

# **Electricity Needs You** I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME

Stop right here. This is YOUR opportunity! Electricity is calling you, and the Electrical Business is in for a tremendous increase. But it needs more trained men—at big pay. By my Home Study Course in Practical Electricity I can train you for these positions.

# Earn **\$7**0 to **\$200** a Week

You've always had a liking for Electricity and a hankering to do electrical jobs. Now is the time to develop that talent; there's big money in it. Even if you don't know anything at all about Electricity you can quickly grasp it by my up-to-date, practical method of teaching. You will find it intensely interest-ing and highly profitable. I've trained and started hundreds of men in the Electrical Business, men who have made big successes. YOU CAN ALSO

## Be a Big Paid ELECTRICAL EXPE

What are you doing to prepare yourself for a real success? At the rate you are going where will you be in ten years from now? Have you the specialized training that will put you on the road to success? Have you ambition enough to prepare for success, and get it?

You have the ambition and I will give you the training, so get busy. I am offering you success and all that goes with it. Will you take it? I'll make you an ELECTRICAL EXPERT. I will train you as you should be trained. I will give you the benefit of my advice and 20 years of engineering experience and help you in every way to the biggest, possible success.

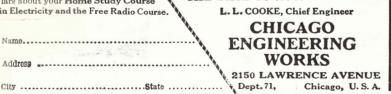
Valuable Book Free <sup>My book,</sup> <sup>(How to</sup> CHIEF ENGINEER COOKE Become an Electrical Expert," has started many a Chicago Engineering Works man on the way to fortune. I will send a copy, free and prepaid, to every person answer-Dept. 71, 2150Lawrence Av. ing this advertisement. CHICAGO, ILL.

Dear Sir: You may send me entirely free and fully prepaid, a copy of your book, "How to Become an Electrical Expert," and particu-lars about your Home Study Course in Electricity and the Free Radio Course.

Address .....

Name.....

Good intentions never Act Now! get you anywhere. It is action, alone, that counts. NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT.





fine outfit of Electrical A fine outfit of Electrical Tools, Instruments, Materi-als, etc., absolutely FREE to every student. I will also send you FREE and fully prepaid —Proof Lessons to show you how easily you can learn Electricity and enter this splendid profession by my new, revised and original sys-tem of Training by Mail.



Special newly-written wireless course worth \$45.00 given away free. Full particulars when you mail coupon below.

## Earn Money While Learning

I give you something you can use now. Early in my Home Study Course I show you how to begin making money in Electricity, and help you get started. No need to wait until the whole course is com-pleted. Hundreds of students have made several times the cost of their course in spare time work while learning.



# Yes, we will ship you this **Genuine Underwood**

Rebuilt in our own factory just like new for ONLY \$3 down-NOT ONE CENT MORE Until you have tried the machine 10 full days at our expense



## **Our Factory**

EVERY MACHINE is fully guar anteed. New parts wherever needed. New enamel, new nickel, new lettering, new platen, new key rings—a complete, perfect typewriter. Impossible to tell it from a brand new Underwood either in ap-pearance, durability or quality of finished work.

An up-to-date machine with two-color rib-bon, back spacer, stencil device, automatic ribbon reverse, tabulator, etc. In addition we furnish FREE waterproof cover and special Touch Typewriter Instruction Book. You can learn to operate this Underwood in one day.

# **Big Book FREE**

Our big handsomely illustrated catalog will be sent free on re-quest. It tells you all about the advantages of owning a STANDARD SIZE UNDERWOOD; how and why this machine will last for years, saving many dollars not only in the purchase price but in its operation.

Send in the coupon and let us send you this beautifully illustrated book **FREE** without any obligation whatever.

Shipman-Ward

Montrose and Ravenswood Aves., Chicago

"Typewriter Emporium"

## Write Right Now

and learn how it is possible for us to ship you this Underwood Typewriter upon our free trial plan and our direct-to-you money saving methods. Get the full details now - just sign the coupon and mail today. Get all the facts - then decide.

## OIT No Obligation

to buy. You don't have to order. Just signthe coupon. send it to us and we will mail you our big cata-log absolutely free. You will be amazed at the liberality of beautyand all around excel Rackord Ko X Send the

Coupon Today

10 Davs **Free Trial** 

You have ten full days in which to try the typewriter before deciding whether you want to keep it. Give it every test—see for yourself—make the Underwood prove its worth to you. Don't take our word for it—put the Under-wood before you and see if you don't think it the great-est typewriter bargain ever offered.

Mfg.

2631 Shipman Bldg.

This is the genuine Underwood Typewriter. We offer you the same three models of the Underwood Typewriter being made and sold by the manufacturers today. Standard 4-row single shift keyboard. Absolutely visible writing the full line of typewriting is visible at all times. All the improvements and attachments that any high grade typewriter ought to have.

## **Big Saving to You**

Our plan of selling to you direct makes possible enormous savings, which are all for your benefit. Send in the coupon and we will send you prepaid our big catalog, including "A Trip Through Our Factory." This shows how the Shipman-Ward Rebuilt Underwood is the best that can be produced at our Special Price.

> don't have to do a thing to get our big Free catalog and com-plete details of our amazing

typewriter offer except to sign and send in the coupon. Then There gation.

excel-lence of our type-writers.

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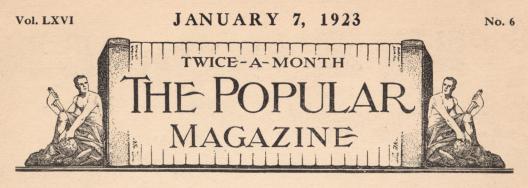


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## Don't miss the next POPULAR on the stands Jan. 20





Ye Gods-Some sel I made \$215 today! er! Buys Car with Profits

"Have earned enough in one month to buy me a new auto." S. W. Knappen, Cal.

\$7 Profit per Hour 3/ Front per Hour "I started out and made \$21.50 in about 3 hours. The Oliver does the work. It certainly is the real thing." L. Zucker, Ohio.

"Sells Like Beer in a Dry Town"

"Am sending today for 7 Olivers. This is one day's orders (\$85 profit), Selling like beer in a dry town." H. W. Drew, Mich,

Mr. T.'s 28th Order in Six Months "Ship 52 Olivers; 10 No. 30; 6 No. 1; 12 No. 2; 24 No. 4." (Mr. T.'s profit on this order alone is \$711). G. T., Ottawa, Ont.

Russell Earned \$3300 in Five Months "Have averaged \$660 profit a month for last six months." A. M. Russell, Conn.

Carnegey 'Carnegey 'S1000 a Month "Am making \$1000 per month. I have made big money before but did not expect so much. Your Burner is just the thing." J. Carnegey, S. D.

Berger— \$258.50 per Week "Send following weekly hereafter: 10 No. 1: 8 No. 2: 4 No. 5." R. Berger, Ont.

\$43 in One Evening "I made \$43 last night selling Oliver Burners." N. B. Chelan. Wash.

# **New Invention Does Away** With Dirty Coal and Wood

In One Day

O wonder this amazing new in-vention is bringing fortunes to agents. All over the whole country country this new device is doing away with dirty and expensive coal and wood in heating stoves, ranges

and furnaces. Already over \$1,000,000 worth have been sold. been sold. You can readunderily stand why this new in-vention—the Oliver Oil-

Oliver Oil-Gas Burner—is Gas Burner—is sweeping over the country like wildfire. It does away with all the expense of coal—making every stove a modern oil-gas burner. Saves money, time and drudgery. Three times the heat of any other method. No wonder agents are rid-ing in on the tide of big Oliver profits.

## It Sells Itself

Agents find it no work at all to sell this amazing invention-the Oliver new improved Oil-Gas Burner. They just show it-taking only one minute to connect it—then light it. And the sale is made! This new invention is its own salesman. It sells The Oliver Oil-Gas Burner is itself! the most timely thing that could be put out. It dispenses entirely with coal and wood when all signs indicate that coal will be impossible to get this winter in every section. Tt burns the cheapest fuel-oil. It saves a woman work how in times when she is looking for just such things. Just as much or as little heat as wanted, off and on instantly by simply turning a valve.

## The Secret of **Big Money**

Of course, now that you Of course, now that you know the facts you yourself can understand why this new invention is going over like wildfire! and you can under-stand why F. W. Bentley made \$215 in one day. Why J. Carnegey made \$1.000 in one month and why hundreds of other agents are cleaning up big too. big too.

These men know the secret of big money. They know a good thing when they see it and they

know that the time is ripe for this new Oliver improved Oil-Gas Burner. They know that this age of high-priced coal and wood and the pres-ent serious coal famine makes it necessary for some substitute. They see ships and locomotives being im by oil and big buildings be-ing heated by it. And they know that an invention



Big Profits Quickly Made

Quickly mades To too can use this secret of big money. Now do not need to be a high-powered sales-man, The Oliver's amazing features sell it for the tit is the thing they want. You will pay you as big money as it does others. We have a definite number of open territories who act quickly. Ferry territors albotted is filled with big-money opportunities. And this big money comes easily. Because not only does this invention practically sell its off on wight but when you have sold one this one there are ready to dispose of to those who act quickly. Ferry territors albotted is filled with big-money opportunities. And this big money comes easily. Because not only does this invention practically sell its off on wight but when you have sold one this one there is the second all heighbors see it. And missions for every sale in your territors. Tou can also make big money but by using more spare time. Note how N. B. Chelan made 33 in one evening.

Coupon Brings Full Offer

If you want to make at least \$5,000 a year easily, mail this coupon now for our offer. We are not making any extravagant claims about this. We do not have to. We be-lieve that your common sense will indicate a good proposition to you when you know about it. We want to give you the facts. Won't you write us? And by doing so quickly you will be allotted an exclusive ter-ritory with private selling rights. The coupon will bring you the facts and will save you writing a letter. But mail the coupon at once.

OLIVER OIL-GAS BURNER AND MACHINE CO. 2412-M Oliver Building, St. Louis, Mo.

### Oliver Oil-Gas Burner and Machine Co. 2412-M Oliver Building, St. Louis, Mo.

Please send me full facts about how I can make at least \$5,000 a year representing you in my territory. Also your plan if I just wish to make big money in my spare time.

Address .....

Name .....

I 1



# "\$60 more a month!"

"LAST night I came home with great news—a \$60 increase in salary! I took the money out of my pocket and asked Mary to count it. You should have seen her face light up when she found the extra \$60. I think she was even happier than I was, for it was the third increase in a year.

"Today I am manager of my departmentearning more money than I ever thought it would be possible for me to make. I owe it all to the training I received from the International Correspondence Schools. That little coupon was the means of changing my whole life."

HOW much longer are you going to wait before taking the step that is bound to bring you more money? Isn't it better to start now than to wait for years and then realize what the delay has cost you?

One hour after supper each night spent with the I. C. S. in your own home will prepare you for the position you want in the work you like best.

Don't let another priceless hour go to waste! Without cost or obligation, let us prove that we can help you. Mark and mail this coupon.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS Box 2059, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject before which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAININ	IG DEPARTMENT
Business Management	□ Salesmanship
Industrial Management	Advertising
Personnel Organization	Better Letters
Traffic Management	Greign Trade
Business Law	Stenography and Typing
Banking and Banking Law	Business English
Accountancy (including C.P.A.)	Civil Service
Nicholson Cost Accounting	Railway Mail Clerk
Bookkeeping	Common School Subjects
Private Secretary	High School Subjects
Business Spanish D French	Illustrating Cartooning
TECHNICAL AND INDUS	TRIAL DEPARTMENT
TElectrical Engineering	□ Architect
Electric Lighting	Blue Print Reading
Mechanical Engineer	Contractor and Builder
Mechanical Draftsman	Architectural Draftsman
Machine Shop Practice	Concrete Builder
Railroad Positions	Structural Engineer
Gas Engine Operating	Plumbing and Heating
Civil Engineer	Chemistry D Pharmacy
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Metallurgy	Navigation
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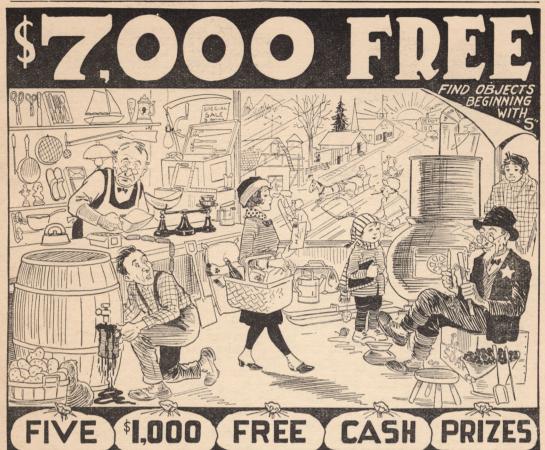
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Lawyer Machine Shop Practice Photoplay Writer Shop Superintendent Employment Manager Steam Engineer Steam Engineer Sanitary Engineer Surveyor (and Mapping) Telephone Engineer High School Graduate Fire Insurance Expert Wireless Radio Undecided





## Solve Puzzle and

WANT TO WIN \$1,000? Sure you do,-then see how many objects you can find in this picture beginning with "S." like "Stove," "Shoes," "Shirt," etc. Have your folks or friends help. You'll have barrels of spare time fun and think of winning \$1,000 besides. Five \$1,000 PRIZEStime fun and 100 IN ALL.

## Winning \$1,000 Easy! Here's How!

Send in your list of S-words as soon as possible. If your list is awarded from first to fifth place, and you have "Qualified" under Class A by sending in a \$5 Henber Pencil order during this campaign, you will win \$1,000; under Class B (\$3 pencil order) you would win \$300; under Class C (no pencil order) you would win \$25. You can win without ordering a Pencil.

## **Advertising Campaign for Henber Pencils**

We want every one to become acquainted with our pencils, the most useful of all writing appliances. They make suitable gifts for every occasion.

Lady's and Gent's Style The illustration shows our Gentieman's Sterling Silver style (regular \$3.50, now \$3 or two for \$5, Lady's or Gent's). The \$5 gold (Lady's or Gent's) comes in Colonial Hexagon shape. The Henber has many distinctive features: Repelling lead device; safety clasp; chase engraved barrel non-clogging mechanism, etc.



\$500 Gentleman's Prize. EXTRA! \$500 Lady's Prize. To the Lady sending in the nearest correct list of S-words an Extra \$500 Prize will be added to which ever prize she wins if she "Qualified" under Class A or B when sending in her list of S-words. An Extra \$500 prize will be awarded under the same conditions to the Gentleman sending in the nearest, correct list of S-words.

Ing in the nearest, correct list of S-words, **Wishing Will Not Win!** Don't wish and wish you could win. Go right ahead and try, Surprise yourself and five \$1,000 prizes, besides many other prizes. Start wing right new Don Tr ind up your list of S-words. Do Tr NOW. This is your opportunity. ACT?

**Others Have Won!** 

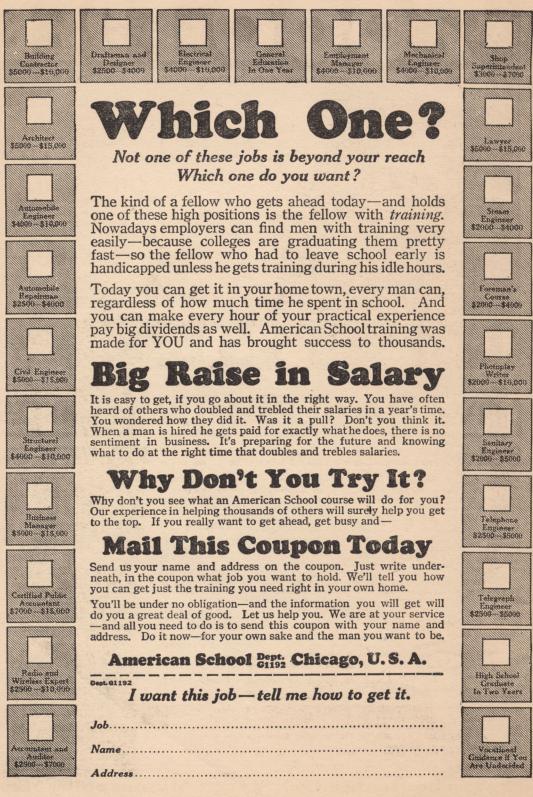
The following persons each won \$1,000 in previous advertising campaigns conducted by this company: Thomas Damico, 1154 S. 12th St. Philadelphia, Pa.; Frank Vogel, 720 North I St., Tacoma, Wash.; E. J. Kilkelly, Kenosha, Wis.; Mrs. B. Bulfin, Milwaukee, Wis.

100		rize	25	
Prizes	Class"A"	Class"B" Cl		
1st	\$1,000.00	\$300.00	\$25.00	
2nd	1,000.00	300.00	25.00	
3rd	1,000.00	300.00	25.00	
4th	1,000.00	300.00	25.00	
5th 6th	1,000.00	200-00	15.00	
6th	200.00	100.00	10.00	
8th	100.00	50.00	8.00	
9th	75.00	30.00	6.00	
10th	50.00	20.00	5.00	
11th to 15th.	20.00	10.00	4.00	
16th to 25th.		5.00	3.00	
26th to 50th.	7.50	4.00	2.00	
51st to 100th	5.00	3.00	1.00	
Class "A"	-Prize if ;	you order \$5		
Class "B"	-Prize if y	you order \$3	pencil	
Class "C"	-Prize if	you buy no	pencil	
Prizes at R	epublic State	Bank, Minn	eapolis.	
DEAD THEEE DINES				

Prizes at Republic State Bank, Minneapolic. READ THESE RULES 1. Ayone living outside of Minneapolis may com-pate for the free prizes except employees or their 2. Whoever sends in the largest number of words with ourrectly name the objects shown in the pic-ture starting with "S." will be awarded first prize and so on down the list of 100 free prizes. One point will be alter of or each correct word, and one point ourse the starting of the start of the start correct word. 2. In case of ties for any prizes offered the full award of each prize tied for will be awarded to seach twing combinant. The list winning the first, Enlarged copy of picture will be furnished on request. 4. Your solution must not include hyphenated, obsolved, compound words made up of two com-international Dictionary will be used as authority. 5. It is permissible to name either singular or plural, but both cannot be used. Synonyms and works of ame appling but different meaning will mande. 6. All sejutions male and postmarked, Feb. 10,

count only one, but any part of an object can be 6. All volutions mailed and postmarked. Feb. 10, 1923, will be accepted. Contestants may 'qualify' under Class A or B up to mininght, Feb. 24, 1923. 7. Write words on one side of paper only number-8. Three prominent people of Minneapolis will act and conclusive.

ADVERTISING SECTION



# Bea Master of JAZZ and RAGTIME

Anyone who can remember a tune can easily and quickly learn to play Jazz, Ragtime and Popular Songs by ear, at a very small cost. New Niagara Method makes piano playing wonderfully simple.

> N<sup>O</sup> matter how little you know about music-even though you "have never touched a piano "-if you can just remember a tune, you can learn to PLAY BY EAR. I have perfected an entirely new system. It is so simple, so easy, and shows you so many little tricks of playing that it just comes natural to pick out on the piano any piece that is running through your mind. Even those who could not learn by the old-fashioned method grasp the NIAGARA idea readily, and follow through the entire course of twenty lessons quickly in spare time at home.

# Play By Ear in 90 Days

No need to devote years to study, in order to learn piano nowadays. Neither is special talent necessary. Every lesson is so easy, so interesting and fascinating that you "can't keep your hands off the piano." Just devote a part of your spare time to it for ninety days and you will be playing and entertaining your friends almost before you realize how this wonderful new accomplishment has been acquired. No tiresome scales, no arpeggios to learn -- no do-re-mi, no tiresome practice and meaningless exercises. You learn a bass accompaniment that applies to ANY SONG you play by ear. Once learned you have it for all time and become master of the piano. Experienced and talented musicians are amazed at the rapid progress of Niagara School students and say they cannot understand why this method was not thought of years ago. Yet it has never been used before and is not used by any other teacher or school today.

## Be the Popular One in Your Crowd

One who can sit down any time without notes or music, reel off the latest jazz and ragtime song hits that entertain folks—always being the popular one in the crowd, the center of attraction, the life of the party, sought and invited everywhere.

As easily as hundreds of others have learned, so you, too, can learn and profit by it—not only through the pleasure it provides, but also by playing at dances, movies and other entertainments. Decide to begin now. Just spend a little part of your time with my easy, fascinating lessons, and see how quickly you "catch on" and learn to play. You will be amazed, whether you are a beginner or an advanced student.

Write for my book, "The Niagara Method," de-scribing this wonderful new method of playing by ear. It is sent to you FREE.

**RONALD G. WRIGHT, Director,** 

Niagara School of Music, Dept. 503, Niagara Falls, N. Y.

Coupon NIAGARA SCHOOL OF MUSIC, Dept. 503, Niagara Falls, N. Y. Please send me your Free Booklet describing "The Niagara Method." Name..... Street.....City ..... Age ...... Ever taken piano lessons?..... For how long a time?.....

FREE

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NW

# What Do You Call an Opportunity?

N my lifetime I have heard many men speak of opportunity. I have read some very fine definitions of this wonder-word. It has been the subject of many splendid speeches; authors have written abundantly about it in prose and poetry.

You have said, "I wish I had an opportunity."

But I am wondering what you call an opportunity.

Do you—as so many do-mistakenly associate it with "good fortune'' or "good luck"?

Suppose tomorrow you heard of a \$10,000 position seeking a man. Could you fill it? If so,

it would be an opportunity. If not, it would be no opportunity at all so far as you are concerned. It would be merely a bit of information from which you could not benefit.

Opportunity, I believe, is usually a recognition of worth.

The biggest opportunity that can ever come to you will never be any bigger than your preparation-your worth-whileness.

If you are not worth considering, Opportunity won't give you a thought.

The biggest job of all the big jobs open and

filled in the last twenty-four hours would have been an opportunity for you-

-if you had been prepared.

And I am not one who believes that Opportunity knocks but once.

The hundreds of opportunities which are here to-day will come again to-morrow-

-if you are prepared.

But you can be sure they will never be

found on the door-steps of worthless prospects -men who are not ready.

**Opportunity** seeks and finds only those who have paid the price of preparation. She does not pick men as

you pick a number from a lottery; neither does she cover up what she has to offer. Her gifts are an open book-yours from which to choose.

Pick the thing you want, and get ready for it. Opportunities do not come except as you attract them. LaSalle training offers a sure way to increase your powers of attraction.

Just bear in mind that the biggest opportunity that can ever come

to you will never be greater than

yourpreparation. President LaSalle Extension University of Chicago, Illinois



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- Modern Foremanship and Production Modern Foremanship and Production Anadhing of industrial forces-for Execu-tives, Managers, Superintendents, Con-tractors, Foremen, Sub-foremen, etc. Personnel and Employment Manage-ment: Training for Employers, Employ-ment Managers, Executives, Industrial Enzineers.
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- Commercial Law.
- Expert Bookkeeping.
- **Business English.**
- Commercial Spanish.
- Effective Speaking.

Please send me catalog and full information regarding the course and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of your booklet, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation to me. Business Management: Training for Official, Managerial, Sales and Executive

- Railway Accounting and Station Man-agement: Training for Railway Auditors, Comptrollers, Accountants, Clerks, Sta-tion Agents, Members of Railway and Public Utilities Commissions, etc.
- Industrial Management Efficiency: For Executives, Managers, Office and Shop Employes and those desiring practical training in industrial management princi-ples and practice.

Practice: Training for Sales and Collec-tion Correspondents; Sales Promotion Man-agers; Credit and Office Managers; Corre-spondence Supervisors, Secretaries, etc.

Banking and Finance.

Traffic Management-Foreign and Do-mestic: Training for positions as Railroad or Industrial Traffic Manager, etc. Law: Training for Bar; LL. B. Degree.

Modern Salesmanship: Training for Sales and Advertising Executives, Solici-tors, Sales Promotion Managers, Sales-men, Manufacturers' Agents and all those engaged in retail, wholesale or specialty selling.

Higher Accountancy: Training for posi-tions as Auditor, Comptroller, Certified Public Accountant, Cost Accountant, etc.

positions.

Name

Present Position Address .....

# THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXVI.

JANUARY 7, 1923.





# Quemado

## By Marvin Wilhite

He had a deadly manner with six-guns and women. Killer of men, abductor of maids—that was Quemado as Joanna knew him. She disapproved of him cordially. As her interest in him quickened she schooled herself to hate him. Her hatred flamed and roared under the lash of Quemado's magnificent bombast. To the last she hated him. But at the last she loved him.

## (A Complete Novel)

## CHAPTER I.

O<sup>UT</sup> of the mountains lying among the deserts to the west of the Rio Grande Jim Fairfax rode and with him rode the shadow that had pursued his course for many months. Harry Rankin, old and gray, known to two generations as "Pieboy" from some obscure episode of his youth, paced at Fairfax's right hand. One might have said that age and youth rode together, that death and life went side by side, that the past and the future met and greeted each other. One might have said almost anything indicative of contrast, so utterly unlike were the two—the grizzled man of sixty and the young one of thirty years.

Into the south they rode, faring out as they had fared before, seeking what they might find which would be a relief to restless and reckless souls. But one of them sought only for the delights of the dead past, searching for the sensations that had fed his youth, while the other reached out blindly and impatiently for something that should fill a life that was still incomplete. One reached backward; the other forward. The old man gnawed ceaselessly and fiercely in secret on a furious envy and jealousy of the young one, while in turn the younger contemplated the old man with half curious, half reckless disdain, secretly desirous of baiting him as some small boy contemplates the prodding of a sleepy, caged lion to insensate, roaring fury. And neither manifested in word nor manner what was going on in the minds behind the tanned faces. Outwardly amicable, taciturn and composed, they went on their way to what lay in store for them.

In the little town of Hillsdale, lying perched on the eastern slopes of the Florida Mountains of New Mexico, men gathered on the porch of the Hillsdale House, "American and European plans," their chairs tilted backward and their booted feet upon the rickety rail. A few horses stood with hanging heads and closed eyes, somnolent before the rack to which they were tied. In Jacopo's bar others leaned over the mahogany and retailed the endless gossip of the range.

Before the two or three stores, falsefronted and unpainted, lounged groups of men. In the streets, heedless of the dust, chattering children, mostly Mexican, ran about or splashed in the cool water that ran down the ditches between the sidewalks and the roadway. From where wooden houses of the Anglo-Saxon residents stopped, the adobe dwellings of the Mexicans ran on up the street, uniform in monotonous cubes of clay with rafters sticking through the walls beneath the flat roofs. Among them rose the dingy frame walls of the courthouse. barnlike, with a cupola sticking up from its roof. Across from it was the jail, an adobe structure scarcely different from the houses except that it had barred windows.

Progress and the great outside world were present in the shape of an occasional battered and rusty cheap automobile—and-one car of different description. This was an expensive, powerful touring car which stood before the hotel. In it Arnold Massillon had come with his builder and manager from his great ranch on the Cedro, a dozen or more miles from the town.

Massillon was a millionaire whose fortune had been made in industry in the East and whose wife had brought him to the West. Mrs. Massillon was threatened with tuberculosis and forbidden by physicians to live longer near the seacoast. Her husband had not been content merely to settle in this country, living in hotels or sanatoria, but when the doctor's sentence had been pronounced had determined that he would go West with the idea of settling and bringing his millions and his energies into the service of the district he chose to live in.

The result had been a nine-day wonder in New Mexico. Massillon, the captain of industry, was bringing big-business methods to the range. It had been done before to some extent by the larger cattle companies of Bakersfield and elsewhere, which had succeeded the individual stock raiser in some sections, but this part of the West had not hitherto been invaded. Now the old cattle and sheepmen were to perceive the phenomena of hundreds of thousands of acres of land bought outright or leased from the State, fenced-in pastures for rotation of grazing, and the building of a great irrigation and power system.

But Massillon went farther than the big companies did. They raised cattle for the market as had the old-timers but Massillon intended to raise them for breeding purposes. Instead of good grade stock he was turning into his pastures hundreds of blooded shorthorns, any one of which was worth a small fortune.

To build this institution properly he had brought with him a man who had a wide reputation both as an architect and as an engineer. Baldwin Gretorix, who had at once been christened "Baldy" by the natives, had exercised his genius and his executive ability in the construction and temporary management of the establishment. He had planned and built the great dam and reservoir and the system of ditches which irrigated the vast fields of lucerne. There he had shone as the engineer. But in the great house which Mrs. Massillon had called The Manor his art as an architect had had as full and successful sway.

As an executive his ability also had been called upon in the stocking and management of the ranch and here he again had acquitted himself to the approval of Massillon and even of critical and half antagonistic cattle and sheepmen of the region.

The ranch was finished and in full operation. Already the first droves of sleek, broad-backed heifers and steers had been driven to the railroad and sold at prices that staggered the natives, used to getting thirty dollars a head for prime range steers. Already the shrewd cattle raisers of the neighborhood had gathered to purchase unhesitatingly at figures that assured the success of Massillon's experiment the yearling bulls that would grade up their own herds. Only the finishing touches remained to be put on before Gretorix might go back to building and designing for others.

Massillon and Gretorix were in Hillsdale to settle one final matter and that had to do with the successor as manager or majordomo of the great ranch on Cedro Creek. This was how it came about that they sat with Jake Castro, the biggest of Sierra County cattlemen, and Sam Blenkinship, who enjoyed almost equal rating, on the porch of the Hillsdale House, seeking advice and counsel from men who were well able to give it.

Old Jake reared back and ruminated, his brown and wrinkled face and gray mustache showing with distinction above a suit of clothes that had cost a hundred dollars in Los Angeles and was as carelessly worn as if it were a suit of overalls. His shirt was gray and of French flannel; his shoes were made to order for him and his hat was a Stetson that was as costly as a Parisian milliner's "creation." And yet he looked what he was, a self-respecting cattleman who was able and willing to afford the best but who "put on no dog" in the presence of his fellow men. And Sam Blenkinship was much the same.

"That's some order you give us, Massillon," said Jake. "A man who knows the cattle business is easy enough to get. A man who can run this nickel-plated hacienda you've gone and desecrated the hills of New Mexico with is something else. Mostly the folks around here are raised to regard cows as respectable animals without no great amount of aristocratic distinction and when you introduces them to these here parlor pets of yours they are liable to feel considerable embarrassment. You want a man who's on speaking terms with ordinary vacas and can still appreciate and spare the sensibilities of these here nobility heifers. Likewise you aim to draw a sport that can cuss a cow hand or a Mexican vaguero and yet refrain from spitting his eating tobacco all over the Turkish rugs."

"Something like that," said Massillon grinning. Gretorix thought Jake's wit pretty crude and his judgment negligible.

"I reckon you need some hombre that can connect all this dog and plutocracy up with the plain and democratic ways of our aborigines," said Blenkenship. "Some one that can talk literature with the ladies and then go out and talk turkey to a hard-boiled cattle buyer. Well, I might do it myself and Jake, here, he gets plenty of social training from his daughter Marcella, while his natural orneriness gives him the other qualifications. But outside of us and one or two

others who all own ranches of our own there isn't any one that just jumps to mind."

"You've got young Brad Carson riding for you," said Jake. "He's a graduate of the college up at Albu-Q and a top hand with cows. I reckon you might break him in at a pinch."

"He'll get a job as foreman," said Massillon. "But he's not quite big enough for the general management yet. I'm afraid Gretorix couldn't let his work go in inexperienced hands."

"You could get a man from Bakersfield, I should judge." This suggestion was one that struck Gretorix as sensible. He thought the prospect of getting native talent more or less negligible.

"I don't want a man from Bakersfield," said Massillon quietly. "I think you can guess why."

Jake nodded and Blenkinship followed suit. "The big companies have a way of riding wide and regardless," he agreed. "The men they train sort of fall into the same habits. I reckon a ranch run by one of them wouldn't be entirely popular with the oldtimers."

"That's it exactly," said Massillon. "I'm not here to hurt any one."

"Except the sheepmen," said Blenkinship. "And, speaking personal, I'm rather rooting for you in that direction. I never could overcome my inborn sentiments regarding sheep. There's Hi Docherty, now. He's a fine hombre, personally and I'd be proud to know him if it wasn't for the fact that whenever I herd up with him he reminds me of mutton."

"You think the prospects are poor, then?" asked Massillon with some disappointment.

Both Jake and Blenkinship looked at each other and then turned again to contemplate the dusty street.

"I ain't saying that," said the former. "But it requires thought. You know, here a ways, there are sometimes things that it pays to think about before saying."

"Yeah!" echoed Sam and looked up the street where a little stirring of dust announced the progress of mounted folk. Through it appeared two girls riding in and with them a man dressed as a cow hand. "Here comes that flapper filly of yours, Jake."

But Jake was looking in the other direction where likewise dust obscured the view of horsemen who approached. Gretorix looked up with interest and leaned out to view the girls who came clattering up to the porch. One of them, a bright-haired young woman, browned by the sun, clad in the latest thing in riding breeches and coat, slid down before the horse had stopped and before the young feilow who rode with them could make a move to dismount and aid her. Gretorix ran to the steps to assist the other to alight but the cowboy was before him although the girl did not seem to require the attention from either of them.

Marcella Castro, the fair-haired girl, ran up to the porch and greeted her father.

"Howdy," said he dryly. "Well, you're sure rolling your hoop a plenty, daughter. You showing the Massillons all the latest wrinkles?"

The other girl paused to thank the cowboy, a young fellow rather good looking and not altogether convincing in his rôle. He was intent upon Marcella however, though Gretorix did not notice that fact.

"What are you doing in town, Duncan?" he demanded abruptly.

"Came for the mail," said the other briefly. But the girl had something further to say.

"I asked him to come with us, Baldwin. Some one had to ride in and Mr. Duncan was in from his station for the day. It is his day off."

"Oh!" said Gretorix as though accepting the explanation, but with reservations. "Who's riding your line?"

"Gonzales," said Duncan shortly. He turned away and led his horse across the street to the post office. Behind Gretorix's back the light-haired Marcella made a grimace and then waved as Duncan half turned toward her.

"I'm going to the drug store," said the other girl. "Come on, Marcella!"

"Can I come, too?" asked Gretorix.

She shook her head. "You can keep right on with your gossip," she replied and walked off with Marcella.

"That's quite a pair," said Sam Blenkinship approvingly. "This Miss Thatcher is some girl, Massillon, but we back Marcella to keep New Mexico's kite flyin' even with her."

"Or with any one else," said Massillon cordially. "Mrs. Massillon thinks Marcella is the salt of the earth and so does Joanna Thatcher." "Who's the shorthorn that came with them?" asked Jake.

"That's Johnny Duncan," said Gretorix disparagingly. "A sort of remittance man from the East. Been out here some time, I guess. He's riding fences for us."

"Oh, he's hardly a remittance man," said Massillon, looking at Gretorix keenly. "He strikes me as being a pretty bright fellow who is trying to gain firsthand experience. I believe he has some money of his own."

The dust cloud at the other end of the street was nearer now and Jake's eyes drifted back to it. Out of it loomed two figures, the one in advance a startling apparition whose advent was greeted by excitement all along the street. Here and there a Mexican raised a hand to his hat with a "como la va, señor," but the majority of the natives scowled furtively. The Mexican girls, however, turned their heads, coyly hidden under their mantillas and smiled and blushed as the rider threw compliments at them in their own language.

The two girls walking down the street toward the drug store on the corner heard a murmur running through the groups on the sidewalk. "Quemado is here!" To Joanna Thatcher it meant nothing but Marcella Castro woke to instant interest.

Back on the porch of the hotel Jake Castro made comment.

"Here comes that hell-fired Quemado! He's jinglin' in with a bolero on and velvet pants, and he's ridin' a California tree with the hull hidden under enough conchas to keep the mint running a year. And he's got all the girls giggling and sucking their fingers under their mantillas."

Massillon leaned and looked. "Who is the man?" he asked.

"Quemado? Well—that's one of the things we were thinking about before saying. Some think he's one thing and some think otherwise. Jim Fairfax is his name."

"Fairfax? I seem to have heard something about him."

"I reckon you have. He was world's champion football player once, they say. Not that I know anything about it."

"World's champion-"

But Gretorix broke in. "Jim Fairfax of Columbia? He made the All American, Massillon. I recall that he came from out here."

"Yeah, and he came back, too," said Jake,

"which some would express regrets over. What do you think, Sam?"

"I'm doing no thinking out loud where that hombre is involved," said Sam. "He's still got Pieboy tagging along!"

"Each one to his taste," said Jake. "Me, I'd as soon nurse a frozen rattlesnake in my bosom. But that's Quemado. I reckon he likes the excitement of it."

"Excitement is good," returned his friend. "If it was me, no matter how I honed for excitement I'd hesitate a whole lot before I let that snake get behind me, especially since he heard over at Zuni that Quemado sang that 'Hassayampa Sam' thing. They say Pieboy took the whole thing as personal."

"We're not having much rain nowadays," said Jake, glaring at Sam. Sam blushed.

"It has been dry," he said. Gretorix, somewhat puzzled at this exchange and interested in the picturesque figure down the street, spoke:

"What was that about?" he asked. Jake eyed him severely.

"Mr. Gretorix," he said solemnly, "we've got a climate justly celebrated for salubrity but it has its dangers. Mountain fever and pneumonia, for instance, are plumb deadly."

Gretorix sputtered. "What has that to do----"

But Massillon, once more giving him a thoughtful look, broke in.

"There are some things these gentlemen don't care to discuss, Baldwin," he said quietly. Gretorix muttered and subsided. Able and famous, inclined to hold these natives cheaply, he resented a certain faculty they had of making him feel like a schoolboy. He understood their hints and reticences well enough, or thought that he did, but he thought them exaggerated and overdrawn. They annoyed him.

Massillon spoke again to Jake. "You don't care to tell me who the man is, then?"

"Oh, not at all," said Jake. "Glad to. His father was Clay Fairfax, said to have come from Virginia after the Civil War. He was a pretty big cattleman back in the eighties. Folks do say that he stole most of his herd during the little unpleasantness we had here in those days, but as most of us were doing likewise that wasn't much to his discredit. Old Clay was some lobo, though. He didn't hold on to his money and I reckon he found law-abiding ways too tame for him. He liked to go out and *take* his. This is his son." "He sent the kid to that college back in New York," added Blenkinship, "where they taught him to be a mining engineer, but he don't work at it regular or at anything else. Mainly he piroots around all over the map, squandering into places where he hasn't any business, looking for trouble and raising his own brand of hell. See that horse he's riding?"

"A beautiful animal," said Massillon.

"It sure is. He got the sire of that horse, along with a half a dozen others, from some sport that knew the Sultan of Turkey. He brings them into these mountains and allows there's no money in cattle any more and that he's going to show us how to raise real horses. I reckon he does, too."

"He's got that range around his ranch on Elk Mountain stocked with pure-bred Arabs that'd make your mouth water," said Jake. "But he don't seem to make money at it. He won't sell any of them."

"That's a pity," said Massillon. "I'd like to buy some."

"Well, you can try. But I don't hold out any hopes. Still, you can't tell what Quemado will do. Look at that, now!"

The four of them and others gathered on the porch started up and craned outward as shouts broke out up the street. The man who had ridden in, after stopping to exchange a word or two with a Mexican loafing before a cantina, had turned and ridden on. Before him was a fat little brown child playing in the dust. The rider had stooped with a cheery word and grasping the youngster by the ragged shirt had lifted him up to the saddle horn where, at first frightened and then shyly delighted, the child rode grinning.

But just ahead of where Joanna Thatcher and Marcella stood before the drug store a Mexican, apparently the parent of the boy, suddenly broke into wild screams and orders, oaths directed at Quemado and commands to the child instantly to leave the robber who carried him. He shook a fist wildly at the rider, his right hand clutching at his belt whence a knife handle peeped.

The horseman turned his head and laughed without sound. Then with startling suddenness he wheeled and spurred his horse, which reared and curveted across the roadway and upon the sidewalk, smashing down upon the man. With a screech of fury and terror the Mexican fled out of the way and into the doorway nearest to him. The lad on the saddle horn laughed out loud. Then the man set him gently down.

"That's Quemado in a forbearing mood," said Jake.

"I should think he'd be knifed if he treats these Mexicans that way," said Massillon. Sam Blenkinship snorted in sudden mirth.

"He ain't in much danger," said Jake dryly. "Well, now that you've seen him, what do you think of him?"

"Of Fairfax? Why, I don't know. Picturesque, certainly."

"I was referring to his utility," said Jake. "He's the man Sam and I were devoting all that thought to a while back."

"Do you mean as a major-domo?"

"He seems to have some of the specifications," said Jake. "He's a gentleman, educated, knows the cattle business and after a fashion he gets along with folks. Yes, I'd say he sure gets along with them. That isn't saying he gets along just the way you'd appreciate."

"Do you appreciate him?" asked Massillon. Jake grinned.

"I sure do," he said. "I'll even go so far as to say I like him. So do lots of other folks although some of them won't own to it. But I wouldn't hire him. I've got a daughter who's susceptible."

Massillon laughed. "I haven't got one," he said, "so that wouldn't count against him."

"But you got Miss Thatcher," said Jake and Gretorix scowled. Massillon was undisturbed. "She's already planned otherwise, I think," he said, looking at Gretorix. "Besides, she'll not be here long."

"Well, it's your funeral," said Castro. "And hers. Only Quemado has a way of ignoring any one's plans but his own. However, if you want to risk him I'll speak to him. Maybe he will and maybe he won't. He may trample right over me for suggesting it to him but then again he may not. You can't tell about Quemado."

## CHAPTER II.

Joanna Thatcher and Marcella Castro, pausing to stand on the sidewalk and stare with frank curiosity at the horsemen, observed them with differing feelings. To the cattleman's daughter, young, joyous, facing an interesting world without a care, the arrival of Quemado Jim meant only a titillation of curiosity, a vague stirring of interest as in something often heard of, slightly familiar and undeniably questionable and reprehensible. Quemado was an old story to her, a story once heard with the interest attached to romance, forgotten for a time and then revived in the form of later and worse tales. To Joanna name and personality were new and fresh. Older, more sophisticated, facing a future which had none of the rosy tints of Marcella's dreams, hungry for relief from monotony and discouragement, there broke on her vision and imagination something colorful and vibrant with atmosphere and life.

She gazed frankly on Quemado, jogging leisurely down the dusty road, a slim but powerful figure outlandishly clad in jaunty, short bolero jacket of black velvet worn over a white silk shirt, and rimmed with silver braid; and long *calzoneras*, also of black velvet, tight to the knee and thence flaring out and slashed to the bottom, the vent lined with pale blue silk and the edges trimmed with tiny silver buttons; broadly belted with cartridge belt and holstered six-shooter. On Quemado's head sloped a flat-brimmed Stetson; on his hands were buckskin gauntlets, and his feet were cased in high-heeled, patent-leather boots from which silver spurs jingled. The face beneath the hat was clean cut, strong, with gray eyes that roved restlessly, keen and never still. The man had a sort of still, confident beauty, compelling and disturbing, like the beauty of a black leopard in repose.

He was mounted on a horse that in clean, slender limbs and small, handsome head matched its rider's striking personality. His accouterments were in keeping. The saddle, of fair leather, unstamped, bore a silver concha wherever the strings sprang from it. Bit and bridle carried a full share of the metal. The whole effect was of a somber, artfully subdued and yet cunningly insistent splendor and opulence; a masterpiece of suggestion, saved from extravagance by its undeniable good taste.

And yet the man dominated his costume, with that straight figure and still face, made restless by the roving eyes. Perhaps the effect was enhanced by the foil that rode beside and a little behind him, for Quemado's countenance showed nothing evil while the whole burly, grizzled being of Pieboy Rankin spoke of nothing else. Hard, seamed, cruel eyes above a bull neck, the old ruffian's face was a record of his life. He moved with Quemado in a slow, inevitable pace as though he personified evil pursuing joy, terror following laughter, death crowding hard upon life.

The arrival of Quemado had about it something theatrical, although the Mexicans slinking here and there out of the way, fading quietly from the streets, the gringos straightening from lounging attitudes to a certain alert and expectant interest, the halfguarded greetings, the scowls and muttered oaths here and there and the smiles of some, gave his arrival a touch of reality and seriousness that belied the spectacular features. There was a note of art, of studied effect, but there also was a more prominent note of individuality, of independence, as though Quemado aimed at being first, last and all the time, himself, and achieving his object made a picture of himself unintentionally that would have made the fortune of an artist.

And yet, as long as that hard, gray figure rode at his side there was a note of tragedy and sorrow, as though a threat hung over the joy of living.

When, as the two had come opposite the girls, the Mexican had run out shouting as Quemado stooped and lifted the lad to his saddle, Joanna had understood the furious oaths and sensed the fiery hatred behind them. She had seen the calm face of Quemado smiling kindly on the little boy at one moment and now she saw it light up with reckless ferocity as he wheeled and spun his horse upon the narrow pathway and drove the panic-stricken native into hiding. The stamping, quivering animal backed down almost upon them. In the roadway the hard-faced Pieboy had quietly drawn his horse around crosswise of the street and sat still, glancing to this side and to that. His attitude was challenging, threatening, that of welcoming any interference.

"Jim Fairfax, what are you doing?" Marcella Castro cried angrily. Her confident, commonplace, familiar scolding brought Joanna out of her trance with a start. The horse swung around, sidewise to them. The boy slid to the ground and ran off, half frightened, half laughing. Then Quemado dropped lightly from the saddle and stood there, quiet-faced, good looking and friendly, his hat in his hand.

"I beg your pardon, Marcella," he said. "If I'd noticed who it was-but how could I when you're all gotten up like a Central Park parade!"

Half quizzical, half admiring, his restless eyes roamed over the indignant young woman and from her to Joanna. They flitted swiftly over her and came to a sudden, startling rest and stop as they came level with her eyes. Joanna met the keen, straight look, saw what seemed a point of flame burning in the depths of the gray eyes and a flush crept over her face. The cold, calm, unemotional Miss Thatcher felt a flutter of embarrassment that would have graced a débutante.

