate and unreasonable. Not because of my temperament, but because, having no respect for my counselors, I never believed what they told me. You're quite right about our advertising manager, too. He's afraid of me—and therefore I despise him. Men should not be afraid. Have I told you enough?"

Barnaby with difficulty restrained an impulse to show his exultation. "It—it's a good beginning," he forced himself to say, slowly.

"All right, it's a beginning. Now let's take up this copy. I'm going to try hard to be as reasonable as you want me to be. I think it's rotten!"

Barnaby hesitated. Bradley was so obviously sincere in his intent to start afresh that he was reluctant to press him further. But he was well aware that although he had won the first skirmish the battle as a whole was still undecided.

"The copy doesn't matter," he said presently. "Not yet, anyway. I don't think we ought to worry about the cornice until we've settled on the foundations."

Bradley's face clouded again. "You're making it hard for me," he warned.

Barnaby smiled. "Mr. Bradley, this operation is going to be a complete success—or it isn't. There isn't going to be any compromise."

"Well—what else have you got against me?"

"There's a man I want you to listen to."

"What sort of man?"

"In our jargon, he's a 'merchandiser.'"

Bradley shook his head vigorously. "No, thank you!"

Affecting not to hear him, Barnaby reached for the telephone. "If Mr. J. Andrew Smith is there, ask him to step into Mr. Bradley's office."

"I told you I didn't want to be bored with any merchandising experts," complained Bradley. "They——"

"It's merely what we *call* him," explained Barnaby soothingly. "He's really a chap who's exceptionally gifted as to common sense."

A moment later, J. Andrew made his appearance. Barnaby presented him and then went directly to the matter in hand.

"Mr. Bradley wanted to discuss copy and art work—and I wouldn't," he said. "I suggested hearing from you—and he objected. I told him he was all wrong. Now you tell him, J. Andrew. What ails his business?"

If Smith was astonished at this easy statement of the problem he did not betray his emotions by so much as the flicker of an eyelash. He accepted his cue as promptly as if he had been expecting it.

"The trouble with your business, Mr. Bradley," he said, "is simply that the tail flies the kite."

Mr. Bradley was manifestly wearying a little of being harried. "Explain!" he snapped.

"Sure. First off, your salesmen don't work for you—they work for themselves. And I'll bet some of 'em make more jack than you do!"

Bradley rose and walked to the window, his hands clasped behind him. "Well—you've made a statement. Why don't you amplify it?" he flung over his shoulder.

Smith rolled his eyes in a grimace of despair. But at Barnaby's frown he clenched his teeth and his features hardened.

"All right, I will. Your men don't sell Bradley Brothers to their trade. They sell their own sweet selves. They have big territories and they take things easy. You're scared to death of 'em, because you know that any time you raise a holler about their records—let's say it's twenty per cent of the potential business—they can up and switch their trade, lock, stock and barrel to Mackenzie—and you'll merely be out the twenty per cent you already had. Therefore——"

"You seem to know a lot about it," interrupted Bradley, without turning around.

"I do," answered Smith with a wink at Barnaby. "And what's more, when Lamb here has trouble in selling you copy or layouts, the real reason is that you've got to sell 'em to your own salesmen. When you kick holes in a schedule, our fellows all say, 'Old Bradley isn't sold on advertising.' But

it really means that your salesmen aren't sold on advertising and you don't dare do what they don't want you to do. Isn't it the truth?"

Bradley swung around. "Anything else?" he demanded coldly.

"Yes," said Smith, "there is. Your attitude toward the dealer is all wrong, too. You work like blazes trying to sell him soap. But he ain't—I mean, he *isn't* interested in soap."

"Indeed? And what *are* his interests, then?"

"He's interested in making a living, same as you and me. When you tell him you make the finest soap on the market, what's that to him? It won't buy boots for baby. He isn't going to *use* your soap. He's going to try and sell it, isn't he?"

"Obviously."

"You don't act as if it was obvious, retorted Smith. "You decide you won't go in the *Post* this year. Why? Because the salesmen say to you, 'Give us the money and we'll sell more soap than the advertising will.' Maybe it's true. But what good is it going to do Mr. Dealer to have a clever salesman load up his shelves with the best soap in the world, if he can't sell it? Mr. Bradley, I've been a storekeeper, myself. And I want to tell you that while the quality of any product is important, it isn't a darn bit more important than its salability. What I mean is that one won't work without the other."

"But we're selling our line," said Bradley.

"Nonsense!" cried Smith sharply. "Mackenzie outsells you in your best territories. You've got a fine product and a fine old house, Mr. Bradley—but this isn't 1860!"

Bradley made a gesture which, to Barnaby who was studying him intently, could be characterized only as one of weariness.

"The fact of the matter is——" he began slowly, then halted. His face clouded. "Both of you young gentlemen seem to have extremely definite ideas about this business. They may be right, too. I've only been in it for thirty years and there is of course much that I haven't had time to learn. Suppose you reduce your ideas to writing and submit them to me. Perhaps——"

Barnaby was dumfounded. "We—we'll do it immediately!" he stammered.

"Next month," went on Bradley with a singular apathy, "we have our sales convention. Perhaps you would be willing to talk to our men?"

Smith nodded. "You bet—if you'll let me talk turkey," he said bluntly.

Bradley continued to stare at his finger tips. "If I feel as I feel this minute, you can say anything you like. But I warn you," he said slowly, "I am a man of extreme vacillation. It is more than likely that I shall change my mind completely."

Barnaby rose. "We shall get to work on the plan without delay. In a few days——"

Bradley interrupted him with a gesture of dismissal.

"Here—take this stuff with you," he said indifferently, picking up the pile of proofs. "Do what you like with it. Only—please remember—I'm easily bored. You can't imagine *how* easily!"

Once they were out on the street, Barnaby gave way to his repressed emotions. "I'm all in!" he sighed weakly, leaning for support on Smith's shoulder. "Once again I ask you, J. Andrew—are we dreaming?"

Smith shook his head. "He's a queer guy, Barney—a mighty queer guy!"

"How he ate up your stuff, J. Andrew! You were wonderful!"

"Rats," answered Smith succinctly. "I don't think he heard a word of it. He wasn't listening, I tell you. All that stuff about the resale idea—why, we were talking to the wrong man, Barney. That guy's business is shot to pieces and he doesn't give one hoot."

"You're crazy, J. Andrew!"

"No, I am not. Do you know why he's busted so many willing workers in our vineyard? It's because they put things up to him for O. K. They made *him* do the thinking—and he doesn't *want* to think about his business. You got by because you argued him into silence and then told him what he ought to do."

CHAPTER IX.

REVELATIONS.

Daniel Wegg was frankly incredulous when Barnaby reported the outcome of his interview with Mr. Bradley. But he set the machinery in motion for the preparation of the memorandum for which Bradley had asked.

Barnaby and J. Andrew, of course, slaved over it. The others, spurred on by Mr. Wegg, labored with extra zeal. When it came to completion it was a very impressive

thing, full of charts and diagrams in many-colored inks and bound in in a hand-lettered cover which was held together with a silken cord. Every one was highly pleased and the outcome of its submission to Mr. Bradley was awaited with the utmost eagerness.

Barnaby took the portfolio over in person. He was extremely conscious of its importance and he was the more taken aback when, as he fumbled with the strings of the wrapping, Bradley inquired, with an unmistakable note of ennui in his voice:

"Do I have to look at it now?"

"I thought you were waiting for it," answered Barnaby disappointedly. It was rather hard to have the fruit of so many weary hours dismissed so lightly.

Bradley murmured an apologetic "of course," and listlessly turned the pages.

"That new series of drawings is unusually fine, I think," suggested Barnaby. "They're only sketches, of course, but——"

"They'll never be anything else," was Bradley's curt reply.

"I—I don't understand."

Bradley looked up. "Do you know anything about art?"

"Why, I—I——" The question found Barnaby at a loss for an answer.

Bradley pushed his chair away from the desk. "I've had a fiendish morning, Lamb. Looking at this rubbish now would unsettle my mind completely."

"It *isn't* rubbish," said Barnaby stoutly. "It's——"

Bradley smiled. "Oh, I know. Don't take me too literally. I have no doubt I'll find it all very practical and valuable. But not right now."

Barnaby shrugged his shoulders. "I want you to take all the time you think necessary, of course."

"I'll look over it to-night. I promise." Bradley closed the portfolio and rose. "Now, would you like to join me in looking at something that is not at all useful—but is not rubbish?"

Barnaby was completely mystified. "I haven't the faintest idea of what you're talking about," he confessed.

Bradley smiled quizzically. "I wonder if you'll have any more when I've shown you." He took his coat and hat from the costumer in the corner. "Come—I'll only keep you an hour or so."

An invitation from a client of Bradley's magnitude was a command from the throne. Added, however, to such professional considerations, Barnaby felt a profound curiosity to penetrate Mr. Bradley's singularly repellent exterior. Smith's conviction that the man was not at all what he seemed had gained Barnaby's credence.

They walked rapidly eastward. Conversation was fragmentary, made so by the constant necessity of dodging vehicles and the pedestrians on the sidewalks. Finally they reached the boulevard and turned north.

"Look at the faces of these two-legged animals!" exclaimed Bradley suddenly. "Marching up and down at full speed. Can you see any evidence that they know where they are going?"

"About their business, I suppose," answered Barnaby.

"Exactly! You've said it all."

Barnaby waited expectantly, but Bradley relapsed into another long silence. Then, several minutes later, he burst forth again. "They think they're acting of their own volition. Poor fools!" The bitterness in his tone was evident.

Barnaby tried to lead him on. "You despise them?"

"No," answered Bradley curtly. "Myself."

"Why?"

Instead of answering the question, Bradley took his arm. "Here we are," he said in an altogether different tone. "Let's not talk for a while."

He had halted before what was apparently a remodeled residence, only the brass plate at the doorway and the window full of prints and fragile-looking pottery in vivid hues of blue and saffron indicating its changed status.

Together they ascended the short flight of steps in the vestibule and Bradley opened the door. "Out of the world," he said softly.

Barnaby observed that the young woman who rose from her desk at their entrance greeted Bradley by name and with cordiality. Bradley acknowledged her welcome with a silent bow and led the way back to what had perhaps been the living room of the former residence. It was a chamber of considerable size, richly carpeted and hung with velours curtains of softly faded mulberry. From a bay window at one end, giving upon a garden, filtered the yellow gold of the late afternoon sun.

Bradley, with a sweeping gesture, indi-

cated the paintings which hung upon the walls. "This is a long way from a soap factory, isn't it?" he whispered. His manner was curiously changed and to Barnaby's fancy the hard lines of discontent around his mouth had vanished.

The clamor of the streets was far behind them. The soft carpet gave no echo to their footfalls. Instinctively Barnaby found himself speaking in what was little more than a whisper.

Bradley smiled understandingly. "I know—*they* do it." His hand indicated the pictures. For the first time Barnaby noted the extraordinary length and delicacy of the man's fingers. "Do you sense how quietly they speak—not boisterously, like that stuff you brought to me."

Barnaby nodded. "They're not *salesmen!*" he said with a flash of insight.

"That's it!" Bradley's eyes gleamed. "That's it, exactly. They're not trying to prove anything. They don't argue. They don't insist. They don't offer you anything. They demand it of you."

"And if you haven't got it to give—that's *your* loss, not theirs."

Bradley put his hand on Barnaby's shoulder. "That little thing in the corner, for instance. What do you think of it?"

"Why, I—I like it," answered Barnaby simply.

"Oh, of course." Bradley's gesture was impatient. "But what does it tell you? Doesn't it fill you with a yearning for the sound of water running over stones, the feel of a clean sun on your skin, the smell of the earth underfoot?"

Barnaby was thoughtful. He realized that in a sense he was on trial. Instinctively he resolved upon sincerity. "I spent my boyhood with those things," he said quietly. "The brook suggests watering the horses—it—it doesn't make me feel any yearning!"

It was Bradley's turn to be thoughtful. Presently he nodded. "You're right again. You see, I've lived all *my* life in smoke and noise and struggle. That one farther down—you like that better, don't you?"

The picture he pointed out was of a railroad switch yard, in winter. Long lines of drab brown freight cars lay in the foreground. A single, dirty, black switch engine, accentuating a vivid white puff of steam against the leaden background of the sky, completed the composition.

Barnaby studied it for a moment. "Yes," he said, "I think I do."

"What does it tell you?" demanded Bradley.

Barnaby scratched his head. "Why, I don't know——"

"Of course you do. Think!"

"Well——" He hesitated, oddly embarrassed.

"Don't be afraid," urged Bradley sympathetically. "Let your imagination run. Or shall I express it for you? In that white smoke you see the beauty and purity of life that exists even in our dirty industrialism. You see your own instinctive love of beauty confirmed and the pettiness of your daily life glorified. Isn't it something more to you than a composition of lights and shadows—hasn't the painter done more than lay pigment on a bit of canvas?"

Barnaby made no effort to conceal his amazement. "I never thought of pictures that way," he admitted.

Bradley smiled. "You mean you've never thought of them at all. Let's look at some of the others. This one, for instance. Does it please you?"

He had indicated a small canvas—a coldly vivid winter landscape. Barnaby shivered involuntarily. "Brr—it looks cold!"

Bradley's expression was enigmatic. "You think so? But it's clean, isn't it? There's no smoke in *that* sky."

"No—there's no smoke. The snow wouldn't be white like that if there were."

"There's no smoke—there isn't a human habitation within miles of that spot," said Bradley dreamily. "Nobody has soiled the face of nature. It's clean—and quiet—oh, so quiet."

"You speak as if you'd been there?"

Bradley hesitated. "Why, I—I—that is to say, I know the artist."

Barnaby scanned the canvas for the signature. "Robert Whitney?"

"Yes, that's his name. I think he has talent. Do you?"

Barnaby laughed. "Heavens, Mr. Bradley—*I'm* no critic!"

"Of course you are. We *all* are. But here's another by the same chap. Like it?"

The second picture was as warm as the first had been cold. The sky was a vibrant sapphire, the grass a luscious emerald. A still pool glowed limpidly in the foreground.

Barnaby was dubious. "I think I'd like it better if there was some life in it," he con-

fessed finally. "A bit of smoke, a footprint, maybe, or even a——"

"I wouldn't like it as well," interrupted Bradley. "I don't think I'd like it at all." He turned away and instinctively Barnaby knew that he was disappointed.

The afternoon was waning and visitors began to drift into the gallery. As their numbers increased, Bradley's impatience grew more manifest. "Let's go," he said presently. "People! Always people! The world is full of them!"

Barnaby, wondering, followed him to the door.

On the street, Bradley suddenly held out his hand. "Thanks, Lamb," he said, smiling faintly. "It was good of you. I hope I didn't bore you too much."

"You didn't bore me at all," answered Barnaby frankly. "But you *did* mystify me!"

The older man nodded, as if that were to be expected. "When you know me better, you'll understand. I'm really quite simple."

For two hours Barnaby had given no thought to business. All at once he thought about it very earnestly.

"You *will* look at that memorandum, won't you?" he asked doggedly. "The sooner we get started with those drawings, the sooner——"

A shade of annoyance crossed Bradley's face. "Oh, I guess I know what's in your book. It—it's all right with me. Go ahead."

Barnaby's elation was exceeded only by his astonishment. "W-would you drop me a line to that effect?" he stammered. "Y-you'll find the whole plan summarized on the last page—if you don't want to read it all. Though I——"

Bradley nodded. "Go ahead," he said again. "I guess you know what you're about."

Barnaby waited for no more. Restraining an impulse to shout, he waved an adieu to his companion and dashed for a passing bus.

True to his promise, Bradley confirmed his verbal approval of the memorandum with a brief note which Barnaby received the following afternoon.

DEAR MR. LAMB: I have gone over the portfolio submitted to me and find your suggestions on the whole satisfactory. You may proceed with the execution. I find the art work, in conception and performance, quite up to my expectations. It is, however, a little less bad than that previously supplied.

I have referred the balance of your plan to the factors in this company who are affected and you can take up details directly with them.

I am going away the latter part of this week.

Faithfully yours, JAMES BRADLEY.
By M. J. F.

"He doesn't even take the trouble to sign his letters," exclaimed Smith when he was shown the missive. "He's a queer bird, I'll say!"

Daniel Wegg was profoundly impressed when Barnaby told him that his program had been approved in its entirety. "When does the billing start?" he asked, reaching for his pencil.

"Immediately."

"Great stuff!" He consulted a calendar. "I wonder—can we make the February magazines?"

"That depends on how long it takes to get the finished drawings out."

"Well, if that's all, we'll make 'em, you bet!" growled Wegg. "I'll have Briarleigh over here right off and he can get his prima donnas on the job. How about copy?"

"Written and O. K'd."

Wegg held out his hand. "Lamb, you're a knock-out! There's no two ways about it—you're certainly a knock-out!"

Barnaby smiled. "It's all in the handling, Mr. Wegg," he said loftily. "I have Bradley's confidence. He does just about what I say."

"It sure looks it," admitted Mr. Wegg. "I never knew a schedule to go over with less fuss. And with that bird—it's a miracle, that's what it is—a miracle!"

"Don't forget J. Andrew Smith," said Barnaby. "I never could have done it without him. Bradley listened to him as I never saw him listen to an advertising man before."

"Smith is smart, all right," agreed Wegg, nodding his head.

"He's more than that," declared Barnaby, emphasizing his words with taps of his finger on the desk. "He's a merchandising genius!"

"Y-y-yes, I guess he is," admitted Wegg with some reluctance. "Only—he—he's different from the other ones I've known."

"That," said Barnaby with finality, "is

because he's real. The others were imitation."

Despite the marked change in his financial condition, Barnaby's habit of living had not changed at all. He still kept his third-floor room at Mrs. Mooney's boarding establishment and still endured what she was pleased to call her home cooking. In only one particular, at first, was his scale of living advanced. He felt obliged, by the eminence he had attained, to give up lunching at cafeterias and to patronize places where, he found, one could spend two dollars on a single meal.

Despite this extravagance, however, he found his surplus increasing at an alarming rate. In the space of a few months it had become a problem with him as to just what to do with it. He yielded to a deepening interest in haberdashery. He became a frequenter of the movies. He bought cigars by the box. But even with these dissipations of wealth, he still earned considerably more than he spent.

Smith, who found no difficulty in disposing of the whole of his income, counseled against the folly of saving.

"You live but once," he declared incontrovertibly. "Why not enjoy it?"

"Some day I may have a chance at a good thing," answered Barnaby, unmoved. "I'm going to save all I can."

Such extreme foresight was beyond Smith. He shook his head at the spectacle of such folly. "Four per cent in the savings bank won't get you anywhere, Barney," he insisted. "It's too slow. Nobody ever got rich by just saving."

"What did they do?" inquired Barnaby with some sarcasm.

"They plunged," declared Smith. "A thousand per cent—or the poorhouse!"

Barnaby laughed. "That was your idea when you bought that bonanza oil stock, I suppose?"

Smith looked pained. "Don't laugh, Barney. It's down now, of course. But you wait. That stuff's going to be worth a lot of money one of these days."

"Twaddle! That stock's worth about a cent a pound—as old paper. For the life of me, J. Andrew, I can't see why you want to risk your money in something you know absolutely nothing about."

Smith scratched his head. "I guess I did go it pretty blind," he admitted. "But it sure looked good to me."

Barnaby grew thoughtful. "Do you know what I think?" he said presently. "I think we ought to invest in concerns we *know*."

"For instance?"

"Well—how about Bradley Brothers? We're certainly on the inside there. We're just about dictating the selling policy of that business. Nobody can know more about it than we do."

"What's Bradley's selling at?"

"Eighty-four or thereabouts. But that figure represents the old management. If we're on the right track in what we're getting them to do, it ought to be worth a lot more in no time."

"You can't make enough," objected Smith. "A few points, maybe."

Barnaby dismissed the objection. "It's not a speculation, of course. But I don't *want* to speculate. It's just a good, sound, conservative investment, that you can watch."

Smith was not wholly convinced. "Seven or eight per cent—it'll take a long time to get anywhere on *that!*"

"I tell you, it's not a gamble!" cried Barnaby impatiently. "Can't you recognize an investment when you see one?"

The upshot of the discussion was that Barnaby went to the brokerage house which Smith recommended and became the possessor of seven shares of Bradley Brothers common stock. The broker expressed surprise at the purchase, hinted broadly that there were better buys to be had and yielded only when he saw how resolute the young man was.

"You seem to know this stock?" he suggested.

"I do," answered Barnaby.

"Think it's a buy, eh?"

"Evidently."

"Got some inside dope, have you?"

Barnaby was human. He contrived a cryptic smile and shrugged his shoulders in a fashion to indicate that he could tell more than he would. He was not unaffected by the flattery of the broker's interest.

He would have been amazed could he have guessed the consequences of that histrionic shrug. No sooner had he left the office than the broker was telephoning a list of clients and revealing, under the seal of strictest confidence, a certain piece of valuable information. By the time the Exchange

closed that afternoon, the hitherto moribund Bradley common had advanced three and one quarter points—and Barnaby was at the peak of exaltation.

Smith counseled profit taking, but Barnaby was contemptuous. "That's only the start," he declared with complete confidence. "Don't you know that the market always discounts coming events? The Street has gotten wind of the new sales policy, that's all. If it goes up on the rumor of a plan, what will it do when the plan really begins to work?"

"Maybe you're right," said Smith dubiously. "But I'd take my twenty-odd dollars if I was in your shoes."

"How many times do I have to tell you that I'm *not* a speculator?" asked Barnaby wearily.

Smith found his vindication in events. The following day, Bradley common sagged a point and a half at the opening, recovered five eighths and then tumbled abruptly to eighty-three—where it remained, resuming its interrupted somnolence with every evidence of permanence.

Barnaby, completely mystified, declined to admit it. "Just a flurry," he said casually with a wave of his hand. And Smith could not prevail upon him to discuss the subject further.

Secretly, however, he scanned the market reports every morning and every evening. But Bradley common remained as motionless as the pyramids. Even the appearance of color pages in the women's publications failed to create so much as a tremor.

"It's a long-pull investment, I guess," said Barnaby finally to himself. "I'd better forget it." And he set himself with renewed vigor to the task of bringing order out of the chaos of the Bradley selling methods.

CHAPTER X.

A WARNING.

Time passed, pleasantly, smoothly and with satisfaction to all the personnel of Daniel Wegg, Incorporated. From being beyond competition as the most troublesome the Bradley account now ranked as the office jest from the ease with which it was handled. Schedules were accepted and suggestions acted upon without need of cajolery or argument. Proofs were brought back by the boy who took them, approved, or at the worst, with a noncommittal insult as to their quality.

Mr. Wegg was well pleased and made no effort to conceal the fact. Smith, most of his work on the Bradley account finished, was turned to other matters where his simple sanity continued to justify all the claims that Barnaby had made for him. Barnaby himself, wearing the laurels of his victory, began to cast about for new fields to conquer. The Bradley account had reached a point where it made relatively little demand upon his time.

He was gratified by the respect which every one, from Mr. Wegg down, accorded him. He was full of the consciousness of achievement and he knew that he should have been happy. But he was not happy; and, alone with Smith in the evenings, he showed it.

"What's the matter, buddy?" asked the latter sympathetically. "Speculating again?"

"No," growled Barnaby.

"Something's on your mind. Worried?"

"Shut up!" was the glum response.

Smith, thus properly snubbed, retreated, whistling. But a few nights later he reverted to the subject.

"You've come clean with me on everything else," he complained. "What are you keeping this back for?"

"I'm keeping nothing back," answered Barnaby shortly.

"Rot! You're about as good company as a corpse."

"I'm sorry."

"What is it, old top—got a girl?"

Barnaby buried himself deeper in the book he was reading and made no reply to the question.

"That's probably it," continued Smith thoughtfully. "If you'd tell me——"

"You talk too blamed much!" snapped Barnaby.

Smith grinned. "So that's it, eh! Well, well!"

Barnaby looked up and at the honest pain in Barnaby's eyes Smith sobered.

"It isn't a joke, J. Andrew," growled Barnaby.

Smith hesitated. "You know I'd come through with anything for you, Barney. Perhaps, if you——"

Barnaby closed his eyes. "I'm a poor loser, J. Andrew—that's all. I staked everything on one move and I lost. I try to for-

get—but I can't. I—I think about it all the time. I'm a fool!" He rose suddenly and fell to pacing the floor.

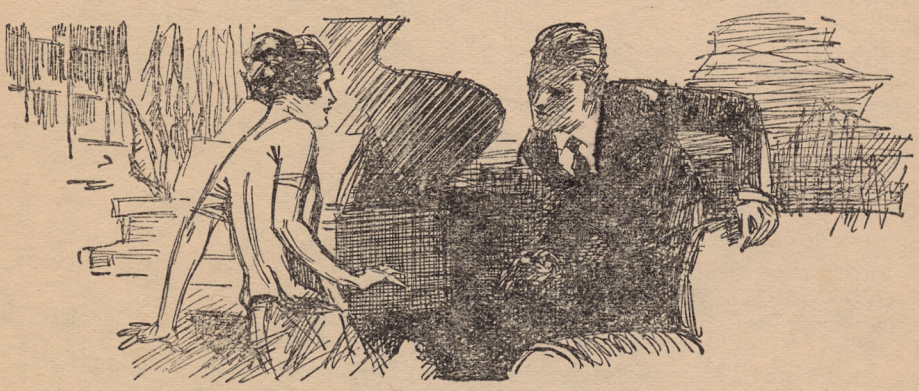
Smith sighed helplessly. "I can't do anything, Barney, if you won't give me the low down. What's her name?"

Barnaby made no answer. It was evident that he intended to make none. Smith ceased his efforts.

The next afternoon, however, when Smith reached the boarding house and went through the mail on the marble-topped table in the front hall he found a small envelope addressed, in an obviously feminine hand to Barnaby.

He was going out to dinner but he delayed his departure until Barnaby's arrival a few minutes later. "Here's something for you," he said, holding out the letter and watching for its effect.

The effect was instantaneous. The lines of weariness faded from Barnaby's face and



his eyes sparkled as he tore open the envelope. The message it contained was brief:

> DEAR BINNY: I'd like to see you some evening as soon as possible. PEG.

Barnaby read it and reread it until its simple words were photographed on his memory. Then he crushed the bit of paper in his hand and thrust it deep into his pocket. His lips formed the soundless fragment of a tune.

"You act like you'd heard good news," said Smith expectantly.

Barnaby clapped him on the back. "Right-o, J. Andrew!" he cried. "And I'm not going to the movies with you to-night. I—I have an engagement!"

Whistling blithely, he skipped up the stairs, two at a bound, leaving Smith to stare disappointedly after him.

The mere fact of receiving a message from Peggy had precluded, in Barnaby's mind, any speculation as to its significance. But as he went up the steps of the Whitredge house and rang the doorbell it occurred to him that the tidings she wished to convey to him might not be good tidings.

The wording of the message, now that he reflected upon it, carried a vague intimation of distress. Its brevity, the fact that she wished to see him "as soon as possible," the complete absence of explanation, might well betoken something unpleasant. It was with a vague sense of foreboding that he acknowledged the butler's greeting and entered the library.

The expression on Peggy's face, when she came down a few moments later, was not of a nature to dispel his anxiety. As she took his hand, "I'm glad you came so promptly," she said seriously.

He bowed. "I'm always at your service, my dear."

"Be yourself, Binny," was her answer to that, accompanied by a frown of annoyance. "This is no time for nonsense."

He shrugged his shoulders. "Apparently not. Perhaps you will enlighten me as to what it is for?"

She hesitated, biting her lip. "Well," she said at length—and it was evident that she spoke with an effort. "I told you to come and I've made up my mind to tell you what I've got to tell. But I want you to understand that it doesn't come easily, Binny. On the whole, I—I think I've got a decent sense

of honor. It—it isn't pleasant to be—dishonorable."

"You couldn't be that!" he exclaimed impulsively.

She shook her head. "You don't know me, Binny. You're going to find out that I can be-betray a confidence!"

"Why do you do it?" he asked gently, impressed by her color and the way she dropped her eyes—a manner quite foreign to her.

"Because," she said, looking up at him and making an obvious effort to control the trembling of her lip, "I'm fond of you, Binny dear. You've doubted it, I know. So I'm going to prove it."

"Like a sister, I suppose." His voice had an accent of bitterness.

She nodded. "Yes—like a sister. If I had a brother and I could help him, I think I'd be dishonorable just the way I'm going to be."

"Thanks," said Barnaby with unconcealed sarcasm.

"Please"—her eyes grew moist—"don't make it hard for me, Binny!"

"I'm sorry, Peg!" His tone expressed his contrition. "I——"

"You won't understand, I suppose. I mean, *why* I do this."

"Do *you?*"

She ignored the question and went on as if she were reciting something prepared in advance. "Douglas Mackenzie was here the other night——"

"Indeed?"

Again she ignored his ironic interruption. "Somehow or other," she continued, "I happened to speak of you."

"How curious!"

"He—he doesn't like you, Binny."

"I'm astonished!"

"He doesn't like you any better than you like him. I—I don't know why."

"Don't you?" Instinctively Barnaby sought her hand.

She quietly released it but the color rose faintly in her cheeks.

"N-not entirely," she replied. "Anyway, he told me about your connection with the Wegg Company and how you were handling the Bradley Brothers' account and then——"

"He seems to know a lot about me," said Barnaby stiffly.

"More than you guess, Binny. He said everybody was so surprised at how successful you had been. Oh, he told me a lot about you—things you might have told me yourself, I think."

"You never gave me the chance."

"Well, anyway, it was all so delightful and surprising that I—I suppose I said something about how pleased I was. That seemed to make him angry. Because then he began to tell me things I don't think even you know. He said Bradley Brothers was—what *did* he call it—oh, yes, your 'meal ticket;' and he said that pretty soon you were going to go hungry."

Barnaby's assumed indifference left him and he sat suddenly upright. "What did he mean by that?"

"Well, he said that Bradley Brothers was nothing but a shell—that it was just running along on its reputation, with very bad management, and was getting deeper and deeper in the hole. One of these days, he said, they'd be in so deep they couldn't get out; and then they'd be put under the hammer. I don't understand business very well, of course, but those were his exact words—they would be put under the hammer, he said."

Barnaby's brain was working rapidly. "The fox!" he exclaimed. "It must be the old man, though."

"Does it surprise you?"

He nodded vehemently.

"What does it mean?" asked Peggy.

"Just what you thought," he responded, his face hardening. "That is, if what he says is true."

"He had no reason to say anything else."

"True enough. He's a soap manufacturer himself. His father is one of the wiliest old wolves unhung. The thing is as clear as a bell. When Bradley goes bust the Mackenzies will buy up the remains—at their own price. And as an incidental prize Douglas will get my hide. Oh, it's very clear!"

"That's the way it seemed to me," said Peggy. "And that's why I told you."

Barnaby was thoughtful. Incidents in connection with the management of Bradley Brothers, hitherto ignored, suddenly took on great significance. It all fitted in.

Peggy went on with her revelations. "Doug said that the banks—oh, I know I'll get it all mixed—I can't remember the words he used. Anyway, the idea I got was that for some reason the banks are going to foreclose on their mortgages—or whatever it is

that banks foreclose on. He gave me a sort of picture of Mr. Bradley sitting out on the sidewalk with an old mattress and a couple of chairs and no place to go!"

"You got his meaning pretty clearly," laughed Barnaby. "That is precisely what is going to happen to a lot of concerns this year."

"It's dreadful!" cried Peggy. "Why do they allow it?"

"The piper must be paid," answered Barnaby cryptically. He took out a cigarette and lighted it. For a long time he sat staring into vacancy.

He said nothing until he had finished his cigarette. He tossed what was left of it into the fireplace, and turned to Peggy. "Why did you tell me this?" he asked quietly.

"I told you why," she answered.

"That was the only reason?"

"Yes. What other could there be?"

He pondered for a moment. "It seems to me that you've exhibited some favoritism—haven't you?"

She flushed. "Perhaps I have," she replied, with a toss of her head. "And why not? It wasn't a fair fight. The Mackenzies have everything——"

"And I have nothing," he finished for her. "Is that it?"

"Well—yes."

"So you were moved merely by a feeling of sympathy for the under dog?"

"Oh, Binny, more than that. I *am* fond of you—you know that. And whether you believe it or not, I was so pleased and proud to learn how well you were getting on that I just couldn't stand the thought of you making such a brave fight—against such odds. There wasn't anything I could do to help you, but I could *warn* you. And I don't care whether it's right or wrong, I'm glad I did!"

"It was very wrong," said Barnaby gravely. "But I'm glad, too."

Her forehead wrinkled in perplexity. "But what can you *do?*"

"Do you care?"

"Of course I care! What a silly question!"

"Listen, Peg." He laid his hand on hers. "No—don't draw away. I'm not going to make love to you. I'm through with that."

"Oh—are you?" She regretted the words the instant they left her lips.

He nodded soberly. "Yes, I'm through. Until now I thought that the reason you wouldn't look at me was because there was some one else. I thought it was Mackenzie. That was why I hated him."

"Oh, was *that* the reason?" she murmured with every appearance of surprise.

"Yes, that was the reason. Now I know it isn't Mackenzie. He isn't anything to you. You care a great deal for me—as a brother. Well, Peg, dear girl, that's the way it shall be. I've changed the whole way of my life, these months gone, and I shall change this part of it, too. It's the last fragment of the old Barnaby, but it will go the way of the others. I've done so many impossible things of late, I know I can do this."

She turned her face to his and her lips trembled irresolutely. "You—you mean you're not going to see me any more?"

He shook his head. "No. I—I tried that. It didn't work. I tried being disagreeable to you and ignoring you. It didn't succeed. I thought about you constantly. Now I shall see you as often as may be—and think of you——"

"As little as may be?" she supplied.

He nodded slowly, but she noticed that his fingers were so tightly clenched that the knuckles were white.

"What are you going to do, Binny—about business, I mean?"

He rose and a deep sigh escaped him. "I haven't the faintest idea," he said with a slow smile. "The outlook isn't promising, is it? But I have nothing to lose—except a mirage. I shall do what I can to make things unpleasant for Mr. Douglas Mackenzie—in return for some unpleasant moments he has given me."

She swallowed hard. "Y-you're not going, Binny? So early?"

"Yes, I'm going."

"Well—good night." She kept her eyes averted as she held out her hand to him.

He took that to mean indifference and his heart, already heavy, became as lead. "Good night, Peg. And thank you—so much."

Peggy stood like a statue until she heard the sound of the front door closing behind him. Then, as if the sound had released a spring under tension, she flung herself upon the couch and burst into a passion of tears.

She was not certain that she knew why.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Bootlegger's Luck

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Goat Pro Tem.," "The Joshua Palm," Etc.

Casey Ryan's wife didn't know what he was doing out there on the desert and for a long time Casey wasn't so very sure about it himself—you can ask anybody if he was!

(*A Novelette*)

CHAPTER I.

THE highway north from the Santa Fe railroad climbs an imperceptible grade across barren land to where the mesa changes and becomes potentially fertile. Up this road, going north, a cloud of yellow dust rolled swiftly. Had you stood at the first signpost and waited, you would have seen the nose of a dingy Ford emerge presently from the enveloping cloud, and a moment later you would have seen Casey Ryan, hard-eyed and with his jaw set to the fighting mood, sitting behind the wheel and driving as if he had a grudge against the road or the Ford—or both, more likely.

At the first signpost, Casey canted a malevolent eye toward it and went lurching by at top speed. The car bulked black for a moment, dimmed and merged into the fleeing cloud that presently seemed no more than a dust devil whirling across the mesa. At the second signpost Casey slowed, his eyes dwelling speculatively upon the legend: "Juniper Wells 3 m." A narrow, little-used trail angled crookedly away through the greasewood to the northeast. Casey gave a deciding twist to the steering wheel and turned into the trail.

Juniper Wells is not nearly so nice a place as it sounds. But it is the first water north of the Santa Fe, and more than one wayfarer of the desert has turned from the main highway and approached it, driven by necessity. Such a wayfarer was Casey Ryan.

When a man has driven a Ford fifteen hours without once leaving the wheel for a drink of water or a bite to eat, however great his trouble or his haste his first thought will be of water, food and rest. Even Casey hunted the first water hole and thought longingly of bacon and coffee and a bit of sleep afterward.

Juniper Wells offered water—such as it was. The immediate surroundings offered seclusion, as precious now to Casey as the well itself. Seclusion and Casey Ryan had never before been close companions; now, however, while the soul of him had turned to bitterness and brotherly love had turned to gall, the one thing Casey was not prepared to meet was a man.

Wind and water and more wind, buffeting

that trail since the last car had passed, made heavy going. The Ford labored up small hills and into shallow gullies, dipping downward at last to Juniper Wells where Casey stopped close beside the blackened embers left by some forgotten traveler of the wild. He slid stiffly from behind the wheel to the vacant seat beside him and climbed out like the old man he had determined he would never become. He walked away a few paces, turned and stood glaring back at the Ford as if familiarizing himself with an object little known and hated much.