As for Quemado Jim, he had taken in a slender, graceful figure in tan riding boots and skirt and then raised his eyes to a face that stilled the restless fire in his heart. It was a beautiful face, blue-eyed under sharply contrasting, jet-black hair, vivid for that reason but otherwise rather calm, almost bored in expression, without any mirth in the eyes or about the shapely mouth. She was no more striking, no more beautiful than Marcella Castro. People who knew her well said she was lacking in spirit, discontented; they often dismissed her as one who might have counted had she been more animated. But Marcella, with precocious insight, even as she hurriedly made an introduction vaguely felt that her friend matched Quemado in some indefinable way; that she set him off, harmonized with and completed him, and she was stirred to a faint uneasiness.

Quemado merely bowed, uttered a polite commonplace and turned to lead his horse off the walk and swing into the saddle. He and the stolid, brooding Pieboy moved off up the street.

Marcella almost dragged Joanna into the drug store and to a table for the unromantic operation of drinking a soda. She was frowning in annovance.

"Who on earth is Quemado?" asked Joanna, still uneasy with that sudden reaction to that meeting.

"I knew you'd say it!" said Marcella tartly. "Who is Quemado? What is Quemado? How and why and wherefore is Quemado? If this darned country would advertise that spectacular idiot to tourists the Santa Fe couldn't carry them all. We'd have every flapper in the country out here raving over him and gushing slush about him as they gush about Owen Marshbanks, the handsome devil of the films. And now you must begin raving about that—thatoh, why don't you get out a kodak and snapshot him and then put it on your dressing table? What fools women are!"

"But what on earth have I done?" protested Joanna. "I simply asked who he was? Surely I can do that."

Marcella viciously attacked her ice cream.

"Oh, yes," she said resignedly. "You can and you will. Well, you leave him alone. He's no good. He's just a conceited, vicious devil and he dresses that way and looks that way and poses that way because he knows that susceptible female hearts go pit-a-pat whenever the ensemble bursts upon them. I hope you've got more sense than to be silly about a cheap matinée-idol, would-be bad man like that, Joanna!"

Joanna stiffened. "I'm not exactly silly, I think. I simply indicated a natural interest in a rather striking figure."

"Oh, I know! I suppose you must have it. Well, this Jim Fairfax is a man who might have been a credit to us and instead elects to be a disgrace. He goes swashbuckling around, appearing here and disappearing there. He is, or was, a gentleman. He is well educated and is said to have talents. I don't know about that. I never knew him well and I haven't seen him for two or three years. But you saw that brute who was with him?"

"Yes. I wondered at the contrast."

"There isn't any real contrast. One's young and hasn't had time to show his character in his face, that is all. That Pieboy Rankin is the last of an almost extinct species-or almost the last, although Quemado apparently is trying to revive it in his own person. He is a contemporary of Billie the Kid and the old gunmen who were hired to murder and steal in the days when the cattlemen were fighting each other for the range and the water. Ouemado's father was one of the prominent ones and this Pieboy was his pet assassin and head cattle stealer. Lord only knows what crimes he had committed. He never stopped at murder. He killed inoffensive Mexicans for the mere fun of creating terror among them. He is a fearfully fast and accurate shot with a gun and even to-day he is feared as one fears a rattlesnake or a tarantula.

"That's the man who has been boon companion and tutor to your Quemado. He has taught young Fairfax more than Columbia ever did, taught him to be a gunman and a swaggering bully. People are afraid of Quemado because he is said to shoot as well as Pieboy himself and to be as ready to shoot. He has killed men—and he has done worse than that."

Then she laughed shortly and fiercely. "There's only one humorous and comforting thing about either of them. They'll kill each other before long and then New Mexico will be rid of them."

"But," said Joanna, "why should they kill each other if they are so closely related?"

"Oh, you don't know the type, since it is extinct except for these precious specimens. I can shoot a pistol as well as most of our cow-punchers, and goodness knows I'd never win any medals at it. But the kind that make a cult of skill with the six-shooter are insanely proud and jealous of their reputations. An old-time gunman, hearing of some famous rival, would be irresistibly impelled to seek him out and try conclusions. If he didn't the other would be looking for him with the advantage of being prepared. Suspicion, envy and fear were the commodities they dealt in. In each community one killer had to be supreme and unchallenged. He had to maintain his ascendancy by killing any one who threatened it. The condition was naturally corrected by mutual extermination.

"But Pieboy survived. Old Fairfax protected him and through some unholy luck he lived until the country settled down. Quemado's father kept him and tamed him more or less. I suppose he was loyal enough, like some old feudal retainer. He retaliated by training Quemado to be a sleight-of-hand performer with a gun. And everything went well until it began to be whispered about that Quemado was a better man than Pieboy.

"Now Pieboy can't stand that. He may have had some affection for Quemado at one time if he's capable of any such feeling. But when his cherished reputation for bloodthirstiness was eclipsed he turned on him. He hates him worse than poison and they say the climax came when that reckless fool Quemado sang an idiotic song about some mythical bad man over at Zuni a few months ago. Some other fools bruited it around that his hero was actually Pieboy and every one has been snickering as loud as they dared when Pieboy wasn't within a hundred miles."

"But how on earth can they ride and live together?"

"Just habit and secretiveness. Each knows

the truth and each hides it, awaiting the psychological moment for the tragedy. In the meantime Quemado flaunts about as though he really enjoyed having that shadow of death at his elbow. Ugh! The horror of it!"

"It's evident that you don't like the man," said Joanna. Inwardly she was feeling a strange, barbarian thrill, as though lost in some alien, savage romance.

"That's the worst of it," said Marcella. "I did like him. He's the kind of man every one does like—or hate. You can't help liking him, he's so—so 'don't-give-a-darn' and all the rest. But never again! Not after his latest exploit!"

"And what was his latest?"

But Marcella suddenly seemed to realize that she had talked too much. She fell stubbornly silent.

"You'll probably hear plenty about it," was all she would say.

"Still," said Joanna, "I don't see why you should be so anxious that I should know about him."

"I anxious? Joanna Thatcher, you began to cross-examine me the moment we got in here! And anyway I was anxious! The man's dangerous."

"Dangerous?"

"Oh, you know what I mean. He's infernally attractive. I saw you—well—staring at him and I was afraid that his spell was falling on you. You forget him."

Joanna laughed. "I fancy that he won't trouble my dreams," she said in some disdain.

In the meantime Quemado had ridden on until he came opposite the post office where Johnny Duncan was just emerging with the mail. His roving eyes, which seemed to see everything in a flash, fell on the fence rider's form and stopped for a fractional instant. He said a word to Pieboy who answered with a surly nod and swung across the road to dismount and stalk into Jacopo's bar at the hotel, where he elbowed his way to the rail, truculent and silent, gruffly ordered his liquor and stood aloof and grim among the other patrons who sidled away and gave him room, ignoring him with studied, half-fearful ostentation.

Quemado had come to the ground before the post office with a word for Johnny Duncan.

"Como la val" he greeted. "John Dun-

can of Rochester, isn't it? Don't you remember me?"

Duncan looked up blankly, eyed the splendid figure with astonishment and then with growing recognition.

"Why—it's Fairfax, isn't it? Remember you! I'm surprised that you recalled *me*. Every one remembers Jim Fairfax."

They shook hands cordially but with some little reserve on the part of the younger man, awed in spite of himself at contact with a famous figure in the annals of his university, even though half forgotten now. And then the usual questions.

"What are you doing out here?"

"Why, I'm wandering around, learning the cattle business. I'm riding fences for Massillon now."

"Riding fences?" asked Quemado. "That's a new one on me. And Massillon? Is that the plutocratic party who is raising hand-painted and bottle-fed cows out here?"

"The same. He has the range fenced so there's no need for range riders. We have stations about twenty miles apart along the wire and we ride the fence to see that there are no breaks and, if there are, to drive the cattle back and mend the gap. Tame work enough."

"It doesn't sound exciting," said Quemado, grinning. He questioned Duncan briefly, idly curious about the place. And then:

"I came in with Miss Castro and Miss Thatcher," Duncan volunteered. Instantly Quemado's roving eyes became fixed.

"Yes?" he said politely. "Little Marcella Castro? She's blossomed out, hasn't she?"

"She's staying a while with Mrs. Massillon and Miss Thatcher," said Johnny, flushing a little. "She's a mighty fine girl."

"She sure is! I've known her for years. That why you're staying on that fence job?"

"No," said Johnny. "I'm thinking of leaving it. I'd like to make some money and fence riding pays about thirty a month."

"Why don't you go to work for old Jake, then?"

"Well—I couldn't do that. He's rich, isn't he?"

"Fairly," said Quemado, smiling.

"I've got a little money. But it seems to me there's no chance to make it in cattle. It takes capital like Massillon's to make it pay. I've been thinking of sheep." Quemado laughed quietly. "Sheep and Marcella? My God, man! You'll queer yourself with Jake."

Again the young fellow blushed. "Well, if Marcella....."

"Marcella comes high, though! Well, go ahead with the sheep. If Jake gets to pitching just carry her off. I'll help you there. Do you know Docherty?"

"I've been talking to him."

"Then I'll talk some more to him. The old longhorn will listen to me. You buy in with Hi and you'll be wearing diamonds shortly. And, by the way, who is the young woman I saw with Marcella?"

"Miss Thatcher? She's a girl from the Coast staying with Mrs. Massillon. Going to marry Gretorix, the big noise at the ranch, I understand."

"Oh, she is? And who's Gretorix?"

Duncan gave a brief and unenthusiastic account of Baldwin's career and functions.

"I suppose he's going to marry her," he added. "He seems to think he owns her, at any rate. Rather high-and-mighty sort at least with me. Gets along all right with the natives. I imagine it's a sort of cut-anddried affair. Both of them are that sort."

"Both?" questioned Quemado musingly.

"Oh, he's the important man all over, making a career and all that. She's ornamental and distinguished, and if I guess right pretty cold blooded. Hasn't any money, you know."

"No, I didn't know," said Quemado thoughtfully. "You're going to leave Massillon, then, I take it?"

"Yes, I am. He, or rather Gretorix, is talking about polo, now. Wants to get up a team among the cow-punchers. I know what that means and I'm not anxious to play around as a polo coach."

"Better herd sheep, hey? Well, I don't blame you. I'll fix it right with Docherty, old man. And, say, John, there will be a vacancy among the fence riders, won't there? I wonder if I could get a job?"

Johnny laughed heartily at the idea of the resplendent Quemado in the rôle of a lowly fence rider but Quemado did not answer his smile. He was glancing at the form of Jake Castro striding across the street. The latter came straight to where they stood.

"Howdy, Quemado," he said. "Looking for you. Want a job?"

"Whose and what?" asked Quemado.

"Fellow with an eighteen-carat, hand-

painted, manicured, latest-model cow establishment looking for a major-domo. Want to take it on?"

"Who is it?" Old Jake nodded back at the porch of the hotel. "Millionaire name of Massillon. This sport works for him."

"Good job, is it?"

"I reckon so! The cow hands live in a stone house with a room for each one and curtains on the windows. Right luxurious, they do say."

"I thought a man named Gretorix was running the place?"

"He was. But he's a big bug in the way of building houses and courthouses and dams and things and he's got to go back to his regular labor. He's just hanging around until they get another man. I sort of recommended you."

"Thanks, Jake. I'm not quite sure. Do you think I could sell them any horses?"

Jake stared at him in astonishment. "Sell 'em your horses! Of course you can. Ain't every hombre in the country been trying to buy some, and you won't sell? I'll make a trade with you myself, right now."

"I'll not sell you any but I'll send Marcella down a colt with my best wishes. I'm going to sell Massillon some for his polo team. And I'll think about the job. Are they in a hurry?"

"Well, they'd like to get it settled. But Gretorix may hang around a while. I reckon he's aiming to persuade Miss Thatcher to team up with him and he hasn't made the grade yet. He'll stay until he does."

"Oh, will he?" Again Quemado seemed lost in thought.

"Jake, you go and tell Mr. Massillon that I'll be along out there—to sell him a few horses and perhaps to get a job. But I'll want to start low and work up. Say fence riding, to begin with."

Again Duncan laughed but Jake simply looked at Quemado with a half-affectionate affectation of disgust.

"Quemado," he said, "you grow more damn foolish every year that passes! What in hell are you aiming to do now?"

"To get a job," said Quemado serenely. "A job of fence riding. I'm learning something new about the cattle business, Jake, and I can't run a ranch where I don't know every job on it. I'll come as a fence rider —but not otherwise."

Jake shook his head and turned back to the porch. He came up to the group and they waited expectantly for his news. "I reckon you can hire Quemado," he said. "He says he'll take on a job riding fences at thirty dollars a month. He'll be out to sell you some horses and talk it over."

"But, good Lord!" said Massillon, "I don't want to hire him as a fence rider."

"I reckon you better do it," said Jake despondently. "He says he has to know it all and he don't know that job. If it was me, I'd humor him. After he's played around he'll probably run the ranch."

"Well, I'm inclined to try him—humor him as you call it. He'll be out, you say?"

"Yeah! With bells on," said Jake and he and Sam Blenkinship chuckled.

## CHAPTER III.

The big house that Massillon had elected to call The Manor lay ghostlike in the moonlight that flooded the terraced bench overlooking the Cedro valley. Vast it was, with wings at right angles to the central portion forming a sort of letter H. It was of whitish stone, quarried from the hills about it and affected a modified Tudor style, toned down to chaste severity. It would not have been out of place on Long Island among estates of millionaires and yet even in that wilderness where the adobe built round a patio was the regulation dwelling it blended well with the eternal hills and its white strength harmonized appropriately with the green and brown chaos of the mountains.

At some little distance was another building, also of stone but without particular architectural pretense. This was the dormitory for the hands and was handsome enough in itself to cause comment in New Mexico although its lines had been so planned that it did not obtrude upon the effect intended for the manor.

Higher up, the valley narrowed to a cañon and at its head there was a wide swale of flat land through which several creeks ran to join in making the Cedro. Here nature had made a site for a reservoir and Gretorix had taken full advantage of the fact. A great bow of concrete already spanned the narrowest notch of the cañon, solidly locked to bed rock and the walls of cliff. Behind it gathered a growing lake of mountain water, to be fed through a tunnel into ditches and led far out on the lower lands of the valley, rendering them fertile and prolific. A power house nestled deep below the dam where the water, before it took up the work of irrigation, turned a huge dynamo that furnished ample power for lights and machinery.

The great house was ablaze with lights and glowed like a jewel in the lonely night. Through French doors came the sound of voices and laughter. Here was a vast living room, with vaulted ceiling and a fireplace that might have been the door of a cathedral. The polished floor was covered with rugs, skins, Navajo blankets. There was a grand piano, huge divans, great easy-chairs. It was magnificent and yet warmly homelike.

To one side of the huge fireplace, crackling with burning ironwood, stood Baldwin Gretorix, big, well-groomed, wearing a dinner jacket. He was a good-looking man, somewhere between thirty and forty years old, with a keen, intellectual, strong face. In an easy-chair facing him sat Massillon, sturdy, a little corpulent, gray, with a fine face and thin, straight lips. He was the second generation of wealth, retaining strength and ability and adding to it culture and refinement.

Mrs. Massillon, a pretty, languid woman, chiefly interested in following the régime prescribed for her ailment and after that in making a match between Joanna Thatcher and Gretorix, sat back in a deep chair while the great divan was shared between Marcella Castro and Joanna. The three of them were in decorous, semievening dress. The talk was desultory, of the ranch, of riding trips, of social affairs on the Coast and in the East. The worlds of Los Angeles and San Francisco and of New York and Palm Beach joined and mingled here. Marcella had attended school on the Coast. Joanna was a Californian born and bred but with the background of an Eastern education. The Massillons and Gretorix were at home equally on either side of the continent.

But there was nothing new in all this. The monotony palled and inevitably the thoughts of most of them veered half unconsciously to a subject which had the interest of expectancy and uncertainty. With infernal flair for effect, deliberate or not, that subject had kept them waiting. It had been almost a week since Fairfax had appeared, had roused their interest and vanished. They had seen nothing of him, heard nothing except that he had gone on down to Deming. In the meantime they waited with expectancy out of all proportion to the seeming importance of the matter. And as had been the case whenever they gathered together the talk shifted little by little to the man and his promised advent.

Half bored, half restless, discontented, Ioanna sat asking herself why she did not end the tiresome stay at the ranch, accept the proposal that Gretorix obviously had been ready to make for weeks, and which she really had come there to hear, and then go back home to prepare for the wedding and the future—with Gretorix. Gretorix was the man she wanted to marry, such a man as she had always intended to marry; a successful, ambitious, prominent man who could give her not only comfort and increasing luxury but the distinction that is reflected from achievement. She had had her share of being nobody in particular, of struggling to maintain her place among wealthy people. Only it was annoying that in the tiresome sameness of the life at the ranch, lazing away the days in the blazing sunlight, the prospect of a future with Baldwin little by little took on a drab tinge.

That day she had sat her horse on a rise of ground and watched the two cow hands detailed to the work as they gathered a herd of yearling heifers to drive to the railroad for shipment. The sun burned through her waist, it was hot and dusty, overhead the sky was hard and blue while the ground around was brown and arid, the hills harsh and uninviting. It was a prospect to make one of her training yawn and yet she had been interested. While she sat there she had forgotten Gretorix and her plans in some vague stirring, some unsatisfied longing.

She supposed that an inherited knowledge of this sort of existence had its part in her interest. She was of the settlers who had owned big cattle ranches in southern California in the early days and she had a dash of Spanish blood in her veins which maybe accounted for her vivid and contrasting color.

At any rate the solid, well-groomed Gretorix standing there before her seemed rather flat and commonplace to her now. The thought of passing a lifetime with him did not arouse her enthusiasm. Not that it mattered. She had no place for romance in her plans and she was disdainfully skeptical of what was called "love."

And then Massillon came to the inevitable. "I'd give a lot to know if that man Fairfax is going to show up," he said. "Castro, I suspect, may have been joking." "I'm rather hoping he doesn't," said Mrs. Massillon. "A man with a name like his must be rather a dubious character, don't you think?"

"Is Fairfax a dubious name?" asked Joanna.

"I'm not referring to his family name but his nickname. Something like 'Quasimodo,' isn't it?"

"Nothing like it," said Joanna dryly.

"It's Quemado," said Gretorix. "He gets it, I think, from the name of some obscure station out here somewhere. They have a way of giving nicknames like that. It has a picturesque sound but otherwise I don't exactly see the point, except of course that he may have been a native of the place."

"You don't speak Spanish, do you?" asked Marcella.

"No, he doesn't," said Joanna.

"I've picked up a little since being here," said Gretorix with dignity. "Of course that's Spanish, but I didn't suppose it had any meaning."

"But it has," said Joanna. She was reflecting that the meaning seemed peculiarly to fit the name's wearer, although she hardly knew why.

"Anyway he's kept us guessing long enough," Mr. Massillon said. "I'm inclined to send to Bakersfield for a man and not waste further time. We could get along all right for a while without one, but if this fellow really intends to try the job he'd better show up."

"I don't think he's going to show up," said Gretorix. "I don't agree with Castro that he's the man for the job. He may be able but he certainly is irresponsible. And his record, as far as I've been able to gather it, isn't reassuring. Having a pet bandit about the place isn't exactly what I'd advise for a serious undertaking."

"Is he a bandit?" asked Mrs. Massillon. "That should be interesting. I don't suppose he practices it on respectable people?"

"Well, I wouldn't be too sure. Some of his exploits are none too savory although one can't get details of much value from the people here. They have that polite but emphatic way of changing the subject in a broad hint to shut up about certain things and Quemado seems to be one of those things. Still, I gather that he's killed men and that one of his latest exploits was the carrying off, on her wedding night, of a young woman from that Mexican village, Pajillito, over here."

"Carried off a young woman? Against her will?" asked Joanna sharply.

"Naturally, I presume that it was against her will. She was being married at the time."

"Now, I don't know about that," said Massillon, chuckling. "I heard a hint of that and asked Sam Blenkinship about it. He wouldn't say much but laughed when I hinted as you have. He said that it wasn't likely, since there wasn't a Mexican girl in the State that wouldn't run off with him at the slightest encouragement. Most people seem to look on that with a sort of secret amusement."

Then the knocker on the door sounded. They all sat erect as the Chinese servant padded across the room and opened the outer door.

Quemado entered.

Through half-veiled, glancing, swift eves he swept the great room and its inmates. His glance rested a moment on details, swept to individuals, lingered briefly on Massillon and his wife, on Marcella, on Gretorix, then came to that sudden, disconcerting stop as it fell upon Joanna. And under the pale ivory tan of the girl's cheeks crept a slow mounting of color, while her heart leaped unaccountably. She was seized with suppressed anger at herself for blushing like a silly schoolgirl. She inwardly damned Ouemado's theatrical ability to seize attention and dominate it to the exclusion of everything else. The others stared at him as though fascinated and Mrs. Massillon fairly gasped. His somber, splendid figure seemed for the moment to dwarf and render tawdry all the magnificence of the place.

"I owe you an apology, Mr. Massillon," said Quemado composedly. "I should have been earlier——."

"We're mighty glad to see you anyhow, Mr. Fairfax," said Massillon cordially. "You have met Miss Thatcher and Miss Castro. This is my wife—and Mr. Gretorix!"

Quemado's eyes swept Gretorix again and then flew to Joanna as though he were registering items of their appearances for his own comparisons. To the others he bowed, quite at home and composed.

"I was delayed in Deming," he explained. "Some friends of mine—Zuni Indians, they are—had turquoise for sale and I undertook to dispose of it for them. It took me longer than I anticipated. However, I'm here now to claim my promised job." "Arnold," said Mrs. Massillon emphati-

"Arnold," said Mrs. Massillon emphatically, "Mr. Fairfax is going to be employed. I insist on it."

Quemado rewarded this with a frank smile that was warm as the sun. "Thank you," he said.

"I'm willing enough," said Massillon. "I think we can come to terms on Mr. Castro's recommendation."

"There oughtn't to be a bit of difficulty," said Quemado. "I'm quite willing to go to work at once at the regular rates. Thirty dollars a month I believe you pay fence riders."

Massillon broke out in objections and arguments but Quemado smilingly stood his ground. He would ride fences for the time being and after that they would see. Gretorix, half disapproving the whole scheme, partly sensing ridicule but unable to object because his own inquiries had resulted in the knowledge of Quemado's capabilities, remained silent. The man was the one for the job, of that there could be no doubt, if ability was what was looked for.

And then Quemado deftly spoke of horses and Massillon's interest flamed. He had horses such as they had seen. An explorer, a friend of his, had brought them from Arabia through a special firman of the sultan and their get now ranged the fastnesses of Elk Mountain. He would let Massillon have some, certainly.

Massillon was in no mood to cavil at price nor did it seem was Quemado extortionate. Agreeably and quickly a bargain was struck.

"I'll send Rankin right up to the ranch after them and he should be back in a week or ten days. I'm not inflicting him on you, you know. He's no parlor ornament."

"Fine," said Massillon. "And now, won't you stay-""

But Quemado declined, Joanna was sure because he knew just when to take his presence away to leave the greatest effect. He bowed himself out, Gretorix following him. And outside he burst out: "But, man alive. Why are you doing this?"

"It's the only job I'll take," said Quemado, understanding him.

"But what do you want it for?"

Quemado grinned, "I've tried everything else in the cow business," he asserted, "but this is a new one on me. I'm curious to see what it's like. Suppose you give me a chance at it!"

Baldwin shook his head doubtfully, endeavoring to read the other's face in the tantalizing moonlight. But he failed and raised his eyes. There, at some distance, loomed a bulky, black silhouette, a man mounted on one horse and holding the bridle of another. Somehow that formless black, cutting the white moonlight sharply had a sinister quality of suggestion, conveying a nameless threat. Underneath Quemado's matter-offact tones and calm demeanor, as under that motionless, silent specter in the night, he half sensed a certain restless, fiery energy whose direction he could not guess.

But Gretorix was courageous and a sportsman, liking the tang of adventure. The life on the ranch, however they might strive to enliven it with visitors and entertainments, was bound to be monotonous and dull to the Massillons. Here was an opportunity to add a certain color and picturesqueness to it and if in doing so they added also a menace of some sort he could not guess, the fillip of danger would perhaps be welcome.

Yet he was uneasily conscious that the danger, if there was any, would be directed toward himself or what he claimed as his own. There was Joanna—and Joanna was of particular interest to him. Quemado's presence could not fail to be interesting to a woman and—he recalled that tale of a girl carried off from a Mexican wedding fiesta by this man.

He spoke half sullenly. "You may have the job—if you insist. I'll go over and assign you a room in the house where the hands live, right over here, which you will occupy when you come back, when you're in from the station assigned to you. You can meet the boys also."

"I'll have plenty of chance to get acquainted," said Quemado, "because I'm going to stay here. Might as well start in at once."

"But I thought you were going to get the horses?"

"Pieboy can attend to that." He turned and called to the black bulk on the horse. In answer to the hail the rider dismounted and stalked toward them.

"What's wanted?" growled a voice, rumbling and surly.

Quemado spoke rapidly in Spanish, giving his directions to his henchman to proceed to his own ranch, gather the horses and return with all speed. Pieboy listened without comment until he was through.

"What you aimin' to do?" he then asked. He spoke in English.

"I am staying here for the present. I'm going to ride fences."

Pieboy broke into a rumbling laugh that was as much a sneer as anything else.

"Ride fences! Quemado ridin' fences! Ha, ha! It's the women, I reckon, an' not the vacas, you're aimin' to herd!"

"Shut up and get out! You've got your orders."

"I'm takin' orders when I want to, Quemado."

"Pieboy, you going to ride?"

And suddenly Baldwin thrilled to a certainty that in the quiet tones of both, emotionless on the part of Quemado, surly on that of Pieboy, lay a smothered menace, a covered fire smoldering and ready to burst forth. The two black figures silhouetted in the moonlight, motionless and formless, were surcharged with deadly and surpressed threat.

"You're gettin' some haughty, ain't you, Quemado?" said Pieboy.

"You're getting more ornery every day, Pieboy," retorted Quemado calmly. "Will you ride or shall we have it out?"

Again Pieboy laughed. "Gettin' to think pretty of yourself, ain't you? Shucks, you ain't half growed up, yet. Oh, I'll ride, so long as you're payin' me. But I'm liable to quit you one o' these days, Quemado. Only fer your pa I'd be doin' it now."

He turned and for an instant Baldwin had the feeling that the black, threatening outline was surveying him with cold, ferocious contempt and appraisal. Then it stalked back to the horses, mounted one and with a sudden clatter of hoofs whirled and tore away down the road. The other horse lifted its head and whinnied after its departing companion.

Baldwin drew a sibilant breath. "You and your hand don't seem to hit it off very well," he commented.

Quemado shrugged his shoulders. "We get on well enough," he said noncommittally. "You're going in again?"

"Of course," said Baldwin, surprised. "After I have shown you your room."

"Well, it's none of my business and I'm not offering advice. But in this country there are certain customs pretty generally observed. One of 'em is not to comment unnecessarily on things that don't concern you."

Gretorix straightened up. "It seems to me that you take considerable on yourself, Fairfax! I think I'm capable of judging proper subjects of conversation."

"Maybe you are," said Quemado carelessly. "I'm telling you, however. If you want to talk about Pieboy, go ahead, but don't say I didn't give you a hint."

"Well, I'm obliged to you but—I hardly think it's necessary. Now, here's the cottage where the hands live. We'll give you a room here until you go to your station. You're welcome at The Manor at any time, of course, and we'll be glad to see you whenever you care to ride in after you've begun your work."

He opened the door of the stone house and stepped with Quemado into a big and comfortably fitted living room where a number of men, most of them young, sat smoking and oiling saddlery or playing cards. They were all cowmen of the usual type or a little above it; the sons, for the most part, of cattlemen of the region. Most of them had attended high schools and several were graduates of universities or of agricultural colleges. Although the ranch was so big there were not more than half a dozen of them altogether.

"Boys," announced Gretorix, "this is Mr. Fairfax, who's signed on to ride fences for a while. Most of you have heard of him, I take it."

"What's that?" shouted one tall youth. "Quemado Jim riding fences? What are you handing us, Baldy?"

The others echoed this sentiment. There were few who knew Quemado but all had heard of him and the idea that this figure of romance should descend to riding fences struck them all as grotesque. They burst out laughing and jibing Gretorix, who seemed to be on the most familiar terms with them.

But Quemado eyed them soberly and when they gave him an opportunity broke in on their scoffing.

"That's right," he said. "I'm riding fences, boys. I've hooted cows around these hills and done everything else I can think of and I thought I knew the cow business. But you don't know it until you know it all. This fence riding is a new one on me so I'm going to take it up and learn it by practical experience. There's a new kind of

cow business come to New Mexico and I'm starting at the bottom to learn it."

"You ought to start by learnin' to ride a burro, Quemado," said the tall youth who had first spoken. He came up and shook hands with Fairfax, introducing himself.

"Name of Carson. I'm Brad Carson's son, from over to Carlinville. He runs the Hayfork brand. This here is Sam East but he's all West. Comes from around your way up toward Tularosa. Here's Billy Watson from Albu-Q and 'Slippery' Wilkins from 'round Watrous in the north. We're down here learnin' this new-fangled cow business like you-all, Quemado."

"I'm glad to see that New Mexico is looking for progress and enlightenment that a way," said Quemado solemnly as he shook hands with them. "I hear that you-all have to throw away your running irons and ropes, though, and learn to carry fly whisks and nursing bottles, and instead of wearing chaps you dress in white aprons and carry blue umbrellas to keep the sun off the lady cattle. Is that right?"

"You got it pretty near correct," said Carson gravely.

Baldwin smiled and turned to the door with a parting word.

"Pick out a place to bunk, Fairfax, and then we'd be glad to see you at The Manor," he said.

Quemado nodded. "Thanks. But I reckon I'll get acquainted with these amateurs first," he answered.

Baldwin stepped out into the night and walked toward the house, half regretting the impulse which had led Massillon to accept Quemado's bizarre offer to work. He wondered if the man was bent on making a joke of the whole affair and of the Massillons, judging that, whether or not he was serious, the countryside would find much food for mirth in the fact that Quemado, the pride of the range, had descended to riding fences for the millionaire.

Then recurred the veiled warning given him by Quemado as to mention of Pieboy and what seemed to be the start of a quarrel between them. Why should he not mention that sinister character?

He came into the house and was greeted with eager and questioning glances in answer to which he explained that he had arranged for Quemado's comfort.

"It's your funeral, Massillon, and I'm not interfering. Still it strikes me that you're taking a chance with this man. I know he's able and that there is no doubt he can run the place as well as or better than I can—if he takes it seriously. But what we've heard of him isn't reassuring any more than this crazy whim of starting in by riding fences. I'm not given to premonition, but I don't like the fellow."

Joanna was silent and thoughtful. Once she glanced at Marcella but that young woman merely looked at her and sniffed. Then, with her restlessness urging her, she arose, gave Baldwin a glance and went out on the veranda. He followed her promptly, to find her standing out on the flagstones looking toward the bunk house which loomed black, pricked with squares of light, against the gleaming, cold moonlight.

Joanna turned to Gretorix as he came up to her.

"Baldwin, I wish Mr. Massillon had not hired that man," she said. He laughed a little and attempted to take her hand. She drew it out of his reach.

"Why, you're mysterious," he said. "I'm not much in favor of it myself. But it can't make much difference to us. We'll not be here long."

"I've a feeling that I'll be here longer than we think," she answered. She stood there passive, without warmth. Gretorix often had noticed a certain lack of response and it invariably left him uncertain of her.

"We'll neither of us be here long, Joanna. I've done nearly all I came to do and pretty soon I'll go away. In the meantime, why worry about this Quemado and his bizarre mannerisms?"

"I don't worry for myself—but for you, Baldwin."

He laughed at this. "I fancy I can take care of myself," he asserted.

"I know. But I think you've misread the man. He's not ordinary. He's dangerous, I should say."

Again Gretorix felt that cold presentiment but he dismissed it impatiently.

"Oh, I've no doubt he's reckless and perhaps lawless. But there is no earthly reason to fear anything he may do to me. In the first place, he'd have no motive whatever."

Joanna sighed. "He'll do nothing to you —directly. It's what he may do to others that I was thinking of. I tell you, Baldwin, he's dangerous! I—I wish we could go away at once." But he persisted in scoffing. "Why, he'll not run me out. I'm going pretty soon and it would be ridiculous to hurry our plans for this fellow. He may be dangerous. In fact, after something I heard out here, I'm inclined to think you're right. But that has nothing to do with us."

"What was that you heard?" asked Joanna quickly.

Gretorix told her in some detail of the incipient quarrel between Quemado and Pieboy and the impression he had had that there was some deep, repressed feeling underlying it.

"I knew it," she said. "Baldwin, there will be a tragedy here!"

"But, even if these two get to fighting, what has it to do with us?" he insisted.

"I don't know," she replied. "But the man's no noisy swashbuckler. I'm sure of it. For your own sake I wish you were away from here."

"But you admit that he does not threaten me!"

"Not that way—but in another way. I can't explain—yet. Maybe I am wrong. But he frightens me strangely and if he ever should—""

"Should what?"

"I can't tell you. I am probably silly. But I am sure he will kill Pieboy—or Pieboy will kill him."

Gretorix again laughed indulgently.

"We'll not think of it any more," he said. "There's some one singing in the cottage. Let's walk over and listen from outside."

Joanna shuddered, perhaps with a sudden realization of the chill of a New Mexican night. But she went with him toward the cottage.

## CHAPTER IV.

Standing outside in the moonlight the two could see through the open window into the big room where the hands were grouped. Near the fireplace, strumming a guitar, sat Quemado Jim, his white silk shirt gleaming and shimmering against the black velvet of his jacket, his hat thrust carelessly back on his head. He was singing a rollicking song to a tune that was lively and burlesque, and yet, underneath its burlesque quality lay some hint of fierceness.

'Hassayampa Sam! 'Ssayampa Sam-u-el! They cut him down to half his size: Hassayampa's gone to hell!"

The gay cow hands caught up the refrain

and shouted it at the top of their lungs. Quemado's fingers swept the strings and his voice took up the song:

"Hassayampa Sam! The Rio Grande's pride; He stood eight foot from hoof to hair.

He was forty inches wide. His voice was like a wolf; there was lightnin'

in his eye, And the poppin' of six shooters was his favor-ite lullaby."

A gust of sound swept the air as the boys crashed out the chorus:

"Hassavampa's gone to hell!"

Long drawn and wailing it died away and the strumming chords beat to Ouemado's singing again:

"Hassayampa Sam! As a babe was awful cute! He was bottle fed on pizen juice an' tiger's blood to boot.

- He killed his nurse at two years old and slew his brother Jim, Then chewed his daddy's finger off because he
- scolded him !"

Ioanna shuddered even Baldwin as laughed at her side. Again Quemado's musical voice took up the tale:

"Way down in San Miguel lived Lola Arrigo; The loveliest little maid ever weaned in Mexico. She danced for Juan Fernandez in Juan's cantina there,

And Manuel Rocas loved her from her heels up to her hair."

The roaring chorus thundered again and lingered, long drawn. Then above the joyous laughter Quemado's voice arose:

"Manuel was young an' timid, he'd never beefed a foe,

And when Sam from Hassayampa came, he didn't stand a show.

That fickle female smiled on Sam and Sam

he grinned at her, While he picked his teeth with a six-gun of forty-five caliber."

Louder roared the chorus:

"Hassayampa Sam! 'Ssayampa Sam-u-el! They cut him down to half his size: Hassayampa's gone to hell!"

Quemado's glancing eyes flitted from face to grinning face as his soft voice soared again:

- "Manuel's poor heart was tore as he saw Sam press a kiss
- On the ruby lips of Lola where he once had sought for bliss.
- He sneaked behind the bar a-feelin' like the deuce,

And sought to drown his sorrow in four quarts of cactus juice. 2A-P

"Oh! Juan's mescal was strong, and as it hit the spot, Young Rocas' soul was fortified and rendered

wild and hot.

He sprang upon the bar and uttering a yell,

Drew eighteen inch of bowie knife and leaped on Sam-u-el."

In a crescendo shriek the chorus came:

"Hassavampa's gone to hell!"

## Ouemado swept the guitar and sang:

"Hassayampa's hand was quick; his aim was verv true.

His bullets comin' thick and fast smote Rocas through and through.

But though he should have bled to death he

bled no gore at all, Instead of leakin' blood, Manuel leaked high-proof alcohol.

"All tremblin' at the sight, Sam turned too late to flee,

For Manuel reached him with the knife and carved him merrily.

He cut six pounds of roastin' meat from off his brisket bone

And chopped the rest to hamburg steak, so Samuel might atone.

"While up in heaven the angels laugh, the devil, down in hell, Is swearin' sultry, sulphurous oaths above our

Sam-u-el.

His imps are workin' overtime and drawin' extra pelf

Assorting Samuel's remnants to a semblance of himself."

Like a gale of wind came the final crashing refrain:

"Hassayampa Sam! 'Ssayampa Sam-u-el! They cut him down to half his size: Hassayampa's go-one to he-ell!"

As the last lingering wail died away and the jubilant laughter of the cow-punchers followed it the tall Bradley Carson shouted above the noise:

"Say, boys, they ought to sing that song to old Pieboy. He'd sure appreciate it."

Quemado's swift eyes swept his face in a direct glance, to find it open and grinning. The slender Slippery Wilkins, a trapjawed young fellow with hard eyes, smiled crookedly.

"Sure fits him plenty personal, if you ask me," he declared. Quemado's gaze danced to him and flitted on as the others, in reckless chorus, echoed this opinion.

"Better not try it," he advised quietly as the noise died down. Brad Carson sobered suddenly.

"I reckon you're right, Quemado," he answered. "Shut up, you fellows."

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There was a sudden cessation of the hilarity. There was no discussion, no resentment. Every man seemed to switch his thoughts at once from the subject.

"Where you riding, Quemado?" asked Wilkins as casually as though a dangerous subject had not just occupied them. As casually Quemado replied.

"I'm taking the southeast lines to-morrow. You know where the station is?"

"Sure. Right up at the head of Bear Creek. Nice little lookout there, Jim."

"I'll be riding out there to-morrow as soon as I get an outfit. Who's riding that line now?"

"A pilgrim from New York. Nice lad, too. The boss is bringing him in for wrangling horses and playing polo. D'you play, Ouemado?"

"No," said Quemado. "What's his name?"

"John Duncan. And say," he glanced around but did not lower his voice, since there was apparently none to hear but the hands, "I'm guessing that John will linger here. He's some busy riding round and sparking Baldy's girl."

"Baldy's girl?"

"I forgot you're just in and don't know the gossip. Sure, Baldy's going to marry Miss Thatcher. They'll make a fine pair, too. Baldy's all right and if he had a little more sense of humor he'd be a prize. But, say, Johnny Duncan's going to mourn when it comes off."

"Hadn't you better let him do his own mourning without help?" asked Quemado gently.

"Right!" said Carson promptly and without resentment. Outside, Baldwin, who had stopped in spite of the attempt that Joanna made at escape as soon as she knew the direction of the conversation, frowned in some perplexity as he noted the ready acquiescence in what sounded like a rebuke, the second that Quemado had given these young fellows. He was annoyed not so much that he and Joanna had been mentioned as at the reference to Duncan. Was that fence rider hanging around Joanna? He recalled merely an occasional meeting and conversation which had hitherto had little significance but now, in the light of sudden jealousy, seemed to acquire importance.

But Joanna, flushed and angry, was walking off. Her anger was not at Carson but at Baldwin, who had ignored her urge to

get out of hearing in order to listen to the discussion. That seemed to argue a lack of delicacy and consideration for her. But he now came hurrying after her.

"Never mind that sort of talk, Jo," he said. "There's bound to be gossip."

"I wasn't thinking of the gossip," she replied absently. She was wondering why it was that anger flared so readily in her against the man she intended to marry. "It's —it's more than that. I wish we hadn't gone to hear the singing."

A formless bulk ahead of them, merging with a row of bushes planted along the terrace edge, moved slightly as they drew nearer but they did not notice it.

"Why, I thought it was very typical and amusing," said Baldy, surprised.

"I'm afraid you don't always appreciate humor—at least Southwestern humor—as Carson hinted," said Joanna moodily.

Baldwin denied the implication hotly.

"Why, that's nonsense," he answered. "I can see a joke—a real joke—as quick as any one."

They had come opposite the formless bulk against the bushes and it moved again, silently, like a threatening shadow. The moonlight shone white at this spot and the burly figure of Pieboy Rankin was easily recognized.

Joanna acknowledged the man's identity with a half-suppressed indraft of breath although she did not start back at his unexpected appearance.

"How!" said the man grimly.

"What is it?" asked Baldwin sharply. The man's hard, seamed face and staring, cruel eyes annoyed him.

"Heard you talkin'," said Pieboy. "I reckon you was listenin' in on that song, same as me. Funny, wasn't it?"

Baldwin did not answer.

"This here Quemado's quite a joker," went on Pieboy musingly but with a certain rumbling anger in his voice. "Quite a joker! We hear a heap about Quemado here a ways."

"Well?" said Baldwin taking Joanna's arm to steer her past the obstructing figure. But she did not move, looking intently at the face of the man, so stern and so evil.

"And I reckon," Pieboy went on drawlingly, "that we'll be hearin' more. Somethin' different we'll hear, I reckon."

"I don't care what we hear about him," said Baldwin shortly and took a step to pass Pieboy. A hand, white and delicate although strong—a hand in startling contrast to the roughness of its owner—fell on his arm and held him like a steel trap.

"You ain't carin', maybe. But, señor, I'm tellin' you something. Don't go to singin' any songs around here that you think are funny—leastwise none about me."

"Baldwin!" breathed Joanna desperately but she was too late. Incensed at what he considered a gratuitous meddling and dictation Baldy flamed out.

"See here!" he said, "I've had enough of this sort of thing. You're trespassing here and I'd thank you to get out. I'm not interested in you or your affairs but I'll sing if I please without your censoring it and I'll retain my own ideas of humor without instruction from you. Do you get that?"

Expecting a tragedy Joanna was surprised to see the big Pieboy fall back a step and release Baldwin, laughing softly as he did so.

"I sabe, all right," he answered contemptuously. "Run along then an' roll your hoop, you an' the girl. Only you might recollect what I say: don't go singin' any 'Hassayampa Sam' in this region."

"You'd better be on your way to Elk Mountain," retorted Baldwin angrily.

Again Pieboy laughed and then strolled away. Joanna whisked about and hastened to the shelter of the deep veranda, where the disgruntled Baldwin followed her.

She turned on him impatiently, her uneasiness manifesting itself in temper.

"Why won't you *ever* learn?" she asked as he stood before her somewhat at a loss to understand her agitation. "You're wonderfully capable in many things, Baldwin. Why can't you understand—grasp—a simple thing like this."

"I don't see what it is that I don't grasp," he replied. "What's the matter with you, Jo? You're seeing things. I haven't a sense of humor because I don't see some tragedy underneath a comic song. I am dense as putty because I don't let that fellow meddle and dictate what I shall say or think."

"But, Baldwin, these people are different! Not exactly that perhaps, but they have a different background. It's a phase of etiquette, perhaps, though it's more than that, too. Can't you see?"

"I'll admit I can't," said Baldwin frankly. "I know they have a sort of overdone tenderness about mentioning things. They remind me of certain heathens who regard some things as sacred and not to be talked about. I certainly can't go about as dumb as an oyster for fear of hurting people's feelings, or whatever it is they are afraid of."

"Why——" Joanna paused as though in despair at making him realize what was plain enough to her though she had never encountered it before. Then in a burst: "It's what isn't talked about! Quemado called off Wilkins, he cautioned you, and now this man has added to the warning, and all about the same thing! They are warning you not to mix in anything between them!"

"But how the deuce am 1 mixing in it? You're wild, Jo! What earthly business have I to be meddling in their squabbles?"

"It isn't a squabble! That's the point, Baldwin. Don't you see that there is something deadly and fatal underneath all this quiet warning and readiness to avoid the subject? I tell you there will be a tragedy here and these people know it. That's why they warn each other not to interfere by even a casual word."

"But I'm not interfering. If they want to kill each other in orthodox dime-novel style, let them. It's silly to think I'll be drawn in for singing a song or laughing at a joke. Anyhow this sensitive bandit isn't the only subject that's forbidden. How about the call-down Quemado gave to Carson—about Duncan?"

Joanna flushed. "You need not have mentioned that," she said. "That's—chivalry, I suppose. Such things are not discussed—I hope—among gentlemen anywhere."

"I hope there's no foundation for discussion," said Baldwin. "You haven't been flirting with Duncan, Joanna?"

"No," said Joanna contemptuously. If the man had only been agitated, either angry or anxious, she would have forgiven. But he was not—unless he was angry at Duncan. And why be angry at the man who was reputed to be attracted by her? A growing resentment against him was being fed by every word he uttered.

And yet, although she had never been wildly in love with Gretorix she had liked and admired him; had even been fond of him. He was a strong, successful man who could give her an enviable position in keeping with her own beauty and distinction. The idea of marrying him had pleased her and there had been no repugnance until she had come to New Mexico at Mrs. Massillon's invitation, ostensibly to bear her company but really to be near Baldwin. Somewhere out here with the desert and mountains all about her, among sunburned men and rough surroundings, she had lost all taste for a life mapped out with Baldwin Gretorix.

But had she lost it then? Honesty compelled her to hesitate before the doubt. That certain things about him that did not exactly match the country and the climate had appeared in him since she had come here was true but up until recently she had felt only a slight reaction to these things. New Mexico was merely a passing phase and New Mexicans were in no sense a part of either her existence or his. In his own environment he would be perfect, and that environment was the one she had been bred to. In California or New York there would be no contrasts to emphasize psychological differences. In either place Gretorix would fit like a glove.

So she had felt until—when? Pondering her doubts, her cheeks flushed with a slowly growing suffusion of blood. When? Recently, very recently! Was it only to-night that the doubt and the revolt had suddenly leaped into being? Nonsense. It must be a thing of slower growth, an accumulation of impressions, unnoticed hitherto but suddenly assuming importance!

But why should it be so difficult to avoid recalling that slender, straight, black figure in outlandish costume with whom she had —as yet—exchanged hardly one word beyond a murmur following his introduction to her? Why should the thought of an impending quarrel, even a fatal one, between this man and another, weigh her down with foreboding?

Suddenly angry at herself her mood changed.

"Let's don't be silly," she said, laying her hand on his arm. "I'm foolish, I suppose. Only—I wish we were through here and going back to our own place. Some of these things get on my nerves, I think."

Baldwin laughed in ready acceptance of her surrender. "I can see how that would be," he said tolerantly. "These veiled warnings and tragic appearances in the gloom, men with legendary reputations as killers and all the rest, are enough to disturb you. But this is the twentieth century and even New Mexico is civilized."

Joanna sighed. "I suppose you're right,"

she said. But his very assurance grated on her. "We had better go in."

## CHAPTER V.

Early in the morning Joanna Thatcher was roused and drawn to her window overlooking the court by some unexplained impulse of curiosity. But it was not adequately rewarded. She did, it is true, see Quemado, but merely in the prosaic rôle of one who prepares for work. He appeared with his own horse and a pack horse all laden, and rode away without so much as a glance at the house. Furthermore he was now dressed like any other cow hand, in woolen shirt, unbuttoned waistcoat and blue jeans over his trousers and boots.

Somewhat disillusioned and disappointed Joanna appeared for breakfast to find Marcella Castro making preparations for a ride.

"I'm going to Pajillito, Joanna," she said. "Do you want to go along?"

"I've no preference," the other answered. "But what is there there? It is nothing but a Mexican hamlet, isn't it?"

"I want to see about something there," said Marcella. Mr. Massillon listened and commented.

"You had better have some one go with you, I think. Duncan came in last night and I'll tell him to ride with you."

He telephoned the cottage and pretty soon Duncan appeared with the horses. He was rather silent as he waited for them and when Gretorix came out to go to his office in the cottage greeted him with the barest of nods. Baldwin stopped and frowned.

"I thought you were with the horse herd to-day," he said. Duncan inclined his head toward the house.

"Massillon's orders," he said. Baldwin shrugged his shoulders and walked away. He was irritated and annoyed at Duncan's being detailed to escort Joanna where the appointment of any other would not have affected him.

As for Johnny, he cared little for Gretorix and as long as he could ride with Marcella Castro allowed nothing to trouble him. When the two girls came out he stepped forward to hold Marcella's stirrup for her but she laughed at him.

"I was riding bronks before you were in long trousers," she said, waving him aside. Then, a hand on the reins at the horse's neck and another on the saddle horn, she suddenly shouted, slashed the animal with her hand and as it leaped and whirled at a run she took a running step or two, hopped once or twice and then vaulted into the saddle as lightly as a bird.

As she tore off at a dead run Johnny turned to Joanna and assisted her, grinning. "Look at that girl ride," he said. A moment after he was spurring ahead of Joanna in an effort to catch the flying figure while Joanna galloped along more leisurely.

When they had calmed down and joined forces again Joanna, considerate of their interest in each other, rode at a little distance. The conversation, however, was mostly of Johnny's affairs and fast developed into an incipient quarrel. Duncan had confessed to Marcella, the daughter of a cattleman, that he was going into the sheep business with Hiram Docherty. After Marcella had become somewhat reconciled to this-although she declared that her father never would be -they rode on across the open range after passing the last fences until they finally came to the road which wound down to the valley in which Pajillito lay. The dusty road meandered on, an occasional adobe structure. a light, sickly brown in color, with rafters projecting through the walls, being the only sign of habitation. These merged finally in a group of houses lining the road at closer intervals.

An elderly man in a priest's cassock, together with several Mexicans, was at work on what seemed to be a stone edifice at one end of the street. In the doorways of the houses lounged women clad in shapeless cotton or sateen dresses, black or gray in color. Their sleek, crow-black hair was plastered to their heads. Children played in the dust but scattered and ran to shelter as the visitors rode through the lane. The women and the few lounging men watched them silently and inscrutably. Johnny addressed a question in English to one of the men, to be greeted with a stare and a muttered "No sabel"

"Hernando Ramirez!" Marcella spoke to Joanna. "He understands English well, the sneaky rat!"

They came to the place where the priest and the men were at work on what was now seen to be the foundation for a church. The padre had a more intellectual face than the others. One of the men held a drill and another a heavy sledge, with which he struck the drill as its holder squatted beside the stone. Marcella began talking with the priest about the ostensible object of her visit, some charitable enterprise. The padre answered her courteously and Marcella exchanged with him a few polite inquiries about his flock. These also he answered formally.

"And Hernando Ramirez, whom we passed but now? Is it that he has lost his tongue or has he forgotten what English he spoke?"

The priest shrugged his shoulders. "Panchito does not like the gringos, señorita," he replied. "Since Quemado—you understand?"

Joanna heard the name and turned sharply from her contemplation of the stolid peons. She listened now to what Marcella was saying.

"It was his sister, was it not, that Quemado carried off?"

The padre nodded, a sorrowful look on his face. "He will not forget that wrong nor forgive, señorita," he said.

"Your pardon, padre!" broke in Joanna. "I am a newcomer here and am ignorant of many things. May I ask what is this of one who has carried off the sister of Ramirez?"

Marcella fell back a little, an enigmatic look on her face. As the priest glanced inquiringly at her before replying to Joanna she gave him a slight nod.

"It is a regrettable story, señorita," said the priest. "One can hardly blame my people for disliking the gringos when such things can happen. There is one of the Americanos who is a veritable fiend, a child of the devil indeed, whom they call Quemado because he is a brand of hell. He is accursed with the beauty that turns women's silly heads as his master Satan intended should be the case.

"It was this one who when a marriage had been arranged between Conchita Ramirez. a lovely girl of my flock, and our esteemed sheriff's brother, Pancho Garcia, sent word to Hernando Ramirez that if he let the girl wed Pancho, the wedding night would see Pajillito exposed to fire and disaster. But Garcia, the sheriff, vowed that he would uphold the law and come with his deputies. Notwithstanding which, on the wedding night, when the bride was about to join her spouse at the altar, which had been blessed in the parish house, this devil Quemado, with his attendant imp, the murderous Rankeen, descended upon us. One of them set fire to the wood which had been stored in my patio and the arbor which supported my poor vines while the other frightened the people by shooting at the door and shouting his barbarous threats. Our brave sheriff, it is true, ran with his deputies to the front and the bride in great fear sought refuge in the patio, not noting that it was afire.

"Then while the brave Garcia was fighting off the fiend in front the twice-cursed Quemado galloped through the garden on his horse. I heard him laughing above the poor girl's screams as he swept her to his saddle and galloped away with her, leaping the wall at the rear before the brave Garcia could come to her rescue.

"You may be sure that we followed hard but it was useless. Quemado has horses which the devil, his master, obtained for him from the infidel Turks and which our beasts could not catch. He vanished away with the girl and that is the last that we have seen of her to this day although I pray for her soul always, señorita."

Joanna was listening in horror to this cruel tale of outrage. Marcella watched her through narrowed eyes.

"But, padre, there is the law and you say that the sheriff is Garcia, the brother of the bridegroom! Surely he could have held this man to account!"

The priest shrugged his shoulders. "It would seem that it should be so," he said wearily. "Yet the man is an Americano and the courts are not kind to Mexicanos who have suits against such. It is perhaps as the sheriff has said; that we put our hopes in ourselves and seek redress in such ways as offer. But I do not approve of violence and that is what I fear he advocates."

Joanna was bewildered and shocked. "And what became of the girl?" she asked. The priest shook his head and made the sign of the cross.

"Can you ask?" he sighed. "I pray that her tortured soul may find rest with God."

Joanna, sick at heart, turned away and the two others followed her. She rode in silence to the edge of the village and out onto the plain. Marcella and Johnny ranged alongside of her.

"But why?" she breathed, half to herself. "Why did he do it?"

"If you ask me, only Quemado knows or the devil, as the padre would undoubtedly suggest," said Marcella. "Anyway, now you have Quemado's pedigree."

Joanna shuddered, in her mind's eye a

picture of a shrieking, hopeless, maddened maiden being borne away. Then Duncan spoke.

"What was the yarn the padre told her?" he asked. "I caught enough to know it was about Quemado but my Spanish isn't good enough to get it all."

Marcella told him briefly and he listened shrewdly to her summary of the story.

"There's something wrong with that," he said at the end, heedless of Marcella's flashing eyes which vainly ordered him to be still. "D'you mean to tell me that this bandit could ride off with a girl against her will in the face of the sheriff of the county? Why, he'd never dare show his face again anywhere and yet here's Quemado prancing about the country without a care on his mind. And that's all rot about the courts. Three of the county judges are Mexicans and the juries are notoriously packed with them. Garcia is sheriff, too."

"But everybody knows it's true," declared Marcella.

"Oh, everybody's heard that Quemado carried the girl off. I've heard it too. But nobody thinks she was unwilling to go. If she was, how long would Quemado last?"

"I don't see that her willingness excuses him," said Marcella tartly.

"It casts some doubt on that padre's yarn, anyway," asserted Johnny. "Those Mexicans are out after Quemado, I'll grant you that, but I'll bet there's another side to the story."

"There's no very good side, at any rate," said Marcella.

Joanna rode on in silence, angry at herself for several reasons. In the first place she was angry because Quemado interested her at all. She was angry because her interest had led her to inquire into his story and more angry because she had been so shocked at it. Again she was angry because Johnny Duncan's doubt had pleased her. She confessed that she would be glad to have those doubts confirmed.

A certain fear was taking possession of her. She recognized that this interest in a man whom she did not know was extraordinary although she would have denied that it had any sentimental basis. Yet it made her uneasy, especially when she remembered that, whenever Quemado filled her mind the possibility of her engagement to Gretorix became more than ever distasteful.

As they rode on she looked about her at the bare and arid wastes of sandy soil and mesquite and sage. The blue sky above and the bare earth beneath seemed to take on a character of sinister hardness. Blue mountains screened with timber, far off to the west, lay dim against the horizon. Between her and them lay tumbled bare hills, yellow and glaring in the sun. She felt an urge to head straight across the wastes and keep traveling until she reached the mountains and then to bury herself among the trees, to sleep beside the running, tumbling streams and to crouch over a camp fire while the darkness crept around her and the cold of the high places drove the heat of day into retirement.

"I wonder if we couldn't go hunting and fishing up in the mountains some time," she asked Marcella.

That young woman at once fell in with the idea and began to lay plans for such an expedition. But immediately Joanna regretted her suggestion. She didn't want a planned expedition. She wanted to plunge into the wilderness by herself—or at least almost by herself. She wanted no guides and helpers to fuss with tents and packs and to cook meals for them. She wanted—

She abruptly made up her mind that what she wanted was to be alone, somewhere or anywhere. She wasn't happy and the more she contemplated a future all mapped out for her the more unhappy she became. She was in a state of revolt and because her revolt would not be understood she did not want to share it with her intimates. She was lonely, that was it. No one understood her nor could understand her because she did not understand herself.

And suddenly she found herself wondering if Quemado would understand her; if, behind his splendid surface there lay the brain and heart to understand and to feel.

Impatiently she uttered an exclamation.

"Oh, come on, for Heaven's sake!" she cried and spurred her horse to a gallop. Marcella exchanged a meaning look with Johnny and then the two raced after her. But, with some intuition, Marcella restrained the young man and they contented themselves with keeping pace with Joanna at a distance of twenty-five yards or so.

Thus, sometimes riding fast and sometimes slowing down, they came home at last to The Manor. Flushed and tired, Joanna felt more calm.

## CHAPTER VI.

Perhaps it was Johnny's obvious satisfaction with affairs that again irritated Gretorix or maybe it was general dissatisfaction at a fairly obvious interruption to the progress of his affair with Joanna. At any rate his temper was stirred and uncertain and he felt a sullen antagonism to the young fellow where before had been nothing but contempt. He had seen the three return from their ride and Joanna go into the house without a word for him. She retired to her room with the excuse that she had a headache and did not appear again.

And on the day following the trip to Pajillito, Johnny Duncan did not go to work with the horses but remained at the cottage until Gretorix was about. When the manager entered his office about nine o'clock Johnny was lounging before the door instead of being about his business and Baldwin greeted this delinquency with a frown. Johnny Duncan meant to him a source of mingled annoyance and a constant reminder of his own personal difficulties.

"I thought you were to go to work with the horses this morning?" he said as Duncan straightened up to meet him.

"No," said Duncan, "I'm waiting to get my time."

"Your time? Do you mean that you're quitting?"

"That's what I mean."

"Isn't that rather sudden?"

Duncan shrugged his shoulders. "It isn't too sudden for me," he retorted. "I'm not working for this outfit any more."

Gretorix was annoyed still more. He hated to have his plans go wrong even in minor details. His vague antagonism to Duncan, a man that he looked upon with a certain contempt, flared into resentment. Gretorix was a man of system and method and he hated to have the ordered course of his affairs disturbed by the vagaries of others.

"Well, I'll make out your check, but it seems to me you might have had the decency to give me a little more notice. Not that we can't get along without you," he added with a sneer.

"I reckon we can both get along without each other," said Johnny. "As for notice, I was hired to ride the fences. You didn't ask me or give me any notice when you dragged me in to play with your horse herd." "Oh," said Baldwin unpleasantly. "You don't like being in here, is it? Rather hang about where you aren't under any eyes and can do as you please."

"Johnny flushed red. "I generally do as I please no matter where I am, Mr. Gretorix."

"So I see," said Gretorix as he entered the office. "It's as well that you do it somewhere else, then. We don't care to have any such independence here. And when doing as you please boils down to forcing yourself as escort on Miss Thatcher and Miss Castro it becomes annoying. Here's your check."

Johnny took the check and folded it. "I'm going to tell you something, Gretorix," he said, slowly. "You're not only a liar but you're a fool!"

Gretorix's temper was frayed and strained to the breaking point. It broke now. With a strangled cry of rage he leaped forward and struck at Johnny. The rider stepped back, threw up an arm in defense, stumbled on the door sill and lurched backward into the open. Neither of them saw that the occupants of The Manor had come out on the terrace where they could see the quarrel.

Following up the retreating man Gretorix rushed in swinging his fists. He was far larger than Johnny, a powerful and dynamic man. The rider had an advantage in quickness but that was all. He was also at a disadvantage from having been thrown off his balance and the high boot heels interfered somewhat with his activity. Still, although retreating he got in a stinging blow on Baldwin's cheek. Then the bigger man closed with him.

Smashing, short-arm blows crashed home. Johnny clinched blindly, striving to bind his opponent's arms but Gretorex tore them loose and uppercut him viciously. Duncan staggered back, tried to recover and as Baldwin ran in again was hurled to the ground. Breathing heavily, Gretorix stood over him, threatening.

"Get up, you sheep!" he snarled, "and take what's coming to you!"

Johnny was not much hurt and drew himself together, preparatory to renewing the fight. He was on one knee, about to spring up, his face distorted with rage and marred with blood from a bleeding mouth, when Massillon, followed closely by Marcella, ran forward shouting to Gretorix.

"What does this mean, Baldwin?" cried the owner of the ranch angrily. Baldwin uttered a short laugh and fell back while Johnny slowly rose to his feet.

"This blackguard gave me a bit too much of his impudence and I lost my temper," he said. "Sorry, Massillon. But I can't take names like that from a worthless remittance man."

"How's that!" Massillon turned sternly on Duncan. The young man stood there dusting the hat he had retrieved.

"You lie again," he said harshly. "I told him he was a liar and a fool and I repeat it, Mr. Massillon. Furthermore, if you'll stand out of the way I'll do my best to make him admit it."

Baldwin laughed shortly and contemptuously. "It's all nonsense, of course," he said. "I shouldn't have made such a scene. But the man's discharged and I hope that will be the end of it."

Massillon became the business man at once. "If you've discharged him that is the end of it. There is no need to carry the matter into brawling and fighting. You, Duncan, had better get your things together and go, if you've been paid off. Let it end there."

Johnny looked from under his hat brim with lowering eyes. "It doesn't end there," he said. "You'll realize that later, Mr. Gretorix."

He looked at Marcella who had stood frowning behind Massillon and except for a cry when they had come on the scene had uttered no sound. "Sorry, Miss Castro. I'm afraid I won't have that ride after all."

Marcella did not answer in words. She raised one hand and pinched her lip, looking thoughtfully at Johnny and then at Gretorix. Then she nodded and turned away. Johnny ruefully flexed a fist that had been barked in the struggle and then walked off toward the stable to get his horse. In a few moments he came out, went into the cottage and began to gather his things together. Marcella and the other two men walked to the veranda.

Joanna and Ruth met them with anxious inquiries.

"Oh, it was nothing but a rotten squabble," said Gretorix impatiently. "Duncan has been presuming on the fact that you rode with him, I suppose. He got impertinent and I lost my temper."

"Because he rode with us?" asked Joanna with ominous calm. This nettled Gretorix again.

"No!" he said too emphatically. "He called me a liar."

"Why did he call you a liar?" asked Marcella quietly.

But Gretorix did not answer that. He followed Massillon into the house where his employer led him to a smaller room, used as a library, off the big living room. There Massillon motioned him to a seat.

"See here, Gretorix," he began abruptly. "Something is wrong, isn't there? I don't mean about your discharging this fellow. That's all right if he deserved it. It's your affair anyhow. But I don't understand your flying off the handle this way."

"To tell the truth," said Gretorix, "I don't understand it myself, entirely. Something is wrong and I'm not sure that I know what it is."

"It won't do, I think," said Massillon. "It isn't so much your hitting Duncan-but suppose it had been some one else vou tackled."

"What do you mean?" Gretorix thought he detected an imputation on his courage in attacking a smaller man and resented it.

"I mean that you may fight with Duncan and it's merely a fight. Presumably you've made an enemy but an enemy who'll probably act as you or I would act under the circumstances. Duncan, however, is one type, and a type we all know. There are men here who are not his type and you must not go knocking them about. You understand me, don't you?"

"If you mean that I'm to take blackguarding from any of these men, I don't understand you."

Massillon tapped the arm of his chair impatiently. "I'm used to reading men, Baldwin, and I thought you were. Suppose you had to handle employees in the South-or a bunch of Sicilians?"

"I think I get what you are driving at," said Gretorix. "It would hardly do to rely on fists with them."

"It would not do to rely on the assumption that ordinary methods applied to them at all. The point is that different kinds of people have different attitudes toward such matters. You might whip one of these cowboys with your fists, but would he admit that he was whipped?"

"He'd have to, I should think," grinned Baldwin.

"No more than you would admit a fair whipping received from a Japanese jujutsu expert administered through his peculiar skill. You'd think he'd taken an advantage of you." "And so he would have done."

"You'd want to get even by trying him at your specialty, wouldn't you?"

"If I get what you're aiming at, Massillon, you mean that if I fight any more men here, especially our cowboys-which isn't at all likely. I assure you—I'd best be prepared to be shot. Is that it?"

Massillon shook his head. "We've got a greater problem on our hands than I think you realize, Baldwin," he said. "I imagine that most of the men around here are quite willing to rely on fists and take a whipping just like any one else, if they can't give one. On ordinary occasions I judge that they are not any more dangerous or vindictive than others. Still-"

He paused and reflected before resuming.

"There's a certain survival of custom and instinct, if you can call it that. I've noticed it here and there. There is a certain cautious reticence at times, a meticulous attention to one's own affairs apparent, that seems to us overdrawn. There are also persons who seem somehow to be set apart, in a way of speaking. Such men as this Quemado, for example."

"All of which is easily explained by the fact that they are survivals," said Baldwin. "I assume that Quemado is a gunman who's peculiar conception of honor would require him to kill any man who quarreled with him. But what has that to do with me?"

But again Massillon shook his head. "T think it's deeper than that," he said. "In fact, I think Quemado would go out of his way to avoid a guarrel-because a guarrel may be so serious."

"Well, I'm not likely to quarrel with him," said Baldwin. "I admit that I'd stand no chance and I don't intend to commit suicide even if they hanged him afterward. As for this other episode, it is finished. I've been short tempered lately and forgot myself. That's all."

Massillon trimmed the end of a cigar. "I'm afraid this fellow may make further trouble. Joanna and Marcella were talking this morning about yesterday's ride. They were quite facetious but I gathered that young Duncan is somewhat smitten with Marcella. And you humiliated him in front of her."

"All the better for her," said Baldwin.

"It will show the worthless pup in his true light, in case she has been taken with him."

Massillon rose. "Perhaps. But it is just possible, although I don't think so, that he has been inoculated with this—whatever it is that makes a Southwesterner. In that case he may be dangerous."

Baldwin merely laughed.

A few days later a man rode up to The Manor asking for Gretorix. He was a huge, grizzled, rock-faced man, Scotch-Irish in blood, a man whose character was like his looks, rock hard, dour, straightforward. Such a man as would take a course and keep to it though the whole world opposed.

"Hiram Docherty," Marcella told Joanna as they saw him engage Gretorix in conversation before the office door. "He owns more sheep than any other man in this part of the country. But he's square."

Out before the cottage Gretorix was listening to the sheepman's proposals.

"We're drivin' north to the desert below Elk Mountain," Docherty told Gretorix. "There ain't no water down this way except what you've got fenced above your reservoir. If I have to go up in the hills I'll be hard driven to get any unless I go way back beyond Pajillito. What I was aimin' to ask was, could we go through your fence up on Hermosa Creek and water there? Of course we'd tie up the wire and see that the cattle didn't git away and we'll just water and git right out again."

Gretorix gave this some thought. "I don't see why you can't," he said. "There aren't any cows in that pasture now and we don't intend to put any there for some time. You could cut the wire and drive to the creek without scattering your flocks. I suppose?"

without scattering your flocks, I suppose?" "Oh, we'll herd 'em close," said Docherty. "I don't aim to spoil your grass. And we'll pay fer the water, if you say so."

"You're welcome to the water. But you'll be careful not to let your sheep get away and graze. If that's understood, go ahead."

Docherty gathered up his reins. "That's right neighborly, amigo," he said. "I'm thankin' you fer it."

This episode reached Marcella's ears in due time and set her thinking. She had not seen Johnny Duncan since he had gone from the ranch but Brad Carson had told her that he was with Docherty and probably would be with the sheep for the rest of the season. It was probable that he would be on this drive in some capacity or other.

She and Joanna were accustomed to riding out almost daily and it was a simple matter to turn their course toward the upper part of the range above the reservoir when they started out a few days later.

They skirted the great pastures, following the outer fence and noting with interest the contrast already apparent between the range on one side the barrier and that on the other. Outside the wire the sandy soil lay bare and forbidding, with scattered, straggling, short-stemmed bunch grass eaten almost level with the ground. Spiny prickly pear cactus alternated with gnarled sage and spiky yucca. Sheep trails crisscrossed the plain in endless confusion of paths and on the barbs of the fence fluttered tufts of white wool where the animals had brushed along it and tried in vain to gain the other side.

On that other side there was a difference. Here the grass grew in strong tufts, scattered but thriving. Even the cactus was different, for Baldwin had sown freely since he had come and now, among the spined varieties there cropped numerous fat, warty plants of the spineless kind developed by Burbank. The soil had a warmth and life that was utterly lacking in the open country, a more lively color and a vastly greater capacity. In every swale that would hold any moisture tall grasses were growing prolifically, green and yellow in the sunlight.

As they rode along, the evidence of converging sheep became more apparent. The trails became a wild, tangled confusion until the arid soil was beaten into dust which sifted up from every step their horses took. Along the fences the little tufted balls of wool clung thicker, almost hiding the wire.

Finally, far ahead of them, they heard a low, monotonous noise, the incessant, toneless *baa-ing* of countless sheep. It grew louder as they went on until it filled the air with a maddening, clamorous, senseless complaint.

Then they came over a sharp rise, the ridge separating the creek from the plain, and before them beheld the rolling valley crowded now with blatting imbeciles.

The wire ran along the ridge, well up on their side. Outside of it, trickling along the hillside in confused lines, hundreds and thousands of sheep wandered, strolling along at leisure, stopping to crop grass or to look about them, jumping in sudden, idiot haste and crowding to leap upon each other. Swirling and drifting they meandered along the trails while dogs trotted on the flanks of the flock and kept them moving in the right direction. A man against the sky line walked slowly along while another, lower down, followed the flock.

Behind the man on the sky line followed a wagon and a rider.

Below them the fence had been cut for a width of about a hundred feet and through it poured another flock, jostling, crushing and blatting as they hurried to water. Dogs raced around them and the herders called and shouted to keep them from spreading wide over the lush grass. Ahead the crystal creek was fouled and churned to soup where the animals trampled in it.

At the break in the fence sat a horseman, a dark man wearing a sombrero. He was silent and motionless, leaning on his saddle horn as he watched the performance. It was Gonzales, the Mexican fence rider for this section of wire.

Joanna watched the scene fascinated. She did not notice that Marcella, seeing her abstraction, had stolen another glance at the wagon trailing along the sky line and stealthily turned her horse. A moment later she had ridden off, leaving Joanna alone.

Her horse at a gallop, Marcella climbed the slope, and the rider behind the wagon shortly saw her and turned back to meet her. They came together on top of the ridge and sat there conversing while the sheep trailed on, spreading out in long lines to crawl around the head of the valley where the fence ended.

The wagon went on out of sight and the sheep in the pasture crowded and swirled forward toward the water. Those that were satisfied were driven away and herded close with dogs ranging vigilantly around them. Others took their places in an endless rush of bleating crowds.

"I'm hard at it, you see," said Johnny as he swept a hand over the scene. Marcella turned up her nose.

"You shouldn't boast of it," she replied. "What sort of animal is that for a man to associate with? But I didn't come here to discuss sheep. I want to know what happened between you and Gretorix."

Johnny's face darkened. "That'll be all right. He got the first round. I'd rather not discuss it."

"But I must know. Did he discharge you and what for?"

"You know he didn't. " Juit Then he

insinuated it was because I was set up and thought myself too good to do anything but ride around and play squire to dames. I told him he was a liar and a fool—and he hit me."

"You were both fools," said Marcella sagely. "But since you've taken to being intimate with sheep I can expect nothing else from you. But what are you going to do about him, I mean?"

"I don't know," said Johnny. "Whip him the first chance I get, if I can."

"I don't think you can. But, anyhow, you're not going to-----"

"Oh, I'm not going to lay for him and bushwhack him with a gun. I'll get square with him in a legitimate way. Darn it, what's Pancho doing?"

He looked down at the sheep in the pasture. The flock, most of which had watered by now, instead of being turned to the fence was milling in a vast jam not far from the water. One of the herders was standing idly, leaning on a rifle which he carried. The other shouted something and pointed toward the head of the valley across the pasture. The Mexican at the gap in the fence straightened suddenly in his saddle.

Johnny broke away from Marcella and spurred his horse down the slope. He waved his hat and yelled, motioning in a wide sweep.

"Get going, Garcia!" he yelled. The idle herder looked up and waved in answer. The dogs barked and dashed among the sheep. The fence rider relaxed in his saddle. Johnny rode back to Marcella.

The wagon had sunk below the sky line and was out of sight. Far away the last of the sheep trailing the hillside were disappearing in the folds of the upper valley.

"I'll have to be getting along," said Johnny regretfully. "But don't worry. I'll not kill Gretorix if you'd rather have him alive."

"I wish some one would kill him—or get rid of him," said Marcella. "Efficiency experts aren't needed in this country yet. But you be careful. Don't let these sheep affect you to any imbecility."

"I won't," said Johnny with a laugh. "And if I come back in a little while can I come to the Forkhandle and see you?"

"Why, we wouldn't even turn a sheepman away. You know that," said Marcella.

"Docherty likes me," said Johnny vaguely.

"He hasn't any children—and he and his wife want to let go and go back to the old country next year. I'm going to make good here, Marcella. Would that make any difference to you?"

"We'll see about it—when you make good," said Marcella.

Johnny held out his hand and she put hers in it. He shook it frankly, wheeled his horse and a moment later rode over the sky line and down on the other side.

### CHAPTER VII.

Joanna, watching the sheep, felt more and more at peace with herself and her world. The blazing sunlight and bracing air made for physical well-being and the sight of the mauling, milling animals was interesting and absorbing. She found herself laughing at their crazy helplessness and marveling at the intelligence of the tireless dogs. She did not notice that Marcella was gone until some time had passed. Then, seeing her far up the hill talking to Duncan, she thought no more of her.

But when Johnny had gone Marcella after a moment rode to the crest of the ridge and halted there to watch him as he galloped out of sight following his wagon. Joanna again did not notice but remained absorbed in watching the sheep.

After Johnny had called and signaled to the herders there was a moment of activity. Joanna supposed that the sheep were about to be driven out of the gap to take up the trail of the other flock. But all they did was mill about in apparent senseless confusion while the dogs raced and yelped around the bunched woollies.

One of the herders should to the other. The man he addressed answered in an argumentative way but the first speaker gesticulated insistently. The other finally shrugged his shoulders and turned. The dogs got an order and sprang at once to work.

To Joanna's amazement the sheep straightened out and began to drift, a bellwether leading them. Straggling, running, stopping, leaping, they scattered out and began to trail—not toward the gap in the wire but up the valley along the course of the little stream. They trampled and cropped the lush grass cruelly and behind them as they drifted on appeared barren lines of trail.

Startled she picked up her reins and her dozing horse came to life. She began to

ride down to the pasture with some vague idea of interfering.

But the fence rider was ahead of her. As the course of the sheep became apparent he came out of his trance with a shout. In another instant he was whirling along outside the fence, crying orders to the herders which they affected not to understand. The sheep drifted along unmindful of his objections. Joanna spurred her horse and rode faster.

Now the fence rider, seeing that the herders paid no heed to his orders, wheeled again and started back on the run for the gap. He pivoted through it on his horse's haunches and was off like a shot in the wake of the sheep. Joanna, entering the gap behind him, saw him range up alongside the herder and engage in a heated argument. Both of them waved their arms excitably and oaths rose above the dispute.

The fence rider suddenly abandoned reason and went on to force. He galloped away toward the head of the flock, scattering stray sheep ahead of him. He shouted and waved his hat and a dog sprang at him, barking and snarling.

But before he could make any successful effort to turn the sheep the herder with the rifle coolly raised the gun, aimed it carefully and fired. The fence rider lurched in his saddle, almost fell out of it, straightened with a vast effort. His horse swerved, either of its own volition or in response to the rein. The sheep drifted on and the man with the rifle stood there with it half lowered, ready for another shot.

Joanna stopped with a jerk, her horse plunging. She felt a vast astonishment, not exactly shock but a simple noncomprehension. A man had been shot but she was unable to realize it for the moment. The wounded man's horse, wheeling, ears back, nostrils distended, was rushing about in a half circle, heading back toward her. The man, crumpled up, clutched the saddle and lurched to every leap of the animal.

Then she awoke to reality as the horse thundered past her with snorting breath. She saw the gray face above the saddle horn and the black stain spreading on the man's denim jacket. His tangled black hair fell over his face and his hat lay on the ground back by the sheep.

The herder uncertainly raised his rifle again. Joanna dragged her rein across her horse's neck and whirled the animal across the path the rider had taken, interposing herself between him and a second shot. The herder pointed excitedly. The other man was running back toward him, gesticulating. The man who had fired the shot swept a hand across his forehead, turned to the sheep and whistled shrilly to the dogs. With every evidence of haste they fell on the flock and hurried it on at top speed.

Joanna tried to think but her mind was blank. She did not know what to do though she knew that she should do something. There through the gap went the wounded man and here his murderer hastened away. There should be a warning and succor for the victim but where was she to go to give one or get the other? She looked around for Marcella but the girl was nowhere in sight.

First and foremost the wounded man needed help. Joanna comprehended that and she also knew that his horse was running away. That offered her a clear course and she took it. Wheeling, she roweled her horse and settled down to catch the other.

The frightened animal had turned along the fence and still was running but not with the panic speed of his first flight. His swaying rider still clung to the horn with the instinct of the born horseman. He would not fall until all strength departed from him.

Joanna settled in the saddle, her feet straight against the stirrups, her knees loose. The horse gathered his limbs beneath him, laid out his head and took the ground in great, tearing leaps. With rein loose, head up, right hand swung out, the girl urged him on with tapping spurs. At the gap in the wire he swung out and Joanna let her right knee swing against the leather while her left foot swung out against the stirrup. It was not park riding. It was the loose-seated, perfectly balanced horsemanship of the range. Her body lay in the saddle as in a cradle.

The fence rider's horse was slowing down and she was gaining as the animal's panic left it. But the pounding hoofs behind started him up again and she gained but slowly. Along the fence they tore, the dust around them and the wire sweeping past as the wind beat in Joanna's face.

Miles swept behind them and the man still clung, though swaying drunkenly in the saddle now. Leaping sage and yucca the girl rode like a storm and ahead of her ran the other horse, losing ground foot by foot. A confident determination had succeeded to her confusion of mind. Horror and panic had gone.

Then as they tore up the long slope of a rise another figure appeared suddenly on the sky line, paused a moment. She heard a cry, saw a hand flung up. Her horse was closing on the runaway and the wounded man was reeling from side to side.

The man ahead was cutting across the path of the runaway. The fence rider's horse saw him, planted its feet, jolted to a sliding stop, wheeled as though to dart away in another direction and, as though concluding that it was hopeless to escape, took a step or two and stopped, head hanging, flanks sweating and heaving. The man on his back half turned and flopped with sodden looseness to the ground.

Joanna's horse was dragged to a stop. The other man left his while it was still running and landed on light feet beside the fence rider. In another instant Joanna was down beside him.

The man stooped over, tore the denim jacket open, laid his hand on the Mexican's breast, shook his head and straightened up. It was Quemado.

"That was a good ride," he said quietly, "but you were too late. He's dead."

Joanna was surprised to feel no shock. Her interest was sober and practical as though the expected had been discounted.

"I did my best," she said.

"You couldn't have helped him. Wonder was that he lived at all. Must have come some distance." He glanced at her horse, dripping and blown.

Joanna indicated with a nod of the head the direction from which they had come.

"It happened back where they were watering sheep. They'd cut a gap in the fence. A sheep-herder shot him."

"Who else was there?" asked Quemado.

"Nobody except the other herder. Marcella Castro was with me but she went off somewhere. The other sheep and a wagon had gone on and were out of sight."

Quemado straightened up and leaned against his saddle. He pulled tobacco and papers from a pocket in the breast of his shirt and rolled a cigarette. The action, casual in the face of tragedy as it seemed, did not shock Joanna. She was taking the matter coolly and impersonally herself.

"What's to be done about it?" she asked. Quemado for the first time appeared to give her his attention. His eyes came to rest on her face and remained there, steady and cool.

"You've got good sand," he said contemplatively. She felt slightly warmed by his approval, even in face of the dead man. "You're not afraid to stay with that?"

A nod of the head indicated the corpse. Joanna felt a little vague wonder because she did not shudder nor feel any great emotion.

"No," she said.

"I'll have to go and close the gap—and I'll pick up Miss Castro. Will you wait or come with me?"

"I'll wait."

Without another word Quemado turned and swung into his saddle. A moment later he was spurring back on her route almost as fast as she had come. Joanna watched him go until he was out of sight. Then, although the still form of Gonzales lay there near her, covered by Quemado with his saddle blanket, she sat down with a strange absence of fear and horror to think what all this upheaval might mean to her and her ordered and planned existence.

Quemado rode fast and mechanically and he too was thinking, but it would have been hard to guess what went on behind his still features. Wild plans, vague and impulsive, were, no doubt, half forming in his restless, reckless mind; plans which swirled about a girl with black hair and blue eyes—a girl that was going to marry Gretorix.

He came up to the gap in the wire at last, finding no signs of sheep except the place where they had left the field. He mended the breaks and turned back. He found Marcella coursing anxiously about looking for Joanna, and briefly told her what had occurred.

"Oh, what *will* this mean to Johnny!" she whispered with suppressed horror. Quemado shrugged his shoulders as he reined his horse around and led the way back to Joanna.

They found her still sitting beside the dead man, her hands in her lap. Marcella was volubly sympathetic at what she imagined must have been Joanna's terrible ordeal but the latter simply smiled at her agitation.

"I hardly think this is the worst of it," she said quietly. Her eyes met Quemado's and he nodded.

"What do you mean?" asked Marcella.

ginning. His death isn't so bad as what it means, is it?"

Quemado was fastening the gruesome burden to the man's horse while Joanna and Marcella sat on their horses at a little distance.

Marcella was paler and more distressed than Joanna.

"It will mean trouble, of course. But they can't blame Johnny—or Hiram Docherty. They never dreamed of anything like this. Why, I was with Johnny when he waved to Garcia to take the sheep out through the gap."

Yet she was wondering if Garcia would not, in case he was charged with the crime, swear that he interpreted Johnny's motion to mean that he was to drive through the pasture.

Quemado had mounted as she spoke. He caught the name she uttered.

"Garcia? Was that the herder who shot him?"

"Yes," said Marcella, paling still more. "It was Pancho."

Quemado laughed shortly. Joanna suddenly recalled that this was the Mexican whose bride Quemado was said to have stolen. But the fact struck her as having small significance.

"Johnny had nothing to do with it," Marcella said as though she found it necessary to bolster her own belief by iteration.

"Of course not," said Joanna soothingly. "We all know that."

Quemado jogged behind them, leading the horse burdened with the dead man. They had taken the way through the fence offering a short cut to The Manor. Here and there groups of broad-backed cattle grazed peacefully.

"But will Gretorix know it?" Marcella half whispered. "Johnny threatened him the other day."

"Nothing happened to Johnny," said Quemado dryly.

Marcella flushed and Joanna smiled. A few days ago the younger girl had been the one who had directed, the experienced and shrewdly capable guide of the other. Now the rôles were reversed in the most unexpected way. Joanna had acquired some inward strength which was inexplicable.

And so they came to the house at last and were greeted with stormy questions and ejaculations. Joanna told the story quietly and calmly while Ruth Massillon stared with pale face and parted lips and Marcella listened timidly. Massillon was stern and quiet, Gretorix angry and stormy.

Quemado came up to the veranda as they were still grouped about the girl, pelting her with questions. He had turned his charge over to others. It was to him that Massillon turned for additional details but he could not supplement Joanna's story to any extent beyond telling what he had done. Yet Gretorix saw an opportunity to question his actions.

"You say you followed the sheep and made sure that they had left the field and the fence was restored where they had gone through," he remarked. "Then you came back and closed the wire where they had entered. It seems to me that you were much more anxious to mend fences inclosing an empty field than you were to pursue the murderer."

Marcella stared at Gretorix in frank and startled amazement. But Joanna merely smiled in some contempt. Massillon frowned but said nothing. He had been thinking much of late, revising all previous opinions of his manager and friend. He was still gathering impressions and making up his mind about him and was willing to let Baldwin betray himself.

Quemado merely glanced flittingly at Gretorix and answered shortly.

"Why, yes. I'm hired to ride and mend fences; not to chase Mexicans with rifles."

"Humph!" said Gretorix contemptuously. "I see. Well, we'll get the sheriff on the phone and put him on the case."

"I would," said Quemado. "And don't forget to tell him who did the killing."

Gretorix wheeled about. "You know? Who was it then?"

"The sheriff's brother," replied Quemado with a smile.

For an instant Gretorix glared at him as though to make some further observation but he thought better of it and flung off to the telephone.

While he endeavored to get his connection Massillon turned to Quemado, looking him over curiously. Some of his picturesqueness had gone with his Mexican costume but even in wool shirt and opened waistcoat, with trousers tucked into high boots, the man was a splendid figure.

"What do you think was the occasion for this affair, Mr. Fairfax?" he asked. Quemado leaned against a column of the veranda and rolled a cigarette.

"Hard to say," he replied rather indifferently. "Gonzales isn't—or wasn't—a friend of the Garcias. He was a friend of mine. Used to ride for my father. Then, Ramon Garcia, the sheriff, owns sheep. The sheepmen don't like your fencing the range, you know. Ramon doesn't like Docherty, either. Mix all that with a rifle in the hands of a fellow like Pancho Garcia and you're likely to get most any result."

"But a bold murder like that, in the presence of witnesses! Surely, even though it is his brother, the sheriff will act vigorously."

"He sure will," said Quemado with his short laugh. "I'll gamble that he'll be over here on the run and dragging Brother Pancho behind him."

Joanna broke in hastily. "Then you will not be here to give your evidence?" she said.

Quemado's eyes looked into hers.

"What makes you think I won't be here?" he asked.

"But—I thought that you and Garcia he'll arrest you, won't he?"

"No, ma'am," said Quemado quietly. "He won't arrest me. Why should he?"

"About your—the girl his brother was going to marry."

Quemado broke into a soft laugh of pure enjoyment. "Oh, yes! The Ramirez girl! I'd plumb forgotten about that. Yes, he *might* want to run me in for that. Guess I'll just stick around in case he wants to serve his warrant—providing he's got one."

Joanna was astonished and puzzled and Marcella, to whom she turned for enlightenment, seemed embarrassed and uncomfortable. Before anything further could be said Gretorix strode out of the house.

"Garcia will be over in the morning," he said. "He was astonished to hear that his brother was mixed up in the thing but assured me that no family consideration would deter him from doing his full duty. He pointed out that the murderer, being on foot and well known to the rest of Docherty's men, would be easily apprehended."

"He sure will be," said Quemado. Gretorix turned to him.

"Well, Fairfax," he said, "we've heard what you have to tell us and there doesn't seem to be anything material you can add to Miss Thatcher's account. You'd better be getting back to your station at once. Some of those sheepmen may cut wires at other places."

"I'm staying to see Garcia," said Quemado.

Gretorix needed only a hint of opposition to rouse his slumbering resentment. Inwardly he had concluded that Quemado was an overrated person and that most of the stories told about him were legendary. His conduct to-day stamped him, in Gretorix's opinion, as a "four-flusher" with a reputation founded largely on bluff. With this conviction added to the irritation roused in him by a resentful recognition of the man's attraction he was not disposed to let his authority be questioned.

"I've said that you aren't needed here and you are needed at your post," he said emphatically. "Do you intend to obey orders?"

"No," said Quemado casually and calmly. Gretorix stood, oddly helpless. His masterfulness was at fault. To discharge Quemado was the obvious thing to do and the one thing that would make him ridiculous. He turned helplessly to Massillon and found that gentleman eying him with a half smile that was instantly wiped away.

"What do you intend to do?" he asked because he could think of nothing else to say.

"Nothing," said Quemado. "I'm through."

Then he too smiled and looked at Joanna, catching her with a twitching lip. Gretorix stalked furiously away.

## CHAPTER VIII.

That evening, again restless and disturbed by some premonition that alarmed her, Joanna found no comfort in Gretorix. He was sulky and irritated. Marcella also was out of tune with her. She was worrying about Duncan and things which Joanna did not understand.

The coolness of the outer veranda offered Joanna a refuge from her thoughts and she wandered out there. The moon, now but a thin, rising crescent, did not bring out the shadow against a white blaze of light as it often did. The night seemed softer than usual, more sympathetic to her moods.

And then Quemado came, dressed again in his Mexican costume, somber and overpowering in its theatrical fitness to the occasion. He came up on the veranda and though she sat still on a bench behind one of the columns he seemed to sense her presence or to have faculties which enabled him to see in the dark. At any rate he came directly to her and sat down.

Joanna's eyes fell on his hand which was outstretched on the rail of the veranda where a shaft of light fell through the French doors. It was white, strong and well groomed, like the hand of an artist, deft and handsome, yet its appearance gave her a shock. It reminded her of something she had seen but could not place for the moment. Somewhere she had observed a hand that resembled it, in circumstances which were unnatural, a white artistic hand where one would expect a far different sort. Quemado saw the direction of her glance and withdrew the hand.

"I was wondering," said Joanna, "how you managed to keep your hands so soft and so free from tan. Mine are as dark as an Indian's." She held one of them out, displaying its slender fingers, barely tinted by the sun to a delicate ivory tint.

"I wear gloves more religiously than you do, I suppose," said Quemado. "Can't I tell you about turquoises?"

"I don't want to talk about turquoises," she said. "I know that you represent the Indians in disposing of them because Mr. Massillon told me about it. But I'd rather talk about other things I am curious about —if it isn't forbidden?"

Quemado smiled back at her. "Nothing's forbidden," he answered. "Only sometimes we don't like to discuss certain subjects for one reason or another. But you say what you like and if I don't answer you can form your own conclusions."

"Well, I don't know why you should be so sensitive about hands, but if you are I'll try something else. Is it a breach of good taste to ask about—Miss Ramirez?"

"Not that I know of," answered Quemado with a chuckle. "She was well the last I heard of her."

Joanna was dazed.

"Is that effrontery or callousness?" she asked indignantly. But Quemado was quite unmoved.

"Merely the courage of my convictions," he said brazenly.

Joanna was moved by a great curiosity and encouraged by several obvious inconsistencies in what she had heard about the man. She recognized that the abduction with which he was credited must have embraced other factors than those she had heard or else the man would never be allowed to come and go unchallenged.

"I wish you would tell me something about Señorita Ramirez," she said. "Is it quite a romance?"

Quemado answered carelessly. "It was something like that. However, there isn't much to tell. She was going to marry a man and I carried her off. She didn't marry him, that's all."

"That's all? But didn't she-marryyou?"

"Good Lord, no!" exclaimed Quemado. "I wouldn't marry her."

Again she was puzzled and shocked, but more puzzled than shocked. His bare words hinted at a brutal and sickening disregard for decency and humanity but beyond them lay the puzzle of his cool indifference and casual discussion of it all. On top of that his face, with clean, perfect features, showed no sign of a character in keeping with such conduct.

"I don't understand you," she said helplessly. Again Quemado smiled.

"It isn't necessary," he answered. "Understanding and disillusion go hand in hand. When you understand me—I'll be sorry."

"Oh, if you want to be a mystery," she said depreciatively.

"I certainly do. Mystery arouses interest and if you find me mysterious you also find me interesting. I'm egotistic"—he anticipated the thought in her mind. "I strive for effect. If I get it I am satisfied."

"What effect?" and then she instantly was in a panic for his level eyes were on hers and his were dancing with a fire that frightened her.

"What effect? Is it hard to guess? What has my name suggested? I'm Quemado, Miss Thatcher, and Quemado is—only the name of a village? Isn't it the name of one who has burned? I've burned—and the fire has consumed myself because it had nothing else to feed upon. You're thinking I'm a theatrical *poseur*, I know. Perhaps I am. But you may indulge your curiosity if you wish. I'll tell you what you want to know if you'll ask."