Fate, he felt, had played a shabby trick upon an honest man. Through all the pugnacious years of his life, Casey Ryan had never broken the law deliberately and with full foreknowledge of the consequences. When Casey fought, he fought because his Irish rights had been threatened. When Casey gambled, he played where gambling found full favor among his fellows. When Casey drank, it was his custom to drink openly with a friend or two at his elbow and his money on the bar to pay. The traffic rules of the cities Casey did not consider legitimate laws, but rather a bullying attempt to force Casey Ryan into changing his manner of driving a car. For these he felt contempt. But when the stern finger at Washington pointed and said, "Thou shalt not," Casey tipped his hat and obeyed.

Yet here he stood, a criminal in the eyes of the law, and a liar in the eyes of the Little Woman. An honest man and truthful, he had been forced into a position where he, Casey Ryan, was actually afraid to face his fellow man.

"*He* wasn't no friend of Bill Masters—the divil himself wouldn't of owned him fer a friend!" snarled Casey, thinking of the man who had robbed him and tricked him in the guise of friendship, and had brought him to this pass.

"Me—Casey Ryan—with a load of booze wished onto me and a car that may have been stole fer all I know, and not a darned cent to my name! They can make a goat of Casey once, but watch close when they try it the second time! Casey may be gittin' old—he might possibly have softenin' of the brain—but he'll git the skunks that done this or you'll find his carcass layin' alongside their trail bleachin' like a blowed-out tire! I'll trail 'em till my tongue hangs down t' my knees! I'll git 'em an' I'll drown 'em face down in a bucket uh their own booze! They can't do dirt t' Casey Ryan an' git away with it—an' you can ask anybody if that ain't straight goods!" Whipped by emotion, his voice rose stridently until it cracked just under a shout.

"I surely will, if I can only find somebody to ask," a strange voice spoke whimsically behind Casey. "Who is it you're going to trail till your tongue hangs down to your knees? That sounds pretty warlike, old man. Going to need any help?"

Casey whirled belligerently and faced the man who had quietly walked up behind him. For the first time in his life, Casey's eyes held a furtive gleam in their unwinking stare. He was too tired, too hungry, too full of his futile rage to dissemble.

"Where'd *you* come from?" he demanded truculently.

"Why does it matter, so long as I'm here?" the other parried blandly. "If you've got the makings of a meal in your car—and you look too old a hand in the desert to be without—I don't mind having a snack with you. I hate to invite myself to breakfast, but it's that or go hungry."

The hard-bitten features of Casey Ryan, tanned by wind and sun to a fair imitation of leather, were never meant to portray mixed emotions. Wherefore, he eyed the stranger impassively except for a queer, cornered look in his eyes. He would like to know just how much of his impassioned soliloquy the man had overheard, and just what effect it would have in his mind. He would like to know who and what this man was, and how he had managed to approach within six feet without being overheard. Above and beyond all this, he would like to know whether there was any grub in the car; and, if so, how he could get at it without revealing his contraband load to the stranger. But Casey Ryan was nothing if not game. He lifted his black felt hat from his perspiring forehead and pulled it down over his right eyebrow at a devil-may-care angle which in itself gave him assurance.

"All right; if you rustle the wood and start a fire I'll see if I can dig up something," he volunteered carelessly, and cocked an eye up at the sun. "It's early t' make a noon camp, but if you ain't et to-day it's all right with me. I can take on grub any time yuh say." And to prepare the way for possible surprises, he added carpingly, "Feller I had along with me I ditched back there at the railroad. He done the packin'

up when we broke camp—and I'd hate t' swear t' what he put in an' what he forgot. But mebbe we can make out a meal."

The stranger seemed perfectly satisfied with this arrangement and preamble. He started off to gather dead branches of sage, and Casey turned with a deep sigh of temporary relief to the car.

Last night he had been merely a passenger in this particular Ford, driving into the desert for pastime and meaning to take the first train back home. For pastime also he had been driving the car himself and had never questioned the stranger, with whom he had made easy acquaintance, about the load he carried. When the time for questions had arrived it was too late to inquire into the business of his new friend. They had been held up by an officer of the law and, so far as Casey's ears informed him, half of the load of whisky had been deposited beside the road at the officer's command. Casey had not seen the whisky—a very large deputy sheriff with a very large automatic had compelled him to gaze straight out through the wind shield. By the conversation, brief but pungent, held between the officer and the owner of the car, Casey had learned that he had been unwittingly driving sixty gallons of bootleg whisky into the desert—though Casey himself was guiltless of conscious bootlegging. Afterward, when he had hotly refused to become a partner in the unlawful business, the heavy hand of misfortune had fallen heavier upon Casey Ryan.

Not only had he been forced at the point of a gun to drive all night across the Mojave Desert; he had been forced that very morning to take the car and the load of whisky and to give up more than sixteen hundred dollars—which was every cent he had—to the bootlegger. It was what one might call literally a forced sale. The bootlegger had caught a train east; and Casey Ryan, turning instinctively to burrow deeper into the wilds with his load of guilt and his righteous rage at being trapped, had driven north.

Here at Juniper Wells he had hoped to bury the unlawful portion of his load. Not until that was safely accomplished could Casey Ryan eat or sleep in peace, or meditate upon his next move. When bootleg whisky is to be buried, custom and the law of self-preservation demand that the interment should be private even to the point of secrecy.

Fear and Casey Ryan had ever been strangers; yet he was conscious of a distinct prickly chill down his spine when he approached the car. The glance he cast over his shoulder at the stranger betrayed uneasiness, best he could do. He grinned in sickly fashion as he turned over the roll of bedding and cautiously began a superficial search which he hoped would reveal grub in plenty—without revealing anything else. He was wholly inexperienced in the fine art of bootlegging; but common sense told him that the whisky should be stowed away at the very bottom of the load. He remembered that the bootlegger had piled a good deal of stuff upon the ground before Casey first heard the clink of bottles.

A grunt of relief signaled his location of a box containing grub. A moment later he lifted out a gunny sack bulging unevenly with cooking utensils. He fished a little deeper, turned over a folded tarp and laid naked to his eyes the top of a whisky keg which he hastily recovered, his heart flopping guiltily in his chest like a fresh-landed fish.

The stranger was kneeling beside a faintly crackling little pile of twigs, his face turned inquiringly toward Casey. The guilty knowledge of that bootleg whisky laid chill hands upon the soul of Casey Ryan. It was as if a dead man was hidden away under that tarp. It seemed to him that the eyes of the stranger were suspicious and dwelt upon him altogether too frequently for a casual interest, even though Casey was carrying a box of grub to the camp fire.

Black coffee, drunk hot and strong, gave the world a brighter aspect. Casey decided that the situation was not so desperate after all. Easy enough to bluff it out—easiest thing in the world. He would just go along as if there wasn't a thing on his mind heavier than his black felt hat. No man had any right snooping around in his car, unless he carried a badge of an officer of the law. Even then, Casey reminded himself sternly, he had a perfect right to resist a search until he was shown a badge and a warrant.

This man did not look like an officer. He was not big and burly, with arrogant eyes and the hint of leashed authority in his tone. He was of medium height, owned an easy drawl and was dressed in that half-military style so popular with mining men, surveyors

and others who can afford to choose what garb they will adopt for the big outdoors.

He had shown a perfect familiarity with cooking over a camp fire, and he told Casey that his name, to his friends, was Mack Nolan. Immediately afterward he grinned and added that he was Irish and didn't care who knew it. Two cups of coffee and that statement eased perceptibly the tension of Casey Ryan's nerves.

"Well, I'm Irish meself," Casey returned approvingly. "An' you can ask anybody if Casey Ryan has ever showed shame fer the blood that's in 'im." He poured another cup of coffee into a chipped enameled cup and took his courage in his two hands. Mack Nolan, he told himself hearteningly, couldn't possibly know what lay hidden under the camp outfit in the Ford. And until he did know, he was harmless as anybody—so long as Casey kept an eye on him.

During breakfast and the companionable smoke that followed, Casey learned that Mack Nolan had spent some time in Nevada, ambling through the hills with a couple of mules, examining the geologic formation of the country with a view to future prospecting in districts yet undeveloped.

"The mineral possibilities of Nevada haven't been much more than scratched," Mack Nolan observed, lying back with one arm thrown up under his head as a makeshift pillow and the other negligently attending to the cigarette he was smoking. His brown army hat was tilted over his eyes, shielding them from the sun while they dwelt rather studiously upon the face of Casey Ryan.

"Every spring I like to get out and poke around through these hills where folks as a rule don't go. Never did much prospecting—as such. Don't take kindly enough to a pick and shovel for that. What I like best is what you might call field work. If I run across a rich enough prospect, time enough then to locate a claim or two and hire a couple of strong backs to do the digging.

"I've been out now for about three weeks, and night before last, just as I had stopped to make camp and before I'd started to unpack, those two dog-goned jacks got scared at a rattler and quit the country. Left me flat, without a thing but my clothes and my six-shooter and what tobacco and matches I carried in my pocket—oh, and my field notes, of course." He lifted the cigarette from between his lips—thin, they were, and curved and rather pitiless, one could guess, if the man were sufficiently roused.

"I wasted yesterday trying to trail 'em. But you can't do much in these rocks back here toward the river. I was hitting for the highway to catch a ride if I could, when I saw you topping this last ridge over here. Don't blame me much for bumming a breakfast, do you?" And he added with a sigh of deep physical content, "It sure-lee was some feed." His lids drooped lower as if sleep were overtaking him. "I'd ask yuh if you'd seen anything of them mules—only I don't give a darn now. I wish this was night instead of noon. I could sleep the clock around after that bacon and bannock of yours. Haven't a care in the world," he murmured drowsily. "Happy as a toad in the sun first warm day of spring. How soon you going to crank up?"

Casey stared at him unwinkingly through narrowed lids. He lifted his hat and resettled it with a sharp tilt over his right eyebrow—which meant always that Casey Ryan had just O. K.'d an idea.

"Go on an' take a nap if you want to," he urged good-naturedly. "I got some tinkerin' t' do on the Ford an' I was aimin' t' lay over here an' do it. I'm kinda lookin' around, myself, fer a likely prospect, an' I guess I got all the time there is. I'll back the car down there in the hollow where she'll set level, an' clean 'er dingbats while you take a sleep."

Casey left the breakfast things where they were, as a silent reassurance to the drowsy Mack Nolan that the car would not go off without him. Casey was rather good at observing these little psychological details. A smoked coffeepot and an unwashed frying pan, together with soiled cups and plates stacked beside a dead camp fire, establishes evidence, admissible before any jury, that the owner means to return.

Casey went over and cranked the Ford, grimly determined to make his coffeepot and frying pan lie for him if necessary. He backed the Ford down the draw a good seventy-five yards, to where a wrinkle in the bank hid him from the breakfast camp. He stopped there, and left the engine running while he straddled out over the side and went forward to the dip of the front fender to see if the Ford was still visible to Mack Nolan. He was glad to find that by crouching and sighting across the fender he could

see the camp fire and the top of Nolan's hat just beyond. The man need only lift his head off his arm to see that the Ford was standing just around the turn of the draw.

For fifteen minutes the mind of Casey Ryan was at ease. He had found a shovel in the car, placed conveniently at the side where it could be used for just such an emergency as this. For fifteen minutes he had been using that shovel in what had appeared to be loose gravel just under an outcropping of rhyolite a rod or so behind the car and well out of sight of Nolan.

The shadow of a head and shoulders fell across the hole which Casey was beginning to consider almost deep enough to bury two ten-gallon kegs and forty bottles of whisky. Casey did not lift the dirt and rocks he had on his shovel. He froze to a tense quiet, goggling at the shadow.

"What are you doing, Casey? Trying to outdig a badger?" Mack Nolan's chuckle was friendliness itself.

Casey's head snapped around so that he could cock an eye up at Nolan. He grinned mechanically. "Naw. Picked up a likely lookin' piece uh float. Thought I'd just see if it didn't maybe come from this ledge."

Mack Nolan stepped forward interestedly and looked at the ledge. "Where's the piece you found?" he very naturally inquired. "The formation just here wouldn't lead me to expect gold-bearing rock—but of course, anything is possible with gold. Let's have a look at the specimen."

Casey had once tried to bluff a stranger with two deuces and a pair of fives, and two full stacks of blue chips pushed to the center to back the bluff. The stranger had called him, with three queens and a pair of jacks. Casey felt like that now.

He had laughed over his loss then, and he grinned now and reached carelessly to the bank beside him as if he fully expected to lay his hand on a specimen of gold-bearing rock. He went so far as to utter a surprised oath when he failed to find it. He felt in his pockets. He went forward and scanned the top of the ledge. He turned and stood astraddle, his hands on his hips, and gazed at the pile of dirt he had thrown out of the hole. "Now if that there lump uh high grade has went and slid down the bank an' got covered up with the muck," he remarked disgustedly, "I'm a son of a gun if Fate ain't playin' agin' Casey Ryan with a flock uh aces under its vest!"

Mack Nolan laughed, and Casey slanted a look his way. "Thought I left you takin' a nap," he said brazenly. "What's the matter? Didn't yer breakfast set good?"

Mack Nolan laughed again. It was evident that he found Casey Ryan amusing.

"The breakfast was fine," he replied easily. "A couple of lizards got to playing tag over me. That woke me up, and the sun was so hot I just thought I'd come down and crawl into the car and go to sleep there. Go ahead with your digging, Casey—I won't bother you."

Casey went on with his digging, but his heart was not in it. With every laggard shovelful of dirt, he glanced over his shoulder, watching Mack Nolan crawl into the back of the car and settle himself with an audible sigh of satisfaction on top of the load. He had a wild, wicked impulse to lengthen the hole and make it serve as a grave for more than bootleg whisky; but it was an impulse born of desperation and it died almost before it had lived.

CHAPTER II.

Casey left his digging and returned to the Ford, still determined to carry on the bluff that much tinkering was necessary before he could go on. With a great show of industry he rummaged for pliers and wrenches, removed the hood from the motor and squinted down at the little engine.

By that time Mack Nolan was snoring softly but with much convincingness in the car. Casey listened suspiciously, knowing too well how misleading a snore may be. But his own eyelids were growing exceeding heavy and the soporific sound acted hypnotically upon his sleep-hungry brain. He caught himself yawning and suddenly threw down the wrench and crawled under the back of the car, where it was shady.

The sun was nearly down when Casey awoke and crawled out. Mack Nolan was still curled comfortably in the car, his back against the bed roll. He opened his eyes and yawned when Casey leaned and looked in upon him.

"By Jove, that was a fine sleep I had," he announced cheerfully, lifting himself up and dangling his legs outside the car. "Strike anything yet?"

"Naw." Casey's grunt was eloquent of the mood he was in.

"Get the car fixed all right?" Mack No-

lan's cheerfulness seemed diabolical to Casey.

"Naw." Then Casey added grimly, "I'm stuck. *I* dunno what ails the damn thing. It's only three miles out here t' the road. Mebby you better hike over t' the highway an' ketch a ride with somebody. No use waiting fer me—can't tell how long I'll be held up here."

Mack Nolan climbed out of the car, and Casey's spirits rose instantly.

"She was hitting all right when you backed down here," Nolan remarked easily. "I'll just take a look at her myself. Fords are cranky sometimes. But I've assembled too many of 'em in the factory to let one get the best of me in the desert."

Casey could almost hear his heart when it slumped down into his boots. But he wasn't licked yet.

"Aw, let the darned thing alone till we eat," he said and pushed his hat forward to hurry his wits.

"Well, I *can* throw a Ford together in the dark if necessary," smiled Mack Nolan. "Eat it is, if you want it that way. That breakfast I had seems to have sharpened my appetite for supper. Tell you what I'll do, Ryan. I'll look the Ford over while you cook supper. How'll that be?"

That wouldn't be, if Casey could prevent it. His pale, narrow-lidded eyes dwelt upon Nolan unwinkingly.

"Well, mebbe I'm kind of a crank about my car," he hedged with a praiseworthy calmness. "Fords is like horses to me. I drove stage all m' life till I took t' prospectin'—an' I never could stand around and let anybody else monkey with my horses. It ain't a doubt in the world, Mr. Nolan, but what you know as much about Fords as what I do. More, mebbe. But Casey Ryan's got 'is little ways an' he can't seem t' ditch 'em. We'll eat—an' then mebbe we'll look 'er over together.

"At the same time," he went on with rising courage, "I'm liable t' stick around here fer a while an' prospect a little. If you want t' find them mules and outfit, don't bank too strong on Casey Ryan. He's liable t' change 'is mind any old time. Day er night, yuh can't tell what Casey might take a notion t' do. That there's a fact. You can ask anybody if it ain't."

Mack Nolan laughed and slapped Casey unexpectedly on the shoulder. "You're a man after my own heart, Casey Ryan," he declared enigmatically. "I'll stick to you and take a chance. Darn the mules. Somebody will find them and look after them until I show up."

Casey's spirits, as he admitted to himself, were rising and falling like the hammer of a pile driver; and like the hapless pile, the hammer was driving him deeper and deeper into hopelessness. He would have given an ear to know for certain whether Mack Nolan was as innocent and friendly as he seemed. Until he did know, Casey could see nothing before him but to wait and watch his chance to give Nolan the slip.

Sitting cross-legged in the glow of the camp fire after supper, with the huge pattern of stars drawn over the purple night sky, Casey pulled out the old pipe with which he solaced his evenings and stuffed it thoughtfully with tobacco. Across the camp fire Mack Nolan sat with his hat tilted down over his eyes, smoking a cigarette and seeming at peace with all the world. Casey hoped that Nolan would forget about fixing the Ford. He hoped that Nolan would sleep well to-night. Casey was perfectly willing to sacrifice a good roll of bedding and the cooking outfit, for the privilege of traveling alone. No man, he told himself savagely, could ask a better deal than he was prepared to give Nolan. He bent to reach a burning twig for his pipe, and found Nolan watching him curiously from under his hat brim.

"What sort of looking fellows were those, Ryan, that left a load of booze on your hands?" Nolan asked matter-of-factly.

Casey burned his fingers with the blazing twig. "Who said anything about any fellers leavin' me booze?" he countered sharply. "If it's a drink you're hintin' fer, you won't get it. Casey Ryan ain't no booze peddler, an' now's as good a time as any t' let that soak into your system."

Mack Nolan's gray eyes were still watching Casey from under his hat brim.

"It might help us both considerably," he said quietly, "if you told me all about it, Casey. You can't cache that booze you've got in the car—I won't let you, for one thing; for another, that would be merely dodging the issue. And if you'll forgive my frankness, dodging doesn't seem to be quite in your line."

Casey puffed hard on his pipe. "The world's gittin' so darned full uh crooks a man can't turn around now'days, without bumpin' into a few!" Casey declared bit-

terly. "What kinda holdup game are *you* playin', Mr. Nolan?—if that's your name," he added fiercely.