She heard the challenge, feared its significance, feared the admission of interest and yet could not resist.

"Well—what *are* you?" she half whispered. "Why are you Quemado and what have you done?"

"I'm Quemado because I was born near 3A-P the village of that name. It is mere coincidence that Quemado also means something else. Otherwise I suppose I am a very bad man."

She felt that he was tantalizing her and flamed with irritation that he should have the power. Theatrical *poseur* he had described himself and that, no doubt, was exactly what he was.

"I presume you have killed men," she said, endeavoring to express her contempt.

"Three in orthodox single combat, several others in general mêlées," said Quemado with his exasperating calm. "Would you like to have the list?"

"It should be interesting." Her tone conveyed the fact that she accepted his assertions as fabrications.

"All right. The first was when I was eighteen. That was quite lawful, however. The fellow was an escaped convict who undertook to aid his escape by forcibly seizing my horse; he held me up on the road with a gun. I received a reward for 'beefing' him, as the term goes.

"The second was a gentleman in Juarez who dealt a brace game. He and I had differences of opinion regarding one of his maneuvers. In the confusion he got shot. I was acquitted on the ground of self-defense."

"Is that a justification?" she replied, somewhat sickened.

"Not at all. Of course I should not have been engaged with such characters. However, he was earnest in his efforts to empty a double-barreled derringer into me and I was forced to do something.

"Number three was a Mexican. He was intoxicated. His delusion was that he was a tarantula and he was out to prove it. He was mistaken in his estimate of himself, it seems."

"And you were again acquitted, I presume?"

"No, I wasn't even indicted. The community was preponderatingly gringo and this gentleman had annoyed it previously. This time his conduct was more than usually objectionable since he had started his warfare by cutting the throat of a girl with whom he was in love. At the inquest they voted me the regular bounty on lobos and I got ten dollars for my trouble."

"I think I've heard enough," said Joanna faintly.

"Those are the outstanding crimes," said Quemado. "The other murders were performed in the course of one or two military adventures and an exploration. In addition to those I stand credited with a number of pranks which have occasionally annoyed the critical but which did not result fatally, and one abduction which you already know about."

"I do," said Joanna in a stifled voice. "You have succeeded, if that was your object, in arousing a certain interest. I think I shall recall these interesting anecdotes but—I don't think you may flatter yourself on the impressions aroused."

"The truth is that it isn't the actual crimes themselves that horrify you," said Quemado, "but my flippant manner of recording them. If somebody else told them, you'd probably think they were a bit heroic, wouldn't you?"

"I think not," said Joanna dryly. "I might discount the—the shooting, but that abduction——" She shuddered. "The callous brutality of it!"

But Quemado chuckled. "Why, you don't believe that. What about Young Lochinvar and all the other bold heroes of romance who have carried off their inamoratas? If you'd be honest with yourself, the thing appeals to you. I shouldn't be surprised if you'd rather thrill at the idea of being carried off yourself."

"But," she cried, angry because there was a slight degree of shrewd truth in the thrust, "there was at least romance in those others. In this—there is nothing but brutality. You did not want the girl?"

"Certainly not," said Quemado. "I merely didn't want the other fellow to have her—and he didn't get her."

"And she went willingly?"

"She was tickled to death to go."

"But—how could you take advantage desert her?"

"I? I never deserted her. She's at my ranch now, as happy as a queen."

Joanna stared at him endeavoring to express something of her feeling of disgust and contempt. But it had slight effect on the debonair Quemado.

"You talk like a gentleman," she said slowly. "One would think you knew how to be one. But it seems to utterly escape you that what you have told me makes your presence here an insult to me as it would be to any decent girl."

"All on account of an abduction?" he asked.

"You are a rotten beast!" said Joanna

with slow distinctness and emphasis, so that the full force of the words might take effect. Quemado straightened but his eyes did not flash nor his face flush. He was quiet and calm as he answered.

"I wonder if you really think that. I wonder if you know what you are talking about. I wonder if you are so conventional that you do not even thrill at the idea of a real lover who would commit even crimes for you—to win you. I wonder if your ideal is actually—like Gretorix, we'll say."

"I've heard quite enough, Mr. Fairfax. I think we had better go in."

"If you choose. But I'm still wondering. I'm wondering if you would react as you think to an abduction of yourself. Suppose we try it?"

"What?" It was a cry of mingled astonishment and rage but there was a little fear behind it.

"Why shouldn't you have a *real* lover? Why shouldn't you learn to live and feel? Why shouldn't you be *made* to realize that love is love, and not a mere mush of holding hands in the moonlight."

"What do you know of love?" demanded Joanna, stifled with her anger.

"I know. I know that love is strife and passion and *life!* I know that it isn't billing and cooing and holding hands. It's fire and battle and storm. That's what love is with me."

"Take your sort of love to the Ramirez girl!" Joanna choked. "It—it is gross and horrible insolence!" She was walking rapidly toward the house where the others awaited her. Quemado stood where she had left him.

"I've brought it to you," he said. He did not raise his voice but she heard him. "And what I give I do not take back. Gretorix can't have you!"

Startled and upset, seething with rage in which was that undercurrent of fear, she stopped as though she had been shot. Then she slowly retraced her steps to Quemado's side.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "You are threatening—him?"

"I let no one stand in my way," said Quemado.

"You would-would kill him if I---"

"I said he should not have you. I have said that I will take you whether you are willing or not. You are not his; you are mine. I have burned because I did not know you and now the flame is for you. But it will burn any one who stands between you and me."

"But—but—merciful God! You would not murder a man who never did you any harm!"

"What greater harm could he do me?"

Joanna wrung her hands. "But this is unthinkable! You'd make *me* responsible for his life! It's abominable—brutal! You are surely not serious?"

At that anticlimax he laughed again, low and softly. "Of course not—only in spots. But—\_\_\_\_"

He suddenly laid that slim, white hand on her arm and although he did not grip her or exert pressure she had the sense of something steel strong. She glanced down at it fearfully and at that moment, even in her trepidation, she recalled what it reminded her of. She remembered that hand which Pieboy Rankin had laid upon Baldwin's arm in the moonlight those few days ago. It too was white, deft and strong, though larger and coarser than Quemado's. Some hint of what those hands meant among men whose lives were coarsened by toil, whose hands were rough with rope and branding iron, came to her. And yet she did not understand more than that the fact was sinister.

"What can I do?" she asked hopelessly.

"I'll not kill him," said Quemado with the first show of emotion she had yet heard. It was merely a sort of scornful roughness. "You have yet to learn things. But I say he shall not have you. Rather than that I'll carry you off. That much I mean."

Reassured she turned away again.

"You'll never carry me off," she said quietly. And Quemado laughed.

She turned back once more and this time did not stop, her beating heart and flaming cheeks marking her agitation compounded of fear, anger and a lurking, vivid anticipation that fed both and yet added another thrill to her emotions which she would not have dared to define.

And then came the sound of low singing as Quemado walked away. She heard it and laughed—a strangled, hysterical laugh, recognizing the burlesque ballad:

"Hassayampa Sam! As a babe he was awful cute,

He was bottle fed on pizen juice and tiger's blood to boot.

He killed his nurse when two years old and slew his brother Jim,

Then chewed his daddy's finger off because he scolded him."

## CHAPTER IX.

Early the following morning Joanna saw from her window the arrival of two mounted men driving eight or ten horses. One of the men she recognized, with a shudder, as Rankin. The other was a Mexican vaquero. The horses, both those they rode and those they drove were such as she had never seen before even where thoroughbreds were common. Delicate of limb, fine of head, the evidences of royal breeding were plain to the most casual view. She readily surmised that these were the Arabs which Quemado was to sell to Mr. Massillon.

Before they were driven to the horse pasture the cowboys gathered outside to look at them but there was something in their grouping and the alert yet seemingly careless way in which they kept together that hinted at another case of expectant caution. Quemado came out of the cottage and they fell back, letting him have a clear field.

Irritated at her interest she did not pause to watch what happened but dressed hurriedly and went down. She saw Marcella standing on the veranda talking to Bradley Carson who had come over from the cottage. Looking out on the rear court toward the cottage she saw that the horses were being driven away across the fields while the men were lounging back to their place. Nearly all of them seemed to be making no preparation to go to work, although they should have been gone before this under ordinary circumstances.

Then Marcella came in and Carson walked away. Joanna waited to hear the news.

"It was Quemado's horses," said Marcella, which was no news.

"But—wasn't there something else?"

Marcella looked at her furtively, wondering what she had seen or guessed.

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't know. I was looking out the window and there was something about the way the men looked—and stood——"

"We're all getting the fidgets, I guess," said Marcella with a short laugh. "You've caught the prevailing disease. Every time any one connected with Quemado comes around there's an atmosphere of 'Hist! The plot thickens!' It's all nonsense!"

"But Carson was talking to you?"

"Yes, he was and he's as silly as the rest. The whole crew are gaping because the man that came with Rankin is Ramon Gonzales, one of Quemado's men. It's quite natural that he should come and utterly silly to think there's anything behind it. He couldn't have heard that his brother was killed, of course, until he got here and certainly Quemado couldn't have sent for him on that account. Yet to hear these fools you'd think he anticipated the whole thing and planned to have Ramon on hand for the inquest."

"His brother!" ejaculated Joanna. She chilled in a vague anticipation of disaster and trouble.

"Well, he's here—and there may be trouble, of course, though I don't suppose he'll start anything with Garcia and all his friends on hand. There aren't many Gonzaleses in the country around here and there are a mess of Garcias and Ramirezes. If it wasn't for Quemado and Pieboy——"

"What will they do?" asked Joanna.

"Oh!" impatiently, "they probably won't do a thing. But every one always stands around with mouths open expecting fireworks wherever that Quemado appears in anything. He's sent Gonzales over with the horses and Pieboy, too, so it's quite evident he's trying to avoid trouble and not make it. And—it would be just as well, Carson dropped a hint—we'd better avoid letting Garcia know that they are here."

"Of course," said Joanna, relieved to know that Quemado was peacefully inclined. "And has he gone, too?"

"No," said Marcella shortly.

"But surely he will not face the sheriff after that affair with the Ramirez girl!"

Marcella broke out impatiently. "Look here, Joanna, you're thinking too much of that *picaro*. He's getting on your mind like he does on every one else's. I wish he'd take his infernal looks and his reputation down to the Rio Grande and drown himself."

"But I don't understand his effrontery," persisted Joanna.

"Oh, I know you don't. Well, there's probably something else to the story. Anyway, Garcia doesn't dare arrest him, that's all I know. He's had plenty of chance this year back. And Quemado probably won't do a thing but hang around and dare him to do anything."

And later, when Garcia did arrive with a posse of deputies, it did seem that Marcella

was right. Quemado was present when the sheriff entered the bunk house and took possession of the body and he remained calmly about in spite of Garcia's evident agitation which seemed to be mingled of uneasiness and anger. He made no overt move but sauntered up with the others behind the posse as Garcia bustled importantly to the veranda and summoned the witnesses to question them about the murder.

He was abrupt and cursory, listening to Joanna's story politely but impatiently. When Marcella gave her statement he smiled and nodded his satisfaction, pressing her slightly when she told of Duncan's signal to the sheep-herder and forcing her to acknowledge that she had ridden over the brow of the hill and did not see the shooting. Yet the thing seemed clear enough.

The Massillon cowboys were serious, grouping behind the inscrutable Quemado who made no move nor uttered a sound though he stood in full view of Garcia, who pointedly ignored him.

"There will be an inquiry—it is necessary," said Garcia, after his brief investigation. "The magistrate at Hillsdale will hold it. The señoritas will come? It grieves me to trouble them but—they will recognize the importance?"

"Of course," said Joanna.

"Of course, Garcia," said Quemado, speaking unexpectedly and for the first time. "They'll be there. So will others."

Garcia turned snarlingly. "You, perhaps, Señor Quemado?"

"You're shouting," said Quemado calmly.

"Bueno!" retorted Garcia with a grin that showed his teeth. "We will welcome Señor Ouemado!"

Quemado smiled and flecked the ash from his cigarette. A moment later the posse departed, taking the body of the dead man.

During the rest of the day Joanna kept to the house. Quemado had disappeared and after a while the cowboys rode off to their various duties. Yet, somehow, although a somnolent quiet seemed to settle over the place Joanna felt that something was seething beneath the surface. In this apprehension she was confirmed by Marcella's anxious face. The girl seemed to anticipate the arrival of some one and was continually going out to the veranda to watch the road.

In the afternoon her vigil was rewarded by the arrival of three men, one of whom was her father. The others were Blenkinship and another cattleman who ranged in their neighborhood.

They asked for Baldwin Gretorix and Massillon and sat on the rear veranda talking about the affair. Marcella seemed more than ever anxious after greeting her father and Joanna wondered until her curiosity forced a question.

"Oh, don't you see!" said Marcella. "I don't know what tales these Mexicans are spreading. But I'm worried about Duncan."

"But he didn't do it," said Joanna in surprise.

"I know he didn't. But---"

Suddenly she grasped Joanna's arm. "We can sneak up to the French doors opening out of the dining room and listen. They're talking out there. I want to hear."

Joanna was curious too and in spite of her feeble scruples she interposed no objection but joined Marcella in a stealthy approach to the listening post of the half-open window. Here they had no difficulty in hearing what was being said.

Massillon and the cattlemen were doing little of the talking while Baldwin was speaking in a positive, dominating way.

"The thing points to only one conclusion to my way of thinking. This remittance man went away from here threatening me. You heard him, Arnold? I don't say Docherty knew anything about it although I'm aware he resents our fencing the range. He asked for permission to water his sheep and I gave it as a matter of course. But Duncan was sore and he seems to have signaled that fellow. If it was done deliberately, as it seems to have been, he was behind it, I'm sure."

"Do you hear that?" Marcella cried under her breath. "What did I tell you?"

She had told Joanna nothing but the latter was startled at Gretorix's plain accusation.

"I'm not advocating trouble with the sheepmen," went on Baldwin, "but I'm going to see that this Duncan is punished. He's as guilty as Garcia in my opinion."

The third cattleman interjected a remark. "What about Docherty, though?"

Baldwin was surprised. "But he didn't authorize it, I'm sure. There is no need to drag him in."

"Yeah!" said Blenkinship dryly. "But I'm thinkin' he won't stay out. I know Hi Docherty." "So do I," said Castro with equal dryness. Massillon said nothing.

"But what has he to do with this?" demanded Gretorix.

"Hi just naturally hates to be neutral," said Castro vaguely.

"You don't mean he'd shelter a criminal?"

"Depends on what you call a criminal. To my way of thinkin' all sheepmen are sort of criminal and they sort of hang together just like honest men do. This thing looks like it might have what you could call reactions, that a way, so we aim to wander over here and sit in on it—on the cow side of the fence, so to speak."

"But I don't see \_\_\_\_"

"I reckon you'll see Hi Docherty and his men and maybe some of the other sheepmen ridin' in here before long. I don't know how they're goin' to take it or what they'll aim to do. We're sort of hopin' it will be confined to this here Mexican and that us natives won't need to mix in it. But if we do—\_\_\_"

He left the consequences to be conjectured and the others also were silent. Then Massillon spoke.

"We don't want to make any trouble between sheepmen and cowmen," he said quietly but conclusively.

"I reckon we know how you feel, Mr. Massillon," said Castro. "We don't want any trouble ourselves. But if Duncan did it\_\_\_\_\_"

"There's no doubt he did it," said Baldwin.

Marcella shook with sudden rage. "The beast!" she whispered. "Oh, if Quemado or Pieboy——" She did not finish the sentence but Joanna thought she understood. She led the girl away from the door.

"He's prejudiced, I think," she said soothingly. "But he will not do anything to make trouble, I'm sure. He has no proof."

But Marcella greeted this scornfully. "You don't know what you're talking about," she said passionately. "I tell you, Joanna, if you're going to marry that man take him out of this country where he doesn't belong and can't understand. He hasn't an idea what he's doing."

"But what is he doing? I know that this accusation is outrageous but it doesn't amount to anything."

"Doesn't? With that treacherous Mexican holding the sheriff's office! Why, you poor, silly child, do you suppose for an instant that Garcia won't save his brother by laying the whole thing on the first available scapegoat—and that's Johnny!"

A great light began to dawn on Joanna.

"But he couldn't!"

"Why not, with these idiotic sheep and cattlemen ready at any time to believe the worst of each other? Didn't you hear father say he hoped they could keep out of it and didn't you understand that? They don't like Mr. Massillon worth a cent but he's a cowman, anyway. And Docherty's a sheepman. If they accuse Johnny, what will happen?"

"I don't know," said Joanna feebly.

"Docherty'll never let them take himbecause Johnny's a sheepman, now! And the cowmen will take him! Can't you see?"

"I believe I do," said Joanna in a whisper.

"Oh, what am I going to do about Johnny?" moaned Marcella despairingly. But Joanna's mind was on other things and her eyes on the green field of lucerne below them, through which was riding a man, slouching sidewise in his saddle. The sight matched her thoughts, which seemed to gravitate inevitably to the one object.

"There's Quemado," she said.

Marcella looked up and her face lightened at some thought of her own. "Quemado! You're right, Joanna. He *did* say that nothing would happen to Johnny. Maybe he can do something."

"But surely you wouldn't go to him?"

Marcella snapped her head aloft, recklessly. "I'd go to anybody to stop this thing. And why not? Quemado's the very man."

"Well," said Joanna resignedly indicating the horseman, "here he comes."

Quemado had crossed the field and was entering the road leading up the house. He came leisurely, as though he had no troubles nor was ever agitated by thoughts of slender girls with gray eyes and black hair. He seemed detached, remote and serenely capable.

Marcella was off the veranda with a whirl of short skirts and Joanna, half startled, followed her more slowly. She saw her come in front of Quemado's splendid horse and saw him drop from the saddle to listen to her excited pleas. As she came nearer he shoved his flat-brimmed hat back on his head and smiled down on the girl, indulgently and kindly.

"Mr. Fairfax," Marcella was saying

breathlessly, "you know what's going on, don't you?"

"I might know—but perhaps you'd better tell me," he answered.

"I mean about Johnny Duncan and Garcia and the cowmen. Oh, you do know! You're not a fool tenderfoot like this Gretorix!"

"That's what Johnny called him—fool, isn't it?" and Quemado lifted his eyes to Joanna as she came up, his faint smile taking her into the conversation.

"He's not exactly a fool," said Joanna, impelled to defend because she felt guilty of treachery to Gretorix.

"I know it," said Quemado. "Well, you're worrying about Johnny and I reckon Gretorix thinks Johnny's a bad egg, doesn't he? Might even charge him with killing Gonzales, I suppose?"

"You know he will," asserted Marcella. "And that filthy Garcia will back him up."

"I doubt it," said Quemado musingly. "I rather doubt it."

They waited as he began to roll a cigarette, smiling down at his hands, one of which, the right, was gloved while the other was exposed and brown.

"I thought I told you nothing would happen to Johnny," he said idly. Marcella blazed with sudden triumph.

"Was that a promise?" she demanded.

"A prediction," said Quemado. "But I can repeat it."

"Quemado," said Marcella joyously, "I could kiss you for that!"

But Quemado only cocked an eye at Joanna. "You'd be shocking folks around here," he answered. "And Johnny might not like it."

But Joanna was not as ready to accept him as an oracle as Marcella was.

"What are you planning to do?" she asked and recognized at once the folly of it. He would not tell her, of course.

But he merely laughed, frankly, as though taking them both under his care and into his confidence.

"Why, Miss Thatcher," he said, "I never plan anything. I always act on impulse even when I carry off despairing brides from the altar. You know that!"

"I don't care how you act," said Marcella confidingly. "You've promised, Quemado, and if anything happens to Johnny——"

"I'll get the blame. Well, all right. But you'd better tell him to keep in the courthouse at the inquest. And you keep him and Miss Thatcher—inside, too. The streets are hot—you know—these days."

Marcella's tongue slid over her lips as she looked at him. "How about the other men?" she asked huskily.

"Well, I don't think the matter'll concern any of our people. Doesn't seem so to me, anyhow. Of course you never can tell but I'd say this was a matter to be settled between the Garcias and the Gonzaleses. Wouldn't you?"

Again Joanna felt baffled and anxious, as though there were a significance behind the casual comments which was serious and yet concealed. Marcella seemed to understand but she could not. Uneasy, she turned to walk back to the house and Marcella and Quemado came with her, the latter stepping between the two. She could not avoid a little thrill at the closeness of her contact with him. It was as though she ventured close to a peril which frightened and yet drew her.

He seemed to know how he affected her and when they came to the veranda he stepped back and took off his hat.

"I'll be drifting along now," he said. "Don't worry about Johnny or your father, Marcella. And, Miss Thatcher——"

Joanna met his eyes, uncertain whether that was a twinkle she saw in them or whether it was a smoldering fire. And in his voice was what warning and what threat?

"We probably shall not meet again—until the next abduction. *Hasta luego!*"

He turned and was gone and Marcella stared first at his departing figure and then at Joanna who had flushed and then turned pale.

"Hasta luego?" she repeated and then rendered it in English. "Until soon! And he's talking about an abduction."

She burst into a sudden, wide-eyed excitement. "Joanna! He meant you! He'll do it! He'll do it!"

But Joanna, pale to the lips, was scornful. "Nonsense," she said. "Do what?"

And then Marcella laughed, half frightened and half gleeful.

"Oh, if he only would! It'd be glorious!"

And Joanna gasped in amazement that this girl who had once enlightened her as to Quemado's true character should now be joyful over such a horrible possibility. And why was it that she, Joanna, felt a stir, a thrill of shivering anticipation?

"Oh, you silly little fool!" she exclaimed and ran into the house.

## CHAPTER X.

They saw no more of Quemado that day nor did he appear on the following morning while the people at the ranch were gathering to attend the inquiry at Hillsdale. They heard of him, however, and that early enough. The first early risers found Bradley Carson waiting to dispense the news. This he had ready for the ears of Gretorix and Massillon.

"Had you paid for those horses Fairfax brought in yesterday?" he asked seriously.

"I think not," said Massillon and turned to Gretorix for confirmation.

"No, I hadn't. He seemed in no hurry and we hadn't even looked them over. He was to put them in the pasture until we got around to it."

"They put 'em in the pasture all right. Took 'em up to that flat below the reservoir and turned 'em in. But they ain't there now."

"Aren't there? Do you mean they've got out?"

"No, they ain't got out. They was *took* out."

"Stolen!"

"Well, if they weren't paid for I wouldn't exactly go so far as to say they was rustled. Depends on whether they belonged to you or to Quemado."

"What do you mean? We're liable for them, of course. There was a night herd there, wasn't there?"

"Oh, yes, there was a night herd. He says he was roped and hog tied so's he can't say who did it. But he thinks it was an Injun that bushwhacked him. He didn't have a gun."

"I'll see that they carry guns hereafter," stormed Gretorix. "Well, what was done? You got on the trail at once, didn't you?"

"Well, I aimed to, but I sort o' changed my mind."

"Changed—see here, Carson, you aren't telling me you were afraid to follow those thieves?"

"No," said Carson, grinning amiably. "I wasn't so much afraid as I was dubious. I allowed I'd better come on in and find out whose horses was lifted before I started anything." "But, man, it doesn't make any difference. They were in our charge."

"That's right. But if the fellow that owned 'em came and got them I reckon we couldn't have him arrested for stealing them. Seeing the fence rider up that a way wasn't hurt except for his feelings I reckoned I'd better go slow. Chasing Pieboy around that a way ain't no ladylike sport, I'm telling you."

"Pieboy! D'you mean to tell me that he was in it?"

"Listen!" said Carson at last coming to the point. "Pieboy and Gonzales went with Quemado to drive those colts up. Quemado picked the field although he might have herded them a lot nearer the house. The tracks they left are all over the place. Well, there was three men drove the horses through the wire last night. One wore moccasins and must have been the Injun that lass'ed the fence rider. The other two were Quemado and Pieboy or else they rode Quemado's and Pieboy's horses. They cut the wire and headed right straight north into the hills."

"But Quemado and Pieboy! Why should they steal their own horses?" demanded the bewildered Gretorix.

"Ask some one that knows," said Carson as he started away. "But, just guessin' I'd reckon that it was because they've got something up. Quemado ain't selling you any horses, it seems, and I guess he just indulges in a little humor of his own showin' you that he's called the deal off."

"Why, the insolent scoundrel——" began Gretorix furiously. He was checked by Massillon.

"That will do, Baldwin. Your conduct of the whole affair hasn't been very happy, I think. Now, no harm's been done and we'll let the matter drop. I'll not have you or any one else working for me quarreling with Fairfax. You understand that!"

Gretorix nodded sullenly and Carson, who had turned around and hesitated as he heard Massillon's words, grinned queerly and walked on.

Massillon's big car would hold them all and after breakfast the three cattlemen and the four from the ranch who were to attend the inquiry drove off in it on their way to Hillsdale. None of the cow hands went, however. Carson hinted at the reason when he returned to the cottage.

"Say, the Old Man said he didn't want

none of us quarreling with Quemado, meaning Baldy, chiefly, I reckon. Well, he don't need to admonish me."

"I guess we ain't none of us missing anything we have to go asking him for," agreed Slippery Wilkins. "And while I was aiming to go down to Hillsdale I reckon I've changed my mind. Quemado said yesterday that he figured this killing was a strictly Mexican affair and it would be a sure enough breach of etiquette for us folks to go squandering into it. Seeing he feels that way I reckon I stick to work to-day."

On the way to Hillsdale nothing appeared to rouse any question in the minds of the party from the ranch except the presence on the road, after they had gone some distance, of a more than usual number of pedestrians and horsemen. This was not surprising, for news of the event had gone around and people would be attending the inquiry from motives of curiosity. Yet Castro and Blenkinship and their companion were alert to notice certain signs which caused their mouths to set grimly. A number of people whom they passed wore weapons.

"The clans are gatherin'!" said Castro when he had seen the signs of preparation.

"What do you mean?" asked Joanna, alarmed, but the men did not answer. Instead, Marcella spoke.

"Pop, Quemado says this is a Mexican baile, exclusively," she said hurriedly. "He told me and Joanna to keep inside and to tell you to do the same."

Blenkinship and Castro and their friend considered this with portentous solemnity, interrupted by Gretorix's impatient scoffing from where he sat at the wheel.

"This infernal Quemado has a lot to do with it. He and his pet bandit were busy stealing their own horses from our pasture last night and are probably a long way off by now. What's all the melodrama about, anyway?"

The cattlemen did not answer the question although they were interested in Quemado's latest vagary.

"Looks like he was laying relays for a get-away, maybe," hazarded Blenkinship and the others nodded.

"If that's the case I reckon we better lay low and pass the word around until we see what happens," said Jake. "I'm free to state that I don't want to see no stock war started again. This country's outgrown that." "I see there's quite a passel of Mexicans comin' in, too," said the third cowman. "Some of them's connected with one and more with the other. Garcia can swing most of the county, of course."

"Looks like Quemado was right," said Blenkinship and the other two agreed sagely. The three from the ranch remained puzzled and uninformed. Massillon tried to gain enlightenment with a question.

"What does it mean, if I may ask?" he demanded.

"It means that if Quemado is goin' to mix in it I'm right willing he should throw his loop without me cuttin' his throw. That goes for all of us I reckon."

After that their progress was slower because every now and then one or other of the cattlemen asked to have the car stopped while he got out and spoke to some acquaintance met on the road. These invariably asked a few laconic questions and then nodded as though in agreement, after which the passenger returned to the car and they drove on.

At Hillsdale they found the street showing unusual signs of life. Yet there was no ex-citement apparent. Little groups of men stood around, talking quietly among themselves. Some were sheepmen and some raisers of cattle and they gravitated together according to their affiliations. With either group were men who could be identified as sheep-herders or cow-punchers, most of the former being Mexicans and the latter about equally divided between the two races. Although on previous trips to the town Joanna had rarely seen an armed man she was now conscious that weapons were common. Yet the really substantial men of either party, such as their three guests, were quite unarmed.

Then they saw Docherty standing close to the courthouse entrance and with him were Duncan, a number of Mexicans and half a dozen Americans. They appeared to be grimly ready for anything that might turn up. Castro saw them and turned to Marcella.

"You know that young fellow, daughter? Well, suppose you go over there and tell Docherty what you told me. And say me and my friends are goin' to wait to see what Quemado is doin'."

Marcella jumped from the car and ran over to the group. Johnny Duncan stepped forward with both hands held out and she extended hers to him, at sight of which Castro's eyebrows went up. But he said nothing although one of his companions muttered:

"Looks like there might be another complication, Jake."

Marcella after her greeting hurriedly gave her message. Although she knew more of Quemado than Joanna did she was surprised at the plain evidences of relief, mingled with a certain expectant curiosity which greeted her rendering of Quemado's apparently casual estimate of the affair. Docherty briefly questioned her as to what had happened as she talked to Duncan just before the murder and she gave her story.

"That's about as we got it," he said. "Run along, young lady, and ask your father to step over here, will you?"

When he got the message Jake obeyed without any hesitation. He and Docherty met in front of the group of sheepmen and shook hands. Neither was armed.

All about them lounging cow hands and sheep-herders directed furtive glances at them under cover of assumed indifference and idleness. In doorways of adobe houses Mexicans lounged. In front of every cantina and shop more of them stood about. In front of the adobe jail across the street from the dingy courthouse several armed men lolled sleepily.

"If it's a Mexican row we keep out of it, Jake," said Docherty briefly. Jake nodded.

"I reckon that's it. But we got to figure that Garcia will lay it to Duncan, I guess."

"Two of my herders left me with Garcia right after news came," said Docherty. "One of them was the man who was with him and the other was drivin' the wagon. They lit out fer town and I reckon we can guess that they'll be here as witnesses and what they'll say."

"This fellow Gretorix makes it right bad," commented Jake.

"He ain't got any sabe, I reckon. Don't he know what he's likely to start?"

"Don't seem to know nothing," said Jake. "Can't you gentle him any?"

"Reckon we can try. Anyway, you can handle Garcia."

"Sure! I'll pass the word among the boys that there's nothing doing, then."

Castro nodded and went back to the car. The others seemed to take the result for granted though they also looked relieved.

"Well, what's all of it about?" asked Gre-

torix, who was eaten up with curiosity and a vague uneasiness.

"We was just talkin' about the fact that there isn't any but Mexican evidence against Duncan—and, under the circumstances, that's worse than none. The Mexicans, of course, won't do anything to him although they'll probably let Garcia off clean. Unless some one else brings a charge against him I reckon there won't be no trouble."

"But I'm going to tell about his threatening me," declared Gretorix.

"I reckon you better not," said Castro. "You ain't aiming to accuse him of ordering that killing, are you?"

But Gretorix was nothing if not stubborn. "Not on your life," he began hotly. Then Massillon interrupted quietly.

"You'll keep out of this, Gretorix, or you and I part company right now. I've been seeing evidences of a certain lack of tact in you lately. You know as well as I do that that boy had nothing to do with the killing."

"Well, maybe not," said Gretorix, grudgingly. "I don't say he did. Still, I think I ought to give evidence."

"Man!" his employer burst out in utter disgust, "can't you see what's as apparent as the nose on your face? Don't you know that you may start trouble here that will result in a local feud? You understand me! You give no evidence at all!"

Gretorix turned red and sat back stiffly. "Oh, if you insist!" he said angrily.

They all went into the courthouse, a dingy structure which lent no dignity to justice. In a dirty room furnished with a desk and a row of benches a local magistrate sat. He was a swarthy Mexican, conscious of his importance but courteous.

Apparently the man already was going into the matter in a most informal way. A number of Mexicans sat on the benches and two stood before the magistrate together with the sheriff, Garcia. These men were volubly telling their story and Joanna listened to it in amazement.

They stoutly maintained that Señor Duncan had given orders that the sheep, after watering, should be driven through the pasture and out at the upper end. The one who had been with the flock said that he had received such orders together with Garcia. The other, the driver of the wagon, corroborated him.

Then the herder swore that Gonzales, the fence rider, had first attempted to turn them

back and, as they were obeying, had ridden among the sheep, scattering them. When they remonstrated he had drawn a pistol and fired. Only then had Garcia shot in selfdefense.

Joanna, amazed and horrified, jumped to her feet with a protest. Instantly the magistrate stopped the witnesses and turned urbanely to her.

"The señorita can throw some light on this distressing affair? That is well. We will be grateful for her evidence."

Reassured, Joanna began to tell what she had seen. She pointed out that Gonzales had had no weapon and that he certainly had not shot at either of the men. She also swore that he had not attempted to turn the sheep until his remonstrances with Garcia had been ignored. Neither had she seen Duncan give any signal to them.

Then Marcella chimed in with her account. Through it all the magistrate listened politely although the Mexicans broke in with fervid protestations that the señoritas were mistaken, that they had not seen all. At the end the magistrate indicated a revolver that lay on his desk.

"And the señorita who testifies that the man Gonzales was unarmed, can she explain this which was picked up after the affair in the pasture? It has two cartridges discharged."

But Joanna could only shake her head. She had never seen the gun. The men behind her grinned derisively. Planted evidence was nothing new to them.

"It is regrettable that there should be such discrepancy," said the magistrate with what seemed real concern. "Is there none other who has anything to say?"

He looked pointedly at Gretorix. The latter turned red but mindful of Massillon's command said nothing.

The *jefe* went on smoothly.

"There is testimony which appears to shift some of the responsibility to the shoulders of Señor Duncan, but it is not apparent that he anticipated any violence. It seems that, at the most, he was guilty of ordering a trespass upon the property of Señor Massillon and unless the señor makes a charge against him"—Massillon shook his head as the magistrate paused inquiringly—"there would not appear to be any reason to hold him. As for the man Pancho Garcia, the evidence is conflicting and in view of that fact I will hold him in two thousand dollars bail for the action of the grand jury. There will be no difficulty, I presume?"

The last was directed to the sheriff, Ramon Garcia, who smiled.

"There will be none," he remarked.

"Then, Señor Sheriff, if you will have the goodness to produce the prisoner for arraignment we will conclude the affair."

Garcia bowed and went out. The rest turned and went slowly into the corridor. The cattlemen were grinning sardonically and exchanged a few comments.

"The sheriff wasn't any too pleased."

"He was countin' on Massillon's standin' pat, of course. Nothing they'd like better."

"Well, he's fooled. I reckon the whole county can thank Mr. Massillon for havin' good sense, that a way."

"That danged Quemado was right again." "Well, yes! But you don't want to forget that he says to stay off the street."

To Joanna the whole affair was a terrible anticlimax. She had looked forward vaguely to a stern battle before the magistrate to be followed by a line-up of opposite factions, an attempt to arrest Duncan, resistance on the part of his friends and a finale, perhaps, of battle, murder, and sudden death. Instead, although there had been a very plain lack of formality and a perfunctoriness which she could easily observe, the proceedings had been conducted with every courtesy and in peaceful orderliness, the culprit had been bound over to the grand jury and would, no doubt, be tried, though his bail seemed low. To her the mysterious uneasiness and grimness of the ranchers involved appeared to have been entirely uncalled for.

But Marcella gave her cause for suspending judgment. "Well, that's off our minds," she breathed her relief as they stood in the dusty hall. "It's up to the Gonzales outfit to settle it—with Quemado's help."

"Settle it? Why, isn't it settled now?"

Marcella laughed. "In a way it is. The grand jury will meet solemnly, every friend of Gonzales will be kept off it, and it will decide that Gonzales was the cause of it all and was killed regrettably but justifiably. They will apologize to Garcia and let him go."

"But that is a farce!" exclaimed Joanna. "No, it isn't. But this is a county where Mexicans control, and this is a Mexican feud. The Garcia clan have control, and the Gonzales crowd have a fat young chance of getting anything by lawful means. It's what they call practical politics back East, I believe."

"But isn't there any chance to get justice?"

Marcella laughed. "Well, the Mexicans are simply doing what our own politicians have done before this. But Mexicans are not like us, Joanna, and don't you forget it. Back in New England or Illinois the outs would take their medicine and wait for the day when they might be in. But the Mexicans aren't that patient. Which is why we're waiting on Quemado."

"Quemado again! That man seems to fill the whole horizon," said Joanna impatiently.

"I'll bet he's filling Garcia's horizon, anyhow," said Marcella dryly. "And, Joanna, it isn't—\_\_\_"

A note of something like contrition mingled with anxiety came into her voice as she paused.

"It isn't any of my business of course. But isn't Quemado filling a good deal of your-----"

Joanna turned on her angrily. She was only too conscious that the hint was true. It angered her to know that what she regarded as an obsession was becoming apparent to others.

"And if he is, whose fault is it? I hear nothing but 'Quemado this' and 'Quemado that' until I begin to believe that he's the only thing in New Mexico of any importance. You've been dangling him before me until I'm dizzy with trying to guess what he is and what he isn't. One moment you exhibit him as a degraded and beastly criminal and the next you are almost falling on his neck over nothing. I'm sick and tired of this Quemado, I tell you!"

She whirled about and stalked toward the front door of the courthouse where a number of men were standing. Her own friends were there, and Docherty and his allies were mingling with them amicably. Joanna did not stop, but hurried past them with the idea of taking refuge in the car until they were ready to start home.

She heard Marcella's steps hurrying behind her and her half-whispered cry to wait, but she paid it no heed. Gretorix started to intercept her, but she hated Gretorix and all he stood for as much as she hated herself or Marcella or Quemado. In fact her rage was rather impartially extended to everybody within sight. She wished to get away from the whole thing, to get back to civilization and out of the atmosphere of petty reticence and ridiculously exaggerated trivialities to where burglars and safe blowers and pickpockets and shoplifters were items of news interest and nothing else, while everyday life ignored them by leaving them to the police. Here, it seemed, crime was not crime, and she could not yet guess just what it was. It seemed to be almost anything, shifting with most disconcerting inconsistency from something more or less reprehensible to something commendable.

Why, for example, didn't the sheriff of the county arrest the insufferable Quemado for abducting a bride on her wedding night? Why did a priest speak of that horror with loathing while respectable citizens either laughed at it or declined to speak of it at And why did Marcella, who knew all? Quemado, take pains to first present that episode in its true light and later fairly squeal with romantic delight when she imagined that Quemado might have the unspeakable effrontery to repeat that exploit with Joanna as its victim? And, lastly, why did she, herself, shuddering at the very thought of such an outrage, find the shudder trailing into a-well, a thrill?

Behind her Marcella's plaintive appeal was wasted, but Jake Castro had better success than his daughter. He gained it by stepping swiftly forward and grasping her arm as Joanna opened the door.

"Better wait a minute before you go out, ma'am," he said quietly. "Quemado said the streets weren't safe."

Quemado again! She tore her arm free with an impatient energy and swung the door wide.

Across the street, deserted now by every one except a few Mexicans, loomed the squat, dirty-brown block of the jail, and as Joanna was about to step out on the porch of the courthouse, the door of the prison opened. Through it came, first, Ramon Garcia, the sheriff, followed by two slouching deputies armed with pistols. Between them lounged Pancho Garcia, smoking a cigarette and quite at his ease. The quartet headed across the street toward where she stood.

Joanna had no mind to encounter either the sheriff or his villainous brother. She hesitated a moment and then drew back, but still held the door ajar. On either side the other men had gravitated to windows which flanked the entrance, while Castro stood behind her.

"Here comes hell a-poppin'," remarked the cattleman.

But she saw it herself and drew her breath with a sharp intake while the blood seemed first to recede upon her heart and then to surge riotously through her veins. Standing there, her hand on the edge of the door, she remained quiescent while the swift, terrible drama was enacted.

Around the corners of the jail, which stood apart from the neighboring buildings, had wheeled three horsemen, one coming from the right and the other two from the left, all of them springing into the dusty street as though materialized by a magician. The rider on the left, gay and yet somber in velvet jacket and trousers slashed at the bottom, reined in his horse full in the center of the street. One of the two to the right, burly, gray, and evil as a wolf, wheeled opposite him. Between them, frozen where they stood, clustered the sheriff, his brother, and the two deputies.

The third man, a Mexican apparently, reined his horse sharply at the corner of the jail, dragging him into the air with forefeet beating and wheeled him at right angles to come down and stand before the door of the jail while the rider dropped gracefully and lightly from the saddle.

In Quemado's hands and in those of the burly Pieboy rested dull blue, bulky guns, carelessly sweeping to right and left, commanding the street in either direction and the little group clustered in the dusty roadway.

And then came Quemado's voice, quiet, almost casual.

"Step away, sheriff, and you, too, you deputies. Drop the prisoner and put your hands up. Stand still, Pancho!"

The sheriff, turning a sickly yellow, lifted his hands and backed toward the courthouse veranda. His deputies, stiff with panic, also obeyed, sidling away from Pancho Garcia. The latter, with the fear of death in his staring eyes, remained motionless where they left him.

The Mexican behind them moved forward and stepped in front of Garcia with  $\circ$  mocking inclination of the head. The murderer's lips moved, and a hoarse whisper of supplication to the saints came through their blue barrier. He began to tremble, sagging slowly at the knees as though about to sink to the ground.

A sharp word in Spanish from Quemado braced him. Although his eyes rolled and his lips writhed above his white teeth he straightened up and remained erect.

The Mexican, as though performing a drill often rehearsed, wheeled to each of the other three in turn, running his hands over them, removing from the deputies their revolvers and from the sheriff a large jackknife. These he threw on the ground before the jail door.

From doors and windows faces looked out, agitated or curious. But the nearest house had no windows on the side toward the scene, and those in front looked upon it only at an acute angle. If there were armed enemies inside they could not fire without leaning from the casements and evidently none cared to take that risk. Or perhaps awe of that slender velvet-clad figure, fear of him and of his grim henchman was dominant in every inimical mind. At any rate although in porch and doorways on either side of the road were crowded forms and faces those two horsemen sat serenely, mastering the street and all who looked upon them. Not a shot was fired at them, and a deadly silence hung about the scene.

And now the Mexican, having disarmed the others, wheeled again on the terrified Pancho Garcia. His dark eyes were snapping and his teeth showed in a smile. It was not a pleasant nor mirthful smile. Joanna heard what he said.

"Pig and son of a pig!" he murmured at the sallow culprit. "It is you who kill my brother and whom the *jefe* will allow to escape! But there is still a Gonzales to avenge a Gonzales, as you shall learn! Here! Take this, thou pig, and see if thou canst die otherwise than as a pig dies!"

He drew from his breast two evil-looking knives and threw one of them in the dust at Pancho's feet. At this moment the sharp voice of Quemado broke the stillness with Spanish words.

"You, there! Look out!"

His hand flicked with apparent carelessness to one side and the pistol in it flamed and roared. A bullet smashed into the jamb of a door of a cantina fifty yards away, just above the head of a man who was fumbling stealthily at his hip. The man ducked and dove into the place. The grim Pieboy, commanding the other side of the scene, did not even glance around or move, though his horse threw up his head with a start.

The wretched Garcia shrank back. The swarthy Nemesis in front of him, knife in his right hand, pointed at the blade upon the ground with the other. There was something theatrical and yet impressive about the gesture.

"Pick it up, thou dog, or must I cut thy throat as I would that of a pig?"

The man glanced at his brother, who was sagging inert, with yellow face. There was no help there. On either side the statuesque horsemen sat, silent, deadly and alert and yet apparently uninterested. They paid him not the slightest heed.

Joanna took a step backward, with one hand still holding the edge of the door and the other groping for Castro's arm. To see a man killed before her eyes was unthinkable. If it had to be she must tear her gaze from it, bury her face in her hands, turn her back. Yet she could not. With lips half parted and dry she kept her face to the street, every movement and look of the actors registering vividly on her brain.

Behind her Marcella half sobbed.

"Pop! For God's sake can't you do something?" It was strange that Marcella should feel the horror of it more than she.

"It's a Mexican *baile*," growled Jake but his voice was shaking. "Let 'em settle it!"

And then Joanna knew why these people had puzzled her. They had known what Quemado meant; had known perhaps that he would take a hand in the settlement himself. They were glad that the settlement was out of their hands.

And then at last the shaking Pancho Garcia stooped slowly and cautiously for the knife. His hand closed on the hilt and, half on one knee he looked up at his antagonist, running his tongue over his lips. His features contorted, writhed into a snarl as he summoned the frenzy of desperation. With a shrill scream he leaped at Gonzales.

Joanna saw the two bodies come together, hands clutching at wrists, knees uplifted as they strained against each other. There was a twisting of forms and they fell apart and circled each other. The two horsemen sat unmoved and watchful. From every door and window forms moved out or leaned out, crowding to the street to see. Joanna leaned forward, her breath stopped.

Then Castro dragged her back and forcibly turned her from the sight. As soon as her eyes were off it she put her hands over them and leaned her face against his arm. Shivering with revulsion she listened to the loud beating of her own heart, wondering at her lingering excitement.

Through the door there came a choking cry and around her the men looking from the windows cried subdued exclamations. A scattering shout from outside wavered up and fell.

Then she heard the sudden clatter of hoofs and away into the distance faded the rolling beat of running horses. A shot rang out and then a scattering volley while yells and shouts shattered the former silence into bits.

The half-derisive voice of Sam Blenkinship made comment.

"Ain't them Mexicans plenty hostile and valiant after it's over? If they'd warwhooped like that twenty minutes ago-""

He did not finish and nobody else made any comment. Joanna raised her head and saw them standing around, most of them with faces grave and pale. Gretorix was wiping his face with his handkerchief and licking his lips. Massillon was shaking his head soberly as though unable to overcome a doubt that he was fighting. Marcella was frankly crying, with Johnny Duncan's arm about her.

The chatter of voices outside subsided somewhat. It was followed by shouts and scrambling about. Horses snorted and reared. A storm of hoofbeats and the yells of excited men came through the door.

"What is that?" asked Joanna anxiously. Why she was anxious at an evident pursuit she did not pause to analyze. One of the sheepmen made answer.

"Their aimin' to chase Quemado," he said. "They might as well chase the devil, I reckon."

Two or three of them laughed. Joanna felt an urge to look out which she could not resist. But there was nothing there except what looked like a wet spot in the street where mud had taken the place of dust. Farther down the street a crowd was standing in front of a house. Far off in the distance there was a hanging cloud of dust.

# CHAPTER XI.

Chasing Quemado and his companions, mounted as they were, was like chasing a sunbeam. The pursuit had little chance of success even if enthusiastically carried out, but when to the difficulty was added the indisputable fact that Garcia and his adherents, when all was said and done, were not at all certain of what would happen if they did catch the fugitives a slackening of their efforts was bound to take place before they had ridden more than a few hours.

The debonair Ouemado knew this quite as well as did his Mexican adversaries and acted accordingly. Although he rode hard and fast for fifteen miles and then found a relay of fresh horses, at the end of another equal distance he ceased to worry—if he had ever done so. The sheriff had been distanced and although the wires might be burning all along the Rio Grande and posses setting out to intercept his flight the fact did not disturb him. North and west were untracked miles of mountain and desert: around him were the ragged hills in which searching for him was like looking for a needle in a haystack. And, last of all, the affair had elements in it which would not look exceedingly well for Garcia and his party if all came to light.

The sheriff from Socorro might and probably would ride into his ranch on Elk Mountain and make inquiries for him but he doubted if that functionary would bother further in the matter after finding that Quemado was not at home and his whereabouts a matter of ignorance to his employees.

Gonzales, as the actual killer of Pancho Garcia, would of course be duly indicted at the next session of the grand jury and true bills would assuredly be returned against Pieboy and Ouemado as accessories. But following that adherence to formula the matter would be allowed to rest, the Mexican county prosecutor would discover a convenient memory and forget to be active, and meanwhile various members of the Garcia clan would quietly and unobtrusively "lay for" any of the Gonzales faction they could find and if judged sufficiently safe take their vengeance with knife or gun. As for Quemado and Pieboy, it would be best to leave them alone rather than run undue risk. Of course, if either could be caught at an advantage-

But as neither was at all likely to be so caught the prospect sat rather lightly on them. They rode steadily, heading far into the timbered slopes of the Floridas and made camp in the evening where a little stream cut a gash beside a high mesa which in turn looked out boldly on the brush and hills which fringed the barren plains to the north. A cool, peaceful glen it was, well shaded by pines and stunted walnut, with a grassy flat which afforded excellent fodder for their horses. On an edge of the adjoining flattopped plateau a watcher could see for many miles and warn against the approach of pursuit.

Apparently there was none. Like a cat that has just killed a canary Quemado rested placidly, easy of mind and temporarily satiated with achievement. With him lounged and brooded Pieboy, silent and surly, one ideaed, apparently quiescent. But that was only apparent.

In that queer, twisted, evil brain the picture of the past always dominated the present. To Pieboy life was colored by memories of days when he had ridden the range and dominated it much as Quemado rode and dominated now. His method had been different, perhaps not so picturesque but far more deadly. Had he had the conduct of this affair and could set it back twenty-five years he would simply have ridden into Hillsdale and shot Garcia and any of his friends who were handy. Quemado's methods were planned better from the histrionic point of view but to Pieboy's mind they lacked conclusiveness and were too complicated.

In his day Pieboy had been used to the whispered word of awe, the deprecating deference, the cringing respect of men for the noted killer. The range had been full of his name and his exploits. He had not only been feared but he had been great, in his way.

He was still hale, still hearty, still peerless in deadliness. He still was feared. But he was no longer great and no longer respected. Men hated him and avoided him, spoke of him often but not in terms of respect. He was only Quemado's henchman, subordinate to the man he had taught, his own deeds merely appendages to the exploits of the new celebrity. It was "Quemado this" and "Quemado that" from Albu-Q to El Paso. It was Quemado who filled men's minds and men's thoughts, Quemado who was the hero of a hundred legends—this Quemado whom he had taught and whose lily-handed methods he held in contempt.

Pieboy, gray with years and iniquity, quiescent these many years and tamed by force of circumstances, despised and hated the new West, the new spirit, the new squeamishness and the new terror. He hated Quemado and he despised him as a poor imitation of what a bad man should be. But above all there gnawed into the very vitals of his pride and narrow egotism a vast and sullen jealousy of the notoriety which Quemado had seized.

Jealousy had no outlet but one with Pieboy. To the killer that he had been and still was at heart there was no toleration of another who usurped the fame that he claimed as his own. If Quemado was reputed to be deadly he, Pieboy, was deadlier still and still able to prove it. Evil, brooding, patient, he waited for the time when he should try conclusions with his one-time pupil and settle once for all the question of which was the better man.

And Quemado knew it. Literally, Quemado walked with the shadow of death ever at his elbow and he knew that the shadow was there. He knew it and still he went his way, smiling and at ease, perhaps thrilled a little by the grim anticipation, perhaps feeding his restless energy and force on the feverish contemplation of the ever-imminent catastrophe.

Here, in their concealed aerie, he lounged at ease before the fire, opposite the squatting Rankin who stared with gray-browed, red eyes into the flaming coals and brooded like a forest wolf over his secret plans. And Quemado brooded too.

But a few days ago he would have rather enjoyed a subtle baiting of the dull-brained old murderer, a deft pushing and tempting of him into deadly and fatal rage in which one or other of them inevitably must have died. But then Quemado was quite indifferent whether he lived or not, while now he was conscious that some of his views of life and death had undergone a change. A month ago, to Quemado life had consisted of taking pleasurable chances and the more deadly and dangerous those chances the more pleasurable they were. To perish as a consequence appealed to him as but a normal outcome and in itself an experience that might even offer a new, if a final sensation. Death, after all, was but the Great Adventure.

That attitude, however, was of a month ago. He was not aware that he had changed greatly but he knew that he did not contemplate death with the same detached curiosity that formerly had distinguished him. In fact he found himself averse to considering death at all and impelled by some subtle principle to consider life and living in its stead.

Watching the motionless, grim bulk of Pieboy across the fire, Quemado Jim found his thoughts on new adventures and new exploits. These new, vague plans were quite different from the old ones. They were not so much different in detail as in the attitude with which he examined them. He had done a great many things in his short life which, while perhaps excusable from his point of view had he cared to excuse them, had been done with no real motive except the dubious one of seeing how far he could go before he reached the end. He always had looked forward to an inevitable end. But now he found himself planning a future not greatly different except that his motive had changed. He no longer contemplated a final accounting but schemed to a final accomplishment. Instead of completing his career and dying he was planning to consummate it and live.

A month ago he had been humorously philosophical toward the inevitable. To-day he was still humorous and philosophical but serenely determined to combat the inevitable.

The wild energy concealed under his lazy relaxation was turning toward tentative schemes and in those schemes one figure predominated. He lay, immobile as Pieboy, with still features and half-veiled eyes but the flames at which he looked burned no hotter than his own wild heart as he fed that ultimate thrill on visions of Joanna with her black mane of hair shading her disdainful face. He wondered if Joanna knew anything at all about the real joy of living and daring; whether she knew actual life at all or whether she had merely existed, drifting, bored, routine fed to repletion. To dance and to dine, to chatter and to gossip, to "win" success and position through the simple means of mating with such a man as Gretorix who personified success and position! That was not to live! Not as Quemado saw it. He could teach her to live, because he wanted to live, full-fed with life, himself; and he could not live without her.

His dreams wandered until his lips curled in a smile. Across the fire, sitting like a black threat of doom, the watchful Pieboy saw the face lit up.

"What's amusin' you?" he growled.

"I was thinking that I'd go back," said Quemado softly. Pieboy grunted. He would as soon go back as not and would rather welcome the chance to shoot his way through a gang of infuriated Mexicans.

"Well, when you startin'?"

"To-morrow, I reckon."

Pieboy spat indifferently upon the coals. "Suits me," he said.

Quemado shook his head reflectively. "You're not going," he said quietly and Pieboy looked up with something of a glare. "It's a one-man play."

"Killin' Mexicans? Sure, but why shouldn't I kill 'em as well as any one?"

"I'm not going to kill any one," said Quemado. "I've got another job on hand."

Pieboy relapsed into his stolid indifference. Contempt was the only emotion expressed by his tone.

"Sure! Go ahead and fly your kite. I ain't bein' amused by these here nursery stunts. Watchin' Mexicans knife each other and lettin' 'em chase me up and down the country don't make any hit with me. If you was goin' back to clean 'em out I'd rack along, but if you're aimin' to pull another college initiation you're plumb welcome to pull it alone."

"Where will you be?" asked Quemado, ignoring the sneer.

"I'll be ramblin' around up Corduroy Cañon, I reckon, if you want to look me up."

Quemado nodded assent. "Gonzales can hang around here with the horses, waiting for me. And you'll be passing Bitter Spring on your way. Tell Keno to hold his string there for another week or until I come, will you?"

Pieboy grunted what might have been consent. Quemado was satisfied. A little later both of them rolled into their blankets and went to sleep. Yet Quemado knew that Pieboy was filled with deadly resentment against him for leaving him out of the new adventure although he was at the same time scornful of it. The truth was that Quemado dared not take the man. He could not know when the lust for killing would break loose. It was no part of his half-formed plan to hurt any one on this expedition.

The next morning, the fourth since the killing of Garcia, saw Quemado riding back on the way they had come while Pieboy, with a laden pack horse, went northward and Gonzales remained at the camp with the extra horses. Quemado rode openly and carelessly as though there were not a price on his head and an infuriated clan of Mexicans awaiting him where he was going. Such things as that bothered him not at all. They but added zest to the adventure. With Pieboy gone he rode alone in the blazing sunlight, in shining black and silver, his hat sloped a little and his eyes dancing as he sang low to himself.

He did not ride swiftly. On the contrary he jogged along at a pace well calculated to spare the horse. The distance that he had come in one day he now took two to cover, although he changed horses where the first relay had been left, spending an hour or more ranging the hills about the spring where they had turned their horses loose until he finally found them grazing slowly northward toward the ranch they knew as home.

On the afternoon of the second day he was skirting the fence that marked off Massillon's range from the open country, weaving slowly in and out of gullies and draws, pausing on the ridges where the view was open to scan the landscape about him, although he did not seem so much anxious to anticipate being seen as to find some one himself.

Night found him near the fence rider's station which he had once occupied and there he encountered his successor, a young son of a neighboring rancher named Davis. The boy, who was no more than seventeen years old and already found his job one of exceeding monotony, was glad to welcome him.

"Gee! Quemado!" he exclaimed as that young man dropped from his saddle before the door. "Say, I'm sure glad to see you. D'you know them Mexicans are sure raisin' hell about you!"

Quemado smiled pleasantly. "I'm sorry to have disturbed 'em," he said. "But they'll get over it."

Davis grinned as he led Quemado into his cabin. "They'll get over it quicker than these shorthorns I'm workin' for," he said. "The old man takes it right well. He don't say much of anything. But this Baldy sport and the girl he's sweet on ain't so calm. Baldy, he allows that you ought to be hanged and the girl says you're a ruffian. I heard 'em swingin' on you when I was up at the house after they came back from Hillsdale."

"They are law-abiding people and it would naturally shock 'em a whole lot. I don't blame them," said Quemado virtuously as he sat down and let the fence rider, proud to be waiting on Quemado, rustle his dinner.

4A-P

"Violent people like the Garcias and the Gonzaleses ought to be suppressed."

"Ow!" snorted the boy. "I see you suppressin' Gonzales, a whole lot!"

"I'm not delegated to suppress him," said Quemado. "Besides, before suppressing Gonzales, I think Garcia ought to be gentled a bit."

"Well, he ain't gentled none that you could reco'nize," retorted Davis. "He's rarin' round down there threatenin' to cut your heart out and feed it to you."

"Don't tell him I'm back then," said Quemado and the boy flushed.

"Say, what you think I am? Tell him! I got a picture of me tellin' him!"

Quemado smiled his thanks and drew up to the table to eat. After he had finished, Davis spoke in some surprise.

"Ain't you goin' to turn your horse out?"

"I'm going on in a little," said Quemado. "I may be back later on but don't expect me. I can roll up in the field."

"You come right on in whenever you get here," said Davis. "But you ain't goin' yet? I was hopin' you'd maybe sing 'Hassayampa Sam' fer me."

Quemado shook his head. "I'm not singing that song just now," he said with regret. "But I'll sing you another if you want me to."

Davis did and Quemado sang a Spanish love song for him. The boy, although speaking the limited dialect of the region, had no vocabulary to understand the thing in its entirety but he sat spellbound, his lips parted and eyes glowing, while Quemado sat with head back and eyes half closed, softly pouring his soul into the words. It was not such a song as Davis preferred but he sat silent after it was over, the intense rapture of the thing filling his immature heart with vague longings. And Quemado also sat with his eyes looking far away and a smile on his lips.

At last he rose. "I'll be pulling my freight," he said.

He rode away through the fence and into the pasture, heading toward The Manor. It was about seven o'clock and he calculated that he would arrive at the ranch house an hour later, when they would be rising from dinner. In this he was correct but he did not go around to the front and call at the house. Instead, leaving his horse behind a clump of evergreen shrubs that bounded the gardens at the rear, he came up to about fifty feet of the rear veranda and stood there leaning against a pomegranate tree, in the shadow of which his black and silver blended into invisibility.

There he stood, motionless and statuesque, his eves fixed hungrily on the lighted house from which occasional subdued tones of laughter came. The minutes sped on into an hour and still nothing occurred. The doors remained shut and curtained, the light sifting through their silk hangings. Quemado never moved but he hummed so softly that one could not hear it a foot away:

"Till the sun grows cold, And the stars are old, And the leaves of the Judgment Book unfold!"

At last a shadow clouded the rose of the doors and one of them swung slowly open. A slender figure made its way through and stood silhouetted under the arching gloom of the veranda.

Slowly but with some subtle hint of uneasy restlessness the figure walked up and down the veranda two or three times and again came to rest, looking out into the moonlight. Then it took a slow step downward—another—hesitated—another step! It was on the graveled walk and sauntering slowly toward the black and silver figure invisible under the pomegranate.

### CHAPTER XII.

On the return to the ranch after that scene on the one street of Hillsdale there was for some time very little comment on the occurrences that had been witnessed. Gretorix, driving the car, evidently had much to think about and devoted himself to that and to his wheel. The cattleman who sat beside him was not a loquacious person. In the rear seats Massillon was thoughtful while Castro and Blenkinship discoursed little and that casually on topics rather remote. Marcella seemed satisfied to think of the fortunate outcome for Johnny Duncan.

As for Joanna, she was in a state of revulsion and shock. For the life of her she could not banish the persistent impression left by the sight of those grim horsemen sitting in their saddles and commanding the awed population of the town. The black and silver figure of Quemado especially obsessed her, painting itself on her brain so persistently that she strove desperately to exclude it by keeping her eyes on the broad back of Gretorix before her.

Gretorix spelled safety for her she now told herself. He represented the solid virtues, the orderly processes of life, the things she had always known and always respected. The picturesque, unscrupulous and lawless might be romantic, might grip her imagination, might even rouse in her responsive instincts which she had never known she possessed and which frightened and horrified her, but there was no doubt that solid respectability and substantial responsibility were to be preferred as being safer. Even the people with whom she sat, born and raised in New Mexico and presumably in tune with its sentiments, by their references confirmed her view. Neither Castro nor Blenkinship approved nor condoned the acts of Quemado, she was sure. At best they merely did not judge him because his sphere of action was in matters with which they had no immediate concern.

Thus the killing of Gonzales by Garcia and the slaying, in turn, of Garcia by a Gonzales, meant nothing serious to the ranchers and townsmen so long as it remained merely that. It was only when Garcia attempted to involve men of Anglo-Saxon blood in the affair and to subject them to Mexican ideas of justice and law that they lined up to take sides. When that was shown to be unnecessary, chiefly through the good sense and firmness of Massillon, the quarrel became no business of theirs. Quemado, who had chosen to mix in a matter concerning Mexicans, might look out for himself as best he could. As between the Garcias and the Gonzaleses no doubt they favored the latter but that had nothing to do with it. The approval was merely academic.

But to Joanna the whole affair had a personal interest. An attitude of indifferent detachment was impossible to her because the personality of the chief figure insisted on obtruding itself on her thoughts. She hated the man and she feared him and yet he fascinated her with his infernal good looks, his assurance, his flair for the dramatic. He was like a moving-picture star, monopolizing her attention as handsome screen favorites seized the imaginations of countless of her sisters.

During the next three or four days she strove with fair success against that fascination, aided by the conviction that escape was easy, made so by Quemado himself. That threat, so absurd and melodramatic, no longer troubled her. With the passing of that cloud of dust which told of swift flight

and determined pursuit Quemado was removed from active participation in her decisions. He would be busy for some time in evading his enemies; too busy to annoy her. Strange that she should feel a tiny twinge of what seemed regret as that knowledge was admitted!

That was romanticism, however, and she was not romantic. The thing to do was to root out the persistent memory of the man and the way to do that was to get out of his environment and go where she would no longer be reminded of him. Her safety lay with Baldwin—and Baldwin was going too.

This she discovered that night when she heard Gretorix and Massillon discussing matters in the library. She did not listen but coming into the adjoining living room before she knew that they were there she caught a sentence or two before she could withdraw. As a matter of fact they were finishing what they had to say.

"It isn't that I haven't a great deal to thank you for, Baldwin," Massillon was saying in conclusion to what had gone before. "I've paid full tribute to your ability—in your own lines. You've done wonders. But this thing from now on is a case of psychological fitness rather than technical qualifications. You've got plenty to boast of in what you've done—and it's the right time to quit."

"I agree with you," replied Baldwin as Joanna backed to the door through which she had entered. "I'm not the type and I'm glad of it. I've no doubt you can find some one who'll fill the place."

Then Joanna paused, why she could hardly have said. But she awaited the reply expectantly and heard it without surprise as though she had actually anticipated it.

"I don't know that I can. It wouldn't be difficult if the man were willing. I may be mistaken, but it strikes me that this Fairfax would be ideal. Provided this latest escapade blows over, of course."

Escapade! And Massillon actually thoughtfully considering the possibility of employing that man! She drew back with a flame of indignation but not so rapidly that she did not hear the further comment.

"He's in need of something to settle him, of course, but otherwise he strikes me as being highly efficient."

Well, that settled it. Baldwin was going and she would go too. As long as she remained in this place she would be dreaming

of that spectacular swashbuckler. There was no reason why she should remain. She and Gretorix belonged elsewhere and they would go together.

Baldwin, a little stiff and disturbed by his interview with Massillon, was cheered and warmed by Joanna's attitude at dinner. She chatted with him in a light, friendly way of New York and Los Angeles and of people they both knew and places they both were familiar with. They removed themselves automatically from this world in which, after all, they were aliens, and back to that which was their natural environment.

Quemado rode by day and hid by night, driven clear away from all they stood for by the pack that rode at his heels.

When the meal was over Joanna and Gretorix drifted away from the others. They found a seat out in the rear hall behind the great stairway and near the French doors opening onto the veranda and garden, and for a while their talk ran on about East and West, the people of the world and the work of the world. And then Gretorix spoke.

"D'you know I'm going away, Joanna?" "I know," she replied quietly. "I think you are wise."

She added that she had heard something of what had passed between Massillon and himself.

"I'm glad you heard it. It makes it simpler. Arnold was right, I think, though I don't understand his taking up with that fellow." Joanna shrank slightly at mention of the man. Could she never rid herself of his shadow? But Gretorix drifted from dangerous ground unconscious that he had trodden on quicksand.

"Running this place isn't proper work for me anyway. The planning and construction of it was another thing and he admits that it was well done. Well, that let's me out. I hung on because I liked it and for the novelty of it all. But my work lies in building, not in being a manager of properties. He suggested it when he hinted that I had nothing to gain and something to lose by staying."

"I don't think there is any question of that. Your reputation shouldn't be risked in the running of a cattle ranch, no matter how glorified. Let people who have been bred to that do it."

Baldwin nodded. Yet he tried to be honest with himself.

"I'm not denying that he's right in hint-

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ing that I have limitations. It's a psychological and not a technical problem, as Arnold says. It isn't exactly a question of being able to handle men, either. I can do that, and the more primitive they are the easier they are to handle. I could run the ranch profitably too. But when it comes to getting down under the skin of these people I fall down. They are primitive-or something like it-but it isn't the kind of primitiveness we generally describe by that term. The nearest I can come to it is to class them with Tennessee or Kentucky mountaineers-and yet they are not at all like them. I wonder if you know what I mean?"

"I think I do," said Joanna. "At any rate I feel that there is a difference."

"It's more their independence than anything else, I should say. It gets into them some way. A boss isn't exactly a boss—and yet he is. I've heard Jake Castro curse his hands and fire them as quick as an Irish foreman would fire a bunch of Hungarians. They take his curses and his orders but— I don't know. It isn't the same at all."

"As like as not the man he fires calls him 'Jake' and slaps him on the back the next time they meet," suggested Joanna.

"That's it-or he undertakes to whip him for firing him. Well, these men take my orders but every now and then I seem to step on the toes of one of them and then it's all off. They don't wait for me to fire them. They fire me. They tolerate me but they don't really respect me, or something like that. Take that Johnny Duncan, for example. A year ago he would have been looking up to me even if he didn't work for me. Now after a few months of this atmosphere he is as cocky as they make them and calls me a liar to my face for nothing at all. The worst of it is that he makes me feel that he was right, after all. I've been ashamed, although I hate to confess it, that I thrashed him. That's a hard thing to admit."

"It is," said Joanna feelingly. She liked Gretorix then better than she had ever liked him before.

"I'm trying to analyze where I fell down. I think I have fallen down, in part. I think I can read character and I don't despise these people. Far from it. It's just because there's a gap between us which I haven't yet bridged. I'd stay to bridge it if I could, but frankly I don't think it's worth it. I've got other work to do and the little quirks of character that distinguish this species of Americans aren't of sufficient interest to keep me from that work.

"Then there's this-attitude toward certain things. This Fairfax. That, I admit, has me guessing. What is he and who is he? Why is he allowed to get away with the stuff he pulls? I can't figure him. I remember him when he played football at Columbia and was All American half back. There was something about him even then. He seemed to dominate the field as he dominates the range. Perhaps he's able-but to me he seems rather worthless; a man deliberately throwing away his opportunities and wasting whatever talent he may have. A fellow like that-and helping Mexican murderers and prehistoric gunmen in their lawless exhibitions! It's beyond me."

"Let's don't talk of him," said Joanna shortly. Gretorix had again stepped on the sand.

"All right. But I wanted you to know why I go; why I failed to fit. I don't fit with Quemado."

"No," said Joanna, feeling half stifled. "I'm glad you are going—and I'm going too."

"If you—if you'd go with me; if you'd let me tell the others that we—were going together to be married, Joanna. You know that I worship the ground you walk on. And I can make you happy, dear—"

But Joanna felt as though she were stifling. Something was rising before her eyes, called there by Gretorix himself; a figure of black and silver. Something was making her heart pound with reaction, something fighting within her against herself or what she thought was herself.

Gretorix's hand was on hers, a large, capable, shapely hand, but its touch was distasteful. Beside it she seemed to feel another hand, singularly white and supple, like the hand of a pianist, steely with strength, almost effeminate in deftness. She rose from the seat, almost without volition, drawing her hand away from him.

"I know, Baldwin, and I—think I feel the way you want me to feel. But I'm not quite sure. I—I want to think a few minutes. I want to go and think by myself, if you don't mind.

"Oh, no!" as he rose at once, solicitous. "I don't mean for you to go. Wait here for me. I'll walk outside. I'm—flushed." She laughed uncertainly. "Upset a little. But if you'll let me go for a moment—I'll come back——"

She was upset. He thought her marvelous in her sweet and trembling confusion; a confusion that he had not expected from one generally so calm. But there could be only one explanation and that a delightful one. It meant surrender.

He stood there watching her, his heart in his eyes as she went to the door and hesitantly opened it, picking up a light wrap against the chill night air. Then she stepped through the door with one backward glance that left him puzzled. He had read in it not love but something like fear!

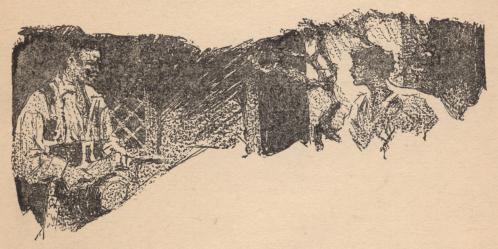
For a few moments she paced slowly up and down the flags of the veranda, strangely restless, striving to calm herself by measured steps. But the dark arches pressed upon Quemado laughed low and softly. "Out of your life! I've come into your life! I've come there with life itself! You've never had a life as yet. Neither have I. You thought you were living; so did I think I was living. But we haven't lived, Joanna! That's why I came back. I said I'd come."

"And I wish you'd go-at once!"

He shook his head. "Do you? Well, I'm going pretty soon. But I came, first of all, to tell you that living without you isn't living. I've come to tell you that I love you. I think you ought to know it."

There was plenty of feeling there but there was also a queer effect of *naïveté* that set her pulses leaping again. She held herself together well.

"I'm not interested in your affections, Mr. Fairfax."



her. The limitless sky and the flooding moonlight offered relief from the pressure of her thoughts—if she had any thoughts. Slowly she stepped into the walk and slowly drifted onward through the garden.

Then she came to a pomegranate tree and beheld without shock or surprise a slender form, black against the moonlight, but dotted with silver, as it stepped, hat in hand before her.

"I was hoping you would come," said Quemado. She raised her hands to her throat and held them there, crossed one above the other.

"And I was congratulating myself that you wouldn't—and couldn't!" she replied steadily although her heart was leaping outrageously. "That you'd gone forever out of my life." "Yes, you are. You don't know what they are—but you're going to know. You've come out here—"

"I came, if it interests you, to—er—look at the moon—before returning to tell Mr. Gretorix that I will marry him."

She flushed red, feeling a strangled desire to laugh; wondering if she was on the verge of hysteria or was losing her mind that she could see anything funny in the situation.

"Gretorix?" repeated Quemado. "Gretorix? You are going to marry him?"

"Yes," she said but her voice trembled uncertainly, giving the word an effect of hesitancy.

"Why," said Quemado reflectively but with a note of roughness in his voice, "that puts a different face on it. You're not going to marry Gretorix. Who's he, to have you?" "I think we've talked enough," said Joanna but she was unable to turn and go as she wished to do. She found herself trembling though she did not feel cold.

"Yes, we've talked enough. I came here to talk, though. But it isn't necessary. You're not going to marry Gretorix."

She tried to put defiance into the answer. "Am I not?"

"No. Not Gretorix. I didn't intend this —in spite of what I said. But you don't know—and you've got to know. So we'll not talk. It's too late for that."

He seemed to loom suddenly although he had not moved appreciably. She shrank away, shaking.

"What is it? What do you mean?"

And then he had stepped in, swept her into his arms and off the ground. She was raised up, swung around and being borne swiftly away.

She tried to scream and her voice would not come. She tried to struggle and she was paralyzed. Steel bands encircled her and fright that was half pleasant was thrilling her. Then she was heaved up and across a saddle.

At last she found her voice in a wavering cry but he was already in the sadde and the creaking leather seemed to be loud enough to drown her voice. Strength, however, was returning to her and she found herself able to twist and struggle in the endeavor to break out of those restraining arms and throw herself to the ground. She might as well have tried to escape from a straitjacket for all the good it did.

And the horse was moving, with a wheel and a lurch as he gathered himself and leaped under the spur. And then he settled into a smooth, swift stride that set the wind blowing fiercely against her hair and cheeks while the drumming hoofs beat a rolling accompaniment to the pounding of her heart.

Again she cried out, this time with fulldrawn breath and volume sufficient to carry more than a few yards. Flinging her head around she saw the shadowed face of the man close to her own. With clutching fingers that seemed to bruise themselves on muscles like hard rubber, she gripped the arm that encircled her and with the other hand struck at Quemado's face. He merely swung it back slighty, leaning to one side so that her cramped blows were wasted on the air or fell harmlessly.

Joanna strained to listen, hoping to hear

the noise of pursuit. Back there in the darkness she thought she heard confused outcry but if so its very indistinctness bore the terrifying suggestion that it was already far distant. And at best she could not be sure. The hammering drum beat of the hoofs deadened hearing. Strange that it did not also drown the insistent creak of saddle leather and the tap, tap, tapping of the urgent spurs!

Wildly she struggled now. She lifted her voice in a scream that cut the air like a knife. She strove to bring her left arm, which was pinned behind her, high enough to drive the elbow into Quemado's face. But the steel band held her close against the velvet breast.

"Coward! Coward! Coward!" she cried, her strained voice breaking in a desperate sob. But Quemado answered only with a short laugh.

Then she fell to weeping. She felt as though all ability to resist, to strive, to call for help had deserted her. With every roll of the hoofs she was being snatched farther from everything that tied her to life as she knew it. Every leap of the horse was a leap into a new world, an unknown, dark future separated by a bottomless gulf from the past, from her friends, her conventions and her habits. She felt unutterably lonely.

Back there at The Manor precious moments which might have meant her rescue were being wasted. Gretorix, hearing a halfsuppressed cry, had come out onto the veranda and standing in the shade of the arches had looked about to see what had become of her. He saw nothing and heard nothing except the receding rattle of hoofs in the distance. Anxious, he ran up and down the garden for five minutes, searching for her. Not until then did he raise an alarm and then merely confided his anxiety to the others of the household. They, too, never dreamed of what had happened. That a girl could be forcibly abducted from beneath their very noses never entered their heads.

The cow hands at the cottage finally were aroused and turned out. They got horses and began to scour the pastures and fields nearest the house on the supposition that Joanna might have wandered out and have been injured. But the combing of the fields resulted in nothing although the circle was cast farther and farther as the night wore on.

A nighthawk in the horse pasture about

a mile and a half from the house gave the only clew and that was indefinite. He had heard a shriek, distant but insistent, and had thought it was the cry of a wild cat. He thought it had scared some horse that was grazing by itself for there also had been the sound of galloping. That argued an accident and more time was spent in raking every foot of the smaller pastures in that They found neither Joanna nor vicinity. any horse that could have made the noise. But on the rough road that led back through the fenced areas toward the hilly country and the reservoir were the deeply scored tracks of a horse that ran with tremendous. reaching strides, lightly shod with plates that bore small calks.

Toward morning the circle of hard-riding cowboys, raking every foot of the rougher ground, reached the fence rider's station where Davis was just getting ready to go out on his rounds. There they heard for the first time that Quemado had been in the vicinity the night before. One of them bore the news swiftly to The Manor while the others promptly scattered to ride every inch of the outer fence to discover where the hoof prints of the running horse had left the confines of the ranch.

The anxious, sleepless group at the ranch hailed the cow-puncher as he "set up" his horse and leaped to the ground before the veranda. Massillon, stern and self-contained, was there, his wife, pale and shaken, and Marcella Castro, restless, impatient, already dressed for riding to join the hunt as soon as day permitted.

"Nothin' certain," said the cow-puncher. "There was a horse went through last night on the upper road, goin' hard. Wouldn't mean much, I reckon, if it wasn't that Quemado was here last night."

"Quemado!" echoed Massillon blankly. "What's that got to do with it?" The idea of abduction was so preposterous that it had not yet occurred to him. Those who knew Quemado better than he were not so slow to grasp the indications. Marcella, alert and energetic at once, cried out with a great enlightenment.

"He said he'd do it! Oh, the unspeakable scoundrel! He's done it, Mr. Massillon! He's done it!"

"Done what?"

Impatiently she seized his arm and shook him. "He's carried her off—like he carried the Ramirez girl. There's nothing he'll stop at! Oh, where is Gretorix? Riding around like a lost sheep when he should be here to do something!"

Massillon bit through the cigar he had been smoking and his eyes flamed with a fury more devastating because it was controlled by an iron will.

"If that's the case he'll find that there's law and men to enforce it, even in New Mexico. Here, you!"

He rasped upon the cowboy as though the man were an immigrant laborer. He was the driving boss, the master of men in that instant. And the range rider, who would have resented an encroachment on his self-respect from the archangels themselves, sprang to attention and stood alert and ready to obey.

"Kill that horse getting to Hillsdale and rouse the town. Get the sheriff and a posse and bring them here. We'll telephone the ranches 'round about but I want a man to get down there and see that these Mexicans turn out. We'll have horses here at once. Marcella, can you ride to the upper pastures and drive a bunch in?"

"I'll do better than that," she said with grim determination matching his own. "I'm going through to the outer fence and I'll send the men back for fresh horses."

She was off the steps and headed for the stables where the horses she and Joanna and Mrs. Massillon rode were always kept. Massillon called after her.

"What's that you're planning?"

"I'm going after the ranchers at Pajillito —the sheepmen. Hi Docherty is there and Johnny Duncan, if they haven't yet gone north with their flocks."

A moment later she was flashing from the open stable door on a horse that ran as though chased by wolves, her spurs and quirt urging him to the utmost of his speed. Then Massillon turned and sprang to the telephone.

### CHAPTER XIII.

Through half an hour or more of swift progress Joanna lay almost inert, too shaken and exhausted to struggle further, too forlornly conscious that struggling was useless. Then there came a sudden pause, the jolt arousing her as the horse slowed to a trot and then wheeled and stopped, head hanging and breath panting. He stood an instant relaxed and Quemado shifted his grip and swung far out of the saddle to unhook a section of wire looped here to form a gate. Then the horse sprang through and took up his smooth, fleet stride into the unknown.

But the tireless gallop changed now. The monotony of motion was dispelled. Thev were heading into rougher country, plunging down steep slopes into black draws, smashing through scrub timber, climbing up hog backs and winding tortuously into the higher hills. The horse grunted and snorted with his efforts and his labored breathing suggested a faint but welcome hope to Joanna. She remembered that the beast was carrying double, nearly three hundred pounds of humanity. Surely he could not go far nor fast under that burden! The pursuit might be delayed but it was inevitable and, provided that the trail could be followed, all advantage lay on the side of the huntsmen. Even such horses as Ouemado had could not distance the pursuit so long as she burdened him.

"Are you feeling tired?" asked Quemado as the thought caused her to stir. The question, laden with solicitude for her welfare suddenly struck her as supremely ludicrous, rousing hysterical laughter.

"Tired! Tired! Oh, my God!"

Quemado frowned at her mirth, accompanied as it was by staccato catching of breath.

"Here, don't lose your grip!" he said. "You're not going to be hurt!"

Again she laughed, this time shrilly. "Oh! Oh! Hurt! I'm not going to be—hurt!"

The horse twisted and lurched and plunged, scrambling upward with heaving back, gained a level ridge, broke into a trot that added its jolt to her distraction, from that to a gallop and again to a trot ending in a pitch forward as the animal half slid and half strode down a sandy slope into a clump of tangled, tearing mesquite. Then up a gully, fairly clear and level, occasionally splashing into water, the plates clanking on stones.

"Shut up!" said Quemado, briefly and forcibly. Somehow, unmitigated ruffian as she thought him, the roughness of the command was surprising from him, acting like a dousing of cold water, shocking her out of her hysteria. She fell to trembling which gradually quieted as they plowed onward.

How many miles? She had no idea. It seemed that they had been traveling endlessly for many ages but the moon still shone though it was low, now. She did not know at what hour it rose and set and so was unable to guess what time its position betokened. But it had been up when this shattering event had occurred so probably not more than three or four hours had passed altogether. Would the pursuit be on its way by now?

On and on they went, the shadows growing ever longer as the moon sank. The stars speckled the sky so thickly that it looked almost light with their brilliant points of fire. The sky was infinitely remote. That was as it should be. Her vague belief in heaven placed it somewhere up there—and heaven certainly was remote; too remote for succor; too far removed for comforting.

Joanna thought of dying. She had heard of girls who shot themselves rather than fall into the hands of evil men. Quemado was evil but, somehow, dying had no attractions as a means of escape. In the first place, she could not believe that he threatened her with any real harm. What she feared, or rather what she dared not even think of lest the fear of it should dominate her, was that he might subdue her, break her will and take possession of her mind to such an extent as to reduce her to his mastery, hypnotize her by his personality. Anything was possible in this extraordinary, mad, maniac adventure.

But here the memory of the Ramirez girl came to her aid. She was wondering if that girl, enslaved and doting, had fought and screamed and wept—and finally come to dazed subjection. She probably had. But where the horror of the affair somehow failed to retain its strength that knowledge of another woman caused her power of resistance to flame again.

And then she paused, aghast! What was she coming to that such an idea could for a moment find lodgment in her mind? The whole preposterous outrage was something to be met with cold scorn and biting contempt, the man nothing but a brutal ruffian who could inspire only loathing and disgust.

And, looming there beside her, the soft velvet of his jacket rubbing her hot cheek, Quemado rode unmoved and inscrutable into the night.

At the end of that climb they came out upon flatter ground rimmed round by trees of some kind. The tread of the horse was soft and noiseless here and it was easy to guess that he trod on grass. He did not break into a gallop however but walked sedately. Then he raised his head and nickered shrilly. An answering neigh came from the black shadows of a clump of trees off to one side and a bell jangled.

Quemado circled the place, plunging among the trees, the branches of which plucked and tore at Joanna's flimsy garments. In that dense darkness the air struck her with sudden chill which the rapid movement had hitherto kept her from feeling. She could see nothing, but the horse stepped out eagerly and she heard the movement of other horses in the brush, their snorts and the snapping of branches. The bell jangled protestingly and the abrupt thud of hoofs told her that the horses were hobbled.

Then they came out again into the grassy glade and Quemado swung down from the saddle, lifting her after him. She found her limbs stiff and sank to the damp grass, shivering with the cold. The man turned to his horse and untied the roll behind the saddle, producing a heavy coat like a sailor's reefer which he put about her unresisting shoulders. Next the saddle came off the horse, which waited with hanging head and steaming, wet flanks until the bridle was slipped off. Then it moved away and presently lay down and rolled.

Quemado threw the saddle on another horse, took off the hobbles and turned a second one loose also. Then he came back to the girl, sitting supine on the grass.

"Hadn't you better walk around a bit before we go on?" he asked. The polite solicitude for her comfort struck her again with a hysterical desire to laugh which was almost instantly followed by an impulse to forlorn tears. She felt friendless and alone and even *his* consideration touched her in her need to lean upon some one.

"Please take me back!" she begged in a small voice, like a child.

But Quemado shook his head. "It's too late, I'm afraid. We must go on."

He placed a hand under her arm and assisted her to her feet and then led her up and down across the glade a few times. The walk rested her and his impersonal touch on her arm reassured her. As the stiffness departed from her limbs she felt a new birth of energy and hope.

They came back to where the saddled horse stood with the other animal at a little distance. As Quemado stepped to his saddle Joanna suddenly ran to the other horse. The beast was gentle and though it moved away and half turned she gained its withers, clutched its mane and strove to throw herself to its back.

But she did not have the knack and merely found herself futilely springing in awkward hops and sliding back again while the beast turned and edged away from her. Then Quemado on the other horse ranged beside her, leaned down, slid a powerful arm beneath hers and hauled her up again to his saddle horn where she came to rest, dignity outraged, on a folded blanket. She struggled and struck at him without the least avail.

Curiously, she resented the lack of grace and agility shown by her effort and its sequel more than she did the actual failure or his calm seizure of her. She was furiously conscious that she had not looked well while trying to mount the horse and while being dragged up across that saddle horn. She felt vexed envy of Marcella's ability to lash a horse into a run and to vault upon it from the ground. If she could have done that, with grace and certainty—

Her hand fell on the butt of Quemado's six-shooter and she jerked it out, feeling a great triumph as it seemed that at last the ascendancy was to be hers. But this was premature. In the first place she had hauled it out backward and found herself gripping it awkwardly upside down. As his arm was holding her and she could not bring her hands together there was no way of changing her grasp without letting it fall. She raised her hand high over her head in an effort to train the muzzle down and at him but even then found herself helpless, for she could reach the trigger only with her little finger and then with only the utmost tip of it.

And Quemado laughed low and joyously. "I'm afraid you can't use it that way," he said. "Shall I show you?"

Furiously Joanna struck him with the gun, the blow reaching the side of his head and scoring his cheek. His laughter ceased. He reached up and shifted his grip on her to his left arm, drawing her forward against him. Her cheek was pulled against his breast and her hair under his chin as he reached her hand with his right hand and took the gun away, slipping it back into the holster. In Joanna's left ear beat his heart, regular and strong. Her position, thus, stirred her somewhat. Then he kissed her hair.

That was the only tenderness, the only liberty he took with her and the next instant she was released and back to her original position, flushed, angry but subdued and —shy!

They were riding on at a lope and behind them clattered another horse, not the tired one he had ridden here but the companion of the one hobbled in the glade. The change of horses and the presence of a second mount destroyed her hope that pursuit was bound to overtake them. It was apparent that Quemado was well provided with relays and that there was little chance that his horses would give out.

She found courage to ask a question. "What time is it?"

Quemado glanced up at the sky and answered shortly.

"A little past midnight. One o'clock perhaps."

Four hours! She had thought they had been gone at least eight. "We've come better than twenty miles," he added. Again she was surprised and should have been elated—but, strangely, was not. She was merely critical, as though blaming him for not having made better progress. A certain detached interest was beginning to form in her mind, a desire to observe the outcome of the affair.

They came out of the timber and loped along a high ridge on each side of which was a black gulf of shadows. Tirelessly the sturdy Arab justified the fame of his breed as he swung along for mile after mile. The ground was not difficult and the motion was monotonously smooth. Joanna began to feel drowsy and her head drooped against the velvet shoulder. Quemado tightened his arm and she relaxed securely in its fold, never considering what iron endurance he must be displaying.

Thus they went on through the night and Quemado, with blood drying on his cheek where she had struck him with the gun, looked down on the black, disheveled head against his breast. His still features relaxed and grew soft and the restless eyes remained still and tender as they rested on her.

It was growing dawn when he rode into the gulch from whence he had started on this mad adventure. Early as it was the Mexican, Gonzales, who had heard the tread of the horses, was out of his blankets and standing alert to meet him.

The tired horse stood at ease, hips sloped and head down. Gonzales, his swarthy face a compound of emotions, doubt, fear and disapproval predominant, stepped forward to receive Quemado's burden, pity in his eyes. But Quemado motioned him away.

"Sh-h! Don't wake her!" he muttered in Spanish. Then he dropped the reins to the ground, gathered her carefully in his arms and swinging his right leg over the horn stepped from the saddle and to the ground. Joanna stirred but did not open her eyes. Ouemado carried her to the camp fire while Gonzales followed with the blanket. He spread this on the ground and on it Quemado laid the girl, folding the covering about her. Then the two men tiptoed quietly about, stirring up the fire and making ready to prepare food. They moved with elaborate caution, painfully solicitous not to arouse the prisoner.

"But, señor, this a bad affair!" whispered Gonzales. "It is not right that you should steal the lady. And the señor knows that there will be great trouble over this."

Quemado grinned, not altogether mirthfully. "It is pretty raw, Ramon!" he admitted. "And you're safe in saying there will be trouble. Do you know what they'll be doing by this time or a little later?"

Ramon shook his head doubtfully. "I am thinking of the poor señorita," he answered. "Unless, of course, she came willingly? But, even then—"

Bending over frying pan and Dutch oven neither noticed that Joanna's eyes had opened and that she was staring wonderingly and blankly at the sky. They spoke low but she could hear them. Gradually comprehension of her situation dawned on her but with it came sudden, unreasoning panic that paralyzed her. It passed quickly but by that time the voices held her quiet. And the rich aroma of an antelope steak broiling over the coals smote her nostrils, giving her something else to think about.

"She didn't come willingly," said Quemado gloomily. "I don't know that I'd want her to come willingly. That's the devil in me, I guess. If I want a thing badly I want to take it—not have it handed to me. And yet I wouldn't hurt her. You know that, Ramon?" It was as though he appealed to the man for reassuring trust and Gonzales answered him, though he did not approve.

"The señor is like the tiger," he said. "But under the tiger is the man. If the tiger seizes its prey without pity, the man spares and cherishes its helplessness. We who know the señor, know that, but—does the señorita know it? I fear that she will suffer much before—"

"Before she finds it out," completed Quemado dryly. "Well, your metaphors are illuminating if extravagant, Ramon. I reckon that the tiger side must be the more conspicuous to her sight."

"The señor could take her back," suggested the Mexican. But Quemado growled a negative.

"Take her back! Why, she'd marry that man Gretorix! If she did I think I'd kill Gretorix if they hanged me for it."

"The hanging may not be remote even as it is," Ramon said suggestively. Quemado acquiesced indifferently.

"They will be swarming from every town on the Rio Grande," he said with a faint grin. "Mexican and gringo will be riding into the mountains from east and south and west, drawing a circle around me. It begins to look interesting, doesn't it?"

"It looks like a rope and a tree for the señor," said Gonzales, gloomily. But Quemado laughed.

"Well, we'll give them a chase while we can," he said. "And anyway she'll never marry that fellow now."

"If he gets her back-"

"Gets her back! I know his breed. He'd be grave, sorrowful, pitying—and conventional. She'd be the heroine of an adventure, abducted by a desperado, alone with him in the hills—terribly compromising, you know! Unfortunate; to be sincerely pitied —but not to be married. That's *his* kind, listening to the cackle of gossips and governing his life by what people may say."

"Even so," said Ramon gently, "the señorita is to be pitied if her reputation is to be sacrificed—for what?"

Quemado rose from the fire and stood straight and splendid in his ruffled and scratched costume.

"It's for her to say for what," he said quietly. "I've torn her out of that treadmill and brought her where she can *live*. There'll be a priest at Elk Mountain—you can fetch Padre Felix from Xeres in case she will marry me. If she won't——"

Then Joanna raised herself on her blankets and spoke with ringing indignation.

"And if she won't?"

Quemado did not seem surprised. He turned and looked at her unembarrassed, his eyes blue and light against the brown of his face. The red streak of the wound she had given him flamed in her view, shocking her.

"If she won't"—he paused and then went on with a shrug of the shoulders—"there'll be merry hell to pay in the Datils, I suppose. They'll haze us up and down until they get us. Then you can go back with them."

"A fine prospect for me—to pay in suffering and ignominy and disgrace for your fun, Mr. Fairfax! Remember that I pay not you!"

"Oh," said Quemado easily, "I'll pay too. Don't fool yourself."

"You!" she said scornfully. "How?"

Quemado turned his chin into the air, ran a forefinger round his throat and with clenched hand made a lifting motion at his ear, grimly clear pantomime that made her pale.