Mack Nolan laughed to himself and rubbed the ash from his cigarette against the sole of his shoe. "Why," he answered genially, "my game is to hold up the crooks. You've got a fine chance, I should say offhand, to sit in with me. Of course I'm just guessing," he added dryly, "but I'm tolerably good at that. A man's got to be, these days."

"A man's got to do better'n guess with Casey Ryan," Casey stated flatly. "The last man that guessed Casey Ryan, guessed 'im plumb wrong."

"Meaning that you don't want to come in with me and help round up a few bootleggers and crooked officers?" A steel edge had crept into Mack Nolan's voice. He leaned forward a little, his elbows on his knees, and his eyes trying to read Casey's thoughts. "Man, don't stall with me. You've got brains enough to know that if I were a crook I'd have held you up long before now. I've had three splendid opportunities to stick a gun in your back. And," he added with a little smile, "if I had thought that you were a bootlegger or a crook I'd have had you in Las Vegas jail before now. You're no more a crook than I am. You've got neither the looks nor the actions of a slicker.

"I've been all day sizing you up. I'm going to be perfectly honest with you, and tell you all I knew about you. I happened to be right close when you drove down in here and stopped. As a matter of fact, I was behind that little clump of junipers within fifteen feet of you. You came down here mad. You were so mad you started talking to yourself—and you made matters pretty plain, right then. For instance, you're not at all certain that this car isn't stolen. You're broke—robbed, I take it, by the men who somehow managed to leave you with a carload of booze on your hands. You told all of that, right out loud, while you stood looking at the car. The deal must have been pulled on you this morning—down at the railroad, I imagine; because you hadn't taken time to size up the predicament you were in until you got here.

"Your main idea had been to get off somewhere out of sight. You were scared, for fear some one would come along and find out what you had in the car. You didn't hear me behind you until I spoke. You're a green hand at dodging, which is a very good recommendation to a man in my line of work. But you're shrewd, Ryan and you're game—dead game. You're a peach at thinking up schemes to get yourself out of a hole. You don't think quite far enough—for instance, because you found me afoot it never occurred to you that I might know something about a car—but the rest of your plan was a dandy.

"Your idea of backing down there around the turn and burying the booze was all right. Once you got that off your mind, I rather think you'd be glad to have me along with you, instead of giving me broad hints to leave. But you haven't got your booze buried, and you've been wondering all evening how the devil you're going to manage it with me around. I'll do some guessing, now: I guess you've doped it out that you'll bring the bed roll up here, tuck me in and pray that I'll sleep sound—at least until you've cached the booze and made your getaway. Or possibly, if you got the booze put away safe from my prying eyes, you might come back to bed and I'd find you here in the morning. Isn't that about right?"

"Aw, go t' hell!" said Casey, swallowing a sickly grin. "If them darn' lizards had let yuh alone, I wouldn't have nothin' on my mind now but my hat." He looked across the fire at Mack Nolan, a queer expression in his eyes. "Keep on, you'll tell me what the missus and I was arguin' about last night over long distance. I've heard tell uh mind readin'—but I never met up with it before. If you're aimin' t' take up a collection after the show, you won't make much. I been what a feller called dusted off." He added after a pause that was eloquent, "They done it thoroughly."

Mack Nolan laughed. "They usually are thorough, when they're 'dusting off a clown,' as I believe they call it."

"You've got the lingo, all right. I'm kinda hopin' you ain't got the disposition. But anyways, you're too late. I'm cleaned."

Mack Nolan rolled another cigarette, lighted it and flipped the match into the camp fire. He smoked it down to the last inch, staring into the fire and saying nothing the while. When the cigarette stub followed the match he leaned back upon one elbow and began tracing a geometrical figure in the sand with a stick.

"Ryan," he said abruptly, "you're square and I know it. The very nature of my business makes it impossible for me to trust many men, but I'm going to trust you." He stopped again, taking great pains with the point of a triangle he was drawing.

Casey knocked the ashes out of his pipe on his boot heel. "Puttin' it that way, Mr. Nolan, the man's yet t' live that Casey Ryan ever double crossed. Cops I got no use for; nor yet bootleggers. Whether I got any use for you, Mr. Nolan, I can say better when I've heard yuh out. A goat I've been for the last time. But I'm willin' t' *hear* yuh out, mind reader though yuh be. That there's more'n what Casey Ryan woulda said this morning."

"And that's fair enough, Ryan. If you jumped into things with your eyes shut, I don't think I'd want you with me."

Casey squirmed, remembering certain times when he had gone too headlong into things. His respect for Mack Nolan was increasing noticeably. The Little Woman would have been surprised to see how subdued he was this evening.

CHAPTER III.

"I'm going to ask you, Ryan, to tell me the whole story of this car and its load of whisky. But before you do that, I'll tell you this much to show good faith and prove to you how much I trust you: I'm a Federal officer, working direct from Washington. I'm after bootleggers, it is true. But they're small game. My real work for the government—and you'll see at once that secrecy is absolutely essential to success—is to find out who is making bootlegging possible. I think you can help me in that. I wish you would tell me exactly what you've been up against. Don't leave out anything, however trivial it may seem to you."

"One thing I'd like to know first, Mr. Nolan." Casey's face had lost the look of a man ready to fight and waiting for the first blow. "Are yuh or ain't yuh huntin' mules?"

Mack Nolan laughed. "I am, yes. You may understand me better, Casey, when I tell you that the mule I'm hunting is white."

Casey studied that until he had the pipe going well. Then he cocked an eye at Nolan and grinned understandingly.

"So it's 'White Mule' you're trailin', is it?" Casey kicked the stub of a greasewood branch back into the flames and laughed. "Well, I can say this much—they's tracks deep an' plenty uh that same White Mule all over the country. An' if it's true you're trailin' 'im fer the gove'ment in Washin'ton, I'm with yuh. Now I'll tell yuh the whole works from the first run-in I had with a bunch of moonshiners over at Black Butte in the Panamints, down to where I drove in here this morning."

Mack Nolan enjoyed the telling of the story of Casey Ryan's wrongs, quite apart from the information he gleaned. When Casey had once more stopped and killed his engine at Juniper Wells, Mack Nolan sat up and leaned forward a little, his eyes steady and his mouth, that had curved to laughter many times during the tale, once more firm and somewhat pitiless.

"This Smiling Lou—you'd know him again, of course?"

"Know him? Say! I'd know him after he'd fried a week in Hades!" Casey's tone left no doubt whatever of his sincerity.

"And I suppose you could tell the bootlegger a mile off and around a corner. Now I'll tell you what I want you to do, Casey. This may jar you a little—until I explain. I want you"—Mack Nolan paused, his lips twitching in a faint smile at the shock to come—"to do a little bootlegging yourself."

"Yuh—*what?*" In the firelight Casey's eyes were seen to bulge.

"Bootleg," Nolan smiled. "I want you to go back and peddle this booze Kenner worked off on you. I want you to do it so that Smiling Lou or one of his bunch will hold you up. Do you see what I mean? We'll put it in marked bottles. I have the bottles and the seals and labels—I can forge anything that's to be had in the country. With marked money and marked bottles, and something to use in case you get pinched by an honest officer, we ought to be able to get the goods on that gang."

Casey thought of something quite suddenly and held out an imperative, pointing finger.

"There's somethin' else that feller told me was in the car," he cried agitatedly. "He said he had forty pints of French champagne cached in a false bottom under the front seat. And he said the front cushion had a blind pocket all the way around it and was full uh dope uh some kind. Hop, he called it."

Mack Nolan whistled under his breath.

"And he turned the outfit over to you for sixteen hundred dollars or so?" His eyes turned to stare thoughtfully into the firelight. Abruptly he looked up at Casey. "What the deuce had you done to him, Ryan?" he asked with a quizzical intentness. "He must have been badly scared to let go of all that for sixteen hundred. Why, the 'junk' alone —that's what they call dope—must have been worth a great deal more than that. And the champagne, if he's got that much, would bring six or eight hundred, the prices they're getting for a good grade, these days. I hope," he added seriously, "the fellow wasn't too scared to come back."

"Well," Casey said grimly, "I dunno how scart he is—but he knows darn' well I'll kill 'im. I told 'im I would."

Again Mack Nolan laughed. "Catching's much better than killing. It hurts a man worse, and it lasts a heap longer. What do you say to turning in? To-morrow we'll have a full day at my private bottling works."

They moved their cooking outfit down near the Ford for safety's sake. There was little fear that the car would be robbed in the night, but Mack Nolan was a man who took as few chances as possible. They pulled the roll of bedding from the Ford, spread it out and went to bed, talking in low tones of their plans until they fell asleep.

Dawn was just thinning the curtain of darkness when Nolan woke Casey with a shake of the shoulder.

"I think we'd better be moving from here before the world's astir. You can back on down this draw, Ryan, and strike an old trail that cuts over the ridge and up the next draw to a deserted old mine where I have my stuff cached. It isn't far, and we can have our breakfast at my camp."

Casey swallowed his astonishment, and for once in his life he did as he was told without argument. The stern finger at Washington had pointed, and even a disputatious Casey Ryan away out in Nevada was constrained to unquestioning obedience.

Mack Nolan's camp was fairly accessible by a roundabout trail with a single set of tire tracks to point the way for Casey. Straight across the ridges, it could not have been more than two miles to Juniper Wells. Nevertheless not one man in a year would be tempted to come this way.

As the camp of a man who was prospecting as a pastime rather than for a grubstake, the place was perfect. Mack Nolan had taken possession of a cabin dug into the hill at the head of a long draw and walled with rocks. A brush-covered shed of makeshift construction sheltered a Ford car. Fifty yards away and in full sight of the cabin the mouth of a tunnel yawned blackly under a rhyolite ledge.

Casey swept the camp with an observant glance as he drove up and stopped before the cabin.

"As a prospector, Mr. Nolan, I'll say 'tis a fine layout yuh got here. 'Tain't the first time an honest-lookin' mine has been made t' cover things far off from minin'. But if any one was t' ride up on yuh onexpected here, I'll say yuh could meet 'em with a grin an' feel easy about your secrets."

"That's praise, indeed, coming from an old hand like you," Mack Nolan declared. "Now I'll tell you something else. With Casey Ryan in the camp the whole thing's twice as convincing. Come in, old man—I want to show you what *I* call an artistic interior."

Grinning, Casey followed him inside and exclaimed profanely in admiration of Mack Nolan's genius. The cabin showed every mark of the owner's interest in the geologic formation of that immediate district. On the floor along the wall lay specimens of mineralized rock, a couple of prospector's picks, a single jack whose edges betrayed hard usage on the end of a drill, and a sample sack grimed and with a hole in the corner mended by the simple process of gathering the whole cloth together around it and tying it tightly with a string. On the window sill were specimens of ore; two or three of the pieces showed a richness that lighted Casey's eyes with true prospector's enthusiasm. Mining journals covered a box table at the foot of the bunk. For the rest, the cabin looked exactly what it was—the orderly home of a man quite accustomed to primitive living far off from his fellows.

They had a very satisfactory breakfast cooked by Mack Nolan from his own supplies and eaten in a leisurely manner while Nolan talked of primary formation and secondary, and of mineral intrusions and breaks. Casey listened and learned a few things he had not known, for all his years of prospecting. Mack Nolan, he decided, could pass anywhere as a mining expert.

"And now," said Nolan briskly, when he had hung up the dish pan and draped the

dishcloth over it to dry, "I'll show you the bottling works. We'll have to do the work underground. There's not one chance in fifty that any one would come—but you never can tell. We could get the stuff out of sight easily enough while a car was coming up the draw. But the smell is a different matter. We'll take no chances."

At the head of the bunk a curtained space beneath a high shelf very obviously did duty as a wardrobe. A leather motor coat hung there, one sleeve protruding beyond the curtain of flowered calico. Other garments bulged the cloth here and there. Nolan, smiling over his shoulder at Casey, nodded and stepped behind the curtain. A door pushed inward, admitting the two into a small recess from which another door opened to an underground room.

Undoubtedly this had once been used as a frost-proof cellar and storeroom. A small ventilator pipe opened—so Nolan told Casey—in the middle of a clump of junipers. Nolan lighted a gasoline lantern that shed a white brilliance upon the long table which extended down one side of the room. Casey saw boxes of bottles and other supplies which he did not at the moment recognize.

"We'll have to rebottle all the whisky," said Nolan. "You'll see a certain mark blown into the bottom of each one of these. The champagne, I'm afraid, I must either confiscate or run the risk of marking the labels. The 'junk' we'll lay aside for further consideration."

Casey grinned, thinking of the speedy downfall of his enemies, Smiling Lou and young Kenner—and other crooks of their type.

"So now we'll unload the stuff, old man, and get to work here." Nolan adjusted the white flame in the mantle of the gasoline lantern, and led the way outside. "Take in the seat cushion, Casey. I don't fancy opening it outside, even in this howling wilderness."

"I think I'll just pack in the kags first, Mr. Nolan." For the first time since the shock of Nolan's "mind readin'" the night before, Casey ventured a suggestion. "Anybody comes along, it's the kags they'd look at cross-eyed. Cushions is expected—if I ain't buttin' in," he added meekly.

"Which you're not. You're acting as my agent now, Ryan, and it will take two heads to put this over without a hitch. Sure, put the kegs out of sight first. The bottles next—and then we'll make short work of the dope in the seat cushion."

Wherefore, Casey carried in the kegs, while Mack Nolan kept watch for inopportune visitors. It was thought inadvisable to unload more than was absolutely necessary from the car. They were taking no chances. One yank at the bed roll would conceal everything below. They both breathed freer when the two kegs were in the cellar. Nolan was pleased, too, when Casey came out with the sample bag and announced that he would carry in the bottles in the bag.

Mack Nolan thought that he heard a car coming up the draw, and walked away up a sharp ridge where he would have a better view. He would whistle, he said, and warn Casey if some one was coming.

He was gone five minutes perhaps when Casey yelled and brought him back at a run. Casey was swearing and rummaging in the car, and throwing things about with a recklessness which ill became an agent of the government.

"There ain't a darn' bottle here!" he shouted indignantly. "Them crooks gyped me outa ten gallons uh bottled hooch! That feller said it was high-grade stuff he had packed away at the bottom. He lied. There ain't a drop in the car—except them two kegs I just packed in. An' the champagne, mebbe, under the front seat!"

Mack Nolan's eyes narrowed a bit. His voice was very quiet when he spoke.

"I think, Ryan, I'll have a look under that front seat."

He had a look—several looks, in fact. He took his pocketknife, opened the small blade and skillfully slit the edge of the seat cushion at the bottom. He inserted a finger and thumb in the opening and drew out a bit of matted hair. He stood up and eyed Casey sharply for a space. Casey stared back, but his pale, straight-lidded eyes held an anxious gleam.

"I hope yuh don't think, Mr. Nolan, that *I* knowed anything about this," he said, when Nolan's silence became unbearable.

"I beg your pardon, Ryan," said Nolan. "I was thinking of something else. No, I merely think we'd better take a look at those kegs."

They went in and took a look at the kegs. Both kegs. Afterward they stood and looked at each other.

Casey's hands went to his hips, and the

muscles along his jaw hardened into lumps. He spat into the dirt of the cellar floor.

"Watter!" he snorted disgustedly. "Casey Ryan with the divil an' all scart outa him thinkin' he had ownership in a load uh booze an' hop sufficient t' hang him, was he caught with it!" His hand slid into his trouser pocket, reaching for the solacing plug of tobacco. "Robbed me broke is what they done—an' left me with a rotton camp outfit and two kags uh water—and the fear t' look any man in the eye!"

Nolan stopped whistling under his breath. "There's the Ford," he reminded Casey comfortingly.

"Which I wisht it wasn't!" snarled Casey. "An' yuh know yourself, Mr. Nolan, it's likely stole, 'nd the first man I meet in the trail'll likely take it off me, claimin' it's hisn!"

Mack Nolan started whistling again and checked himself abruptly. "Well, our trap's wanting bait, I see. Looks as if we'll have to get out on the trail of that White Mule, Casey. Buck up, old man—it's bootlegger's luck——"

"It's Casey Ryan's luck!" snarled Casey, kicking the nearest keg viciously as he passed it on his way to the door. "Ta hell with your White Mule! Ta hell with everything!" He went out into the sunshine swearing to himself.

CHAPTER IV.

In the shade of a juniper that grew on the highest point of the gulch's rim, Mack Nolan lay sprawled on the flat of his back, one arm for a pillow, and stared up into the serene blue of the sky with cottony flakes of cloud swimming steadily to the northeast. Three feet away, Casey Ryan rested on left hip and elbow and stared glumly down upon the cabin directly beneath them. Whenever his pale, straight-lidded eyes focused upon the dusty top of the Ford car standing in front of the cabin, Casey said something under his breath.

Miles away to the south, pale violet, dreamlike in the distance, the jagged outline of a small mountain range stood as if painted upon the horizon. A wavy ribbon of smudgy brown was drawn uncertainly across the base of the mountains. This, Casey knew when his eyes lifted to look that way, marked the line of the Santa Fe and a train moving heavily up grade to the west.

Toward it dipped the smooth stretch of barren mesa cut straight down the middle with a yellow line that was the highway up which Casey had driven the morning before. The inimitable magic of distance and high desert air veiled greasewood, sage and sand with the glamour of unreality. The mountains beyond, unspeakably desolate and forbidding at close range, and the little black buttes standing afar off—small spewings of age-old volcanoes dead before man was born—seemed fascinating, unknown islets anchored in a sea of enchantment. Across the valley to the west, nearer mountains, all amethyst and opal tinted, stood bold and inscrutable, with jagged peaks thrust into the blue to pierce and hold the little clouds that came floating by.

When first Casey saw the smoke smudge against the mountains to the south, he remembered his misadventure of the lower desert and swore. When he looked again, the majestic sweep of distance gave him a satisfied feeling of freedom from the crowded pettinesses of the city. For the first time since trouble met him in the trail between Victorville and Barstow, Casey heaved a sigh of content because he was once more out in the big land he loved. Those distant, painted mountains, looking as impossible as the back drop of a stage, held gulches and deep cañons he knew. The closer hills he had prospected. The mesa, spread all around him, seemed more familiar than the white apartment house in Los Angeles which Casey had lately called home. And though the thought of the Little Woman brought with it the vague discomfort of a schoolboy playing hooky, Casey could not have regretted being here with Mack Nolan if he had tried.

They were lying up here in the shade—following the instinct of other creatures of the wild to guard against surprises—while they worked out a nice problem in moonshine. And since the desert had never meant a monotonously placid life to Casey—who carried his problems philosophically, as a dog bears patiently with fleas—he had every reason now for feeling very much at home.

Mack Nolan raised his head off his arm and glanced at Casey quizzically.

"Well, we can't catch fish if we won't cut bait," he volunteered sententiously. "I've a nice little job staked out for you, Casey.

"I've been thinking over the deal those fellows pulled on you. If the man Kenner had left you the booze and dope he told you was in the car, I'd say it was a straight case of a sticky-fingered officer letting a bootlegger by with part of his load, and a later attack of cold feet on the part of the bootlegger. But they didn't leave you any booze. So I have doped it this way, Ryan:

"The thing's deeper than it looked yesterday. Those two were working together; part of a gang, I should say, with a fairly well organized system. By accident—and probably for a greater degree of safety in getting out of the city—Kenner invited you to ride with him. He wanted no argument with that traffic cop—no record made of his name and license number. So he took you in. When he found out who you were, he knew you were at outs with the law. He knew you as an experienced desert man. He had you placed as a valuable member of their gang, if you could be won over and persuaded to join them.

"As soon as possible he got you behind the wheel—further protection to himself if he should meet an officer who was straight. He felt you out on the subject of a partnership. And when you met Smiling Lou—well, this Kenner had decided to take no chance with you. He still had hopes of pulling you in with them, but he was far from feeling sure of you. He undoubtedly gave Smiling Lou the cue to make the thing appear an ordinary case of highjacking while he ditched his whole load so that there would be no evidence against him if he lost out and you turned nasty.

"I'm absolutely certain, Casey, that if you had not been along, Smiling Lou would not have touched that load. They'd probably have stopped there for a talk, exchanged news and perhaps perfected future plans, and parted like two old cronies. It's possible, of course, that Smiling Lou might have taken some whisky back with him—if he had needed it. Otherwise, I think they split more cash than booze, as a rule."

Casey sat up. "Well, they coulda played me for a sucker easy enough," he admitted reluctantly. "An' if it'll be any help to yuh, Mr. Nolan, I'll say that I never seen the money passed from Kenner t' Smilin' Lou, an' I never seen a bottle unloaded from the car. I heard 'em, yes. An' I'll say there was a bunch of 'em, all right. But what I *seen* was the road ahead of me and that car of Smilin' Lou's standin' in the middle of it. He had a gun pulled on me, mind you—and you can ask anybody if a feller feels like rubberin' much when there's only the click of a trigger between him an' a six-foot hole in the ground."

"All the more reason," said Nolan, also sitting up with his hands clasped around his knees, "why it's important to catch them with the goods. You'll have to peddle hooch, Casey, until we get Smiling Lou and his outfit."

"And where, Mr. Nolan, do I git the booze t' peddle?" asked Casey practically.

Nolan laughed to himself. "It can be bought," he said, "but I'd rather not. Since you've never monkeyed with the stuff it might make you conspicuous if you went around buying up a load of hooch. And of course I can't appear in this thing at all. But I have what I think is a very good plan."

Casey looked at him inquiringly, and again Nolan laughed.

"Nothing for it, Casey—we'll have to locate a still and rob it. That, or make some of our own, which takes time. And it's an unpleasant, messy job anyway."

Casey stared dubiously down into the gulch. "That'd be fine, Mr. Nolan, if we knew where was the still. Or mebby yuh do know."

Mack Nolan shook his head. "No, I don't, worse luck. I haven't been long enough in the district to know as much about it as I hope to know later on. Prospecting for this headquarters took a little time; and getting my stuff moved in here secretly took more time. A week ago, Casey, I shouldn't have been quite ready to use you. But you came when you were needed, and so—I feel sure that White Mule will presently show up."

Casey lifted his head and stared meditatively out across the immensity of the empty land around them.

"She's a darn' big country, Mr. Nolan. I dunno," he remarked doubtfully. "But Casey Ryan has yet to go after a thing an' fail to git it. I guess if it's hooch we want, it ought to be easy enough to find; it shore has been hard to dodge it lately! If yuh want White Mule, Mr. Nolan, you send Casey out travelin' peaceful an' meanin' harm to nobody. Foller Casey, and you'll find 'im tangled up with a mess uh hooch b'fore he gits ten miles from camp."

"You could go out and highjack some one," Nolan agreed, taking him seriously—which Casey had not intended. "I think we'll go down and load the camp outfit into my car, Ryan, and I'll start you out. Go up into your old stamping ground where people know you. If you're careful in picking your men, you could locate some hooch, couldn't you, without attracting attention?"

Casey studied the matter. "Bill Masters could mebby help me out," he said finally. "Only I don't like the friends Bill's been wishin' on to me lately. This man Kenner, that held me up, knowed Bill Masters intimate. I'm kinda losin' my taste fer Bill lately."

Mack Nolan seized upon the clew avidly. Before Casey quite realized what he had done, he found himself hustled away from camp in Mack Nolan's car, headed for Lund in the service of his government. Since young Kenner had been able to talk so intimately of Bill Masters, Mack Nolan argued that Bill Masters should likewise be able to give some useful information concerning young Kenner. Moreover, a man in Bill Masters' position would probably know at least a few of the hidden trails of the White Mule near Lund.

"If you can bring back a load of moonshine, Ryan, by all means do so," Nolan instructed Casey at the last moment. "Here's money to buy it with. We should have enough to make a good haul for Smiling Lou. Twenty gallons at least—forty if you can get them. Keep your weather eye open, and whatever happens don't mention my name or say that you are working with the law. In five days if you are not here I shall drive to Las Vegas. Get word to me there if anything goes wrong. Just write or wire to general delivery. But I look for you back, Ryan, not later than Friday midnight. Take no unnecessary risk—this is more important than you know."

Nolan's crisp tone of authority remained with Casey mile upon mile. And such was the Casey Ryan driving that midnight found him coasting into Bill Masters' garage in Lund with the motor shut off and a grin on the Casey Ryan face.

CHAPTER V.

Mack Nolan had just crawled into his bunk on Wednesday night when he thought he heard a car laboring up the gulch. He sat up in bed to listen and then got hurriedly into his clothes. He was standing just around the corner of the dugout where the headlights could not reach him, when Casey killed the engine and stopped before the door. Steam was rising in a small cloud from the radiator cap, and the sound of boiling water was distinctly audible some distance away.

Mack Nolan waited until Casey had climbed out from behind the wheel and headed for the door. Then he stepped out and hailed him. Casey started preceptibly, whirling as if to face an enemy. When he saw that it was Nolan he apparently lost his desire to enter the cabin. Instead he came close to Nolan and spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"We better run 'er under the shed, Mr. Nolan, and drain the darned radiator. I dunno am I follered or not, but I was a while back. But the man that catches Casey Ryan when he's on the trail an' travelin' has yet to be born. An' you can ask anybody if that ain't so."

Mack Nolan's eyes narrowed. "And who followed you, then?" he asked quietly. "Did you bring any hooch?"

"Did yuh send Casey Ryan after hooch, or was it mebby spuds or somethin'?" Casey retorted with heavy dignity. "Will yuh pack it in, Mr. Nolan, while I back the car in the shed, or shall I bring it when I come? It ain't so much," he added dryly, "but it cost the trouble of a trainload."

"I'll take it in," said Nolan. "If any one does come we want no evidence in reach."

Casey turned to the car, clawed at his camp outfit and lifted out a demijohn which he grimly handed to Nolan. "Fer many a mile it rode on the seat with me so I could drink 'er down if they got me cornered," he grinned. "One good swaller is about the size of it, Mr. Nolan."

Nolan grinned in sympathy and turned into the cabin, bearing the three-gallon, wicker-covered glass bottle in his arms. Presently he returned to the doorway and stood there listening until Casey came up, walking from the shed.

" 'Tis a good thing yuh left this other car standin' here cold an' peaceful, Mr. Nolan," Casey observed, after he also had stood for a minute listening. "If they're follerin' they'll be here darn' soon. If they ain't I've ditched 'em. Let's git to bed an' I'll tell yuh my tale uh woe."

Without a word Nolan led the way into the cabin. In the dark they undressed and got into the bed which was luckily wide enough for two.

"Had your supper?" Nolan asked belatedly when they were settled.

"I did not," Casey grunted. "I will say, Mr. Nolan, there's few times in my life when you'd see Casey Ryan missin' 'is supper while layin' tracks away from a fight. But if it was light enough you could gaze upon 'im now. And I must hand it to the gallopin' Gussie yuh give me the loan of fer the trip. She brung me home ahead of the sheriff—and you can ask anybody if Casey Ryan himself can't be proud uh that."

"The sheriff?" Nolan's voice was puzzled. He seemed to be considering something for a minute, before he spoke again. "You could have explained to the sheriff, couldn't you, your reason for having booze in the car?"

Casey raised to one elbow. "When yuh told Casey Ryan 'twas not many men you'd trust, and that you trusted me an' the business was to be secret—Mr. Nolan, you was talkin' to *Casey Ryan!*" He lay down again as if that precluded further argument.

"Good! I thought I hadn't made a mistake in my man," Nolan approved, in a tone that gave Casey an inner glow of pride in himself. "Let's have the story, old man. Did you see Bill Masters?"

"Bill Masters," said Casey grimly, "was not in Lund. His garage is sold an' Bill's in Denver—which is a long drive for a Ford to git there an' back before Friday midnight. Yuh put a time limit on me, Mr. Nolan, an' nobody had Bill's address. I didn't foller Bill to Denver. I asked some others in Lund if they knowed a man named Kenner, and they did not. So then I went huntin' booze that I could git without the hull of Nevada knowin' it in fifteen minutes. An' Casey's got this to say: When yuh want hooch, it's hard to find as free gold in granite. When yuh don't want it, it's forced on yuh at the point of a gun. This jug I stole—seein' your business is private, Mr. Nolan.

"I grabbed it off some fellers I knowed in Lund an' never had no use for anyway. They're mean enough when they're sober, an' when they're jagged they're not to be mentioned on a Sunday. I mighta paid 'em for it, but money's no good to them fellers an' there's no call to waste it. So they made a holler and I sets the jug down an' licks them both, an' comes along home mindin' my own business.

"So I guess they phoned the sheriff in Vegas that 'here comes a bootlegger and land 'im quick.' Anyway I was goin' to stop there an' take on a beefsteak an' a few cups uh coffee, but I never done it. I was slowin' down in front uh Sam's Place when a friend uh mine gives me the high sign to put 'er in high an' keep 'er goin'. Which I done.

"Down by Ladd's, Casey looks back an' here comes the sheriff's car hell-bent-fer-'lection—anyway it looked like the sheriff's car. An' I wanta say right here, Mr. Nolan, that's a darn' good Ford yuh got! I was follered, and I was follered hard. But I'm here an' they ain't—an' you can ask anybody if that didn't take some goin'!"

In the darkness of the cabin Casey turned over and heaved a great sigh. On the heels of that came a chuckle.

"I got to hand it to the L. A. traffic cops, Mr. Nolan. They shore learned me a lot about dodgin'. So now yuh got the hull story. If it was the sheriff behind me an' if he trails me here, they got no evidence an' you can mebby square it with 'im. You'd know what to tell 'im—which is more'n what Casey Ryan can say."

Casey fell asleep immediately afterward, but Mack Nolan lay for a long while with his eyes wide open and his ears alert for strange sounds in the gulch. He was a new man in this district, working independently of sheriffs' offices. Casey Ryan was the first man he had confided in; all others were fair game, for Nolan to prove honest or dishonest. When whisky runners drove openly in broad daylight through the country with their unlawful loads, somewhere along the line officers of the law were sharing the profits.

At daylight he was up and abroad. Two hours after sunrise, Casey awoke with the smell of breakfast in his nostrils. He rolled over and blinked at Mack Nolan standing with his hat on the back of his head and a cigarette between his lips, calmly turning three hot cakes with a kitchen knife. Casey grinned condescendingly. He himself turned his cakes by the simple process of tossing them in the air with a certain kind of flip, and catching them dexterously as they came down. Right there he decided that Mack Nolan was not after all a real outdoors man.

"Well, the sheriff didn't arrive last night," Nolan observed cheerfully when he saw that

Casey was awake. "I don't much look for him, either. Your driving on past the turn to Juniper Wells and coming up that other old road very likely threw him off the track. You must have been close to the State line then, and he gave you up as a bad job."

"It was a *good* job!" Casey maintained, reaching for his clothes. "I made 'em think I was headed clean outa the country. If they knowed who it was at all, they'd know I belong in L. A., and I figured they'd guess I was headed there. They stopped for something this side of Searchlight an' so I pulls away from 'em a couple of miles. They never seen where I went to."

While he washed for breakfast, Casey began to take stock of certain minor injuries.

"That darned Pete Gibson has got tushes in his mouth like a wild hawg; the kind that sticks out," he grumbled, touching certain skinned places on his knuckles. "Every time I landed on 'im yesterday I run against them tushes uh hisn." But he added with a grin, "They ain't so solid as they was when I met up with 'im. I felt one of 'em give, 'fore I got through."

"Brings the price of moonshine up a bit, doesn't it?" Nolan suggested dryly. "I rather think you might better have paid the men their price. A fight is well enough in its way—I'm Irish myself. But as my agent, Ryan, the main idea is to let the law fight for you. I like your not wanting to explain to the sheriff. Prohibition officers do not explain, as a rule. The law behind them does that.

"And since the price seems to be rather hard on the knuckles"—he glanced down at Casey's hands and grinned—"I think it may come cheaper to make the stuff ourselves. Licking two men for three gallons, and getting the officers at your tail light into the bargain, is all right as an experiment; but I don't believe, Ryan, we ought to adopt that as a habit."

Casey cocked an eye up at him. "Did yuh ever make White Mule, Mr. Nolan?" he asked grimly.

Nolan laughed his easy little chuckle. "Why no, Ryan, I never did. Did you?"

"Naw. I seen some made, once, but I had too much of it inside me at the time to learn the receipt for it. I'd rather lay off, if it's all the same to you, Mr. Nolan." His hand went up to the back of his head and moved forward, although there was no hat to push. "I've lived honest all these years —an' darn it, it's kinda tough to break out with stealin' what yuh don't want! Couldn't we fill them bottles with somethin' that *looks* like hooch? Cold tea should get by, Mr. Nolan. It'd be a fine joke on Smilin' Lou."

"A good joke, maybe—but no evidence. It isn't against the law, Ryan, to have cold tea in your possession. No, it's got to be whisky, and there's got to be a load of it. Enough to look like business and tempt him or any other member of the gang you happen to meet. If they caught you with three gallons, Casey, they'd probably run you in and feel very virtuous about it. Nothing for it, I'm afraid. We'll have to become real moonshiners ourselves for a while."

Casey ate with less appetite after that. Making moonshine did not appeal to him at all. Given his choice, I think he would even prefer drinking it, unhappy as the effect had been on him.

"We'll need a still, and we'll need the stuff. I'm going to leave you in charge of the camp, Ryan, while I make a trip to Needles. I'll deputize you to assist me in cleaning up this district. And this district, Ryan, touches salt water. So if revenge looks good to you, you'll have a fine chance to get even with the bootleggers. And in the meantime, just kill time around camp here while I'm gone. If any one shows up, you're prospecting."

That day, doubt devils took hold of Casey Ryan and plucked at his belief. How did he know that Mack Nolan wasn't another bootlegger, wanting to rope Casey in on a job for some fell purpose of his own? He had Mack Nolan's word, and nothing more. For that matter, he had also had young Kenner's word. Kenner had fooled him completely. Mack Nolan could also fool him—perhaps.

CHAPTER VI.

It was noon the next day when Nolan returned, and he did not explain why he was eighteen hours overdue. Casey eyed him expectantly, but Nolan's manner was brisk and preoccupied.

"Help me unload this stuff, Ryan," he said, "and put it out of sight in the cellar. We won't have to go through the process of making moonshine, after all."

Casey looked into the car, pulling aside

the tarp. Four kegs he counted, and lifted out one.

"An' how many did *you* lick, Mr. Nolan?" he grinned over his shoulder as he started for the door.

Nolan laughed noncommittally.

"Perhaps I'm luckier at picking my bootleggers," he retorted. "If you carry the right brand of bluff you can keep the skin on your knuckles, Ryan. This beats making it, at any rate."

That afternoon and the next day, Casey Ryan did what he never dreamed was possible. With Mack Nolan to show him how, Casey performed miracles. While he did not literally change water into wine, he did give forty-three gallons of White Mule a most imposing pedigree.

He turned kegs of crude, moonshine whisky into Canadian Club, Garnkirk, Tom gun on me. Busted a pint on his nose—an' then I never waited to see what happened. I was a wild divil them days when me an' Tommy Pepper was side pardners. But a yaller snake with a green head crawled out of a bottle of 'im once—and that there was where Casey Ryan says good-by to booze. If I hadn't quit 'im then, I'd sure quit 'im now. After this performance, Mr. Nolan, Casey Ryan's goin' to look twice into his coffeepot. I wouldn't believe in cow's milk, if I done the milkin' myself!"

"Most of the stuff that's peddled nowadays is doctored," Nolan replied with the air of one who knows. "When it isn't White Mule it's likely to be something worse. That's one of the chief reasons why I'm fighting it. If they only peddled decent whisky, it wouldn't be so bad, Ryan. But it's rank poison. I've seen so many go stone

Pepper, Three-Star Hennessy and cognac—if you were to believe the bottles, labels and government seals. Under Mack Nolan's instruction and with his expert assistance the forgery was perfect. While the cellar reeked with the odor of White Mule when they had finished, the bottled array on the table whispered of Sybaritic revelings to glisten the eyes of the most dissipated man about town.

"When it's as easy done as that, Mr. Nolan, the feller's a fool that drinks it. You've learned Casey Ryan somethin' that mighta done 'im some good a few years back." He picked up a flat, pint bottle and caressed its label with reminiscent finger tips.

"Many's the time me an' old Tommy Pepper drove stage together," he mused. "Throwed 'im at a bear once that I met in the trail over in Colorado when I hadn't no blind—or die—that it makes me pretty savage sometimes. So now I'll coach you in the part you're to play as hooch runner; and to-morrow you can start for Los Angeles."

Casey did not answer. He felt absently for his pipe, filled and lighted it and went out to sit on the doorstep in gloomy meditation while he smoked.

Returning to Los Angeles, even without a bootlegger's load, was not a matter which Casey liked to contemplate. He would have to face the Little Woman if he went back; either as a deliberate liar, who lied to his wife to gain the freedom he might have had without resorting to deceit, or as the victim once more of crooks. Casey thought he would prefer the accusation of lying deliberately to the Little Woman—though it made him squirm to think of it. He wished she

had not openly taunted him with getting into trouble and needing her always to get him out.