Again she thought of the Ramirez girl. The man had abducted *her* without punishment. Of course she was a Mexican, but even so his immunity was not clear. If they had not punished him for that, would they actually go to extremes against him even for the crime against her? She doubted it, the idea of his splendid manhood being hanged or even immured behind walls being, somehow, unbelievable and unbelievably terrible. She almost caught herself protesting against the notion.

"If you will let me go," she suggested with more gentleness, "I'll see that you are not punished."

But Quemado only laughed. "To let you go would be worse punishment than that," he said. "No; I'll not let you go."

She met his gaze but in the blue eyes was a certain flame that disturbed her more than her situation. Her own eyes sank. And then the odor of antelope venison again furnished relief in the realization that she was famished for food.

"May I have something to eat?" she asked timidly. Gonzales and Quemado almost collided as they sprang to the fire to serve her. Then, sitting cross-legged on the blanket, she had her breakfast, the two men waiting on her as though she were a queen. They were so considerate and solicitous that she began to feel cheered and almost happy.

The polite and kindly Gonzales, especially, reassured her. This was strange, inasmuch as she readily recognized him as the bloodthirsty ruffian who had killed Pancho Garcia with a knife almost as she looked on. He seemed now to be merely a kindly, gentle, soft-spoken fellow, with a good face and unmistakably well disposed toward herself. She could not dream of harm from him and his presence was almost as good as that of one of her own sex. A word or two informed her that he had a wife of whom he was inordinately fond. She even began to speculate on the possibility of persuading him to take her to his home and place her in his señora's care.

But she bided her time, not sure how far his loyalty to Quemado would permit him to aid her. The two men withdrew to the fire and began to clear up the remains of the meal. When they had heated water preparatory to washing the dishes Joanna rose and came over to them, picking up a dish towel as Quemado soused the tin plates. He looked up at her and smiled approvingly. She did not answer the smile as she took the plate he handed her and wiped it dry.

They worked silently a few moments and then Quemado addressed Gonzales. "Seen anything of Pieboy since yesterday?"

The Mexican's face contorted in a frown. "He went—and he returned. He had liquor and was inclined to talk, señor. Pieboy is mad!"

"Crazy as a June bug," agreed Quemado cheerfully. "But if he's gone again it's a good riddance, under the circumstances."

"He is smoldering with hatred for you, señor. His madness grows on him. He is jealous—and he will kill! Now that he is drinking——"

"I hope it spoils his shooting," said Quemado.

"It will not, I am afraid. And the señor will go toward Bitter Spring where the Indian holds the other horses for him. Pieboy has also gone to Bitter Spring."

"And on past it."

"Quien sabe? He spoke of 'dirty' Indios, when he left and he does not like Keno."

"Well, he'll hardly catch Keno napping and crazy as he is he'd hardly rouse the Zunis against him with the South out hunting him."

"Yet he might drive Keno away and wait there—for the señor."

Quemado became thoughtful and sat gazing into the embers of the fire for some time. Finally he nodded.

"I wouldn't be surprised if you were right, Ramon. Anyway, under the circumstances I'll have to take precautions. If it wasn't for Miss Thatcher—but with her along I can't be downed by Pieboy. She'd have a healthy chance with *him!*"

"'Sta bueno!" agreed Ramon emphatically. "The señor is wise."

Quemado went on. "Give me your gun. You won't need it. You're better with a knife anyhow. Here, just the gun and holster, not the belt."

Ramon handed over his six-shooter and holster and Quemado removed his own, sliding Ramon's equipment on his belt in place of it. Then he went to his packs and brought out some rawhide thongs with which he made a sort of sling, hanging his holster from it. He took off his jacket and with a knife pierced some holes in his shirt under the left arm. A loop of the sling went over his head and around his neck, hidden by the soft collar of the shirt. Thongs were worked through the holes in the shirt and brought around his chest out of sight and tied. When this was done he had the gun tucked snugly under his armpit where as soon as he had resumed the little jacket it was completely hidden from sight, while the other weapon hung openly at his thigh.

Quemado gave Ramon terse directions. He was to ride straight to Elk Mountain and to stay there unless a posse drove him out. He would go on into the Tuscans and Corduroy Cañon and if necessary into the Datils, but would get word to him sooner or later or even return to the ranch. To Joanna's dismay the Mexican acquiesced readily and made preparations to depart. Her hopes of influencing him to aid her vanished into thin air.

In a little he was gone, riding hard and driving the spare horses ahead of him. Then Quemado, whose horse, a fresh one, had been saddled and equipped, turned to her.

"It's hard lines, Miss Thatcher—but we'll have to be on our way."

She submitted despairingly—and yet not entirely unhappy. Once more she was in the saddle with his arm around her. Once more they were riding onward into the wilderness, but now in the blazing daylight.

They headed out past the towering mesa and through grassy, barren hills where the sage gave the only relief to the monotony of yellow aridity. The grass grew more and more sparse, the sage more and more thick.

Then they plunged out on the desert where the giant saguaro cactuses towered like grotesque, nightmare stumps high above their heads.

Back whence they had come the wires were humming and out of every town and ranch rode men equipped for the long trail. From Kingston roared automobiles, from Socorro Sheriff Aleck Badger with a posse of hard-bitted riders spurred out westward. From The Manor rode Massillon, Gretorix and half a dozen cowboys, while more came from the other ranches. Marcella Castro roused the sheepmen over toward Pajillito and Docherty and Johnny Duncan, with herders who knew every foot of the mountains and deserts, took the trail. From Hillsdale, Garcia rode with twenty deputies. A hundred men went out to rake every hiding place in the Tularosas, the Mimbres, the Datils and the Tuscans and the deserts that surrounded them. And every man carried a rope-and swore to use it if the chance came.

At last Quemado had come to the end of his string!

#### CHAPTER XIV.

The horse that Quemado rode was desert bred and of desert ancestry but even its fine fiber was tried by that journey. Through sand and clinging sage, through mesquite and stabbing yucca, winding through the gaunt grotesquerie of the giant saguaro, plodding through beds of puff-ball cactus which clung to belly and limbs with barbed spines, with the pitiless sun always beating upon them, they pushed on as rapidly as it was possible to travel in that inferno. There were water bags on the horse and Quemado doled out to his prisoner measured portions of the lukewarm, stale fluid at regular intervals. He had little to say and indeed had assumed a certain grimness different from his former quiet and jaunty air. He had something on his mind and Joanna realized that her own personality had, at least for the time being, taken second place in his consideration.

The horse pushed gallantly on through the hours, stopping not for heat nor the roughness of the way. The girl lay with half-closed eyes, almost unconscious of her surroundings. The man sat like a thing of steel, eyes narrowed, restless and alert to every moving thing that surrounded them. The Spanish bayonet could not sway and rustle dryly in the occasional faint breeze but his vision shot instantly to it. The miles dragged underfoot and the desert grew more barren, even the saguaro thinning out and opening immense vistas to the view. On the left of them the black rampart of mountains appeared, hemming in the basin they were traversing. Ahead were more mountains, very far away.

Thirst and heat and racking, monotonous motion had become for Joanna the only things existent in a world which was all misery when there came a change. Something vaguely perceived loomed up to one side of the trail they were traveling, coming nearer as Quemado pulled up the horse. She came out of her trance with bewildered realization of her situation, to see a man standing beside them talking in some language she did not understand, uttering brief, guttural syllables and gesturing with hands and arms in a pantomime that was suggestive of hidden meanings. Apparently they were not hidden to Quemado, who gave close heed, asking a question here and there in words as laconic as those addressed to him.

Joanna looked with slightly aroused interest at the man. An Indian, evidently; half naked, bronze skin glistening in the sun, a tangled, banged mass of hair falling over his forehead. He carried a bow and a deerskin quiver of arrows and belted over his dingy gray blouse hung belt and holstered six-shooter beside a knife in a beaded sheath.

Quemado straightened in the saddle, looking more grim than ever. "All right, Keno," he said in English, and followed with directions tersely given, to which the Indian nodded assent. Then he pricked the horse to a short lope, the Indian running easily at the side.

"He's there," said Quemado to Joanna, "at the spring. Been there since yesterday —waiting for me."

"Who is there?" asked Joanna dully, feeling only slight interest in that or anything else.

"Pieboy Rankin," was the grim reply. Joanna woke to sudden, acute uneasiness. Quemado, clean eyed, was one thing, a thing she had no real fear of; nor had she fear of the Mexican. Even the laconic. inscrutable Indian did not alarm her. But Rankin, with his hard face and evil, cruel eyes stood for something that she dreaded immeasurably, something that she did not dare even to consider, something utterly ruthless and utterly bad. Yet what had Rankin to do with her who was the helpless prisoner of his master?

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"I'll have to have it out with him," Quemado explained half to himself. "It's the only safe way. He'd follow and lay for us. Well, I'm bored to death with Pieboy, anyhow."

Then he turned his eyes, steady now and lighted with a cruel light, upon her.

"And you do just what you're told, Miss Joanna! There's the spring ahead and I'm going in. You stay with Keno."

He swung out of the saddle as the horse pulled up, leaving her in place and then lifted her round until she had settled against the high cantle, one knee over the horn as though she rode a side saddle. The Indian took the bridle at the bit and they stood there as Quemado strode forward on foot.

A hundred yards ahead was an extensive thicket of willows and brush with two or three tall cottonwoods looming out of it. That must be the spring where Pieboy Rankin was waiting for Quemado—and Quemado was walking into it as though unconscious of danger.

Joanna spoke anxiously. "But why is he leaving me out here?"

"He go meet Pieboy," said the Indian quietly. "You stay. Pieboy maybe so kill Quemado, then Keno take care of you."

"Kill him! You mean there will be a fight!"

"Heap fight!" agreed the Indian, unmoved by her agitation.

Horror-stricken the girl strove to consider the situation. But the slim, black figure of Quemado striding almost at the outer edge of the thicket filled her vision and her thoughts. All she could comprehend clearly was the possibility or probability that he would be killed by Rankin and the unutterable disaster that would be, although she should have welcomed his killing at any hand. She had been told to stay there with the Indian but a surge of feeling which she could not analyze urged irresistibly to another course.

Without thought or consideration she jerked the horse's head up and lashed his withers with the reins. He sprang forward startled and the Indian's grip of the bridle was lost at the sudden jerk. At full gallop Joanna rushed after Quemado, who was just entering the willows.

She reached them close behind him but

he did not look around at her though he must have heard her approach. Keno ran not far behind her. As Quemado strode on Joanna pulled down to a walk, intending to come up to him when he had pierced the thicket.

His voice came back to her, low and intense as she saw the brush open out ahead onto the beaten earth about the spring.

"Get down from that horse and get to one side. Don't stay behind me!"

She knew the command was for her and obeyed it to the extent of dismounting, but she started at once in his wake, pushing through the willows as fast as she could with some idea of catching up with and restraining him before he met Pieboy Rankin.

But Quemado had stepped into the open space around the spring and was standing up, his back to the brush. As Joanna came on she saw another figure looming there ahead of him, a saddle and pack outfit scattered on the ground, a horse standing in the meager shade of the brush.

She could see clearly now and the sight was not reassuring. The man was Pieboy, red of face, red of eye, his gray hair tangled. He stood with legs apart, body slightly leaning forward, head outthrust. His thumbs were hooked in his belt and his fingers, the shapely, strong fingers of the right hand which were so much like those of Quemado, but a tiny space from the butt and exposed trigger guard of his six-shooter. He looked triumphant and a glance at Quemado justified the exultation.

The latter had come carelessly through the brush to be surprised by the waiting gunman. Evidently startled by the meeting he had paused with hands half raised to his shoulders, the left at the level of his shoulder and the right uncertainly held at his breast as though ready to raise aloft.

The hoarse chuckle of Pieboy fell on Joanna's ears.

"The dashin' Quemado! Walkin' right into a man with his eyes on the moon! A hell of a bad hombre *you* are! I thought I'd taught you better than that."

"Why, Pieboy!" said Quemado in apparent uneasy surprise, "what's the matter? Darned if you didn't startle me!"

"I'm goin' to do more than startle you. I'm sick of hearin' this Quemado stuff! I'm tired of hearin' 'em bleat about this here maldito; this two-bit dude; this four-flushin' college sport that thinks he's a killer! I'm plumb wore out with you, Quemado!"

And then his red gaze lengthened—although it did not leave the frozen, trapped Quemado—to focus on Joanna as she appeared behind him. A guttural laugh broke through his thin lips.

"And you've been pullin' another grandstand play, I see! Well, you've pulled it the right time. Quemado does the bold bandit again an' lifts a nice little filly right off of a bunch of shorthorns and brings her out to Pieboy! Ain't that kind of him? Quemado's plannin' on a little pink-tea entertainment of her, I reckon, but Pieboy'll show her somethin' different. When—"

But Quemado's cold voice, rasping, broke in on him.

"That will do, Pieboy. What are you waiting for?"

"Waitin' for you to come out of your trance and start to draw," grinned Pieboy, his flexible fingers twitching over his gun butt. "Whenever you're ready for the *baile* we'll—\_\_\_"

"'Sta bueno! Let's go!" said Quemado, and his hand moved. So did Pieboy's. Both movements were inconceivably quick, magical in their eye-defying swiftness. Pieboy's hand had but an inch to travel to his gun while that of Quemado apparently must drop from breast to thigh—a fatal disadvantage. But, instead it merely twitched into his breast and out again and swung in a short arc to the front. Yet, in spite of the unexpectedness of the move and the shorter arc through which the weapon had to be trained, the blast of both shots was blended into one while Joanna stood frozen into immobility, unable to comprehend.

Then Pieboy bent backward, his weapon half raised and falling from his hand as his chin swung upward and his knees buckled out. At the same time Quemado sank sidewise but more slowly, and as he sank he sent another and another bullet crashing into the toppling form before him as it went down and lay inert.

Quemado also was down, or half down, but he clawed at the brush behind him with his left hand, gaining some support until he was half sitting and half sprawling on the ground, the weapon still leveled and his keen face on the squalid, sodden heap before him. It did not move.

"Got him!" he said conversationally. "But—if it had been an even break——" Joanna's momentary paralysis was over and she moved quickly to him. "Are you hurt?" she demanded anxiously.

Ouemado looked up at her and grinned.

"He got me in the leg," he explained. "Didn't have time to get the gun up enough. But he was chain lightning, I'm here to state. If it had been an even break—"

Again he left his obvious opinion unvoiced with a shake of the head. The Indian Keno pushed through the brush and stood there unmoved. The whole scene seemed unreal to Joanna, the dead man an illusion, the acrid smell of powder an hallucination. Flies buzzed droningly in the sun and settled on the still form. She stooped over Quemado.

"If you're hurt, let me see!"

He lay back but motioned to Keno. "Take a look at him! I can't take a chance."

The Indian walked over to Pieboy's body and stirred it with his foot. "Heap dead!" he commented. Quemado relaxed as though his interest in the matter were ended. Joanna knelt down to examine his leg, finding that it was broken below the knee.

"That's lucky," said Quemado coolly. "Just rip out that slashing and you can get at it. Here, let me show you."

Keno handed him a knife and he ripped the silk from the leg of his *calzoneras*, exposing the booted leg underneath. The wound was above the boot top and only one bone was broken, but that in a bad place.

Joanna ripped up her wrap and using the silk he had cut out they made shift to bandage the wound and stop the bleeding. But with the fracture so close to the joint their skill was not sufficient to extemporize splints for it, where nothing but a cast would serve. The Indian was versed in rude surgery but the only prescription he had for this was absolute lack of movement. At this Quemado scoffed.

"We can't stay here," he explained. "This ends it, all right! I've got to make the ranch with you, Miss Joanna, where you'll be taken care of. Keno!"

Again he gave directions to the Indian in the latter's language which the stolid native listened to without comment. But at the end of them he went to the brush and disappeared. They could hear him moving about and he presently returned leading a horse. With a rope he made a hackamore and twisted it on the animal's nose. Then he led up the saddled horse that Pieboy would have no further use for and the horse that Quemado had ridden. The latter he unsaddled and turned loose and from the brush again produced a fresh beast on which he threw Quemado's saddle.

Joanna, feeling strangely dazed, as though she were participating in some dream scene, was moved to utter a protest as Keno helped Quemado to rise and limp to Pieboy's horse. But he paid no heed, only ordering her to aid the Indian. She obeyed and supported him on one side as he limped to the beast. Then, in the same daze, she helped hold him as he got his good foot in the stirrup and was lifted into the saddle.

"That's right," said Quemado as Keno silently tied the injured leg to the stirrup leather with a thong padded with a piece of Joanna's wrap. "Pil ride without slipping that way," he explained casually to Joanna. But Joanna was wincing inwardly as she saw the sweat starting on his face and the pallor creeping under the bronze of his skin as the pain smote him.

"It's suicidal for you to ride this way!" she cried.

"It's got to be done," was his reply.

"But why? You can remain here. The ranch isn't far, is it? Can't the Indian go for help?"

"Yes, but you?"

"I can stay with you."

"No you can't. You've been through too much as it is. I've got to get you to safety first of all, Miss Thatcher."

"But I'll be safe-"

"You don't understand," he answered her shortly. "This is the only way. Get on that horse and come on."

The Indian already had leaped to the bare back of the third horse and had galloped through the brush on his way to carry Quemado's message. Joanna was unable to resist though every move of Quemado's gave her a twinge of pain as though she had received the injury herself. She mounted and followed him as he went out once more on the desert.

As they went he explained but as though he were talking to himself rather than to her.

"The best way is to get you to the ranch where Conchita can look after you. If they found you out here it would be pretty bad for you. You couldn't ride with Keno and I've got to fix it for you the best I can," He looked at her then, seeing her eyes drawn and strained and her mouth trembling. She had nearly reached the end of her endurance. Anxiously he drew his horse beside hers.

"Don't give way, now," he said gently. "It isn't much farther and it's near the finish."

"I'm very tired," she said meekly and began to weep silently. Quemado reined closer and in spite of the pain it must have put on his leg managed to throw his left arm about her shoulders.

"It will be all right," he said soothingly. "I'll put it right for you."

She seemed to accept his assurance to some degree and relaxed under his arm, riding along more quietly though she still cried a little. After a while this stopped and for five minutes she rode with closed eyes, with his arm about her. Then she opened them as her brain cleared and realized that his face was drawn with excruciating pain.

"Quemado! I'm killing you," she cried and drew away from him. He settled back, gray-faced but smiling at the sound of his name on her lips.

"I'm all right," he lied. She rode around him assuring herself that he had done himself no great injury and then took up her position at a safe distance from him.

They had water and she saw that Quemado drank frequently. Thus they swung on until the desert gave way to rougher ground and they began to climb through the foothills into the mountains. Up and up they wound where grass ran into cedar and scrub walnut and oak and then into pines and firs. Through aspen groves and piñon, across brawling streams cascading down shady gullies they worked there way into the wild and beautiful fastnesses of Elk Mountain. And at last, with the man clinging, reeling but indomitable, to his saddle horn, they broke out into a clearing beside a stream where, perched on the slope of the mountain, rose a cottage, gabled and porched, the lower story of squared and plastered logs, the upper stuccoed with adobe and slanted timbers like an English house. The place was startlingly modern and lovely, embowered in the towering red-barked pines, its wide porch cozy with wicker furniture, its windows hung with figured chintz.

A young and rather stout Mexican woman, pretty in a round-faced, swarthy way, ran down the steps as they came across the clearing. Chattering volubly in affectionate but very respectful solicitude, she helped Quemado down at the edge of the steps after loosing his bonds. Joanna stiffly swung down and helped. The two of them half carried the man up on the porch and into the house where they laid him on a couch in a huge living room, paneled and raftered like a millionaire's hunting lodge.

"Right here will do," said Quemado gaspingly as the woman spoke of preparing his bed. "Where's Ramon?"

"He has not returned as yet, señor."

'Then take care of the señorita! She's ready to collapse."

Joanna stirred from her half stupor. "I'm all right. I'll help-----"

"You'll lie down and rest! There's more to come and you can't stand it. As soon as Ramon comes we'll call you."

His stern ascendancy fell welcome on her reeling senses and she obeyed docilely as the woman led her away. She stumbled up a stairway, through a hall, into a comfortably furnished and cheerful bedroom. A bathroom, complete and immaculate in porcelain, opened off it. The sound of water running into the tub as the Mexican woman turned it on was indescribably soothing. Her nightmare was fading into a mere dream of luxury and comfort known only to the world she had been dragged out of. Dreamily she yielded to the competent ministrations of the woman, hearing but not heeding her voluble comments.

Downstairs, lying still on the couch, with eyes bent on the door, Quemado grimly awaited what was to come. Neglected and forgotten he bore his torture and faced without a quaver what he knew must be the end of everything for him. The night came down and found him there, half in stupor, while from Socorro, from Mogollon, from every town and hamlet on the Rio Grande and from Silver City to Hillsdale, the pursuit converged on his aerie on Elk Mountain. Twenty-four hours, at the utmost of delay and procrastination, would see the posses riding in on him, with ropes ready and looped.

The Mexican woman came down again and did what she could for his comfort. It was not much and he thanked her gruffly, asking after Joanna. When he was informed that she slept the sleep of the dead he grunted "'sta buenol" and lapsed into his grim, gray-faced silence, his fevered eyes ever on the door.

Joanna slept.

#### CHAPTER XV.

Quemado slept fitfully and restlessly during the latter part of the night and into the morning, when he awoke still feverish but in full command of himself. The Mexican woman gave him food and water and told him that Joanna still slept.

"Ramon?" he asked.

"He has not come, Señor Jeem."

Quemado frowned but did not comment. "Let me know as soon as he is here—and let the señorita sleep."

Joanna awoke about ten o'clock to lie for some time unconscious of where she was. The comfortable, pretty room, well furnished with every essential to civilized living as she knew it, was inconsistent with such barbarism as she had been the victim of. She might have been back in southern California. But gradually the recollection of events forced itself on her mind and with memory awoke an active, militant anger and resentment in which all fear was gone. In the midst of linen sheets, silken coverlid, in a mahogany bed, surrounded by "period" furniture and confronted with a porcelain bath and electric lights, the threat of Quemado, the bandit and outlaw, faded into a burlesque. Things like that did not happen among the appurtenances of refinement and luxury. Her abduction became a raw joke, serious in consequences perhaps, in horribly bad taste certainly, but a thing to be met with dignity and disdain and its perpetrator to be punished with scorn and contempt.

But when she had risen and dressed the idea of facing the wounded and helpless Quemado still caused her some uneasiness. Her clothes had been put in order while she slept, probably by the woman she had seen. The thought of that woman caused her to recall the presence of the Ramirez girl with a wave of disgust. This bower in the wilderness, no doubt, was built and furnished for her and her like. But where was the Ramirez girl?

There had been no sign of her and examining her surroundings Joanna saw nothing to indicate the presence of a woman other than the servant in spite of the good taste which had been expended on the place. In the room she occupied there was, for ex-

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ample, no dressing table. The toilet articles were meager and consisted of military brushes and comb and a new toothbrush inclosed in its carton. She had been furnished, by the Mexican servant, a suit of men's pajamas as sleeping garments. They were much too large for her. There were hairpins on the dresser but they were ordinary, black wire things which the servant might very well have possessed.

Vaguely feeling that there was some riddle here but unshaken in her derogatory opinion of Quemado she descended to the living room where she found a table laid for breakfast. At her appearance the Mexican woman, who had been attending Quemado, curtsied and hurried out to serve the food. There was only one place set.

"Good morning," said Quemado calmly from his chair. He was shaven, freshly dressed in a costume identical in exotic picturesqueness with his other. But without hat and gauntlets and boots, with his belt and holster laid aside, with one foot clad in a plain patent-leather pump while the other was covered with a silk stocking, he seemed merely a very good-looking young man and not at all threatening. It was hard but Joanna returned his greeting with a cold stare that was intended to wither him.

The girl brought in breakfast and Joanna was hungry. She sat down to eat, intending to preserve her condemnatory aloofness. But that is a difficult thing to do when one is famished. A stony, haughty air of contempt does not fit well with the act of eating bacon and eggs and pancakes. It grew harder and harder to remain unconscious of the presence of another when that other's eyes were on her and she was buttering a piece of toast.

"I wish you'd stop looking at me," she said at last, peevishly.

There was a silence and she looked up to find that Quemado had not been looking at her, or at least was no longer doing it. He was looking at the door. She flushed and noted with a slight throb of pity that his face was drawn and flushed, with great dark circles under the glazed eyes. His wounded leg lay stretched out on the wicker long-chair that he sat in, its bandages hidden by the flaring leg of his trousers. A certain halfguilty reminder forced itself on her that this helplessness of his had been the result of his battle for her. She knew somehow that had she not been present and in danger Quemado would not have forced matters to a conclusion with Pieboy Rankin and would not have been shot. But this was followed by the uncompromising reminder that Quemado's own crime had placed her in that danger from Rankin.

Then she noticed that at Quemado's right hand lay a naked, long-barreled revolver. The thing gave her a shock, tumbling all at once her confidence, throwing her back on the realization that she was in the grasp of elemental forces and at the mercy of violence. She saw Quemado's hand, supple and well kept, the fingers writhing and recalled that she had seen him exercise them the same way when he had torn off his gauntlets and walked forward to meet Rankin. She had seen a famous pianist do something like that —only he did it with both hands. And Rankin's right hand had been like Quemado's.

The reason was obvious enough now but it brought no reassurance. Men who could groom and train their hands to murder were not parlor ornaments. It was obvious that no one except a man who kept his life safe through the superior deftness of the hand with which he killed his enemies would indulge in a habit like that. The great mystery was that Quemado could be such a man and look the part so little.

Fear had returned to her and with it the impulse to force the matter and to know the full extent of her danger. She pushed back her chair and turned on Quemado.

"Well, I would like to know what you intend doing with me!" She tried to speak disdainfully but there was a tremble in her voice that belied her assumed courage.

Quemado did not take his eyes from the door.

"The best I can—for you," he answered. "I'll try to put it right as far as I am able. It isn't far, I'm afraid."

"After making me notorious and compromising me everywhere a newspaper is read, I judge that whatever amends you may be able to make will be rather inadequate," said Joanna. Her courage had unaccountably returned as she heard his voice, despondent and apologetic.

"It's for you to say," he returned. "Ramon has come in and he's brought Padre Felix." He laughed a little. "The old priest is throwing a fit over the whole thing. But he's a good sport and will help you out."

"A priest! But what on earth can he do?" "Well, he's already put a curse on me. But that doesn't aid you any. However, although a license is lacking, he can perform a wedding ceremony and destroy some of the occasion for scandal."

"Marry me—to you!" Joanna cried. "Are you mad? Do you think I would consent for an instant, even to save my reputation?"

Quemado closed his eyes wearily. "Oh, I don't suppose you welcome the idea. Even at the best I thought I'd have to keep you out here for some time before I brought you round to seeing any good in me. But there isn't a chance of that now and the time's too short. By afternoon there'll be a whole herd of them milling around out there."

The girl was thinking, the hint that rescue was hard on their heels suggesting an explanation to her.

"You mean that my friends are following you?"

"I suppose they are. They would, you know."

"And you wish me to marry you before they arrive?"

"I think that would be best. The padre might even be induced to falsify the date by a little, sticking it back twenty-four hours. You'd be respectably married then."

There was a slight hint of a sneer in Quemado's voice.

"I'd be-married-and you-you'd be safe, wouldn't you?"

There was more than a sneer in Joanna's tone.

"Safe?" repeated Quemado, looking at her with suddenly opened eyes. "Safe? Yes, I'd be safe. I hadn't thought of that. But then, I'll be safe in any event, I think."

"Safe in jail, I hope," retorted Joanna. "And that's where you'll be before I do anything to keep you out of it."

Then Quemado laughed. "I'm not going to jail," he said. "To tell you the truth I never thought that this marriage would help me. Ask Padre Felix. Ramon!" he raised his voice and almost at once Gonzales entered from the porch. Behind him rolled a fat, good-natured priest whose round face was now portentous with frowning solemnity.

"The young lady is doubtful of my motives, father," said Quemado briefly. "Maybe you can say a word to her."

The anxious Padre Felix hastened forward and bowed before Joanna. There was no guile in his face and she knew that he could be trusted. But his presence was an

added insult and the plan an additional outrage. She was in no mood to listen to him.

"I only ask the father's protection for me from you," she said shortly.

"You have that, most assuredly, señorita!" exclaimed Padre Felix hastily and sincerely. "This rash and wicked young man will not injure you. He has committed a great wrong but I believe that he sincerely desires to correct it in so far as he may."

"If he thinks to save himself at my expense, he is planning very badly," replied Joanna.

"To save himself! But, señorita, there has been no thought of that. He has been solicitous of your good name, it is true—and terrible as it seems perhaps his plan offers a way. I hope so. But to be married—and a widow, in the same day, it is true that the idea is repugnant."

"A widow? What do you mean?" But the priest only shook his head dazedly.

"Is it possible?"

"Is what possible? I see very clearly that this man hopes a marriage with me will save him from prosecution and a prison sentence. And you seem to be willing to aid him in that scheme. But think what it means to me! How you, a priest who does not recognize divorce, can calmly propose such a marriage is the only thing that seems impossible to me."

"Divorce! But there will be no need of a divorce, señorita. The men who come will undoubtedly, as I understand, save you that sin."

"I don't know what you mean," said Joanna.

"The señorita does not understand theimpulsiveness—of a New Mexican posse, padre," Quemado broke in dryly. "Nor does she comprehend the exact nature of my relations with the families of Garcia and Ramirez. However, I am afraid the plan presents difficulties which I did not take into account."

Gonzales broke in with voluble pleadings. To Joanna's understanding it dawned that he was begging Quemado to allow him and others, Indian and Mexican, ranch hands whom she had not seen, to arm themselves and gather around the wounded man, to resist his capture at the cost of their lives. But Quemado silenced him abruptly.

"There is no need! I have other work for you, Ramon. For, when these others come here they must not find the señorita. There is not much time but if you hurry you may conduct her out and over the mountain. Take spare horses and ride as though the devil were after you. It will be hard on the señorita but she is brave. Thus you may come into the ranch on Cedro Creek giving out that she has escaped from me night before last and, being found by you, has been brought into the ranch. I would ask the padre to go also but he could not ride hard enough."

Ramon expostulated sullenly but Quemado snarled a sudden, harsh command and he subsided, acquiescent but rebellious.

"I am not sure that I wish to go," said Toanna.

"Have I been so solicitous of your wishes recently that it should make a difference now what you desire?" asked Quemado bitterly. "You will do as you are told to do."

The girl was about to make an angry and defiant retort but at this moment the Indian, Keno, stood in the door. He spoke quickly in his own language, gesturing toward the open country.

Instantly Quemado roused to command.

"Ramon! Padre! Out and through the rear. You can gain the stable and saddle horses there. Take her and see her safe to the ranch, Ramon."

"And you, señor!" the cry was almost a wail of sorrow.

"I'll shake hands with you in hell, Ramon. Get going now, and make your get-away after they rush the house."

Then a few words to the Indian who nodded and vanished. While Joanna stood, slow comprehension dawning upon her, the Mexican touched her arm.

"This way, señorita!" he said. She followed him doubtfully, an impulse urging her to linger and demand the meaning of these preparations. The priest stood by Quemado, with clasped hands, exhorting him, Joanna gathered, to make his peace with God. To which there came a laugh in answer.

"Why, padre, I'm obliged to you but I'll go as I've lived."

And then, with a mocking glitter in his eye he sang:

- "While up in heaven the angels laugh, the devil down in hell Is swearin' sultry, sulphurous oaths above our
- Sam-u-el.
- His imps are workin' overtime and drawing extra pelf

Assorting Samuel's remnants to a semblance of himself."

The good priest turned, shuddering and wringing his hands as the reckless chorus rose:

"Hassayampa Sam! 'Ssayampa Sam-u-el! They cut him down to half his size: Hassayampa's gone to hell!"

The snorting of a car driven in low gear, the ringing of hoofs were discernible. Quemado half raised himself, his hands at his sides on the butts of his revolvers. Joanna hesitating with growing horror on the threshold of the next room, felt herself dragged back through the door. But she turned and pulled away from Gonzales' insistence, listening to the half tearful, fierce oaths the man was muttering in his rage at being driven from his patron's last combat.

"I am not going," she cried and stood fast, resisting the importunities of the Mexican and the priest who had come into the room with her. In vain they pleaded with her. Stubbornly she stood fast, endeavored to reenter the living room with some idea of preventing the tragedy that she realized was impending. They caught her by the arms and held her but she struck their hands away and turned again to the partly open door. Through it, softly muttering to himself, came Quemado's voice:

#### "Hassayampa's gone to hell!"

Curiously, above her agitation, forced itself the thought that he had not uttered one word of farewell to her.

And then the noise of running footsteps, the rattle of spurs, the hasty shouts of men giving orders, familiar voices and a trample of boots upon the boards of the porch! Through the door she saw Quemado sitting upright and the deadly hands raised, revolvers level, ready to spit death.

Outside was an automobile, its tires in rags, fenders and running boards wrecked but with the engine still indomitably purring. Near it were horses from which the riders had leaped to rush the house. There were Mexican herders, two or three cowpunchers from Massillon's ranch, Massillon himself, Gretorix and Duncan, nearly a dozen men altogether who formed the flying vanguard of the hunters, striking direct at Quemado's ranch in the hope, unexpectedly fulfilled, of picking up the trail from there.

The more experienced cowboys and herd-

ers and Mr. Massillon had approached the place with some caution but ahead of them Gretorix and young Johnny Duncan, inflamed and eager, rushed the porch and threw the door open. There, in front of them, teeth gleaming in his fever-stricken face, sat Quemado at bay with weapons leveled upon them.

Caught in the trap of their own making the two recoiled, their own weapons lowered. Slowly a sickly pallor overspread their faces as they momentarily waited for death. And then Quemado laughed and tossed the guns away.

"It had to be you," he said. "Well, Marcella can't spare you, Johnny, and I reckon your friend's death might hurt some one's feelings. All right, then. Start your *baile1*"

Suddenly reprieved, the two would have hesitated but behind them came the others. They were thrown aside, pushed inward as Slippery Wilkins, grim and determined, Brad Carson, two Mexican herders, rushed into the room with leveled weapons. Quemado raised his hands with a grin.

"You ought to have come first, boys, and I'd have entertained you."

"Where's Joanna?" yelled Gretorix. Johnny Duncan, crowding forward, echoed the cry, shaking his fist beneath Quemado's nose.

"Señorita!" Joanna's sleeve was plucked as Ramon half sobbed his plea. "Come! There is time."

But Joanna, stunned at the revelation that Quemado at bay had deliberately thrown away his advantage rather than hurt friends of hers, shook him off, and crouched behind the orifice of the door.

"Miss Thatcher got away yesterday morning," said Quemado coolly. "I guess she's back home by this time."

"You're a liar!" said Wilkins caustically and advanced to shove Gretorix and Duncan aside. In his hand he held a coiled rope. Above them the beams of the ceiling caught his eye. But the ceiling lay close along them. The porch outside was better fitted to his purpose.

He flipped his loop out and tossed it over Quemado's head.

"Tie his hands, boys. Busted laig? Well, it won't bother him long. No use monkeying around about this, Brad. We got only one thing to do and I reckon there ain't any use givin' Quemado time to pray. Ready? Drag him up then, and let's go!" And then Joanna, at last comprehending what swift recompense for such a crime New Mexico dispensed, flaming with an understanding that encompassed everything, awake finally and irrevocably, burst through the door and threw herself between the men and Quemado.

"What are you doing?" she cried. Wilkins looked at her and nodded.

"Thought he was lyin'. Take her away, boys."

"Better get out of sight, Joanna," added Quemado.

They were about to resume their sinister work but she shook off Carson's hand and shouted at them.

"Are you hanging him because I eloped with him? What has he done? You can't murder him. He's my husband!"

"Your husband!" exclaimed Wilkins, his mouth falling open. Carson uttered a sudden chuckle and Johnny Duncan grinned. Gretorix stepped back as though dodging a blow.

"Joanna!" he said hoarsely. "Joanna!" But the girl was facing them all, erect and defiant.

"Yes, he is. If you don't believe it, the priest that married us is there." She pointed to the adjoining room at the door of which stood the petrified Padre Felix, backed by the wondering Ramon. And then to Gretorix, standing like a stricken man: "I—I couldn't go through with it, Baldwin. I'm sorry, but he was out there—waiting—and I went with him. I'm sorry!"

Slippery Wilkins, nudged by Massillon, who stood behind him, awoke and snapped the rope from Quemado's neck. The latter was looking at Joanna with an inquiring gaze but she did not face him. The Mexicans laughed and untied the ropes that bound his hands. Massillon spoke calmly.

"I wish you'd sent us word and saved us a little excitement, Fairfax. Your methods are speedy—but confusing. Gretorix, I guess we're intruding here."

Baldwin, without a word, turned and stumbled out. Massillon held out his hand to Quemado. "I congratulate you," he said, his eyes twinkling. And to Joanna. "I wish you every happiness, my dear!"

"Thank you," said Joanna. Quemado said nothing.

"So do I," said Johnny heartily. "It's a good one on us. Hey, Slippery, they'll be telling all over the range how you wanted to lynch a man for going on a honeymoon."

"Dog take it!" said Slippery. "Let 'em laugh! I'm just glad enough it's this way to stand for it. You all get out of here, now, and let these folks be. Vamos! Poco tiemp'! Well, so long, Quemado, and Mrs. Fairfax! I'm wishin' you all every happiness!"

"For that I'll forget your rope, Slippery," said Quemado and Joanna managed a pale smile for him as he shoved the crowd out of the room. On the porch Massillon paused to give quick orders.

"See that some one covers the trail and heads back Garcia and send some one else to turn them back from Socorro. If Garcia gets here with his gang he's not likely to pause for this."

"If he gets here he'll have to shoot his way through," said Johnny Duncan, and ordered his herders into the saddle. In a few moments the group faded away in the damaged car and on horseback. Then Joanna turned wearily to Quemado, who stood as he had been left, one hand supporting him by the back of the chair.

"If you have no objection—it is necessary now—we can make the lie good. Father Felix is still here."

"Yes," said Quemado thoughtfully. "Ramon, will you get Conchita?"

In a moment the Mexican woman entered and, smiling, took her place with Ramon as a witness. The dazed, almost speechless priest stood before them and performed the ceremony. At its conclusion Joanna dropped Quemado's hand and walked steadily into the next room where she sank into a chair, her face in her hands.

Doubtfully, Ramon and Conchita lingered, then as Quemado, now sitting on the long chair, motioned with his head, they went away, treading softly. Father Felix hesitated, started to say something, and as Quemado raised an impatient hand, choked it back and also slipped out to join the Mexicans and discuss with them the ways of the mad gringos, the maddest but best beloved of whom was Quemado.

#### CHAPTER XVI.

Joanna sat for several minutes until her heart finally resumed something like a normal pace. She was trying to think in a confusion of impressions, trying to reduce her actions to the light of reason, trying to face her motives and to separate them, giving each its proper place of importance. She faced the situation, wondering why she was not bitter, resigned, disgusted. It made her uneasy to admit that, instead, she was pleasantly excited, half fearfully expectant, dreading some imagined disappointment and hoping for some consummation. She wondered what Quemado was doing, went to the door, peeped through the crack and was pitiful at seeing him sitting there, on the edge of the long wicker chair, his wounded leg outstretched, his chin cupped in the hand supported on the knee of the other leg. He was looking steadily at the floor.

Joanna hesitated as though about to open the door and then changed her mind. He could come to her. She had gone to him once and it was his turn now. As he did not come, she endeavored to calm herself by looking about the room, whose appearance up to now she had not noticed at all. It was evidently used as a library, the walls being lined with bookcases. Framed parchments were hung on the walls and a large table held books and papers. Leather-covered easy-chairs were the furnishings.

Joanna walked around, looking at the framed documents, with wonder growing. There was a diploma from the School of Mines, granting the degree of Bachelor of Science and another bestowing that of Master. Another parchment announced that Tames Fairfax was elected to membership in the American Society of Mining Engineers. Still another proclaimed that he was a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and a third that he was a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor. Here and there were pictures of football teams, in one of which Quemado appeared as captain, looking boyishly young and yet much as he did now. Over an open fireplace was a sword.

She then went to the desk, to find it strewn with books and pamphlets, most of them technical works but one or two of a philosophical trend. She picked up one, dusty and apparently neglected, and found it to be a treatise on the mineral resources of French Guiana, the author one James Fairfax, F. R. G. S. The bookcases were filled with works of a catholic taste, most of them classics of their kind.

She turned to the door as she heard a sound as of a man hopping awkwardly. Then it swung open and Quemado appeared, pale, on one leg, supporting himself by holding to the edge of the door. He had made his way around the walls and now stood face to face with her.

She made a motion to go to his assistance but before she could do so he had reached out and grasped the back of a chair and was leaning on it. So she put her hands behind her back and waited, unflinchingly.

"Well, you've saved me, Miss Thatcher," said Quemado. "I'm not sure that I should thank you for it. But, at least, you've disarmed me."

"Have you come to say that you are sorry," said Joanna, coldly.

"No," he answered. "I'm not sorry—except that you've won. I made my play to win you and, instead, I've lost you. But I'll never say I am sorry that I made the attempt. I'd do it again."

Joanna remained uncompromising. "At least, I should like to know why you did it?" she said firmly.

At that Quemado smiled a little.

"I was lonely," he said.

Shocked and outraged at the paucity of the explanation, Joanna stood without expression and in a moment he resumed.

"There's a sort of devil in the Fairfaxes," said Quemado. "Most of us have been wild and adventurous. My father was that way. He came out here when the country was young, threw himself into it, fought Indians, fought other white men, stole cattle and had his own cattle stolen. He kept hired gunmen and killed men himself on occasion. He made money-was a rich man when the country finally settled down. But quiet was not good for him. He kept old Rankin more for the memory of more exciting days than for any affection the old scoundrel inspired. He liked to have Pieboy train me to shoot as a few of them could shoot in the old times.

"Well, he lost most of his money but he never grudged me anything. I inherited this ranch and other property but sold the cattle and went to raising Arab horses through the help of a friend who got me horses from Turkey. At odd times I did other things."

He nodded at the framed things on the wall. "There was always a devil of restlessness behind me. I did those things but the doing of them never satisfied me long. I'd come back here and stay a while and then go away again, looking for something interesting. And I never found it until I saw you. The moment I did see you I knew

that my restlessness was as much loneliness —a sense of incompleteness—as anything. And the first thing I heard about you was that you intended to marry Gretorix."

He paused thoughtfully, silent for a space.

"Gretorix is all right—a big man according to some standards. But you don't want a man like that. You'd be in a rut with him, and you and I don't thrive in ruts. You want the *feel* of living; and so do I. You'd not get that with Gretorix. You'd get position, comfort, distinction of a sort. They wouldn't satisfy you. I couldn't give you those in the same measure but I could give you something else worth all of them and more."

Joanna, listening to the even voice, was moved to breathe a question: "What?"

"I could give you love! Not the kind of sentiment you expect from staid and respectable people, but a real, living and perhaps—uncomfortable love. As you've seen. I've carried you off—but I've also carried you out of yourself at least a little, haven't I?"

Joanna moved a little closer but her face was still uncompromising.

"You've carried me off—and I've married you," she said. "And what's the answer?"

"Nothing, now, I'm afraid," he replied somewhat dejectedly. "You married me to save my life when I didn't want it saved that way. If you can believe me, life isn't the important thing to me. I've played with it at times, recklessly enough. For two years I've ridden with Pieboy and that meant riding with death at my side for he was jealous of me and only habit kept him from killing me, habit and perhaps some slight doubt that he could do it. Yet that very doubt would inevitably have urged him to the attempt in the end—as it did. That's the thing you saved. And I didn't want it."

"But you are like Pieboy," said Joanna. "Your hand-----"

"I've trained that hand for the past two years. I never did before that old ruffian's mania developed until he was a menace. Then I followed his lead, just to get an even break with him. He's dead and my hand may atrophy now for all I care."

Joanna nodded as though satisfied. "That explains it. But it seems to me that you resent my actions more from vanity than anything else. I saved your life, which you declare to be worthless. Isn't it worthless because you cannot bear to be indebted to me for it?"

"I'd take it gladly from your hands if it meant anything," Quemado said. "As gladly as I was giving it. But it was no gift if it was given from motives that call for generosity on my part and force me to give you up. If you bought safety from me in payment for my life you will not get gratitude from me, Joanna."

"I don't think I want your gratitude," said Joanna and a slight smile moved her lips. "Nor," she said slowly and cuttingly, "do I want declarations of love from a man who boasts of abducting Mexican women even as he abducted me."

"You may not want it," retorted Quemado a bit sadly, "but you have it, nevertheless."

"Don't you think," she said angrily, "that you at least owe me some explanation, other than that, in common decency before saying such things to me?"

"Why?" asked Quemado. Again the smile trembled on Joanna's lips.

"If I get a satisfactory one," she said, "perhaps I will tell you why I married you —after saving you."

Quemado's eyes were on her, flaming. "I owe it if you ask for it," he said and turned to call.

"Conchita!"

And in a moment the Mexican woman, buxom and smiling, came to the door and curtsied.

"Señor, Ramon has gone for the *medico*," she said.

"'Sta bueno, Conchita! And now if you will oblige me by telling the señorita the story of how Quemado carried you off on your wedding night. She is interested. Señorita, this is Conchita Ramirez."

And, smiling, Conchita told the tale.

"It was my brother, señorita, who would have forced me to marry the unspeakable Pancho Garcia because the Garcias are powerful in the politics. But I did not wish to wed him because I loved Ramon Gonzales, although the Gonzales family and the Ramirezes are enemies. We were of the Republican faith while the Gonzaleses follow the principles of El Señor Jackson. Me, I do not know who that Señor Jackson is, nor

have I ever seen the great Señor Lincoln, whom the Republicans fight for. All those things mean nothing to me but Ramon, he means much.

"Nevertheless, what could I do? My brother was the head of the family and he threatened me with great evil if I did not do as he said. Padre Junipero, also, who is a Garcia before he is a priest, spoke often to me of my duty and informed me that *his* duty was clear, so that he would if necessary marry me to Garcia even if I shrieked my denial before the altar.