He would like to tell her that he was now working for the government. The secrecy of his mission, the danger it involved, would impress even her amused cynicism. But the very secrecy of his mission in itself made it impossible for him to tell her anything about it. Casey would not admit it, but it was a real disappointment to him that he could not wear a star on his coat.

All that day and evening he was glum—a strange mood for Casey Ryan. But if Mack Nolan noticed his silence he gave no sign. Nolan himself was wholly absorbed by the business in hand. The success of this plan meant a good deal to him, and he told Casey so very frankly; which lightened Casey's gloom perceptibly.

Casey was to drive to Los Angeles, even to San Diego if necessary, and return within a week, unless Nolan's hopes were fulfilled and Casey was held up and highjacked. If he were apprehended by officers who were honestly discharging their duty, Casey was to do thus and so, and presently be free to drive on with his load. If he were highjacked—Casey gritted his teeth and said he hoped the highjacker would be Smiling Lou—he was to permit himself to be robbed, worm himself as far as possible into their confidence and return for further orders.

If Mack Nolan should chance to be absent from the cabin, then Casey was to wait until he returned. And Nolan intimated that hereafter the making of moonshine might be a part of Casey's duties. Then, without warning, Mack Nolan struck at the heart of Casey's worry.

"I don't want to dictate to any man in family affairs, Ryan. But I've got to speak of one other matter," he said diffidently. "I suppose naturally you'll want to go home and let your wife know you're still alive, anyway. But if you can manage to keep your present business a secret for the time being, I think you'd better do it. You said you were planning to be away on a trip for some time, I remember. If you can just let it go that way, or say that you are prospecting over here, I wish you would. Think you can manage that all right?"

"I'd ruther manage a six-horse team of bronk mules," Casey admitted. "But after the way the missus thinks I lied to 'er about takin' the next train home from Barstow, anything I say'll be used agin' me. My wife's got brains. She ain't put it down that the trains have quit runnin'. Accordin' to her figures, Casey's lied and he's in a hole again. Don't matter what I say, she won't believe me anyhow—so Casey won't say nothin'. Can't lie with your mouth shut, can yuh?"

"Oh, yes, it's been done," Mack Nolan chuckled. "Now we'll set down the serial numbers and the bank name of this 'jack'—and here's your expense money separate. And if there's anything that isn't clear to you, Ryan, speak up. You won't hear from me again, probably, until you're back from this fishing trip."

Casey thought that everything was perfectly clear, and rashly he said so.

CHAPTER VII.

From Barstow to Victorville, from Victorville to Camp Cajon, Casey drove expectantly, hoping to meet Smiling Lou. He scanned each car that approached, and slowed for every meeting like a searching party or a man who is lost and wishes to inquire the way. Goggled women tourists eyed him curiously, and one car stopped full to see what he wanted. But his "Tom Pepper" rode safe under the tarp behind him, and the "Three-Star Hennessy" beaded daintily with the joggling it got, and Casey was neither halted nor questioned as he passed.

At Camp Cajon Casey stopped and cooked an early supper, because the summer crowd was there and a real bootlegger would have found stopping rather unsafe. Casey boiled coffee over one of the camp fireplaces, and watched furtively the sunburned, holiday group nearest. He placed his supper on one of the round, cement tables near the car, and every man who passed that way Casey watched unblinkingly while he ate.

He succeeded in making three different parties swallow their supper in a hurry and pack up and leave, glancing back uneasily at Casey as they drove away. But Casey himself was unmolested, and no one asked about his load.

From Camp Cajon to San Bernardino Casey drove furiously, remembering young Kenner's desire for speed. He stopped there for the night, and nearly had a fight with the garage man where he put up, because

he showed undue caution concerning the safety of his car.

He left the car there that day and returned furtively after dark, asking the night man if he had seen any saps around his car. The night man looked at him uncomprehendingly.

"I dunno—nothin's been picked up since I come on at six. We ain't responsible for lost articles anyway. See that sign?"

Casey grunted, cranked up and drove away, wondering whether the night man was as innocent as he tried to act.

From San Bernardino to Los Angeles Casey drove placidly as a load of oranges in February. He put up at a cheap place on San Pedro Street, with his car in the garage next door and a five-dollar tip in the palm of a rat-faced mechanic, with Casey's injunction to clean 'er dingbats and keep other people away.

He did not go out to see the Little Woman, after all. He had sent her a wire from Goffs the day before, saying that he was prospecting with a fellow and he hoped she was well. This, after long pondering, had seemed to him the easiest way out of an argument with the Little Woman. The wire had given no address whereby she might reach him, but the omission was not the oversight Casey hoped she would consider it. He wanted to be reassuring without starting anything.

Los Angeles with no Little Woman at his elbow was a dismal hole, and Casey got out of it as soon as possible. As per instructions, he drove down to San Diego, ventured perilously close to the Mexico line, fooled around there for a day looking for trouble, failed to find so much as a frown, and drove back.

He headed straight for San Bernardino, which was Smiling Lou's headquarters. He killed time there and met the sheriff on the street the day he arrived. The sheriff had a memory trained to hold faces indefinitely. He smiled a little, made a polite gesture in the general direction of his hat and passed on. Casey swore to himself, and resolved to duck guiltily around the nearest corner if he saw the sheriff coming his way again.

On the day when his time limit expired, Casey drove up the gulch to Nolan's camp. In the car behind him rode undisturbed his Canadian Club, Garnkirk, Three-Star Hennessy, cognac and Tom Pepper; bottles, labels, government seals and all. Nolan was walking over from the tunnel when Casey arrived. He smiled inquiringly as he shook hands—a ceremony to which Casey was plainly unaccustomed.

"What luck, Ryan? I beat you back by about two hours. Getting things ready to begin making it. Did they catch you, all right?"

"Naw!" Casey spat disgustedly. "Never seen a booze peddler, never seen a cop look my way. I went around actin' like I just killed a man an' stole a lady's diamonds, and the sheriff at San Berdoo *tips 'is hat to me*, by golly! Drove through L. A. hellawhoopin'—an' not a darned traffic cop knowed it was Casey Ryan. You can ask anybody if I didn't do everything possible to git in bad or give bootleggers a tip I was one of 'em.

"*You* can't git Casey Ryan up agin' the gang you're after, Mr. Nolan. Only way Casey Ryan can git up agin' the law is to go along peaceable tryin' to please the missus an' mindin' his own business. I coulda peddled that darn' hooch on a hangin' tray like circus lemonade. I coulda stood on the corner in any uh them dinged towns with the hull works piled out on a table in front of me, an' I coulda hollered my darn head off; an' Smilin' Lou woulda passed me by like I was sellin' chewin' gum and shoe strings."

Mack Nolan looked at Casey, turned and went into the cabin, sat down on the edge of the bed and laughed until the tears dripped over his lashes. Casey Ryan followed him, and sat on the edge of the table with his arms folded. Whenever Mack Nolan lifted his face from his palms and looked at Casey, Casey swore. Whereat Mack Nolan would give another whoop.

Relations were somewhat strained between them for the rest of that day.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mack Nolan had a way with him. Wherefore, Casey Ryan once more came larruping down the grade to Camp Cajon, and turned in there with a dogged purpose in his eyes and with his jaw set stubbornly.

Behind him, stowed under the bedding, grub and camp dishes, rode his eight cases of bootlegger's bait, packed convincingly in the sawdust, straw and cardboard of the wet old days when Uncle Sam himself O. K.'d the job. A chain of tiny beads at

the top of each bottle lied and said it was good liquor.

It was a good job Mack Nolan had made of the bottling. Uncle Sam himself must needs polish his spectacles and take another look, to detect the fraud. It was a marvelous job of bottling, and the proof lay only in the drinking. A tempting load it was, to men of certain minds and morals. Casey grinned sardonically when he thought of it.

Casey drove deep into the grove of sycamores and made camp there, away from the chattering picnic parties at the cement tables. By Mack Nolan's advice he was adopting a slightly different policy. He no longer shunned his fellow men nor glared suspiciously when strangers approached. Instead he was very nearly the old Casey Ryan, except that he failed to state his name and business to all and sundry with the old Casey Ryan candor, but instead either avoided the subject altogether or evaded questions with vague generalities.

But as an understudy for Ananias, Casey Ryan would have been a failure. In two hours or less he had made easy trail acquaintance with six different men, and he had unconsciously managed to vary his vague account of himself six different times. Wherefore he was presently asked cautiously concerning his thirst.

"They's times," said Casey, hopefully lowering an eyelid, "when a feller dassent take a nip, no matter how thirsty he gits."

The questioner stared at him for a minute and slowly nodded. "You're darn' right," he assented. "I scursely ever touch anything, myself." And he added vaguely, "Quite a lot of it peddled out here in this camp, I guess. Tourists comin' through are scared to pack it themselves—but they sure don't overlook any chances to take a snort."

"Yeah?" Casey cocked a knowing eye at the speaker. "They must pay a pretty fair price fer it, too. Don't the cops bother folks none?"

"Some—I guess."

Casey filled his pipe and offered his tobacco sack to the man. The fellow took it, nodding listless thanks, and filled his own pipe. The two sat down together on the knee of a deformed sycamore, and smoked in circumspect silence.

"Arizona, I see." The man nodded toward the license plates on Casey's car.

"Uh-huh." Casey glanced that way. "Know a man name of Kenner?" he asked abruptly.

The fellow looked at Casey sidelong, without turning his head.

"Some. Do you?"

"Some." Casey felt that he was making headway.

"Friend uh yours?" The fellow turned his head and looked straight at Casey.

Casey returned him a pale, straight-lidded stare. The man's glance flickered and swung away.

"Who wants to know?" Casey asked calmly.

"Oh, you can call me Jim Cassidy. I just asked." He removed his pipe from his mouth and inspected it apathetically. "He's a friend of Bill Masters, garage man up at Lund. Know Bill?"

"Any man says I don't, you can call 'im a liar." Casey also inspected his pipe. "Bought that car off'n Kenner," Casey added boldly. Getting into trouble, he discovered, carried almost the thrill of trying to keep out of it.

"Yeah?" The self-styled Jim Cassidy looked at the Ford more attentively. "And contents?"

Casey snorted. "What do you know about goats, if anything?" he asked mysteriously.

Jim Cassidy eyed Casey sidelong through a silence. Then he brought his palm down flat on his thigh and laughed.

"You pass," he stated with a relieved sigh. "He's a dinger, ain't he?"

"You know 'im, all right." Casey also laughed, and put out his hand. "If you're a friend of Kenner's, shake hands with Casey Ryan! He's darned glad to meet yuh—an' you can ask anybody if that ain't the truth."

After that the acquaintance progressed more smoothly. By the time Casey spread his bed—close alongside the car—he knew just how much booze Jim Cassidy carried, just what Cassidy expected to make off the load, and a good many other bits of information of no particular use to Casey.

A strange, inner excitement held Casey awake long after Jim Cassidy was asleep and snoring. He lay looking up into the leafy branches of the sycamore beside him and watched a star slip slowly across an open space between the branches. Farther up the grove a hilarious group of young hikers sang snatches of songs to the uncer-

tain accompaniment of a ukulele. A hundred feet away on his right, occasional cars went coasting past on the down grade, coming in off the desert—or climbed more slowly with motors working, on their way up from the valley below. The shifting brilliance from their headlights flicked the grove capriciously as they went by. Now and then a car stopped. One, a big, high-powered car with one dazzling spotlight, swung into the narrow driveway and entered the grove.

Casey lifted his head like a desert turtle, and blinked curiously at the car as it eased past him a few feet and stopped. A gloved hand went out to the spotlight and turned it slowly, lighting the grove foot by foot and pausing to dwell upon each silent, parked car. Casey sat up in the blankets and waited.

Luck, he told himself, was grinning at him from ear to ear. For this was Smiling Lou himself, and none other. He was alone—a big, hungry, official fish searching the grove greedily. Casey swallowed a grin and tried to look scared. The light was slowly working around in his direction. When the spotlight finally revealed him, Casey blinked against it with a half-hearted grin, as if he had been caught at something foolish. The light remained upon him, and Smiling Lou got out of the car and came back to him slowly.

Not even Casey thought of calling Smiling Lou a fool. He couldn't be, and play the game he was playing. Smiling Lou said nothing whatever until he had looked the car over carefully, giving the license number a second sharp glance, and had regarded Casey fixedly while he made up his mind.

"Hullo! Where's your pardner?" he demanded then.

"I'm in pardnerships with myself this trip," Casey retorted. He waited while Smiling Lou looked him over again, more carefully this time.

"Where did you get that car?"

"From Kenner—for sixteen hundred and seventeen dollars and five cents." Casey fumbled in the blankets—Smiling Lou following his movements suspiciously—and got out the makings of a cigarette.

"Got any booze in that car?" Smiling Lou might have been a traffic cop, for all the trace of humanity there was in his voice.

Casey cocked an eye up at him, sent a quick glance toward the Ford, and looked back into Smiling Lou's face. He hunched his shoulders and finished the making of his cigarette.

"I wisht you wouldn't look," he said glumly. "I got half my outfit in there an' I hate to have it tore up."

Smiling Lou continued to look at him, seeming slightly puzzled. But indecision was not one of his characteristics, evidently. He stepped up to the car, pulled a flashlight from his pocket and looked in.

Casey was up and into his clothes by the time Smiling Lou had uncovered a box or two. Smiling Lou turned toward him, his lips twitching.

"Lift this stuff out of here and put it in my car," he commanded, elation creeping into his voice in spite of himself. "My Lord! The chances you fellows take! Think a dab of paint is going to cover up a brand burned into the wood?"

Casey looked startled, glancing down into the car to where Smiling Lou pointed.

"The boards is turned over on all the rest," he muttered confidentially. "I dunno how that darned Canadian Club sign got right side up."

"What all have you got?" Smiling Lou lowered his voice when he asked the question. Casey tried not to grin when he replied. Smiling Lou gasped.

"Well, get it into my car, and make it snappy."

Casey made it as snappy as he could, and kept his face straight until Smiling Lou spoke to him sharply.

"I won't take you in to-night with me. I want that car. You drive it into headquarters first thing in the morning. And don't think you can beat it, either. I'll have the road posted. You can knock a good deal off your sentence if you crank up and come in right after breakfast. And make it an early breakfast, too."

His manner was stern, his voice perfectly official. But Casey, eying him grimly, saw distinctly the left eyelid lower and lift again.

"All right—I'm the goat," he surrendered, and sat down again on his canvas-covered bed. He did not immediately crawl between the blankets, however, because interesting things were happening over at Jim Cassidy's car.

Casey watched Jim Cassidy go picking his way among the tree roots and camp litter, his back straightened under the load of hooch he was carrying to Smiling Lou's car. With Jim Cassidy also, Smiling Lou was

crisply official. When the last of the hooch had been transferred, Casey heard Smiling Lou tell Jim Cassidy to drive in to headquarters after breakfast next morning—but he did not see Smiling Lou wink when he said it.

After that, Smiling Lou started his motor and drove slowly up through the grove, halting to scan each car as he passed. He swung out through the upper driveway, turned sharply there and came back down the highway speeding up on the downhill grade to San Bernardino.

CHAPTER IX.

Jim Cassidy came furtively over and settled down for a whispered conference on Casey's bed.

"How much did he git off'n *you?*" he asked inquisitively. "Did he clean yuh out?"

"Clean as a last year's bone in a kioty den," Casey declared, hiding his satisfaction as best he could. "Never got my roll though."

"He wouldn't—not with you workin' on the inside. Guess it must be kinda touchy around here right now. New officers, mebby. He wouldn't 'a' cleaned us out if we'd 'a' been safe. He never came into camp before—not when I've been here. Made that same play to you, didn't he—about givin' yourself up in the morning? Uh course yuh know what that means—*don't!*"

"He shore is foxy, all right," Casey commented with absolute sincerity. "You can ask anybody if he didn't pull it off like the pleasure was all hisn. No L. A. traffic cop ever pinched me an' looked like he enjoyed it more."

"Oh, Lou's cute all right. They don't any of 'em put anything over on Lou. You must be new at the business, ain't yuh?"

"Second trip," Casey informed him with an air of importance—which he really felt, by the way. "What Casey's studyin' on now, is the next move. No use hangin' around here empty. What do *you* figger on doin'?"

"Well, Lou didn't give no tip—not to me, anyway. So I guess it'll be safe to drive on in to the city and load up again. I got a feller with me—he caught a ride in to San Berdoo; left just before you drove in. Know where to go in the city? 'Cause I can ride in with you, an' let him foller."

"That'll suit me fine," Casey declared. And so they left it for the time being, and Cassidy went back to bed.

A great load had dropped from Casey's shoulders, and he was asleep before Jim Cassidy had ceased to turn restlessly in his blankets. Getting the White Mule out of his car and into the car of Smiling Lou had been the task which Nolan had set for him. What was to happen thereafter Casey could only guess, for Nolan had not told him. And such was the Casey Ryan nature that he made no attempt to solve the problems which Mack Nolan had calmly reserved for himself.

He did not dream, for instance, that Mack Nolan had watched him load the stuff into Smiling Lou's car. He did know that an unobtrusive Cadillac roadster was parked at the next camp fire. It had come in half an hour behind him, but the driver had not made any move toward camping until after dark. Casey had glanced his way when the car was parked and the driver got out and began fussing around the car, but he had not been struck with any sense of familiarity in the figure.

There was no reason why he should. Thousands and thousands of men are of Mack Nolan's height and general build. This man looked like a doctor or a dentist perhaps. Beyond the matter of size, similarity to Mack Nolan ceased. The Cadillac man wore a Vandyke beard and colored glasses, and a Panama and light gray business suit. Casey set him down in his mental catalogue as "some town feller" and assumed that they had nothing in common.

Yet Mack Nolan heard nearly every word spoken by Smiling Lou, Casey and Jim Cassidy. The Cadillac car was one of Mack Nolan's little secrets. There is a very good garage at Goffs, not many miles from Juniper Wells. A matter of an hour's driving was sufficient at any time for Mack Nolan to make the exchange. And no man at Goffs would think it very strange that the owner of a Cadillac should prefer to drive a Ford over rough, desert trails to his prospect in the mountains.

CHAPTER X.

With a load of booze in the car and Jim Cassidy by his side, Casey Ryan drove down the long, eucalyptus-shaded avenue that runs past the balloon school at Arcadia, and turned into the Foothill Boulevard. Half a

mile farther on a Cadillac roadster honked and slid past them, speeding away toward Monrovia. But Casey Ryan was busy talking chummily with Jim Cassidy, and he scarcely knew that a car had passed.

The money he had been given for Smiling Lou had been used to pay for this new load of whisky, and Casey found himself wishing that he could get word of it to Mack Nolan. Still, Nolan's oversight in the matter of arranging for communication between them did not bother Casey much. He was doing his part; if Mack Nolan failed to do his, that was no fault of Casey Ryan's.

At Fontana, where young Kenner had stopped for gas on that eventful first trip of Casey's, Casey slowed down also, for the same purpose, half tempted to call up the Little Woman on long distance while the gas tank was being filled. But presently the matter went clean from his mind—and this was the reason:

A speed cop whose motor cycle stood inconspicuously around the corner of the garage, came forward and eyed the Ford sharply. He drew his little book from his pocket, turned a few leaves, found what he was looking for and eyed again the car. The garage man, slowly turning the crank of the gasoline pump, looked at him inquiringly; but the speed cop ignored the look and turned to Casey.

"Where'd you get this car?" he demanded, in much the same tone which Smiling Lou had used the night before.

"Bought it," Casey told him gruffly.

"Where did you buy it?"

"Over at Goffs, just this side of Needles."

"Got a bill of sale?"

"You got Casey Ryan's word fer it," Casey retorted with a growing heat inside where he kept his temper when he wasn't using it.

"Are you Casey Ryan?" The speed cop's eyes hardened just a bit.

"Anybody says I ain't, you send 'em to me—an' then come around in about ten minutes an' look 'em over."

"What's *your* name?" The officer turned to Jim Cassidy.

"Tom Smith. I was just ketchin' a ride with this feller. Don't go an' mix *me* in—I ain't no ways concerned; just ketchin' a ride is all. If I'd 'a' knowed——"

"You can explain that to the judge. Get in there, you, and drive in to San Berdoo. I'll be right with you, so you needn't forget the road!" He stepped back to his motor cycle and pushed it forward.

"Hey! Don't I git paid fer my gas?" the garage man wailed, pulling a dripping nozzle from Casey's gas tank.

"Aw, go to hell!" Casey grunted, and threw a wadded bank note in his direction. "Take that an' shut up. What yuh cryin' around about a gallon uh gas, fer? *You* ain't pinched!"

The money landed near the motor cycle and the officer picked it up, smoothed out the bill, glanced at it and looked through tightened lids at Casey.

"Throwin' money around like a hooch runner!" he sneered. "I guess you birds need lookin' after, all right. Git goin'!"

Casey "got going." Twice on the way in the officer spurted up alongside and waved him down for speeding. Casey had not intended to speed, either. He was merely keeping pace unconsciously with his thoughts.

He had been told just what he must do if he were arrested for bootlegging, but he was not at all certain that his instructions would cover an arrest for stealing an automobile. Nolan had forgotten about that, he guessed. But Casey's optimism carried him jauntily to jail in San Bernardino; and while he was secretly a bit uneasy, he was not half so worried as Jim Cassidy appeared to be.

Casey was booked—along with "Tom Smith"—on two charges: Theft of one Ford car, and unlawful transportation of spirituous liquor. He tried to give the judge the wink, but without any happy result. So he eventually found himself locked in a cell with Jim Cassidy.

Just at first, Casey Ryan was proud of the part he was playing. He could look with righteous toleration upon the limpness of his fellow prisoner. He could feel secure in the knowledge that he, Casey Ryan, was an agent of the government engaged in helping to uphold the laws of his country.

He waited for an hour or two, listening with a superior kind of patience to Jim Cassidy's panicky upbraidings of his luck. At first Jim was inclined to blame Casey rather bitterly for the plight he was in. But Casey soon stopped that. Young Kenner was the responsible party in this mishap, as Casey very soon made plain to Jim.

"Well, I dunno but what you're right.

It *was* kind of a dirty trick—workin' a stole car off on to you. Why didn't he pick some sucker on the outside? Don't line up with Kenner, somehow. Well, I guess mebby Smilin' Lou can see us out uh this hole all right—only I don't like that car-stealin' charge. Mebby Kenner an' Lou can straighten it up, though."

Casey wondered if they could. He wondered, too, how Nolan was going to find out about Smiling Lou getting the camouflaged White Mule. Nolan had not explained that to Casey—but Casey was not worrying yet. His faith in Mack Nolan was firm.

CHAPTER XI.

At noon the next day Casey was still waiting—but not hopefully. "Patience on a monument" couldn't have resembled Casey Ryan in any particular whatever. He was mad. By midnight he had begun to wonder if he was not going to be made a goat again. By daylight he was positive that he was already a goat. By the time the trusty brought his breakfast, Casey was applying to Mack Nolan the identical words and phrases which he had applied to young Kenner when he was the maddest.

Jim Cassidy still clung desperately to his faith in Smiling Lou; but Casey's faith hadn't so much as a finger hold on anything. What kind of a government was it, he asked himself bitterly, that would leave a trusted agent twenty-four hours shut up in a cell with a whining crook like Jim Cassidy? If, he added pessimistically, he *were* an agent of the government. Casey doubted it. So far as he could see, Casey Ryan wasn't anything but the goat.

His chief desire now was to get out of there as soon as possible so that he could hunt up Mack Nolan and lick the livin' tar out of him. He wanted bail, and he wanted it immediately. Not a soul had come near him, save the trusty, in spite of certain mysterious messages which Casey had sent to the office, asking for an interview with the judge or somebody—Casey didn't care who. Locked in a cell, how was he going to do any of the things Nolan had told him to do if he happened to find himself arrested by an honest officer?

When they hauled him before the police judge, Casey hadn't been given the chance to explain anything to anybody. Unless, of course, he wanted to bellow out his business before everybody; and that, he told himself fiercely, was not Casey Ryan's idea of the way to keep a secret. Moreover, that darned speed cop was standing right there just waiting for a chance to wind his fingers in Casey's collar and choke him off if he tried to say a word.

So Casey wanted bail. There were just two ways of getting it, and it went against the grain of his pride to take either one. That is why Casey waited until noon before his Irish stubbornness yielded a bit and he decided to wire to a good friend of his to come. He had to slip the wire out by the underground method—meaning the good will of the trusty. It cost Casey ten dollars, but he didn't grudge that.

He spent that afternoon and most of the night mentally calling the trusty a liar and a thief because there was no reply to the message. As a matter of fact, the trusty sent the wire through as quickly as possible. Instead of answering the wire the good friend telephoned to the Little Woman that Casey was in jail again. Not knowing just what he was in for this time, it seemed well to her to be prepared for a good, stiff bail. It took a little time for her to get her hands on the cash but when at last she reached "San Berdoo" she had ten thousand dollars with her.

At that it was a fool's errand. Casey was out of jail and gone before she arrived. So there she was, holding the bag as you might say—and her ten thousand dollars bail money.

While she was eating her dinner the Little Woman thought over the events of the day. Asking questions had gotten her nowhere—she had questioned every official in town, from the district judge down to the courthouse janitor. All she had been able to learn was that Casey had been booked the previous day for having a stolen car and a load of booze in his possession. It had been hinted in the police court that he had been dismissed for want of evidence; but even on this point she had been able to obtain no definite information.

"I believe Casey has put this town on the run," she told herself. "They can't tell *me!* —something's happened, over around the courthouse. At lot of the men I talked with had a scared look in their eyes and they were nervous when doors opened, and looked around when people came walking along. I don't know what he's been doing, but Casey

Ryan's been up to something. I know how our laundry boy looks when Casey's home."

But where was Casey now? The Little Woman had but one thing to go on—the telegram he had sent her from Goffs ten days before. She had been getting ready ever since it had arrived. Babe had been sent to a boarding school, and the apartment house leased. She had risked ruining the eyes of three dressmakers with night work, making up some nifty sports clothes. If Casey was bound to stay in the desert—well, she was his wife—and Casey did kind of like to have her around.

She had the twin-six packed with the niftiest camp outfit you ever saw. It included a yellow and red beach umbrella, and two reclining chairs. If the Little Woman had to rough it again, she was going to rough it de luxe. She didn't expect to keep Casey in hand—but it was just possible that she could keep him in sight!

When she had finished her meal she started out to drive across the Mojave Desert alone. A Cadillac roadster came up behind her and honked for clear passing as she swung into the long, straight stretch that leads up the Cajon. The Little Woman peered into the rear-vision mirror and pressed the toe of her white pump upon the accelerator.

"There's only one man in the world that can pass *me* on the road," she said to herself, "and he doesn't wear a Panama!"

As she snapped around the turns of Cajon Grade she looked back once or twice. The Cadillac roadster was still following pertinaciously, but it was too far back to honk at her. When she slid down to the Victorville garage and stopped for gas, the Cadillac slid by. The driver in the Panama gave her one glance through his colored glasses—but she felt somehow that the glance was sufficiently comprehensive to fix her firmly in his memory. She inquired at the garage concerning Casey Ryan, taking it for granted he would be driving a Ford. A man of that description had stopped at the garage for gas at nine o'clock that forenoon, the boy told her.

"That gives him five hours' start," the Little Woman remarked to herself as she eased in the clutch and slid around the corner into the highway to Barstow. "But you can't tell *me* I can't run down a Ford with *this* car. I know to the last inch what a Jawn Henry is good for. Now we'll see."

CHAPTER XII.

At Dagget the big, blue car with a lady driver sounded the warning signal and passed Mack Nolan and the Cadillac roadster. Like Casey Ryan, Nolan was rather proud of his driving—and with sufficient reason. He was already hurrying, not to overhaul Casey, but to arrive soon after him.

Women drivers loved to pass other cars with a sudden spurt of speed, he had found by experience. They were not, however, consistently fast drivers. Mack Nolan was conscious of a slight irritation when the twin-six took the lead.

So Mack Nolan drove a bit harder—and succeeded in getting most of the dust kicked up by the big, blue car. He counted on passing it before they reached Ludlow, but he could never quite make it. In that ungodly stretch of sand and rocks and chuck holes that lies between Ludlow and Amboy, Nolan was sure that the woman driver would have to slow down—but she didn't.

Five miles east of Amboy, when a red sunset was darkening to starlight, the blue car, fifty yards in the lead, overhauled a Ford in trouble. In the loose, sandy trail the big car slowed and stopped abreast of the Ford. There was no passing now, unless Mack Nolan wanted to risk smashing his crank case on a lava rock, millions of which peppered that particular portion of the Mojave Desert. He stopped perforce.

A pair of feet, with legs attached to them, protruded from beneath the running board of the Ford. The Little Woman in the big car leaned over the side and studied the feet critically.

"Casey Ryan, are those the best pair of shoes you own?" she drawled at last. "If you wouldn't wear such run-down heels, you know, you wouldn't look so bow-legged. I've told you and *told* you that your legs aren't so bad when you wear straight heels."

Casey Ryan crawled out and looked up at her, grinning sheepishly.

"They was all right when I left home, ma'am," he defended his shoes mildly. "Desert plays the devil with shoe leather—you can ask anybody."

"Hello, Ryan!" Mack Nolan greeted, coming up from the Cadillac. "Having trouble with your car?" Casey whirled.

"Naw. This ain't no trouble," he grunted. "I only been here four hours or so—this is pastime!"

There was an awkward silence. The Little Woman wanted to know who was the man in the Cadillac roadster, and how he happened to know Casey so well. Nolan, no doubt, wanted to know who she was. And there was so much that Casey wanted to know and needed to know, that he couldn't seem to think of anything. However, Casey came up to the side of the blue car, reached in with his hands all greasy black, and took the Little Woman's hand from the wheel and kissed it. The Little Woman made a caressing sound and leaned out to him—and Nolan felt that he mustn't look. So he walked away and spent a minute or two fussing around his car. Then he walked back to the blue car.

"I'm pretty good at guessing," he said, and smiled at the Little Woman. "I guess you're Mrs. Casey Ryan. Casey has talked of you to me. I'm right glad to meet you, too. My name is Mack Nolan, and I'm Irish. I'm Casey Ryan's partner. We have a good—prospect."

Casey looked past the Little Woman, straight into Mack Nolan's eyes. There was an electric quality in the air while their gaze held.

"I'm just getting back from a trip down in the valley," Nolan observed easily. "You never did see me in town duds, did you, Casey?" His eyes turned to the Little Woman's face. "I suppose you know what this wild Irishman has just pulled off—back there," he said, tilting his head toward San Bernardino many a mile away to the southwest. "You wouldn't think it to look at him, but he surely has thrown a monkey wrench into as pretty a bootlegging machine as there is in the country. It's such confidential stuff, of course, that you may call it absolutely secret. But for once I'm telling the truth about it.

"Your husband, Mrs. Casey Ryan, holds a commission from headquarters as a prohibition officer. A deputy, it is true—but commissioned nevertheless. He's just getting back from a very pretty piece of work. A crooked officer named Smiling Lou was arrested last night. He had all kinds of liquor cached away in his house. Casey can tell you some time how he trapped him.

"Of course, I'm just an amateur mining expert on a vacation, myself." His eyes met Casey's straight. "I wasn't with him when he pulled the deal, but I heard about it afterward, and I knew he was planning something of the sort when he left camp. How I happened to know about the commission," he added, reaching into his pocket, "is because he left it with me for safe-keeping. I'm going to let you look at it—just in case he's too proud to let it out of his hands once I give it back.

"Now, of course, I'm talking like an old woman and telling all Casey's secrets—and you'll probably see a real Irish fight when he gets in reach of me. But I knew he hadn't told you exactly what he's doing, and —I personally feel that his wife is entitled to know as much as his partner knows about him."

The Little Woman nodded absently her thanks. She was holding Casey's commission under the dash light to read it.

Casey gulped once or twice while he stared across the car at Mack Nolan. He pushed his dusty, black hat forward over one eyebrow, and reached into his pocket.

"Aw hell!" he grunted, grinning queerly. "You come around here wunst, Mr. Nolan, where I can git my hands on yuh!"

AN EFFICIENT WARNING

IT used to be the pleasing custom in Europe to give an executed criminal a thick coat of pitch and leave him hanging on a gallows near a public road as a gentle warning to prospective evildoers. A Western railroad has used a modernization of this idea to warn reckless motorists of what may happen to them at a dangerous crossing near Tacoma, Washington. The twisted and battered frame of a car wrecked at the crossing has been attached to a pair of sturdy poles so placed that all who step on the gas may see. There is no explanatory sign—the wrecked car speaks for itself.

Blood of the Dog

By T. Von Ziekursch

Author of "The Last Stand," and other stories

When Inspector Blake of the Mounted Police helped that forlorn puppy he made a friend—a real one.

ABOVE the western peaks the sky darkened slowly as the wind fought to conquer those obstacles of rock. The graying of the clouds became deeper, and blackened. Gradually the storm was pushed on, up beyond the topmost ridges, higher and higher, to sweep on at last over the flat country south of Liard River.

Through the white silence came a faint sound, high-pitched, shrill, a staccato of intense anguish. Inspector Blake shifted the pack as he stopped to listen. The cry came again, moaning through the storm as it rose to that same awful pitch of agony, throbbing through the bush. He turned from the trail, following the sound into the thickets. Its intensity increased as he neared, and at the edge of an open space he found the trap.

The thing that was in it presented a ghastly aspect, an emaciated pup with the milky foam at its mouth. Even Blake's trained eyes had to look twice to discern whether it was wolf or dog; but there were the unmistakable markings of the malemute, the heavy thickness of bone in the head, the dark ridge of the spine. Otherwise the pup was beyond recognition as to species. Both front paws were gripped by the punishing iron ally of death.

The man stepped close and put all the power of his heavy shoulders on the trap, releasing the jaws. The pup quivered and lay still, too weak to move as the man straightened and hesitated. One hand was at his belt and the other pushed back the hood of his capote and scratched at his head while his features lost some of that look of fixed purpose. He was traveling south. Another two weeks and he would be out of the wilderness where body, mind and soul had been bent to the aims of the law these two years. A month's leave of absence; that was a big thing. He was making time on the trail, time to reach that goal of a month with his people, with the mother he had not seen in two years, with the girl his mother had always liked so well. Under the sternly molded lines of the features and body of Inspector Blake was an intense human being.

He swung the pack around and one hand

disappeared in it to bring out a slab of pemmican. He threw it on the snow a few inches from the pup's mouth, and started on. At the opposite edge of the clearing he hesitated again, halted and turned to look back. The pup's tongue was weakly licking at the pemmican. Blake watched and saw the small jaws open in a vain effort to bite the food or to wolf it down whole. But the piece was too large and the pup's strength was not equal to chewing it.

A resigned look came to the man's face and he turned back, dropping the pack on the snow and opening it. A few swift blows of the ax and some of the near-by brush had been converted into a fire over which a copper pan was fixed and filled with snow that melted under the heat. Into this Blake threw the pemmican and then put the pan of odorous broth at the pup's mouth. Again the tongue lapped eagerly, ravenously, and the small muzzle was buried in the fluid, almost strangling the pup.

The few extra miles that might have been made before the Arctic twilight settled Blake sacrificed. He scoured the pan out with snow and then made his own meal. The short day was ebbing and graying dusk settled over the forest. The storm passed on eastward and the naked branches were tinged with rich, changeable hues as the great lights crackled and shot their awesome streamers across the vastness of the northern sky. Blake spread his sleeping bag and disappeared within. The pup half arose with the new strength given by the broth and crept closer to the fire, and the shelter at the side of the man's sleeping bag. His front paws were swollen horribly and all the misery of his starved and injured body was given forth in one lone whimper as he dragged nearer the heat. There was a slight opening at the flap of the sleeping bag. Slowly he crawled to it and disappeared within. Inside the bag the man squirmed and then slept.

Blake emerged from the bag just as the dull light of morning came to the wilderness, and the pup crawled off a few feet, cowering as the man towered above him.

The pity note in the man's voice was reassuring as he fanned up the last embers of the fire and added fresh wood. Then came more of the broth for the pup, pemmican broth, vitalizing, concentrated food of the North with enormous nourishment in it. The pup's tail wagged almost imperceptibly and he stood erect as he lapped up the last of a full two quarts that bulged and distended his stomach almost to the point of killing him.

Immediately he settled down to rest again until his emaciated body should absorb it; and as Blake prepared his own food he looked at the pup and wondered. Where had it come from? Probably followed some pariah pack from an Indian lodge until its immature strength gave out, and then had been lost. But what to do with it? Simple enough; leave it here. Blake thought of killing it, but winced mentally. Resolutely he made the pack and started, off to the south again, only to hesitate, then turn abruptly and go back. And there he met the pup, following the trail of his snowshoes, floundering in the weakness that had not yet entirely disappeared.

The impatience that came into the man's heart disappeared as he looked on and realized how grueling must be the struggle. He waited, letting the precious minutes slip by, until the pup had almost reached him. Then it sagged down, panting despite the cold. In the mind of the man some rapid calculation was going on. His pack held six pounds of pemmican and less than five pounds of flour—food for two weeks for one man on rather short rations. He could make it in two weeks, but to wait for the pup would probably lengthen it out a few more days, and the beast must eat. That meant even shorter rations.