"And Ramon could do nothing for there are many more of the Garcia family than there are of the Gonzaleses. He would have killed Pancho eventually but as I would have been his wife before that happened it was not a happy outlook. So there was nothing to do but to resign ourselves, as we thought.

"Then, by chance, Ramon confided in the Señor Jeem, and that was a lucky day for us. The señor sent word to Garcia and my brother that the marriage must not take place and that if it did he would be there and would take me away from the altar itself.

"That is all, señorita, except that Señor Jeem, assisted by Ramon and the *ladron*, Rankeen, rode right into the house of the priest, seized me and bore me away to my beloved Ramon. The good Padre Felix married us."

Joanna stood a moment, her eyes cast down. Then:

"Thank you, Conchita! That is all." The girl bent her head and went out.

"You have the story now," said Quemado dryly. Joanna came slowly up to him.

"And I promised to tell you why----"

She lifted her hand and put it hesitantly on her jacket where the lapel would have been in a coat.

"Will you say—again—why you carried me off?" she asked.

"Because I loved you," said Quemado.

Joanna raised her face then, turned rose pink under the ivory of her sun-kissed cheeks.

"That is why I saved you—and married you, too," she said.

And Quemado, whose love she knew was a flame, bent slowly and kissed her.

In the next issue, "The Edged Tool," a complete novel by William Morton Ferguson.



# Call the Doctor!

## By Thomas McMorrow

Author of "Friendship," "Perfectly All Right," Etc.

The prudent practitioner knows that, in the matter of the all important "bedside manner," there is such a thing as laying it on too thick.

YOU can sit up," said Doctor Bulkley. "It hurts? Nonsense—you must bear a little pain. Sit up! That's better. Now, bend forward. More! You must pull that kink out of your back."

I resented his tone, so harsh and flat and unsympathetic. He was speaking to my wife.

"There, dear," I coaxed. "Let me help you."

"No, no," said Bulkley crisply, putting my arm aside. "Let her help herself."

Bulkley's professional manner is quite unpleasant, which is the more odd since he can be very urbane when he chooses. He is an odd fellow. He does not look like a physician; but he is an excellent one. He was attired this day in golfing clothes, knickerbockers and belted and pleated jacket, of a white and blue herringbone pattern overlaid with a gay black check. His woolen stockings were gray and blue and were decorated with shaggy tufts of black. He is vain of his fine figure; he is in general a cocky and conceited fellow but withal an acute and intelligent one.

"No acid fruits, Garfield," he directed as he sat writing a prescription in my study which overlooks the garden and the Hudson. I live in Longvue, which immediately adjoins the Sleepy Hollow country. "Yes, she may eat meat, except red meats. What do you generally have for breakfast? Better cut out those eggs. Exercise? Oh, yes, almost any kind. She golfs, doesn't she? Rowing would help also to take the permanent wave out of those back muscles."

"I was terribly frightened when she was seized by it. She fell and shrieked with pain when I tried to lift her. I thought it was some kind of a stroke."

"It is a sort of a stroke, as you call it." Bulkley usually either disagrees with you flatly or agrees in a tone calculated to suggest to you that you are uttering a mere truism. "She got what our German friends call a 'witch's shot,' meaning a sudden and powerful cramping of the muscles in the small of the back. She was heated from riding and sat in a draft to cool off. The muscles suddenly knotted, like the clenching of a fist, and now they have to be pulled straight again. It will probably never recur, if she follows for a while the regimen I give her. Brother Dewitt-Melvyl called me in on consultation last summer in a case like this; he diagnosed sciatic rheumatism and he had covered the patient with sores from blistering."

He yawned, displaying fine white teeth,

and ran his hand through his thick black hair. I knew that he was reflecting complacently upon the incompetence of brother Dewitt-Melvyl.

"Are you very busy?" I like to talk to Bulkley.

"I could be if I wished. I could make a half a dozen calls this afternoon, and be very welcome, but there's no real need."

"Your visits might cheer the patients up," I suggested dryly.

"Sick people aren't cheered by the sight of a physician. People who are really sick usually want to be let alone and I'll say that it's ordinarily a sound instinct. It is the nervous relatives who call in the doctor and keep sending for him; and I'm not treating the nervous relatives."

"Don't you think it is ethical," I persisted, "for a physician to visit a patient simply to cheer up the anxious relatives? Or take the case of a patient who is not really sick but prefers to seem so—does not the physician give good value who plays his part gracefully in the bedroom farce which the patient has devised?"

"No," he mumbled brusquely, lighting his cigar. "There are too many people about who are genuinely sick. Not but what it is a very good thing for the patients that some of these fashionable fellows avoid sick people and devote their talents to lazy and pettish women. But I prefer to keep business and pleasure apart."

"But still——" I murmured, wishing to make him aware of my disapproval of his professional manner but not perceiving how to present the sentiment adroitly.

His black eyes twinkled luminously. He understood.

The telephone rang. "It is for you," I said, laying down the receiver.

He took it up. "Sorry," he said after a moment's listening. "I cannot come. It is very natural that Mrs. Channing should develop a temperature at this time. Let me have the nurse. Hello. Yes. If it goes above one hundred and three wrap her in a cold sheet. If it goes to one hundred and four, call me here. It won't, though. See that it doesn't. I will be engaged here for the next hour. At Garfield's—yes! Mrs. Garfield? She is coming on nicely and will be out of bed to-morrow; the new case is Harry Garfield himself. He has been taken down with a sudden attack of—of nervous relationship! I'm treating him here in his study, with inhalations of nicotine; possibly I will try a few drops of *spiritus frumenti* later, if his house affords it. Seriously, Miss Price, I'm fagged out after that siege last night with the Congers baby and I'm going to catch a little rest. Good-by!"

I brought out the *spiritus frumenti*. He poured out two doses and we took them.

"Feel better?"

"Much better," I acknowledged. "You have ministered to a mind diseased and plucked out from the heart a rooted sorrow."

"Sorrow," said Bulkley, smacking his lips and stretching his legs, "is not rooted in the heart, your poet notwithstanding. When sorrow is rooted it is morbid and then it is rooted in the bowels and yields to the art of physic. Remorse, which is acute sorrow, is a symptom of indigestion. If I should wish to arouse a hardened criminal to the error of his ways I should feed him a large and leathery rarebit and then have him sit up and suck on a long black cigar. In the small hours of the night he would weep at the recollection of his innocent childhood and hesitate between suicide and writing his check for the conscience money. If he wrote the check he probably would hurry to stop it after his first bracing cup of coffee in the morning; most hardened criminals are rugged rascals.

"Conscience resides in the stomach. You never heard of a drunkard who couldn't hold his drink, did you? Men with weak stomachs are ordinarily abstemious, good husbands, good citizens, taking their dissipation vicariously in books and pictures and music and the theater. If I should be called in to treat a patient for a raging conscience I should put him on a predigested diet, strictly interdicting smoked fish, church suppers, patent medicines and family squabbles after meals. He should be forbidden to sit and meditate but should be free to swear and shout and tear around. When I had built him up to the psychology of a roaring good fellow\_\_\_\_"

His head was resting on the back of his chair; his eyes were closed; he was alternately drawing deeply on his cigar and gesticulating with it slowly and sweepingly. He likes to talk.

"There's nothing like leather, is there?" I interrupted.

He unclosed one eye and grinned. He coughed and sat up.

"Nothing like leather," he repeated. "No,

I suppose not. Every man to his trade! It's not all foolishness, though. What was this I was saying when you got me off on anatomy? Oh, yes—I was going to tell you—something. You're likely to hear the story eventually anyway and you can wait until then to get the really interesting part; I'll tell you only enough to make my point. How old is your first boy?"

"Eight-about."

"He was my first case in Longvue. I remember that you knocked me out of bed at three o'clock in the morning with that rush order. Eight years, is it?

"I was subbing over in Pelham before then for a fellow named Hawes. He had a nice practice, a very nice practice—I imagine he knocked out thirty thousand per year. You know Pelham—everybody over there has some money. Hawes had plenty too; he was a money-maker, a liberal charger and a close collector. Not that he ever dunned anybody. He knew when to collect.

"'Get them while the tears are in their eyes, Bulkley!' he would say.

"The tears to which he referred were tears of anxiety. His patients didn't die on Hawes; at the first serious turn he would send for a specialist. If the result was unfortunate the relatives naturally blamed the specialist and said that if Hawes had stayed in charge everything would have been well. They couldn't blame him for getting them the best advice.

"Hawes was a 'nurser.' He kept old Mrs. Shanton-widow of the cut glass and porcelain importer-in bed for six months and I nearly lost my job on account of her. I was newly with him then and I called on the old lady, who was a very decent sort but a hopeless hypochondriac, and I examined her and announced to her joyfully that there was nothing whatever the matter with her which a little daily bed-making and sweeping wouldn't cure. She went into such a rage that she developed a temperature and Hawes came hotfoot and had a hard time to bring her around and save her to his practice. He agreed with her that I was hopelessly incompetent when it came to handling so rare and stubborn an ailment as hers but pleaded with her to be permitted to keep me on, saying that he needed me to handle commonplace matters such as diphtheria, smallpox and childbirth. He winked at me across the bed. Yes, I was there; I pacified her by amending my diagnosis to say that she

was afflicted with no disease with which I was familiar.

"He did need me, to be frank. I knew more in a minute than he did in a week; but he trusted me after he found that I gave him fair play and wasn't trying to steal his practice. I was always careful to give my learned confrère the credit for my good work or good fortune and always assumed the blame for accidents. I gained the reputation of a hard-working and conscientious young man who could be trusted because he was under the strong and guiding hand of the learned Hawes.

"Not that I worked hard: I felt no responsibility. I had a good time in Pelham.

"'You should get married,' said Hawes. 'A general practitioner should always get married.'

"'What about yourself?' I asked.

"'I shall get married, so soon as I find the right girl,' said the old sinner. "I have been married before, three times!'

"When I was six months in Pelham I found the right girl. She was a Miss Ida Hilton. I met her at a dance of the Shore and Upland Club which I had joined at Hawes' suggestion and where I spent many pleasant afternoons. As I remember her she was young and good-tempered and rather good looking and when I saw that she was throwing herself at my head I investigated her. I speak to you as to a man of the world; you know that there is more to marriage than love and kisses. Any man can fall in love with any woman with whom he has physical affinity and a sensible man will be wary, which is not to say mercenary. A man should marry only for love, of course.

"Ida's mother was a widow. They lived in a pretty place on the Boston Post Road; the local agent valued it, without my directly asking him, at thirty-five thousand dollars. They had two cars, a chauffeur, a chambermaid, a waitress and a cook. I called at Ida's home several times, being, as I may say, a fairly presentable person. When I had acquired familiar status they thrust their affairs upon me as lone ladies do. In order to advise them capably I was obliged to ask questions and I did so with proper apologies. They were well off. Their home was free and clear and they had several tenement properties in the city and some blocks of gilt-edged stock, and odds and ends which I have forgotten. I called several times in March of that year and happened to be present when they were struggling with their income tax statement, and they prevailed upon me to assist them in making it out. Their net income for the previous year, after all possible deductions, had been sixteen thousand three hundred dollars. The mother had a distinct mitral murmur; it was a close day for that season of the year and she had complained of breathlessness and I examined her.

"On my way home that evening I examined the state of my affections, as calmly as I could, and I decided that I was falling in love with Ida. A telling symptom of love, as I have observed the emotion, is a sentimental interest in the objects which belong to or pertain to the beloved creature. Thus a ribbon, a glove, a bar of music or even the distant sight of a chimney pot may cause a remarkable acceleration of pulse and of respiration; so now I found myself totting up rows of figures, although the science of mathematics had never before interested me."

Bulkley paused to select a fresh cigar. His face had remained entirely serious during the foregoing recitation. He did not smile when he caught my eye.

"It is enlightening to listen to you," I said. "You make everything so beautifully plain."

"You object to my theory of love," he said patronizingly. "You write fiction for a living, Garfield, and I have drudged through several of your stories for the sake of the mental discipline which a wearisome task imposes. If you were telling this thing you would no doubt have me fall in love with Ida upon saving her from drowning or from death beneath the hoofs of a runaway —as though a woman who is blue-faced and water-soaked or dirt-streaked and disordered should be a lovable object. The motivation of your characters, Garfield, is irrational and inhuman.

"I am sure we should have made an excellent match," he continued. "Ida was rich and beautiful and I was cultured, brilliant in my profession and of distinguished appearance. Our tastes were alike; we were fond of society, athletics, and a spacious and elegant manner of living. The old ladies on their porches nodded benignantly to us as we passed along their neatly clipped hedges and the men greeted me with increased respect as a young man who knew what he was about. "There was a pergola in Ida's garden, covered with climbing roses. The time was late in May and the flowers had unfolded their blushing petals and hung in serried red battalions or peeped like single spies through the interstices of the white-painted woodwork. Climbing roses are, as you know, nearly scentless, but there was a towering clump of lilacs between the pergola and the kitchen door and the heavy perfume of the lilacs drifted through the pergola and supplied to its atmosphere the missing sensuous sweetness. I kept my trysts with Ida in this delightful spot; it gratified her rhythmic sense.

"I chose a moonlit evening upon which to declare to her my love; perhaps it is undignified to wait upon the weather in such matters but it is a convention to do so and conventions are ordinarily based on good horse We approached the rustic bench sense. whereon for many evenings past we had talked of everything but what was uppermost in our minds. The air was warm; the obscuring lilacs were uncommonly fragrant; the moon shone brightly upon the slate-green masses of flowering vegetation beneath which the pergola nestled. The moment was propitious; the gentle pressure of Ida's hand upon my sleeve told me that the lady was expectant and in receptive mood.

"A square of white paper was pinned to the back of the rustic bench. Rustic benches are devilishly uncomfortable contrivances at the best; I pulled out the pin and held the square of paper in my hand.

"'What is it—\_\_\_' she asked; and I knew from the sudden catch in her tone as she ended the inquiry that Ida's lips had stopped on the framing of my given name.

"I read the message on the square of paper. It had been printed with pen and ink, in large characters, and was easily legible. This was it:

"You are being watched. If you make love to Ida Hilton I shall kill you, and then I shall tell her the truth about you. Beware!

"On the corner of the paper, by way of crest, had been pasted a pictured skull and crossbones which had evidently been snipped from the label of a vial of poison. Under the skull and crossbones was again 'Beware!'

"'What is it?' she repeated more briskly.

"'Nothing,' I said. 'Nothing at all!' And I crumpled the paper in my hand and cast it away. I seated myself beside her.

"I had arranged a neat phrasing for my

proposal but now the words did not rise readily to my lips. I sat in silence while she waited.

"'Fine night!' I offered lamely at last.

"'Perfectly delicious,' agreed Ida. And again there was a lame silence. I looked up for inspiration to the half hidden moon; I had had ready a pretty phrase referring to the moon but it had slipped my memory.

"'Can you imagine,' I said, getting the thrill into my voice easily enough but not the poetic content into my speech, 'that the moon is a mean distance of two hundred and forty thousand miles away and revolves about the earth in a mean time of twentyseven days? Its density, taking the earth as the unit, is about three fifths, and its extreme elongation——' I stopped short. I recalled later that I had intended to refer humorously to the Man in the Moon and then to ask her could she find the Woman in the Moon and so to drift smoothly into sentimentalities.

"'It's perfectly wonderful to think of,' said Ida somewhat uncertainly.

"'Excuse me,' I said, rising.

"I left her sitting there and walked from the pergola and made the circuit of it, peering carefully into the masses of shadow cast by the shrubbery. There is very little reflection to moonlight and the shadows were black and secretive. Had I known where the alleged watcher was hiding I should have gone and dragged him forth by the nape of his neck but I could not very well go quartering hither and yon about the garden like a cat pursuing blundering June bugs. And I was unbearably restive from the sense of his surveillance.

"You wonder perhaps why I did not exhibit the paper to Ida and take her advice on it. Perhaps she would have recognized it for the handiwork of some jealous suitor and then we could have laughed at it with a congenial sense of complicity; but there was that confounded phrase about 'telling her the truth about you.' What truth? What did this fellow know to my injury? I am a man of the world, and I have done things of which I am ashamed. Everybody has, no doubt. And I have had several affairs with ladies, perfectly innocent affairs, but difficult of explanation to Ida. For instance, it was then but a few days since I had proposed to Miss Delysia Hornblower, the daughter of the tin, tar and slag roofing magnate. I am an impulsive man, and I

had proposed to Miss Hornblower on the spur of the moment—she was starting for Europe and it was then or never—and I had not really been in love with her, and I was unpledged elsewhere at the time and free in honor to propose to any lady who would listen, but I was sure that Ida would find in this happening cause for offense.

"'Doc-tor!' she called chidingly.

"I reëntered the pergola.

"'The moon is shining upon your back, Miss Hilton,' I said. 'Bright moonlight is sometimes very harmful. You may have heard of people being moonstruck? If you don't mind I'll move that bench into the shadow.'

"'You were wandering about out there with bare head,' she said, rising to her feet. 'Weren't you afraid? I think you are a lion!'

"She was growing cross and she spoke the last sentence indistinctly but I am sure that I caught it aright. Ida was a refined person and was quite incapable of crude utterance. "I moved the basely into the she dear

"I moved the bench into the shadow.

"But now I observed that our backs were to a thicket of spirea whose delicate and lacelike fronds were stirring beneath the impulse of a wandering air and reaching out at intervals to caress the back of my neck. It was disconcerting to think that the murderous-minded scribe might be ensconced in that thicket.

"I twisted about suddenly and stared hard at the spirea. And there, sure enough, I saw the watcher. The moonlight fell upon the face of a man who was standing behind the bushes with his eyes upon us. Our moving into the shadow had obliged him to approach nearer in order to make us out; he was now within twenty feet of the bench. He turned his head and motioned with his hand to some confederate.

"'Excuse me, Miss Hilton!' I said, rising with grim resolution.

"I walked from the pergola and stole as noiselessly as I could around the edge of the bushes. But the rascal had evidently heard me for now I saw his figure drifting like a shadow across the lawn. I hurried after him but he had a long start and he entered the garage before I could intercept him. I did not see any necessity for risking a bruising battle in the darkness of the garage; I leaped to the door and slammed it to and snapped the padlock into place. The garage had only one entrance and this night prowler was now securely immured until I should choose to release him. I had trapped him very neatly.

"'Hello, out there!' he shouted, throwing himself against the door. 'You've locked me in—let me out of this!'

"'This is Doctor Bulkley talking,' I called back triumphantly. 'You stay where you are until I have time to attend to you. If you make any disturbance I will hand you over to the police!'

"He subsided at once and I walked quickly away. The garage was a hundred yards from the house and the noise had attracted no attention.

"I saw Ida standing at the entrance to the pergola. She waved at me as I crossed the lawn toward her. She was sitting on the rustic bench when I arrived. I had looked sharply about for my prisoner's confederate but had not seen him.

"'Don't make a sound, dear,' I whispered, venturing the term of affection in view of the exciting contingency. 'I'll explain to you later!'

"I seated myself beside her and watched about us with roving glances. To my delight she promptly snuggled up against me; under the pressure of fear a woman quickly drops her affectation of indifference and turns to the man she trusts.

"'Sh-h!' I warned, patting her shoulder. 'Be brave now!'

"I had seen a dark figure nearing the pergola. It came to the entrance and I saw that it was a woman. She stood studying us.

"'Hulda,' she said in a cold and reprimanding tone, 'who is that man with you on the bench?'

"'It's John, the chauffeur, Miss Ida,' said the lady in my arms. 'We thought you were through with this place for the evening, ma'am, and we took the liberty to sit here a bit, meaning no harm, ma'am. We're keeping company, ma'am, John and me.'

"'Come here, John!' called Ida. She had gone into the house to get a cloak; and the little waitress—who had also a sense of rhythm and a liking for love-making in a setting of moonlight and roses—had promptly taken possession of the romantic site for which she had impatiently waited and had mistaken me for her sweetheart on seeing me returning from the garage. It was an absurd situation, and I could not afford to appear absurd in Ida's eyes. My predicament was beyond explanation.

"'John!' called Ida imperatively.

"The pergola had another entrance, luckily. I sprang up and bolted for it. The two women shrieked and I fell over a sawbuck which some carpenter had left beside the latticed wall. I picked myself up, tore across the lawn, took a frantic header over the hedge and made my escape into a neighboring wood lot.

"'Miss Hilton has been calling you up,' said Hawes, who was sitting on the porch of his residence where I had a room. 'She seems upset. She said something incoherent about a band of robbers.'

"I telephoned Ida.

"'I am quite safe,' I assured her. 'I have had nothing worse than a severe shaking up. You see, the rascals ran off in this direction and I pursued them with the greatest vigor but they finally escaped me. I had a handto-hand tussle with them in the woods behind your house and—but I will tell you the story to-morrow!'

"'But why did you lock John into the garage?' she insisted. 'And why did you sit on the bench with Hulda?'

"'Well, you see,' I floundered, 'you look very much like Hulda, Miss Hilton. The resemblance is indeed most startling, and \_\_\_\_'

"'Do you think so?' she interposed icily. And she rang off with that.

"I cudgeled my brains that night for a creditable explanation of this ridiculous business and I had a fairly adequate one ready by the forenoon of the following day. But I was not given a chance to use it. The Hilton's landaulet drove up and John the chauffeur descended and came to our door. With averted face he handed me a small bundle, and a sealed note. I read the note at once:

"I am returning your presents by the hand of your *rival*. I cannot afford to compete with my waitress, even though I resemble her startlingly. I am also returning you the message which you received last night and which frightened you so; I found it in the garden this morning. I do not dare to imagine what the truth about you must be. (Signed) IDA HILTON.

"'Is there anything else?' I asked John who was loitering in the path.

"He scowled up at me. 'I would like to break your nose,' he growled with venom.

"'I would like to give you the chance to try, my man,' I said briskly, feeling the need of venting my exasperation. 'Come down to the barn and I'll dress you down in style!'

"'If I could afford to lose my place,' he muttered longingly. He turned his back on temptation and stalked away.

"I was out of sorts for several days after this disaster and had to summon all my philosophy to throw off my depression. My money loss was comparatively trifling; I have always considered it vulgar to give costly presents as it is the sentiment that counts and not the intrinsic value of the gift; I had expended a total of only fourteen dollars in this way. The abrading of my tenderest feelings hurt me more. Had I not chanced to meet Miss Ginsberg at this time I should no doubt have moped and brooded for days and days.

"Upon making Miss Nona Ginsberg's acquaintance I definitely abandoned Ida to the suit of the jealous unknown, reflecting that she must have given him great encouragement to have driven him to homicidal desperation upon the dashing of his hopes.

"Miss Ginsberg lived in a tall and stately mansion of the dashing brunette type; I think the style is called Tudor. It was built of long Norman bricks, brown and roughtextured; it had cupolas with twisted columns and a rounded keep upon whose bold sides English ivy was climbing. When I saw Nona first she was standing beneath a towering cedar tree and holding in leash a curvilinear Russian wolfhound. Behind her the land fell away in clipped groves and flowing lawns to the bosky lip of a blue rivulet; over the entrancing landscape shadows were slowly sweeping as fleecy clouds and broad acres of aching azure swept over the summer sky above.

"'Fishing in our river, he was,' said the gardener who had been proceeding with me to the local police station but who had turned aside at my suggestion to lay my case before the lady of the manor.

"'You got a nerve to fish in our river,' she said looking at me reprovingly with eyes of velvety black. 'What do you think my father puts fish in that river for? I was just showing you to our dog and it's lucky for you he didn't see you!'

"She was not strictly beautiful according to our American ideas, being too full of figure and having a blotched and sallow skin which spoke of overfondness for fats and sweets, but her romantic environment inclined me to waive these blemishes. "'I am sorry,' I said, with a graceful bow, 'that your man should have made such a blunder. As a matter of fact, Miss Chalfonte, I hate fish and would not pull one of them out of your river to save his miserable life.'

"'I am not Miss Chalfonte,' she said more graciously. 'She lives next door, in that white house with green blinds.'

"'I am again wrong,' I bowed apologetically. "I had not seen Miss Chalfonte since she was last year in the Ziegfeld beauty group but I knew that she had married and was living in this neighborhood. But now I see that you have not the cast in the left eye which gave variety to Miss Chalfonte's otherwise classic beauty.'

"'I don't see anything beautiful about being cross-eyed,' she sniffed. 'And she don't need to tell me that she don't do something to her hair! But what were you doing on our river?'

"'I was botanizing,' I explained. 'I was using the line to catch lily pads. I am a physician and I prepare a skin lotion from water lilies. The process is not patented and is of great value and therefore I prepare the medicament personally to preserve its secret.'

"'What does the lotion do to you?' she inquired attentively.

"'Its chief therapeutic value,' I explained, giving her my card, 'lies in its astringency. Your skin, for instance, which is to the naked eye so smooth and beautiful, is in reality full of unevenness, bumps, holes, hollows, ridges. In these depressions the natural oils collect, attracting dust. My lotion shrinks the skin and tightens it, pulling it smooth, so that the natural oils flow evenly. Its only bad feature is that the lotion requires for its proper action a profuse exudation of these natural oils and that can be attained only by dieting.'

"'Oh, sure,' she nodded dissatisfiedly. 'Dieting!'

"'That cannot be helped,' I said, spreading my hands. 'We physicians must work with Nature. In order to get the best results the patient must eat nearly a pound of candy per day, much bread soaked in gravy, puddings prepared with cream and sugar, fried foods and bolognas. For breakfast I ordinarily prescribe pork chops done to a delicate Vandyke brown, coffee with rich cream, waffles hot and crisp and baked to a tint slightly redder than straw, and plenty of real maple sirup. Tender little country sausages with their natural oils just breaking the mottled skins, hot cakes——'

"'And butter?' she interpolated eagerly.

"'Plenty of it,' I bowed. 'Golden and unsalted and curved in brittle flakes from an ice-cold paddle.'

"'You certainly got sense,' she said, tucking my card into a pleat at her wrist. 'I'm glad to meet one doctor that's got sense. Will you sell me some of that lotion if I come to your office?'

"'I shall give it to you with pleasure,' I promised. 'And now may I resume my botanizing?'

"'Go as far as you like, doctor,' she said. 'You can catch fish too if you want. What's a few fish? We got plenty!'

"'You are too kind,' I acknowledged, turning toward the brimming rivulet. 'I shall think of you as I gather my simples today.'

""'Here, mister,' growled the baffled gardener, following me. "What am I a-goin' to do with this here can of worms of yourn? Don't you want them for the fish?"

"'Not at all, my man,' I said carelessly. 'Eat them yourself! We have plenty more. I was thinking of you when I gathered them in our garden this morning!'

"A week later I went to see Nona's father at her suggestion to ask him for his daughter's hand. He spoke in a very positive and explosive manner, exhibiting marked symptoms of blood pressure; he was a short man with three chins and vast waist measure. He was an auctioneer by profession and was newly rich and was in general a vulgar and purse-proud man. I left his presence in some confusion of mind and returned later for my umbrella and overheard him telling his wife of our interview. The couple were in the music room whose tall French windows opened into the conservatory where I was retrieving my umbrella.

"'The nerve of that guy!' he was saying. "To marry our Nona he wanted. So mad I got that almost I jumped myself out of my pants!'

"Nona comforted me.

"'Don't mind pop,' she said sweetly. 'That's just a way he's got of shooting off his face. He don't mean anything by it.'

"'But I must conciliate him, dear,' I urged. 'Has he any hobby or peculiar fancy or idiosyncrasy through which I could appeal to him?'

"'You're a cute one,' said Nona admir-

ingly. 'You want to get on pop's blind side, hey? Well, the only thing that he is nutty about is flowers.'

"This was not very promising. I could hardly send the old gentleman flowers, particularly as he had a superfluity of his own. But Fortune favored me as it must always favor the active, the vigilant and the brave.

"Nona and I were strolling through the estate when opportunity presented itself. We ordinarily strolled near the gates, which were several yards from the house. The grounds here were beautifully terraced and landscaped and the public road was near at hand in case the old gentleman suddenly put in an appearance to prick the iridescent bubble of love's young dream. The bluestoned driveway was bordered for several hundred yards on either side by rhododendrons; from the tumbled sea of olive-green leaves rose great blooms in pink and white and orchid.

"Nona loved flowers too. Her eyes lighted as their glance traveled over the rhododendrons. 'Ten thousand dollars' worth,' she murmured. 'But they give the place a very refined look, don't they?—oh, ain't that a shame!'

"'I see that Mr. Ginsberg has been transplanting here,' I said. Among the rhododendrons were a number of rough holes from which flowering plants evidently had been removed recently.

"'Mr. Ginsberg—nothing!' she exclaimed angrily. 'Somebody has been swiping our flowers, that's what! And every one of those rhodies costs five dollars. Can you imagine the low-lifes that live around here? This ain't the first time this has happened neither. Our gardener has laid for these crooks night after night but they don't ever come around when he's laying for them. These rhodies were dug up last night!'

"From beside one of the holes I picked up a smoking pipe. It was a cheap article of near meerschaum with a near-amber bit; upon the silver coupling were engraved the initials T. B.

"'What is your gardener's name, Nona?' I asked at a venture.

"'Tim Boyle,' she answered. 'Why?'

"'And is he by any chance engaged in the business of selling plants?' I asked.

"'No, not our Tim. You're thinking of Boyle's Greenhouses over on the Split Rock Road, ain't you? That Boyle is our Tim's brother.'

"I have great power of intuition and from

the trifling circumstances that the gardener's pipe lay beside the newly excavated hole and that his brother was a florist—facts which would have conveyed no suggestion to the ordinary mind—I instantly darted to the truth. I understood why the gardener failed to lay hold on the thief of the rhododendrons. He was himself the thief! A plan of campaign sprang into my mind whereby I should pay him out for arresting me while fishing and also make interest with the irascible Mr. Ginsberg.

"I communicated it to Nona. 'Have your father instruct the gardener,' I concluded, 'to stand guard to-morrow night and the two following nights. In the meantime I will call up Boyle's Greenhouses and order twenty rhododendrons, to be delivered at my residence to-morrow morning. The rascal will certainly come here to steal them tonight. Mr. Ginsberg and I will be waiting for him and we will catch him red-handed. In gratitude for the saving of his beloved flowers and for the unmasking of this treacherous scoundrel—.'

"I pressed Nona's arm mutely.

"'It is a corking good idea!' she exclaimed enthusiastically. 'Pop is so mad about losing these rhodies that you will make him a friend for life!'

"Later in the day I made occasion to face the gardener with the pipe.

"'Is that yours?' I demanded, flashing the pipe on him and peering keenly into his face.

"'No,' he replied surlily. 'It ain't!'

"His answer convinced me that the pipe was his; naturally he would deny it.

"'By the way,' I continued casually, 'what varieties of rhododendrons are those which are planted along that driveway over there?'

"'Farthest Norths and Smith's Doublebearing,' he said unwilingly.

"'What are they worth in the market?' I asked.

"'Four and a quarter to five dollars,' he answered, watching me suspiciously.

"'I understand Mr. Ginsberg has instructed you to watch those beds to-morrow night,' I tried again. The process which I was employing on his untutored mind was one derived from psychoanalysis; I was suggesting to him the train of circumstances which must eventuate in his attempting the larceny of the plants that evening.

"'Seems to me, mister,' he growled, leaning on his spade and glowering at me, 'that 6A—P

you are mighty interested in them rhododendrons! I notice you hang around that drive a whole lot lately.'

"I laughed and walked away. Before another day had come I would repay him for his impudence. I called up his brother's greenhouse at once and ordered two dozen rhododendrons, specifying Farthest Norths and Smith's Double-bearing. When Larry Boyle told me over the wire that he had neither variety in stock but would be able to obtain them for me by noon of the next day I knew that my plan was in good order.

"When I met Mr. Ginsberg that evening, by appointment at ten o'clock, he seemed grumpy.

"'I got it a very funny letter about you to-day, Mr. Buckley,' he said. He insisted on calling me 'mister.'

"'What was it?' I asked uneasily. 'I am sure I could explain.'

"'I bet you could too,' he said. 'But I don't believe in explanations! Well, we will see what we will see to-night. Might I would not believe the letter if this here business comes out all right.'

"He would not particularize further and I proceeded to divulge my plan of campaign against the thief.

"'Brains you got, Buckley,' he admitted grudgingly. 'You should go in business! If you was a business man now, might I don't got so mad when you asked me you should marry my girl. However, we shall see what this evening happens.'

"'We will hide behind this bush whence we can watch the rhododendron beds. These two heavy canes will be quite sufficient to subdue the rascal if he shows fight.'

"'And if he runs off?'

"'Don't fear that he will escape me,' I said confidently. 'I can say without boasting that there is no man in Pelham who can outrun me! I have a sideboard full of medals and cups at home which I won in foot-racing during my college days and I am still in excellent condition. And when it comes to playing at singlestick I would handle a dozen such rascals and leave them all with cracked heads.'

"'Let me get just one wallop at him,' growled Ginsberg.

"I saw an open wagon pass under an arc light on the public road.

"'Hide quickly!' I urged. 'This may be the vehicle in which he carries off his plunder!'

"We squatted down behind the bush. It was a small bush and Ginsberg was a large man, so that we were obliged to squeeze close together. He crouched with his head amid the branches and I sat on my heels behind him and supported him with my knee and arms. He was a very weighty man and the pressure on my knee would have been exceedingly irksome had it not been for the excitement of the ambush.

"The wagon, which was drawn by a single horse, stopped beside the wall of the Ginsberg estate in a field of darkness shed by a weeping-willow tree. Into the dim light which was upon the bluestoned driveway I saw four dark figures emerge, and I heard the grinding of a wheel.

"'A wheelbarrow they brought with them!' hissed Ginsbery and I felt him shaking with rage. 'Should we wallop them now?'

"'Sh-h!' I warned. 'Not yet!'

"The intruders came directly to the rhododendron beds and set to work with fork and spade to dig up the shrubs. They worked fast and shortly had a half dozen on the barrow. One man then started back to the wagon with the loot.

"'There goes my flowers!' gasped Ginsberg. 'Now we wallop!'

"Wait!' I commanded, holding him tightly. 'We want to send these scoundrels to State's prison so we'd better wait until they load the wagon. That will be grand larceny! If we spring out on them now the wagon will get away; wait until it is loaded and they are all going back to it and then we will bag them all at once! Don't be afraid they'll get away; I could run that old nag down if he was out of the traces.

"'We'll knock them down like ninepins,' I added, jubilant at the prospect of battle. I knew that the marauders would take to flight upon our sudden appearance and I was sorry for that as I was confident that I could master them even if they were forewarned.

"'The suckers!' growled Ginsberg, grasping his loaded cane.

"The thieves trundled six loads to the On the seventh they waiting wagon. crouched for a minute amid the shrubbery and then arose and started for the gate in a body.

"'Now we wallop!' implored Ginsberg.

"'Now!' I cried encouragingly. 'Up and at them!'

"'Loafers!' yelled Ginsberg, plunging out

from behind the bush and rushing forward with uplifted cane. 'Wait up a bit yet and you catch something!'

"He rushed upon them like a storm.

"I had been obliged to fall backward to the earth to let him get free of the bush and now I bounded to my feet brandishing my cane strongly. Already I foresaw the few dexterous blows with which I should lay the fellows prone; I am an expert at singlestick and could have held my own with twice their number. When they cried enough I should go down and fetch in the wagon and our case would be complete and Mr. Ginsberg's gratitude would be touching. There is a great pleasure in seeing a well-thoughtout scheme come to its due fruition. I had foreseen every contingency and provided for itl

"As I say, I bounded to my feet. I leaped forward and thereupon to my intense surprise and disgust I plunged to the surface of the driveway. I lifted myself instantly and found that I could only hobble and hop, like a cripple on a crutch. More slowly, indeed.

"My right leg had gone asleep! Alas, the great superincumbent pressure of Mr. Ginsberg's two hundred and forty pounds had gotten in its fell work; the nerve ganglions of my erstwhile trusty limb were temporarily paralyzed!

"Sounds of battle came from before me. 'Hurry up, Bulkley!' implored my prospective father-in-law.

"'Courage!' I shouted, stumbling forward like a man sinking at every second step into a quicksand.

"I saw a weaving maze of agitated forms before me and strained every effort to reach the scene. While I still was stumbling and thrashing about I saw a knot of men break away and hurry toward the road. Shortly thereafter came the sound of wheels and the clattering of the old nag's hoofs on the macadamized highway. "'I'm coming!' I shouted.

"Suddenly the darkness to my right was split by a spurt of flame and I felt a stinging sensation in my right calf.

"'Hold up, there!' shouted a newcomer, 'or I'll give you the other barrel!'

"Upon receiving the charge of bird shot -for such it proved to be-I sat down at once on the bluestone. My plans were sadly disarranged and nothing was to be gained by endeavoring to proceed with them.

"A pocket electric light was flashed into my face.

"'Hah!' ejaculated with grim satisfaction a voice which I recognized as that of Tim Boyle the gardener. 'So it's you, my fine fellow. I'll learn you to steal our plants. Get up out of that!'

"'Help!' shouted Mr. Ginsberg whose shadowy bulk I could just descry in the distance. He seemed to be sitting upon the ground. The gardener ran to him. I scrambled to my feet and discovered after a testing kick or two that my leg was as good as ever, except for the smarting of the tiny bird shot.

"The gardener returned with Mr. Ginsberg

"'I got one of them, sir,' he said. 'It's that fellow Bulkley that's been hanging around here! He came to me this afternoon and asked me questions about them rhododendrons and if I was going to be watching them to-night. So, thinks I, he will bear watching himself! So I took my shotgun and came down here and caught him just as he was getting away.'

"'State's prison for you, you loafer!' stormed Ginsberg, shaking his fists at me. 'You got medals on you for running, ain't it? Fight them four fellows all by yourself you could, ain't it? Where was you just now when them four fellows give it to me a push in the face? Answer me! Shut up, vou loafer!'

"'I shall make the matter entirely clear to you in due time,' I said dignifiedly. 'Meanwhile I suggest that we hurry back to the house and have our injuries dressed; and first we will call up the constable on duty in the box at the crossroads a mile below. The thieves will pass his post within the next five minutes and there is no time to be lost!'

"'I will call the constable,' cried Ginsberg. 'I guess rather you would call up the thieves; look at that, you crook!'

"He shook an envelope at me. I took it and read the inclosure by the light of the gardener's flash.

"It was addressed to Ginsberg and was printed in characters like those which contained the message ruining my romance with Ida Hilton:

"As a friend I wish to warn you against Doctor Bulkley; I fear that he intends to steal away from you your greatest treasure and I am sure that if you knew the truth about him you would drive him from your door. No more at present, from "One Who Wishes You Well!

"'Might you could explain that, too, hey?' sneered Ginsberg.

"'In due time,' I said austerely. 'You are not at present in a receptive mood. Lie at full length on a couch. Apply an ice bag to the back of your neck. When the extravasation of blood from your nostrils has ceased gargle your throat with a spoonful of bicarbonate of soda in a tumbler of lukewarm water. Think kind thoughts while your neck rests on the ice bag and the pressure of the blood upon the veins of your nose will lessen and the hemorrhage tend to cease. Good night!'

"'Let him go,' said Ginsberg to the gardener. 'Hurry up and call that constable!'

"I limped home disconsolate and sat down with forceps to pick the bird shot from my leg. The injury was trifling; few of the tiny pellets had broken the skin. I painted my freckled epidermis with iodine and went to bed.

"I lay late the next day. When I returned to the house after my morning round of duty I was greeted by Hawes.

"'Very handsome of you, Bulkley,' he said gratefully. 'Here is the bill from Boyle's Greenhouses. I had them bed the shrubs in that angle between the morning room and the sun parlor. That was your notion, wasn't it?

"'Precisely,' I said, looking at the array of rhododendrons over which waved great blooms of pink and white and orchid. 'They look very well there, I'm sure!'

"Fortunately for the course of my affair with Nona her father engendered at this time a large boil upon the back of his neck. She persuaded him to let me treat him for this disorder, stating that I was a recognized authority on boils. I made the most of the matter and thus were my visits to the Ginsberg household resumed. But I was by no means on a familiar footing and I studied various projects by means of which I should make my way into the family's good graces. Nona's faith in me had not been shaken by the affair of the rhododendrons; she pointed out to her father that the rascals had been frightened off and had not returned since.

"My finances had been crippled by the heavy payment I had been obliged to make to Boyle's Greenhouses. The shrubs with which I had involuntarily presented Hawes were not those which had been stolen from the Ginsberg place; that was certain, since the constable had captured the wagon that night although the thieves had escaped. In the depleted state of my pocket I was in no position to make Nona handsome gifts.

"My apparent niggardliness made her restive, although she knew that I was not wealthy except in anticipation; I had explained to her that I had several rich and childless relatives who looked upon me as the very apples of their several eyes. I was pleased but surprised one afternoon when she thanked me for a gift of candy which I had not sent.

"'Homemade, ain't it?' she asked.

"'Why, yes,' I said, taking the hint. 'It was sent me by my maiden aunt in Carbondale. She is a dear, good creature, although quite old-fashioned. She made these sweets with her own hands and I sent them to you, knowing them to be healthful. I am glad you like them.'

"'Mom and pop like them too,' she said. 'And so does little Sam. Pop says he thinks your heart is in the right place, even if you are awful dumb.'

"'It was sweet of your father to say that,' I acknowledged. 'I must hurry away now, dear. Duty calls! I shall return again in the evening.'

"I called up the office an hour later and Hawes talked to me over the telephone.

"'Say, Bulkley,' he said, 'what was in that candy you fed to the Ginsberg family? I was just over there and they are the sickestlooking group! They've been retching and regurgitating in great form. They told me about the candy and I pooh-poohed the idea that the candy had made them sick and blamed their trouble on the oyster patties they ate for lunch—but it was the candy that did it. The old gentleman says he will positively shoot you if you show your face there again and the daughter says the only reason she does not send you back your ring is that you were too cheap to give her one. No offense intended, Bulkley, you understand. I just want you to understand the situation. Be a little more careful in your practical jokes, my dear fellow!'

"And so again the malign hand which had blighted my career in Pelham had intervened against me. I was at a loss to understand the motive which actuated my mysterious persecutor. It could not be jealousy. How had I made this enemy? I could not guess.

"About a month later I met Eunice van Tripper. She was a grass widow, having lost her husband at Reno. She was young, talented, beautiful and wealthy. I became tenderly interested in her at once and it was not long before I saw that she reciprocated my regard. She lived in New Rochelle, which is just adjacent to Pelham; I dropped in to call on her while making my round of duty. And now at last the course of my suit ran smooth. My enemy was apparently unaware of my affection for Eunice and I hastened by every means the happy day when I could call her mine and bid him do his worst. At last the day came when I had the engagement ring in my pocket and partly paid for; in the intervals of my professional visits that afternoon I formulated the apt phrases in which I should implore Eunice to intrust her heart and hand to my keeping.

"By this time I had completely conquered Mrs. Shanton's prejudice. As I smoothed her pillow that afternoon and held her hand and gazed into her eyes—with purely professional interest, of course—she sighed languishingly.

"'You have such a sweet way with you, doctor,' she murmured. 'I hear you've been trying to get married. If I were twenty years younger and had my good health back I'm cursed if I wouldn't marry you myself!'

"Mrs. Shanton had been a chorus girl and a great beauty in her day and she was quite straight-spoken.

"'You have a little fever to-day, my dear girl,' I said, laying my hand lightly on her forehead. 'When you are strong and well again—who knows?'

"'Get away with that sort of talk!' she laughed. But I saw her glance meditatively at her reflection in the pier glass at the foot of the bed. She was a dear old crocodile.

"I had three more visits to pay and then I would be free to fly to Eunice.

"My next visit was to Miss Anna Pipps, who roomed in a cheap boarding house near the railroad station. Miss Pipps was a teacher in the local elementary school; her annual salary would not have defrayed our charges for treatment; we had taken her case at the behest of the local superintendent of schools, who was a millionaire and whose invalid wife was worth to Hawes a cool thousand per year. "Miss Pipps was sitting in a rickety rocker on the dingy porch. She raised her eyes to mine and then dropped them quickly.

"I had been at a loss to diagnose the nature of her illness. It had appeared to me at first to be nothing more than a heavy cold and I had proceeded to cure her of it with expedition so as to write off a losing piece of business. The cough had disappeared with the laryngeal inflammation which had caused it but the young woman did not mend. I found her pulse always rapid and irregular, with strong and eccentric heart action. She flushed easily and heavily and the tonics with which I sought to control this relaxed condition did not seem to help her.

"I drew up a chair to hers and sat beside her and took her wrist in hand. I gazed encouragingly into her eyes. I was, at that time, as I think I have mentioned, a student of psychoanalysis and a believer in the power of suggestion. I wanted to make her feel that I was her friend and that I had the power to cure her. By deft and gentle questioning I had explored her mind, asking her about her dreams and her daily thoughts. It seemed to me that she was brooding over some unpleasant experience; perhaps some morbid thought was in the back of her mind unknown to herself. One of those submerged things. I was convinced that her illness was not entirely of the body but I was unable to bring the trouble to light. During some of my visits she was moody and distraught but during others she was very loquacious. It was a puzzling condition for the girl's health was visibly breaking down and this afternoon she was quite feverish.

"I spoke to her in most carefully modulated tones, patting her hand. She sat with averted face. She was hardly good looking. Her greenish eyes were large and handsome but her eyebrows were too black and thick and threatening. She had a smooth olive skin and the accompanying wealth of black hair but I saw that her finger nails were bitten to the quick. She evidently was of a tempestuous temperament, the sort of girl who will permit her feelings to tear her to pieces.

"I thought that the account of my romance with Eunice van Tripper might interest her.

"'I am in love, Miss Pipps,' I said.

"'Yes?' she drawled, looking at me from under lowered eyelids. I might have thought her expression scornful had there been any reason for the evocation of such an emotion.

"'Yes,' I said softly, looking at her with an effect of appealing for sympathy. And I patted her hand.

"'You have been in love before, I hear,' she said in a hard voice.

"I stopped there and gazed at her speculatively. In fact, I did not have the rest of the phrase ready. But women have excellent taste in such matters and I trusted that even Miss Pipps might give me a hint which I could use when making the speech to Eunice.