Blake waited, slowing up at intervals in the sweeping stride that carried his snowshoes over the crusted surface until the pup had caught up and rested again. Early in the afternoon Blake looked back and the pup was missing. Again came the urge to go on and leave it, but he cursed softly and went back to find it slumped to its hind quarters and gasping. He picked it up—fifteen pounds of bone, hair and hide—and went on.

As the fire burned brightly that night the smoke from Blake's pipe mingled with the rich smell of the spruce logs, and the pup snuggled close. The man looked down at it and cursed every one of the three extra miles he might have made without this added burden that was holding him back from the leave of absence and all that it meant. Then he noted the raw flesh across the front legs above the paws where the trap had sunk deep with the pup's wild

writhing, and the resentment in his heart at those three lost miles died.

Four days more than two weeks had passed when Blake and the pup came in at Dunvegan, east of the Peace River Block. The man was drawn and thin while the pup, though still undernourished and scrawny in appearance, trotted at his heels, a full thirty pounds in weight. The raw flesh across its front legs was healing, leaving broad scars that would remain.

Where Blake went the pup followed, waiting outside closed doors for hours in the three days the man remained at Dunvegan. From somewhere came a heavy collar, twice as large in circumference as the pup's neck, but held on by the bushy hair.

He gave the other dogs around the straggling settlement a wide berth, content to remain alone when not in company of the man who had released him from the trap and plucked his life from the clutches of the wilderness. On the morning of the fourth day Blake was gone and the pup waited, merely accepting the food that was thrown to him by the ancient Scot to whom Blake had bequeathed him.

A month passed, two months and the pup was still waiting, coming into the settlement each morning from the thickets where he rambled at night. Blake's leave of absence was over, but he had reported to headquarters at Regina, far to the south and east of where the pup, grown much larger now, waited at Dunvegan.

With the first chinook that told of the impending summer a new urge came to the pup, a beckoning lure out of the north that called him away to the vast wilderness where he had been born, the progeny of an Indian trapper's sledge dog. He was big with the growth of ten months now, muscular as any of his breed, and his young growth had been nurtured by the food supplied regularly instead of being starved as so many of his kind are; ill-conditioned, ferocious brutes except when they are being worked in the traces and have to be fed for the resultant strength.

Now he turned to the north and was gone three days, hunting for food himself and subsisting on a spruce partridge and two rabbits. Then he returned to the settlement and wandered around aimlessly, sniffing at every doorway, entering some that were open, and always smelling for the scent of the man who had saved him from that awful ordeal in the trap. One more day he waited, and that night he emerged from the thickets beyond the last house. The new moon was high in the southern heavens; the glow of myriad stars added a silvery luster, and a warm breeze curled up over the forest. The malemute pup, big now and deep of chest, threw back his head, his eyes closed and he moaned the loneliness of his heart out on the night. Then he arose and turned into the north, unheeding the yappings from the dogs of the settlement that made the night hideous.

Up past the headwaters of the White Mud River, beyond Battle River, swimming Hay River above the lake he went on. In the great timbered flats where the Sikanni Chief empties its waters northward he halted and circled. Here the season previous he had entered the world and here he hunted, hardening into a thing of the wilderness as his speed and powers developed in nature's sternest school. He was big of bone and the mane of thick hair and the feathering on his legs hid the sharp contour of his great muscles. A scale with him on it would have registered all of seventy pounds.

On a game trail through the muskeg one day his keen nostrils picked up the scent of a wolf, a female. At first his mane bristled. Not far removed from these gray wraiths of the forest himself, still he was a dog. But the season was strong in him and his trot increased to a long lope as he followed. At first the she-wolf fled, but he followed relentlessly and overtook her in a morass where his greater power enabled him to more than match her speed. She bristled and snarled at his blandishing advances, then fled again, with him following, silent and persistent in his wooing. That night she sought to escape him but in vain, and when she leaped to attack him he evaded the slash of her teeth with a side step as neat as that of a trained boxer. At last his perseverance wore down her fears and they ran together through the thickets, hunting with consummate skill and power.

The intense heat of summer was passing and the water level in the bogans and ponds sank lower. In the mornings there was ice at the fringes of the streams and the forest floor had a new, crisp brown carpeting. Then came the first snowfall, and a week later another. The wind howled down out of the north, over the range below Bear Lake, straight from the arctic.

Day after day the dog and the she-wolf hunted together, but the freeze that followed the snow brought a heavy crust and game was scarce. The caribou banded together and fled, with the bulls too dangerous to warrant an attack on their cows. Three days the pair did without food, then the hunger cry echoed through the forest—and it came from the she-wolf, while the dog bristled in silence at the sound, a peculiar revulsion mounting in him.

Out of the fastnesses the cry brought an echo, or was it an answer? It came again, from another direction, and the pack gathered, a score of them, green-eyed in the darkness of the night beneath the spruce branches.

A big male, marked veteran of many battles, went to the fore, but the great dog was on him like a mad thing. Fang met fang and the wolf fell back, cowed by the sheer power of this heavy monster, as quick and far stronger than himself. The pack waited, distrustful, full of hate and fear for this interloper of another breed, yet held back from united attack on him by the fact that the she-wolf nuzzled his great neck in subservience and bared her teeth at them.

They waited, straggling about in the stygian blackness, and then an anomaly occurred. The she-wolf, mate to the dog, loped off through the forest with the dog at her flank, a little in the rear, and the rest following. Thus the pack hunted, led by the she-wolf, a rarity in nature's vast domain. But the first kill—a moose cow that they cut off in one of the paths to a big yard—brought acceptance of her leadership and added fear of the dog, for it was he who made the kill by a frontal attack with all the fierce courage of a grizzly.

Thus they roved, even striking terror into the hearts of the giant bull moose, while the occasional Indian trappers who heard their blood call threw extra branches onto the fires. Their numbers were gradually augmented until nearly twoscore ran under the leadership of the she-wolf, with the great dog ever ready for battle when any questioned her sway.

II.

Theirs was a rule of fear that held all the forest in its grip when Inspector Blake came again into the North. One more year to serve and then his enlistment would be over and he could return to the southland where his mother and another were waiting and where a less stern existence held out its charms to compensate for the lure of the North. And this, his last year, must be spent on the track of a man-killer whom the law wanted. The quest was a long one. It had led down through the States in the midst of civilization, then had doubled back across the border again as the hunted fled for the far places. Eleven months on the trail, remorseless, tireless, grim as the fates, Blake followed, missing his man on more than one occasion only by the narrowest of margins, to take up the trail afresh.

At Pelly Lakes the track was hot. The hunted was racing for the Alaskan border and a last-ditch fight of legal technicalities. Night and day, forced on by the mental lash alone when exhausted, aching bodies rebelling and sagging under the strain, hunted and hunter struggled ahead. Fort Selkirk was less than fifty miles ahead when Blake overhauled the other, a huge hulk of a man named Monroe. There was no ceremony to the arrest, and Blake carefully went over the provisions in their packs to avoid the trip on to Fort Selkirk if possible. They could get through the three hundred miles of wilderness southward to Fort Liard on what they had by stinting their stomachs, and if the worst happened Blake could hunt while the other waited.

Fifteen days and they were almost there, fifteen days in which they talked little and in which Blake followed at the rear while the other went on ahead, unarmed. Each night the handcuffs were slipped on before they slept.

During the last two days it had snowed continuously, many inches piling on top of that which already covered the forest floor deep. Then it stopped and the temperature fell, the wind whipping the frozen, icy flakes along in great, misty clouds that stung like gusts of molten metal pellets, seeming to sear and burn the skin where they came under the hoods of the capotes. The provisions had been exhausted two days before, all except the starvation ration consisting of a tiny bit of pemmican always held back to cheat death, and their bodies craved nourishment to replace the enormous energy burned up on the bitter trail. Blake melted snow in the copper pan and put the last of the sugar in it before they drank it. Another day and they would be at Fort Liard,

where they could rest back into condition for the dash southeast to the end of steel.

Blake snapped the handcuffs on the other and they sat before the fire, smoking. Monroe cursed in a low tone at intervals. Blake began to unroll the sleeping bags when a sound from the forest, distant and vague, came to his ears. Motionless he listened. All was silent save for the occasional cracking of a tree trunk under the cold's intensity. At last it came again, a moaning, long-drawn cry with a peculiar deep quaver to it. Blake waited. Five minutes passed and it was repeated in greater volume and nearer. He swept the pile of branches closer with his feet. Now the sound was taken up steadily, the hunting cry of the wolf pack coming upwind. Constantly it drew closer and he unlocked the handcuffs on the other's wrists and gave him a long sheath knife. Then he examined the rifle, and a look of dismay spread over his features. The firing point had been broken off by a blow with some hard object, probably a rock. He cast a quick glance at the other and smiled grimly as he grasped the rifle by its barrel—an effective club.

III.

In the forest the pack swept along on the hunting trail, mad with hunger. At intervals they had pulled down game, but now they were a ravening mob, pulsing with the blood lust. The caribou outran them on the heavy snow crust that bore up under the broad splay hoofs; the moose herded in big bands in the shelter of their yards where the drive of their sharp forefeet could have full play, and it was madness to attack any other than rare stragglers. Small game had disappeared entirely, and the pack was gaunt with starvation. Then to their nostrils came a new odor, the scent of man mingling with the smell of burning wood. As his keen nose caught that telltale breath borne upwind, something stirred deep in the great dog. The pack had halted momentarily and now veered into the breeze, silently headed toward the men. The things that had stirred in the mind of the dog at that scent grew stronger. Perhaps memory called up that ordeal in the trap and the man who had held him close when weakness and torturing pains in his puppy muscles would not let him follow on the trail.

He growled ominously at his mate as she led the advance, and snapped at another wolf that trotted forward too eagerly. A greenish, phosphorescent glow, like the glow in the eyes of the wolves, had come to his eyes now and he trotted forward stiff-legged, a threatening rumbling in his chest as he turned occasionally to bare great fangs at the pack.

They mounted a low ridge that overlooked a large glade. There in the open space was a fire and the forms of two men were plain in its glow. The pack was mouthing eagerly, slavering at the promise in sight.

The she-wolf emerged into the edge of the glade and turned to circle, with the pack following while the growls in the great dog's throat became more threatening.

One round of the glade and she was leading closer; then the dog began to shoulder her away, back toward the thickets. She hesitated and snapped at him viciously, only to miss. Again she whirled and this time drew blood through the long hair at his shoulder. Twice more her teeth found him without retaliation, then she leaped suddenly forward toward the fire and the pack followed.

One man faced them with clubbed rifle, the other grasped a brand from the fire in one hand and a long sheath knife in the other. But the rush never reached them. Through the mass of the pack a huge, dark form surged, raging like a fury, slashing mighty teeth deep to rip the jugular of more than one. He was over them like a fiend and on out to the fore where the she-wolf hesitated. Twenty feet from the men she stopped, pressed flat on the snow by the clamping grip of powerful jaws that held her tight.

The she-wolf lay quietly, tense. Those great teeth were at her spine and the growl in the dog's throat was deadly. She was his mate, but the scent on the wind had been the scent of the one man he had learned to know and for whom he had waited vainly during those months at Dunvegan, the man who had given him food and warmth when the trap and the wilderness almost had claimed his puppy life. Perhaps it was no such thing as gratitude, perhaps memory did not go back that far, probably it was only the instinct of his breed which had served man throughout the centuries, awakened by an odor that stirred the depths.

A whimper came from the she-wolf and his rage subsided. She was the mate he had

fought for and maintained at the lead of the pack. The others had halted, milling about a few paces away. The dog's jaws opened and he drew back, stiff-legged. Like a gust of mad hatred personified the she-wolf was up and on him. Her sharp fangs ripped one of his ears to shreds at the base and slashed down into his neck muscles as she carried past, sliding and scrambling into the midst of the waiting pack, only to turn and leap back. And the pack was at her heels now.

A step, another, he backed away, meeting the onslaught like some skilled fencer parrying the thrusts of overwhelming numbers of blades. His fangs, muscles and sinews were more than a match for any three of them, and carefully he avoided striking at the little she-wolf.

Foot by foot he was beaten back, bloody, the hide torn to shreds at his shoulders. Ten feet from the men he stopped and one of them came forward, swinging a rifle with powerful arms. It turned a flank attack by crushing the skulls of two wolves that essayed it, and now the dog gave backward no more. Half blinded by the blood from that mangled ear he stood and fought at the side of the man. One last rush the she-wolf led, and the dog's jaws opened wide and tore at her throat. She writhed and was thrown backward, her life pulsing out on the snow. Then the pack fled.

The great dog sank down weakly and Blake looked on in wondering admiration. There was a sudden movement in the huge beast's neck as he turned and his lips wreathed back. His leap was a convulsive thing, and Blake whirled in time to see Monroe crash down directly in back of him, where the other had crept with the long knife in his hand.

A grim smile appeared on the face of Blake as he dragged the dog away and slipped the handcuffs on the man.

The dog was horribly torn; pity mingled with the vast admiration in Blake's heart as it crawled off, dragging slowly the few paces to the side of the she-wolf. He saw the long tongue curl out to lick the face of his dead mate. A puzzled expression came to the face of Blake. He bent closer, scrutinizing the front paws closely in the firelight. Two old scars crossed the legs just above the paws, and memory bridged the gap of time.

Blake turned back to his fire. In his pack were two small squares of pemmican —the last reserve—to be used only when death hovered near on the trail. He brought them forth and put them along with some snow in the copper pan, holding it over the fire until it steamed with a rich, heavy smell. Then he called softly, coaxing words, and held out the pan, but the dog did not move. Its head rested on that of the she-wolf and its body already had stiffened in the cold. Above, the aurora shot its streamers of pale radiance across the heavens and the wind soughed through the spruce like the wail from a tormented spirit of the great waste places.

Another story by Mr. von Ziekursch will be published soon.

A BRIEF ADDRESS

JACK" LEE, one of the South's most noted criminal lawyers, owes much of his success to his gift of capitalizing the mistakes of opposing counsel. In one of his cases his argument followed that of an attorney who, having a bull-like voice, depended more upon resonance than reason to carry his point. On this occasion he was unusually emphatic, high-pitched and alarumlike. He thundered and clamored and made the trusty old welkin ring.

Then came Lee's turn.

"Now that the noise in court has subsided," he murmured suavely, "I will tell your honor in a sentence the gist of this case."

A CHAT WITH YOU

A SHORT time ago a curious lawsuit was decided in Paris. It was between the heirs of one, Auguste Maquet and one, Alexandre Dumas. To few people is the name of Maquet familiar—but the name of Dumas! At its sound there arises before us the image of a florid, robustious man of tropical and West Indian antecedents, who worked like a Titan and lived like a king, a man with all the passion of the hot Midi in him. And behind him and about him cluster figures who were never flesh and blood but are no less real for that—D'Artagnan riding into Meung on his broken-down old charger, the boastful Porthos, the sly Aramis and the noble Athos, Milady de Winter, more seductive and sinister than any vampire we have ever seen on the screen. Then there is Edmond Dantès fighting his way out of the Château d'If. There are many more. Dumas is not one man, he is a crowd. As Shakespeare says, "So full of shapes is fancy."

* * * *

The Parisian lawsuit decided once for all that the comparatively unknown Maquet had a good deal to do with the writing of "Monte Cristo" and helped to make it a success. Neither Maquet nor Dumas were, as it turned out, originators of new material in the novel. There were real originals of the Abbé Faria and Edmond Dantès. The source of the whole edifice of "Monte Cristo" was a book of police memoirs dating from the sixteenth century onward. One of the chapters was called "The Diamond and the Vengeance." Everything in "Monte Cristo" is found in this short tale. Was Dumas a plagiarist then? We think not. If it is a crime to turn lead into gold he is guilty for that is the measure of his offense. What did Dumas say himself? "I do not steal, I conquer." Molière, another great Frenchman said: "I take what I need when I find it." Shakespeare, who took as freely as any one in the world, said nothing. His works justify him.

We once spent a considerable period reading the notes as well as the text and looking up the sources of the plots of all the better known of the Shakespearean dramas. If we remember rightly there are just two plays —"A Midsummer Night's Dream," and "The Tempest"—which are entirely original with "Sweet William." The historical plays came either out of Plutarch's "Lives" or Holinshed's "Chronicles" and the romances and comedies, as well as some of the tragedies, came from the Italian romances of the Renaissance. We had an idea that these stories, since they made such wonderful plays, must be good yarns in themselves, and we started to read them—in an English translation. It was a revelation. It brought to us a realization of what a man Shakespeare was. His touch had purified, exalted and ennobled a set of tawdry chronicles of

deceit and villainy. Some moralists have achieved their renown by discovering the evil in things apparently innocent. Shakespeare wears his laurels because he could find the beautiful and noble in things apparently low and sinister. He vindicated and glorified human nature.

* * * *

Tennyson's line about men rising on their dead selves to higher things comes from the German poet Goethe, and Goethe got it from some one else. Charles Reade helped himself right and left to material for his novels. Dickens got a lot of the stuff for "Pickwick" out of Smollett and other English authors of the generation before his own and Conan Doyle got most of the material for "Rodney Stone" out of an ancient classic called "Tom and Jerry."

Most of this is more or less unconscious on the part of the author. The seed is sown in the mind of the author. Planted there in a new soil it germinates into something rich and strange. Nothing comes out of nothing in nature and this is just as true in the world of ideas as it is in the world of plants and animals. It would be hard to say where Kipling got his ideas but they came from somewhere and he himself cheerfully admits:

When 'Omer smote his blooming lyre
'E'd 'eard men sing by land and sea,
And what 'e thought 'e might require
'E went and took, the same as me.

All the instances mentioned above are not true plagiarisms but simply examples of the succession of seedtime and harvest, that growth and expansion, variation, involution and development that characterize an amazingly consistent universe.

There is another sort. The plagiarist is a man of no ideas who deliberately steals, often word for word, the ideas of a real writer. Every publishing house is pestered with this form of petty larceny and every publisher and editor has various means of protecting himself. The strange beings who copy Jack London word for word and try to sell him to us belong in the psychopathic ward. We have caught more than one in the act but never yet have we been able to entice one into the office.

* * * *

We are still telling the same tales that the Assyrians and shepherd kings recited about their desert camp fires—the same but with a difference. Their blood is in our veins, their thought is in our brains, their old passions are in our hearts and yet all is different. No two generations are quite the same, no two minds offer quite the same reactions to an idea. The old stories are always new again, the old thoughts die and are reborn in a perpetual resurrection. To whom then does the story really belong? Who is the real author?

Though old the thought and oft expressed,
'Tis his, at last, who says it best.