"She turned about in her chair and returned my gaze. There was a strange light in her eyes.

"'And are you really and truly going to propose this afternoon to the girl whom you really love?' she said in her deep and slightly hoarsened voice. 'You have done with these wicked flirtations and you are coming home to her?'

"'I am,' I said, flattered by her interest. 'You will never guess her name!'

"'Yes, I can,' she said, with that strange brightness in her face.

"'No, you never can,' I said confidently. I picked the ring from my pocket and flipped it in the air. It is only fair to myself to say that my love for Eunice van Tripper was something less than passionate. The diamond twinkled in the air and fell again into my palm. 'Try!' I cried archly.

"She leaned forward and picked the ring from my hand. She gazed at it for a long moment with quivering lips. And then, to my astonishment, she slid forward into my arms with a very April shower of laughter and tears.

"'I knew it all the while,' she sobbed. 'Did you think you could keep it a secret from me? I knew it from the first, dearest boy. I heard it in the thrill of your voice; I saw it in the light of your eyes; I felt it in the touch of your hand; even the sound of your footsteps knocked on my heart! And, oh, how you have made me suffer! But that's all over now. We are going to be so happy. You love me—you love me—you love me!—and I love you.'

"And with that she slipped the ring onto her finger, and held it up exultantly for the diamond to flash in the sun, and——"

Bulkley leaned back and laughed—a triumphant, self-conceited laugh. He shrugged his shoulders and rose to go.

"Well, Garfield," he yawned, stretching his arms, "that cured me of my prettified bedside manner. The girl had fallen in love with me, whereas I had not given her a second thought until that moment. Not that she wasn't a girl whom any man might love, understand me—but I had always looked upon her with a professional eye. I'm very distant and businesslike with patients nowadays; in frankness I may say that I am very attractive to women and I must protect them against their volatile emotions.

"Yes, it was Miss Pipps who had pinned the note to the rustic bench in the Hiltons' pergola. It was she who had warned old Ginsberg against me and it was she who had made and sent to Nona the doctored taffy. She confessed these things against my coat lapel and added unashamedly that she would certainly kill any one who tried to take me from her."

He glanced through the farther window. "There's my man with my car," he said. "I suppose Mrs. Bulkley has sent it, thinking that I may be too weary to walk the half mile home. A wonderful woman, Garfield. I tell you a good wife is a treasure beyond any man's deserts; she is a treasure which no man can acquire by taking thought --she is a gift from the gods!"

I am a writer and a writer upon the trail of a story is as remorseless as a bloodhound and is fairly entitled to the same absolution.

"What a horrible creature that Miss Pipps was!" I exclaimed as I went with him to the door. "A woman so shameless deserves to be whipped at the cart tail! I cannot imagine a lady of the least sense of decency or propriety——"

"Careful, Garfield," he said, frowning me into silence. "Remember that you are speaking of Mrs. Bulkley!"

"Let Me Explain," by Mr. McMorrow, in the next number.

# A DISAPPOINTED WOMAN

BEFORE breaking into official life in the national capital, Senator William J. Harris of Georgia regaled himself in his native State with the puzzling job of selling insurance. He was in his office one morning wishing for an influx of applications for hundred-thousand-dollar policies when his door was darkened by a long, lean, lank female person. She strode across the room, plumped into a chair, thumped the floor with a massive umbrella, rested her elbows on the edge of his desk, cupped her chin in her hands and, speaking in a rasping baritone, began:

"I've heard I can insure my house for a thousand dollars in your company."

"Yes, madam," replied Harris. "You pay us five dollars a year and, if your house burns down, we pay you a thousand dollars." "Another thing," she continued, still maintaining her gargoyle glare: "Do you ever in-

"Another thing," she continued, still maintaining her gargoyle glare: "Do you ever inquire as to the cause of the fire?"

"Why, yes," he replied; "we make the most careful investigations concerning that."

"There you are!" she exclaimed, with a gigantic sniff, brandishing the umbrella as she rose to depart. "I knew there was a catch in it somewhere!"

### THE GREATER NEED

NOTE," said the man who kept up with things, "the invention of a machine to record the sound of heartbeats."

"What I want to see," commented the busy man, "is the invention of a machine to drown out the sound of dead beats."

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4

# The Papuan Paddle

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "The Chilean Girl," "Brutus," Etc.

The spirit that swung that paddle was the spirit of a wild island tribe—but not from New Guinea.

THE summer before last, Blades, the manager of the Nicaraguan Trust Company, rented me his bungalow at Sonning-on-Thames. If you know Sonning you know a lovely place; can you tell me of anything prettier than the treecovered reaches, the water meadows, the old river gardens of the Thames below Reading; any place more charming were it not for the river mists and the motor launches?

I paid Blades five guineas a week for the bungalow and he said I could sublet or lend it if I wanted to. I had known Blades some years. He had been mixed up in all sorts of businesses in a great many countries. Starting with tea in Ceylon he had gone on to rubber in Burma; from there he went to New Guinea and from New Guinea to Nicaragua, making money at each remove but never a fortune. Incidentally he was full of stories and the records of strange happenings.

I took the bungalow over on the seventh of June and as he did not want to leave for London till the eighth he stayed on for the night as my guest. Blades had always carried his household goods along with him when he moved, collecting as he went, and the bungalow was a small museum of potbellied idols, inlaid furniture, arms and objects of Eastern art. I honestly detest Eastern things in a Western setting, but I had come to the bungalow for open air so the furniture was of little account; but the chairs were comfortable, and as we sat smoking and yarning that warm June evening with the scents and sounds of the river blowing through the open windows I forgot Blades' Eastern gods and dragons while listening to an Eastern story.

A stand of Papuan arms and accouterments started the business. It was fixed by the fireplace opposite the windows and as the evening light shone on these implements of death and destruction a chance remark of mine made Blades turn his head toward them.

"Yes," he said, "look as if they were stamped out of savagery, don't they? Modern and civilized arms haven't the same touch at all. A rifle, though more deadly, hasn't got 'killing' written on it like those parangs and a cannon doesn't shout murder at you as a stabbing spear does."

"Maybe it's Western hypocrisy," said I, "the hypocrisy that teaches the kindness of Buddha to animals while devouring them, and which camouflages deadliness as you say."

"No," replied Blades, "it's Eastern savagery—ferocity, that is a better word. If I were asked to define the thing that most truly divides the Eastern from the Western man I would say that it was neither color nor religion nor the set of the eyes nor the shape of the face, but just ferocity, a latent ferocity that is hidden under every yellow skin—and I'll tell you something about that.

"When I sold my place in Burma I fell in with a chap named Masters, English in make and name but a cosmopolitan in everything else, the ugliest creature I ever struck. six foot two and as thin as a barber's pole, but devilish interesting for all that. You meet a lot of men in the world but you meet very few personalities. I'm blessed if I know what a personality really is, but it's something, seems to me, in the shape of a magnetic fluid. Once you got in touch with Masters you were him, in a way-sort of induced-electricity business; you'd take his color of mind and if he believed in a thing it's ten to one he'd make you believe in it too. These are the sort of chaps that fascinate women because they believe themselves fascinating. They have faith in themselves, that's the secret of it maybe, and before I had known him three days he'd fascinated me so that I was drawing money out of the bank to help start an expedition with him in search of a ruby mine in Papua.

"I had never heard of rubies being found in Papua, but Masters had the location of what he swore would prove a better corundum ground than any in Burma. He explained to me just what a ruby was, corundum crystallized in six-sided prisms and that just a twist of Nature's hand would turn common corundum into rubies or sapphires. There was no mystery, he said, and Burma hadn't cornered the business by any means; as for the location he had it from a cousin who had died of black-water fever.

"It was up close to the headwaters of a river, the Itang by name, and though the place wasn't specified on the chart by a pin prick, so to speak, he would have no difficulty in finding it as he was an expert geologist. That was all we had to go on but Masters being what he was, we went.

"There was a little old schooner tied up to the wharves at Rangoon. She'd been a pearler and nosing about for a boat we struck her and found the owner and did a deal, hiring her for six months pay in advance, and we insuring her for the trip. Hefferman was the name of the owner and we told him we were going to hunt for butterflies and orchids in Papua. He was an old pearler, red-nosed old swab, an A-1 boozer but likable, somehow, and he said

he'd come along with us and sail the schooner for five dollars a week so's to get away from the drink, and we took him. He got the crew for us and one morning bright and early we slipped down the Irawadi with the land breeze into the Gulf of Martaban. She was a crazy old tub but she got us safe down through the Straits of Malacca and the Banda Sea, and one morning we dropped the hook off the coast we were after in a sort of natural harbor, protected by reefs, and with the Itang River right before us.

"There was a big stockaded village on the right bank of the river and beyond and on the other side we could see alligators sunning themselves on the mud. Then came the forests and beyond the forests great blue hills all broken and strange looking under a streak of cloud.

"We got ashore and Hefferman came with us. Well we took him, for he could make a shot at the lingo. All along that coast the language changes every few miles—it's a Tower of Babel lying on its side but there's one dialect that runs like a skewer through the hundred and fifty others and that's Ubir. Hefferman could speak Ubir and when we stood there surrounded by the whole of that village we were glad we had him along for they were a tough-looking lot, specially the head man, a chap with a frizzy head, named Klang.

"They examined our rifles and automatic pistols and, when Heff explained that we wanted canoes and a party to go with us to the headwaters of the Itang, Klang nearly tumbled at our feet and offered to lead us and bring along a party of his best men lest we should have any trouble with the people in the interior. We thought ourselves in luck. We didn't know that the scamp was planning to use us. Up toward the headwaters of the Itang there was a tribe belonging to the Doriri people and headed by a chap named Kwa. Kwa had raided Klang's village two years before and Klang had been lying low for a chance to return the compliment. Three European gunmen armed with Winchesters and automatics were the chance of his life, for he knew Kwa would open the ball and we'd have to fight.

"We guessed nothing of all that and two days later we started, four canoes, twentysix Papuans armed to the teeth and us three with an automatic and Winchester apiece. Then came three days paddling, tying up at nights under trees full of flying foxes, till one day a spear eight feet long came sailing out of the blue and the ball began.

"There was no strategy or tactics about Kwa. As we drove the canoes up to the bank where the spear had come from his men came out from the trees into the open and fought. They hadn't reckoned on automatics but that didn't stop them. Though they were tumbling dead like ninepins they didn't care; nor did Klang's crowd who fought with spears and paddles and teeth and toe nails while we three stood supervising matters and pumping the lead into the beggars, sure of our marks for the fool Doriri chaps had daubed themselves with yellow clay all over their chests and shoulders.

"I don't know how long that fight lasted, three minutes or ten, but it was soon over and at the end of it Kwa was a prisoner and the whole of his lot dead or flying. Now I'm coming to the keel of my story and the ferocity business. You see that parang, that half sword sort of thing by that spear with three barbs. Well Klang was holding it in his hand and as Kwa stood before him, a prisoner, suddenly up flew the parang and Kwa's head went flying.

"Klang danced before the head, then he went on his knees and jeered at it, then he put out his hand to seize it and suddenly, I don't know how it happened, there was a snap like the snap of a steel spring and a piece was bitten out of his thumb—clean out. Pass us the whisky."

"Did you find any rubies?" I asked presently.

"No, not an indication."

We talked of other things and then I went to bed and dreamed that I was by the Itang River in the doubtful company of Klang, a ferocious Papuan with frizzy hair and armed with a parang. I awoke in the dark but did not put my hand out for matches to see the time lest my search might be rewarded by the touch of a woolly head, parted from its context, yet capable of snapping like a dog. Then dismissing such absurd ideas I fell asleep.

#### II.

All the same, Blades' story remained with me after he had left and gave the stand of Papuan arms a significance best appreciated at night when the woman servant who looked after me had gone home to the village of Sonning and I was alone—all alone with the silence and my dreams. Then, ceasing writing or laying down a book, I would sometimes allow these things to have their way with me, leading me off like slim afreets to find adventure by the banks of an Eastern river or across those blue hills beyond the paddy fields and Doriri-haunted forests. There was a paddle of dark heavy wood leaning against the stand and evidently one with the other exhibits, and with it I would paddle an imaginary canoe in search of rubies up ever-bending rivers, past alligators sunning themselves, past mangrove shadows haunted by blowgun men, past all dangers and difficulties into the world of sleep.

There was a boathouse on the bank by the bungalow containing a boat and an old Canadian canoe that had seen better days. After breakfast in that splendid weather I would take the boat, a book, tobacco, matches and provisions and push off for a long day in search of something better than rubies—the reed-grown banks by Reading, the dragon-fly haunted backwaters close to Sonning or the bottled beer of Caversham.

Then one morning in the middle of this pleasant life came a bombshell, business that called me to London and would take me a week to settle, and I had asked some friends of mine—and Blades'—Hallam the architect and his wife, to stay a few days and they were due that afternoon. At first I thought of wiring to put them off, then I determined to let them come. The servant woman could look after them in my absence and as they were a fairly newly married couple they could get along without my company.

They came, agreeing to stay till my return and off I went to London.

#### III.

I returned on July 4th which was a Monday and the Hallams met me with the boat at Reading; it was pleasant to exchange the heat of the railway train for the coolness of the river and as we slipped downstream to Sonning I could not help pitying them having to return to town on the morrow. Hallam said it was absolutely necessary for him to get back. He said he had business of vital importance, but somehow—something about him, something in his manner, expression and voice, told me a different tale.

We reached Sonning at four o'clock and, having stopped at the White Hart for tea, crossed the stream and put into the bungalow boathouse. The Canadian canoe was there and as I was collecting the boat cushions to take them to the locker by the kitchen, glancing at the canoe I saw there was a paddle in it.

Hallam had remained behind with me to collect the things and he told me he had taken the canoe out one day.

"Couldn't find a paddle," said he, "so I took that one from the house."

"Well," I said, "pick it up and come along. It won't do to leave it lying there, for it's one of old Blades' trophies. I'll carry the cushions."

"I'd rather not," said he. "I've had an experience with that thing I don't want repeated. Do you mind, like a good fellow, leaving it where it is?—for to tell you the truth I don't want to sleep in the same house with it. It sounds like tomfoolery but I'll tell you all about it later on. Meanwhile, like a good fellow, don't mention the subject to my wife."

It was the surprise of my life, for of all my friends and acquaintances Hallam was the hardest-headed and the least likely to be an entertainer of fancies. But he was deadly in earnest and I said no more, compromising by shoving the thing up among the rafters where no thief would be likely to find it.

After dinner we sat out on the lawn and smoked, then when his wife had gone off to bed leaving us to our pipes Hallam turned to me.

"I'm going to tell you about that thing now," he said, "and I don't want you to laugh at me over it. I've never believed in spooks or ghosts but I've come to believe in influences—I can't give it a better term.

"You know Hartley, the wool broker, don't you? Well, he told me once that some one made him a present of a little Eastern figure, some sort of joss out of a temple and that it brought him bad luck. I laughed at him thinking him a fool; maybe he wasn't —I don't know, but during the last few days it has come to me that things may influence us more than we imagine and that evil spirits aren't all bottled under Solomon's seal.

"One morning—two days after you left— Kitty and I went down to the boathouse to get the boat out. As I was getting the oars that old birch-bark canoe struck her fancy and she proposed taking it instead of the boat—she had a Canadian canoe of her own when she was a girl and she said she could manage it all right. But there were no paddles. Then she remembered that Eastern paddle by the stand of arms and she said she could manage with it and ran back to the house for it and off we started, Kitty in the stern.

"We got along pretty well, Kitty doing all the work and piloting us at last into that backwater by the big clump of chestnut trees —you know the place I mean—and there we tied up to the bank, Kitty sticking to the canoe with a book while I landed to attack the morning papers and a bottle of beer.

"I put the beer to cool wrapped round with some wet dock leaves and I was in the middle of an article on foreign politics when suddenly a dreadful-looking specter materialized himself out of the gloom of the trees."

"A spook?"

"Oh, Lord no," said Hallam. "A postwar professor of proletarianism who'd been sleeping all night in a ditch to judge by the look of him, a big man, twice my size with a big blue under jaw, a dirty flannel shirt and no collar or tie. He called me 'mate' and asked for the time, which I gave him, a light which I gave him, and then for some tobacco to light. I gave him the tobacco and he sat down close to me and to windward. I went on reading my paper and trying to think of the spice islands but it was no use. He would talk. He asked for money and I told him I had none about me, which was the truth. 'But you've got beer,' said he.

"'Yes,' said I, 'I have.'

"He put out his hand and grabbed the bottle. I tried to seize it too and failed. Then we were on our feet and next moment I was sitting on the ground half stunned by the smack on the face he'd given me. It got me over the right ear and side of the jaw. It was a nasty swipe but after the first second or two I didn't feel it. The sight of Kitty who had landed with that infernal paddle in her hand shattered every other earthly consideration. You know what a soft little thing Kitty is——"

I did, a little fluffy-haired dreamy woman with the voice of a dove. "Yes," I said, "go on."

"Well, this wasn't Kitty, it wasn't a woman, it was ferocity itself. My wife had changed as if at the touch of some horrible magic. You remember the fisherman who let the jinni out of the bottle? Well, that's how I felt, for the woman I loved had vanished and a specter had taken her place.

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The ruffian did not see her. He had unscrewed the stopper and was drinking from the bottle with his head thrown back when, crying out some words in an unknown tongue, she felled him with a blow of the paddle given with the strength of two men. She had raised the paddle to beat his brains out when I seized her."

I could see Hallam rub his coat sleeve across his forehead to wipe the sweat away, then he went on.

"She struggled and fought with me like a wild cat till I got the confounded thing from her hand. Then instantly she came to, stood for a moment as if dazed and became herself again.

"The P. P. was lying where she had felled him but he was beginning to open his eyes so I just bundled her into the canoe and paddled her home."

"Did you hear any more of the proletarian man?"

"Not a word. He wasn't a chap to make trouble with the police. But the strange thing is that Kitty did not seem to realize her act or the gravity of it; the demon that cursed thing had inspired her with seemed to have numbed her mind to the fact that she would have killed him had I not intervened—she who would not hurt a fly."

"Well," I said, "forget it. There are more things in heaven and earth than we can account for and it's quite possible that a sensitive nature like that of your wife might, under certain circumstances, fall for a moment into the grip of an influence. I'm glad we have left the beastly thing in the boathouse. I don't know what on earth men want importing these Eastern atrocities for. They aren't pleasant to look at and they aren't safe to touch in more ways than one. You remember the case of that man who brought back the poisoned arrows, an unfortunate housemaid scratched herself with one and died—anyhow I shouldn't worry my head any more about this thing. Come on into the house and have some whisky."

The Hallams left next morning and I took up my lonely life again and my work which I had disgracefully neglected. Then one day, when I was out in the boat, passing the White Hart, I saw Santley on the lawn in a basket chair with a drink at his elbow and landed to have a talk.

Santley is a stockbroker, an almost perfect specimen of the old prewar stockbroker from the days when the Kaffir circus was in full swing and income-tax ninepence in the pound; stout, well-groomed, well-dressed, with a flower in his buttonhole. He laid down the *Financial Times*, over which he had been glancing and we shook hands, then I drew another basket chair close up and we talked of the weather, the river and the doings of Lloyd George.

Funny thing memory is. We had been talking a long time before I recalled the fact that Santley had turned spiritualist. It had been the talk of the club and was an amazing fact—if anything can be amazing these postwar days—considering his appearance and general make-up. Then the paddle rose up in my mind.

"Look here," I said, leaning forward in my chair, "excuse the question but you have gone in for the medium business, haven't you?"

"Oh, Lord, no," said Santley, "I have no psychic powers at all but I am very much interested in the medium business as you call it. I'm a believer, have to be from all I've seen of it. But why do you ask?"

I told him the story of the Hallams and he listened without very much apparent interest.

"That's quite a common experience," he said when I had finished. "You would be surprised and perhaps shocked to know the cases that are occurring every day of people who fall under influences such as you describe. You go to an auction and buy an antique; if it is not spurious and if it comes down from the bloodstained Middle Ages or the haunted East ten to one it has still clinging to it the spirit of the maker or user, or even, if it is a lethal instrument, the spirit of the victim on whom it has been used.

"I have had many instances come under my notice. Only a few months ago, for instance, I had the case of an old lady who went to a big sale at a house in South Audley Street and bought a snuffbox—an old French snuffbox set with diamonds and enameled with a scene representing shepherdesses and lambs. She took it home and placed it on a table in a boudoir situated off her bedroom; all that night she heard the voices of two men talking and quarreling in the boudoir though she knew for an absolute fact that no one was there and next morning the snuffbox had been moved from the table to a high shelf and two chairs drawn up to either side of a small table by the window just as though two men had been

playing at cards. The same thing went on night after night till at last she couldn't stand it any longer and gave the thing away to a cousin. I was so interested I called on the cousin to ask had there been any developments and found there had not, for there seems to be a curious law that one person may keep a thing like that with perfect impunity and another person may not. It has, of course, to do with the mediumistic qualities of the possessor."

"Little Mrs. Hallam would have possessed mediumistic qualities then?"

"I think—in fact I'm certain, that she must be highly mediumistic," replied Santley. "The whole thing is interesting and perhaps the most interesting part of it is the fact that you have found me here to-day."

"How's that?" I asked.

"Because I have brought Maythorne, the medium, down here for a few days' rest and change of air. He's been nearly killing himself with overwork. Do you call it a coincidence that I chose this of all other places? It is not. We were led here, as surely as I am talking to you, led here for the purpose of psychometrizing that paddle. Testing it, making whatever uneasy spirit that is attached to it talk."

"Can he do that?" I asked vastly interested.

"Of course he can do it," replied Santley, "and what's more he can exorcise if necessary. You will see something worth seeing. Wait here a moment and I'll fetch him out and introduce you to him, if he's up—he lies in bed pretty late."

He went into the hotel and in a minute or two returned with Maythorne, a tall, washed-out-looking man with a cigarette and cigarette-stained fingers, a kindly, lovable sort of creature with wandering, dreamy, faraway-looking eyes. We told him the business on hand and he agreed to come over to the bungalow that evening and see if there was anything in it. Then I went off to where I had left the boat and started back for the bungalow. Here I was met by another coincidence in the form of Blades.

#### IV.

Blades had run down from London to get some papers from a locked bureau he had left under my care and he said he must get back to town by the five-thirty train.

"Oh, no, you mustn't," said I. "You've got to stay here the night. This puts a complete cap on the business—this is no coincidence, you've been sent."

He thought I was crazy till I made him sit down while I told him the whole business from start to finish.

Then he said: "I suppose you told Hallam all that yarn about Klang and the history of those Papuan things?"

"Yes," I said, "I just mentioned it."

"That would naturally have invested the paddle in Hallam's eyes with a suggestion of ferocity," said he.

"I know what you mean," I replied, "but you are wrong. If there is truth in anything this woman was suddenly possessed by the devil—you know what a level-headed man he is."

"Yes," said Blades, "I know him and I know her—it's curious. Well, we will see what this medium man has to say."

We had dinner at seven o'clock and at eight Santley and Maythorne arrived, the paddle was fetched from the boathouse and Maythorne seated in the sitting room and in a basket chair took the thing in his hands, held it resting on his knees and fell into what seemed a musing fit.

We sat round watching him in a silence broken only by the far-away dying notes of a banjo from some drifting river craft.

Then he spoke. "There is nothing. Whatever influence may have been attached to it has departed. It is clean."

"Good Lord," said Santley, "can it have left it and attached itself to the woman?"

"I do not know," said Maythorne. "It is possible but I cannot tell unless I could touch the woman or some article belonging to her."

"Would a hairpin do?" I asked. "She dropped a hairpin and I put it up there on the mantelpiece behind that jar."

Maythorne nodded and fetching the hairpin which I had carefully preserved for the purpose of pipe cleaning he took it in his hand, sat for a minute or so with closed eyes and then began to speak as if to himself.

"Yes—I see a woman, small, fragile, redhaired and with her and possessing her I see a spirit. The spirit is now asleep. It comes from old and terrible times. It is now asleep but ever ready to wake and break forth against what it considers insult, wrong or injustice. It is the spirit of a tribe—let me think back—oh, I see the spirit seizing her now and filling her with the fire of revenge. She holds a paddle in her hands and she is attacking a man. She has felled him, she would destroy him, but another man seizes her. He is her husband—I can see no more."

V.

When Maythorne and Santley had departed Blades poured himself out a whisky and soda.

"I believe in spiritualism now," said he. "The medium man was absolutely right. I didn't tell you before, but the paddle is not Papuan. It's as innocent of spooks as that siphon. I carved it myself out of some old airplane-propeller wood. It was leaning against those Papuan things but it had nothing to do with them. As for the spirit that has made all this rumpus, don't you know where it comes from? Think! What was Mrs. Hallam's maiden name?"

"O'Connor, I believe."

"Yes," said Blades. "Kitty O'Connor, one of the O'Connors of Tipperary—and, if you want another exhibition of the spirit, go and hit little Hallam another smack on the face in the presence of his wife."

Being an Irishman myself this solution of the problem had never occurred to me nor have I ever tried the experiment suggested by Blades. But to any member of the Society for Psychical Research who would care to do so I shall be happy to forward Hallam's address.

Look for more Stacpoole stories in early issues.



# THE SMOOTH DIAMOND

THERE are a great many people who hold the belief that diamonds must be rough to be genuine. Repeatedly sad experiences with persons of smooth and engaging exteriors have won them to this conviction. But here, as almost everywhere else, generalization is dangerous.

An example of an exceedingly smooth but unquestionably genuine diamond was General Birdwood, the now famous commander of that Australian division which wrote so many large and dazzling pages in the history of the World War.

When General Birdwood assumed command of the division he was immediately put at the head of the black list by the rank and file. The Australians were notorious fanciers of rough diamonds and Birdwood was the smoothest of the smooth. His attire, his accent, his manner, were excruciatingly correct. Worst of all, he wore a monocle! The Australians might have forgiven almost anything else. A general who wore a monocle was an insult. The division at large pretty well made up its collective mind that the war had ended, so far as the Australians were concerned, with the advent of Birdwood.

Mutiny was in the air when the new commander ordered the division out for review. It was his first review. Flanked by his staff he rode along the division front to the center of the far-flung khaki line and turned in to face his troops. He was wearing his monocle!

Suddenly he became aware of a simultaneous movement that rustled up and down the lines. He looked and saw that every man had dragged out his soldier's identification tag and screwed it, monocle fashion, into his eye. The entire division was squinting at its general derisively, an aluminum monocle in the eye of every soldier!

The general let the reins drop on his horse's neck. With elaborate deliberation he drew a dainty silken kerchief from his sleeve, took out his own single glass, wiped it busily, squinted through it, detected a lingering fleck of dust, wiped that off, sent the hated monocle spinning high in the air—and caught it neatly in his eye. Then he glared through it.

"Now, you blighters!" he roared, and his voice carried far and clear, "do that!" Whereupon the Australian division changed its mind.



# The Man with the Yellow Eyes

By Bertram Atkey

Author of "The Taming of Malang Shah," "The Wonderful Day," Etc.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Ferocity flamed in the yellow eyes of Major Aldebaran Weir of the South Chinese army. The Honorable John Brass and his partner, Colonel Clumber, found his style too offensive even for their hardened sensibilities. They were in the business of living by their wits, themselves, but they were genial in their knavery. Their suspicions awakened, they were in no haste to dispose of Purdston Old Place, their country home, to Major Weir. Still, they were ready to talk business—on principle. But Sing, their Chinese valet, interfered. Sing was an ex-member of the Cobra tong. He couldn't read Weir's mind but he could and did drug him, pick his pockets, and identify him as a dangerously active member of the Cobras. The major's pockets produced sufficient evidence to cement the partners' scruples against selling him their estate. In fact, the revelations resultant on Sing's little act of prestidigitation upon the person of Major Weir filled them with such grave forebodings that, without delay, they motored from London out to Purdston. They found Weir ahead of them. His retreating car roared past them, preceded by a galloping horseman, as they entered their home driveway. They found their butler, Bloom, sandbagged and their bloodhound, Corporal, stunned. And while they were asking the why and the wherefore of these circumstances they became aware of another trespasser prowling about the house. The mysterious prowler decamped before they could make his acquaintance, but his trail, picked up by the bloodhound, led them to the adjoining estate of Harchester Hall, the home of Patricia Vandermonde, reputed heiress to the second largest fortune extant. The trail stopped at the Harchester house. Baffled, the partners and the dog were making good a stealthy exit when a car entered the drive, stopped and discharged two men and a woman who entered the Hall. While the Honorable John went to spy upon their doings within the house the colonel proceeded to stalk the strange car, bent on learning its license number. He encountere

#### (A Four-Part Story-Part II.)

## CHAPTER VII.

B<sup>UT</sup> the coming of these shadowy forms, the first faint noise of whose approach had roused the yellow watcher from his position on guard outside the Honorable John's door, resulted in nothing more serious than a quarter of an hour's intense, strained and ghostly silent activity on the part of Sing. The prowlers made no attempt to enter the house, contenting themselves with a watchful and cautious circling of the place. Window after window the Chinese visited, cat-footed, to peer down, keeping the two men below under observation.

It was as though they had come to satisfy themselves that the night was normal at Purdston Old Place, that its occupants had retired like normal people, and that no unusual activities were taking place there.

Sing, returning to the corridor window, seemed to realize this, for he grinned a little as in the slowly increasing first light of dawn he stared down, still clutching his knife, and watched the two figures move away, still no more than a pair of shadows moving through shadows.

They went away in the direction of Harchester Hall.

Then the Chinese turned again to the Honorable John's doorway, thought for a moment, and picked up his rugs.

"Master allee same hungly when he waking. Makee him good blekfast-him good man. Allee same good blekfast for good master-hee!"

He gave a thin, wiry giggle at his little joke and faded away downstairs. He was an extraordinary heathen and if he said any prayers at all it is probable that he addressed them exclusively if secretly to the Honorable John.

He had slept for perhaps as much as forty minutes in the last twenty-four hours and it looked extremely likely that he would get vers little more sleep for the next eighteen hours but he appeared quite happy about it. Not for nothing had the Honorable John in moments of badinage, called him "Old indestructible"-with a touch of possessive pride. They had been through some curious adventures together, these two, and if Sing idolized his master, Mr. Brassthough he rarely gave the slightest sign of it-was by no means without a sort of affection for Sing-one of the secrets of good service and loyalty, for no man ever got good service and loyalty from a servant he did not like.

There were no more alarms or interruptions and though it was a little later than usual when the Honorable John, arrayed in easy, country tweeds, appeared in the dining room, his brisk, cheery and confident demeanor justified the extra slumber.

"Well, Sing, my son, it's a very fine morning," he announced. "What's for breakfast? How are Bloom's bruises and Mrs. Bloom's The colonel will be having his feelings? breakfast upstairs this morning. Make a nice pleasant tray for him, Sing, and just run up with a brandy and soda for himto give him an appetite. That was a nasty cut on the face he collected last night."

He moved to the window. It was a glori-

ous morning with a blazing sun in a clear sky, tempered with a gentle east wind that put a sparkle in the air. For some minutes the old rascal stared out thoughtfully. Then as Sing, having arranged about the colonel's nourishment, returned to serve breakfast, the Honorable John turned.

"A very interesting business this, my son," he said, "and I hang no festoons round my neck when I say that I am handling it extremely well. Yes. What's this-sole à la Colbert. Well, well, it's a very sound way to treat a sole, very. Colbert, whoever he may have been, or his wife more likely, certainly knew how to dope out a flatfish, Sing. Sole is a fish you don't want to play the fool with, and it was a very pretty idea of Mrs. Colbert to remove the backbone of the fish, stuff it with fine herb butter and let it go at that. Neat—and not too gaudy.

"The thing we've got to bear in mind about this business of the Cobra tong is secrecy, Sing. Understand me, man. Don't discuss it with anybody-the Blooms or anybody else. We've got a lot to do and very little time to do it in. Fortunately, I am on deck and at the wheel. Secrecyspeed—silence. We've got to handle things for a time as I handled 'em last night. A bit of good work, that, boy. Here I was handling my men in silence and secrecy. Looking around, learning things, gathering up my clews, and-bar Weir-not a soul the wiser-not a soul. What's this-"

The Honorable John broke off his amiable and self-complacent prattle abruptly as Bloom, lumpy-headed, with his eyes still slightly bloodshot, entered with a letter on a salver. Mr. Brass took it. It was unstamped.

He slit it open and ran an eye over it, and a slow flush ran into his heavy, goodhumored face. He glanced at the door to assure himself that Bloom had closed it behind him, then addressed his Chinese familiar.

"Well, maybe I was wrong about the secrecy and silence last night," he muttered. "Miss Vandermonde seems to be pretty wise to everything we did-up to a point. Listen to this, Sing:

"HARCHESTER HALL, Purdston.

"Miss Vandermonde's secretary, Mr. Arnold Scanlon, presents his compliments to the Hon-orable John Brass, and his friend, Colonel Clumber, and would be grateful if they would call upon him at three o'clock this afternoon and explain the reasons which impelled them to visit the grounds of Harchester Hall last night.

Mr. Scanlon is well aware that neither Mr. Brass nor Colonel Clumber are likely to have paid their nocturnal visit for inadequate reasons or for motives of idle curiosity, but he is at a loss to understand why, having made their way across the park, they should have lingered at the side door, under the cedar at the front, at the window of the library, and subsequently have proceeded down the drive—with the visitors who left by motor car. And he trusts also that they may be able to set his mind at rest concerning the blood splashes by the large rhododendron shrubs halfway down the drive.

"Mr. Scanlon desires it to be appreciated that he has excellent reason for this inquiry on behalf of Miss Vandermonde, and that he will be extremely grateful for any light which Mr. Brass or Colonel Clumber cares to shed upon the matter.

"No—we weren't so very secret, after all, my son," muttered the Honorable John. "If this man had been following us with a portable kinema box he couldn't have been much wiser about our movements."

He placed the note by his plate and studied it in thoughtful silence throughout the lengthy breakfast.

"Arnold Scanlon, is it?" he soliloquized as he selected a cigar and strolled to the window to gaze out over the sunny garden. "Well, Arnold, you certainly have got me guessing this morning. Your tone is friendly —so I see I have to keep a sharp lamp out on you. These friendly guys—don't like 'em, don't like 'em at all. Shall certainly have to drop in on you this afternoon, laddie, and get your measure."

He turned on the flitting Sing busy salving the wreckage of his owner's breakfast.

"How's the dog this morning, Sing?"

The Chinese grinned. "Colprit allee same lumpy head, master—but velly good eatee."

"No doubt, no doubt. Never knew a dog that couldn't eatee a breakfast that would choke a giraffe. But the thing is, can he smell this morning? Is he eager? It takes a tough proposition, be it man or dog, to be eager the morning after being knocked out—like Corporal and the colonel and Bloom were last night," explained the Honorable John.

But Sing reassured him and Mr. Brass grew brisk.

"Good—that's very good. Shall have to give him a bone or two extra per week, ha, ha! Give him a rise, in fact!"

He laughed heartily at his jest, then sat at a table at the side of the room and drew writing materials to him.

"Get yourself ready to do a bit of out-

door work with me in about a quarter of an hour, Sing," he commanded. "I shall be ready for you just as soon as I've sent a cable."

Sing vanished and the Honorable John applied himself diligently to condensed composition.

When a little later Sing, in his chauffeur's outfit, entered silently, the Honorable John had achieved his cable, and, seeming rather proud of it, was softly intoning it to himself. It was directed to one Tony Brass at an address in Chicago and he read it over for Sing's benefit:

"Notify me immediately reasons if any Whitney Vandermonde liable to attentions of highbinders, tongmen, plug-uglies, blackjackers, thorn shooters or other species chinks. Urgent, valuable, and rake-off to you. JOHN.

"How's that, Sing? Straight and to the point. Remember my brother, Mr. Tony Brass, and Miss Fanchon Grey, the lady he married, do you, Sing? We hunted with them that time Kate the Gun, from Chicago, laid herself out to exterminate you and me.\* They were detectives in New York in those days and they still are that—only they've got their own agency in Chicago now. Seems a long time ago, Sing, all that business, hey? We've kind of got on since then. And we've earned it, boy. Right-no need to get sentimental. He's a nice lad is my brother Tony, and his wife Fanchon is a goldfinch. And both of 'em always ready to stand by me. Just flash down to the post office like a streak of lightning on the motor skate, send off this cable, and flash back. I'll be ready for you."

Sing departed to get the powerful motor cycle which the partners allowed him for emergencies and the Honorable John thoughtfully made his way upstairs to see how the colonel was progressing.

He found his partner in slippers and dressing gown, snarling the most bloodcurdling criticisms of Bloom's valeting abilities what time Bloom was endeavoring to shave him without causing the deep cut on his cheek bone to twinge. One of his eyes was magnificently blackened.

The Honorable John did not ask him how he felt for he was—he claimed—a man naturally gifted with great tact. He glanced at the table by the side of the colonel's bed and nodded to himself. His partner was feel-

\*An earlier adventure of the Honorable John.

ing almost cannibalistically well—judging by what he had done to his breakfast.

The Honorable John spoke dourly.

"I'm going after Mr. Nightrider with the hound, squire," he said as Bloom finished with the razor.

"The deuce you are—and I'm coming," growled the colonel. "I've got to get right into the thick of this business and the sooner the better. Get a move on, Bloom. My clothes—my *clothes*, man!" he bawled.

"I've got an idea that when we find out where the man who rode that horse is, we shall find Mister Major Aldebaran Weir of the South Chinese army not far away."

The colonel nodded grimly. He was dressing too fast for conversation.

The Honorable John smiled, quite satisfied. It was abundantly evident to him that the colonel was yearning heart and body and soul to get into action. That was what he wanted—action and plenty of it—harsh, rude and violent action. He was perfectly satisfied to leave the thinking and planning to that astute old rascal the Honorable John.

The colonel was a grizzly bear for action now-and all he asked was to be provided with opportunities and to be given room according to his strength. He was, in his way, a man of simple and uncomplex nature, and he was now quite willing to believe the Honorable John's statement that Miss Vandermonde was in danger of being kidnaped by Major Aldebaran Weir and his tong men, that their plans must be discovered and spoiled, and that a very large financial acknowledgment of his gratitude must be steered from the multimillionaire uncle of the lady to the partners. The colonel accepted all that without demur-but it was with a very great deal of demur that he accepted the deep cut on his cheek and his hideously discolored orb from the man with the yellow eyes.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

Abnormally keen-scented though the black cross-bred was, the partners found it by no means easy to set him on the trail of the mysterious rider of the dead horse. At first they made their starting point the spot where they had found the horse lying at the side of the road, but all Corporal could do for them was to lead them from that spot to the carcass in the shrubbery. Thrice they did this—vastly to the interest of a hard-faced man, a stranger, who, apparently enjoying a pleasant morning stroll in company with a decidedly unpleasant cigar, halted to watch them.

At the third trial he spoke. "Hunting, friends?" he inquired affably.

"You can call it that," said the Honorable John briefly, perspiring over his efforts.

"Say, what you hunting?"

The Honorable John laughed shortly. "We're hunting for a strong smell," he replied.

The stranger stared at the faintly ironical tone. "Well, I sure hope you find it," he observed dryly.

The Honorable John noted the slight American accent of the stranger and ran an interested eye over him. He had him classified in an instant.

The man was a detective, and if the keen, gray eyes, the thin, tight lips, firm jaw, broad forehead and well-shaped head were anything to go by, a good and competent detective.

The Honorable John's greenish eyes grew blank as he studied the man. He was pondering the reason why an American detective should bob up at Purdston. But he did not need to ponder long. It was obvious enough. Whitney Vandermonde was not in the least likely to allow his heiress to be incompletely guarded.

"I'm glad to have your good wishes, my friend," he observed, "but there don't appear to be any smells lying loose about here if there are the dog don't seem to be in any mood to collect 'em. Or," he added, a cold and clammy eye on the black cigar, "or maybe he don't stand high enough on his legs to get the full blast of 'em, so to put it."

He signed to Sing to follow him and they reëntered their own grounds. For a moment the detective stared thoughtfully after them, then moved on down the road at a leisurely stroll.

Five minutes later the trio with the hound emerged again. They had picked up the trail made by the horse on its way to the house, and soon were tracing it back.

Corporal hesitated a little as he passed the spot where the horse had lain—but this was at the side of the road some three yards away from the old trail, and they got him past it. He went slowly, for the scent was elusive and baffling. But presently it ran on to a narrow strip of turf bordering the road

7A-P

and strengthened. The pace quickened a little.

Half a mile from the gates of Purdston Old Place, the hound stopped dead, whining. He quested busily about, snuffling—but he had lost the trail.

The Honorable John bent over the faint hoof marks on the dusty, wind-dried and sun-hardened turf studying them carefully. A motor cyclist, hooded and goggled and hunched over his powerful machine roared past, peering curiously through his huge, mica eye protectors as he passed.

The Honorable John concentrating on the hoof marks hardly noticed him. About a hundred yards past them something seemed to go wrong with the motor cyclist's engine. It began to back fire intermittently in a series of loud reports.

"Well, the horse couldn't have flown through the air on wings from this spot," said the Honorable John in the tone of one who observes that a circle is not a square and that 2 + 2 does not make  $7\frac{3}{8}$ . "And as the last visible hoof marks are deeper than any we've seen yet, and are close to the hedge, and as the hedge is fairly low and beyond it is a grass field it stands to reason that at this spot Mr. Rider either jumped the hedge from the field side or pulled his horse on to the turf from the road. Corporal would have picked up the scent if it had run on to the road, so we'll see what we can find on the other side of the hedge. Get the dog over, Sing. You'll pick up the trail in the field or I am no bloodhounder. Lord, what a racket that petrol skate's making! Get on, Sing."

The motor cyclist had turned and was riding back, making the welkin ring with the back firings of his engine.

He roared by at a good pace as Sing began to force his way through the hedge. As he passed his machine seemed to make an extra special effort, and gave off among others a report that seemed to startle Sing and Corporal.

The hound yelped and Sing emitted a Chinese observation that sounded wholly unprintable. He turned to the partners, raising his hand.

They saw that blood was streaming from it and that an ugly red wound had suddenly and magically been furrowed obliquely along Corporal's back.

"What the blazes is all this?" began the Honorable John, grabbing at the hound. The deep, resonant boom of a very large motor horn raised his head. A few yards away a huge, white car—an eight-cylinder, touring, seventy-horse-power Krugg—was slowing to a standstill. It was driven by a lady. Next to her sat another woman and a big chauffeur kept two bags of golf clubs company in the back.

The driver pulled up, swung open a door and alighted.

She came round to the Honorable John. He recognized her at once—she was the lady whom he had last seen in a kimono through the window of the library at Harchester Hall —Miss Vandermonde. She was wearing a loose veil.

"Are you aware that the person on the motor cycle who has just passed you fired a revolver either at your dog or one of you gentlemen?" she said.

The Honorable John pointed to the wound on Corporal's back. "Well, we knew that something had arrived among us—but I'll confess we hadn't quite realized that it was a bullet."

"I saw that cyclist aim deliberately as he went by and I saw the flash——" She broke off as her eyes fell on Sing's face and eyes. "A Chinese!" she said in a sharp whisper of surprise—so low that only the Honorable John caught it.

"A Chinese, Miss Vandermonde. But I can answer for him. He has been my personal servant for years—and has lived here for a good proportion of that time," he said quietly but significantly.

The rather startled look which had dilated the fine, brown eyes of the lady faded out.

"Ah, but I only meant that he was wounded." She smiled. "Though it is a little odd to find a Chinese out with a dog on an English countryside. And especially to witness a deliberate attempt either to murder him, or to kill the hound! They have had a very narrow escape!"

She glanced down the straight road. The motor cyclist was no more than a far-off dot.

"Too late, my dear young lady," said the Honorable John, guessing the thought. Few ladies of twenty-eight or thereabouts are ever deeply offended at being called anybody's "dear young lady," and pleasant-looking Patricia smiled.

"Oh, no. I think we could overhaul him without much trouble," she said. "And we ought to do it." The Honorable John hesitated. Judging from the heavy reports of the back-firing motor cycle it was a big, twin-cylindered, eight or nine-horse-power machine, and, driven by a bold, clever rider it could have given even the huge Krugg car a lively task on the road which a few miles on ran into more populous and traffic-filled roads—nearing the farther outskirts of London's suburbs.

And the would-be killer was now out of sight.

The Honorable John had not the slightest doubt that the rider had been either Major Aldebaran Weir, or more probably, one of his little band, and though so far he did not know exactly the motive behind the attempt nevertheless he was on the way to finding it—and other motives also. So he smiled.

"I will take care of that sportsman later on, I promise you," he said. "It's very kind of you to offer to throw away a morning's golf like that—very generous indeed—but it isn't necessary. And if this gash hasn't put the dog out of action we have a pressing engagement here, so to put it."

The lady eyed Corporal and stooped to pat the ugly head.

"It is not a deep wound. He has intelligent eyes. What kind of a dog is he? I don't remember seeing one of this kind before."

"Nor any one else," said the Honorable John breezily. "He isn't a well-known kind. In fact, he's at least three kinds but mainly —say fifty per cent—bloodhound."

"Bloodhound!" She raised her eyebrows. "But—are you tracking?"

"If Corporal is still willing, we are," admitted the old adventurer.

"How thrilling! A criminal?"

But the Honorable John could not accommodate her with any further thrills.

"Well, hardly that. Just a gentleman who called upon us at Purdston Old Place last night and left no address."

"A burglar?"

"No\_\_\_"

"Just a mysterious rider—a very fine rider, I should say, Miss Vandermonde," put in the colonel, who had finished binding Sing's bullet-grazed wrist.

"But—how do you know he was a fine rider?" The lady seemed suddenly interested.

"Well, he galloped in the dark in a way very few people would gallop in the daylight. He was prepared to jump a high, spiked gate —which we chanced to have left open, luckily for him. And I've got an idea that he jumped this hedge in the moonlight."

Her gaze was oddly intent as she studied their faces.

"A very fine rider," she repeated, as one who muses. "Did you see his face?"

"Only a glimpse."

"What was he like? Do forgive my curiosity, but I have a motive for asking."

The Honorable John pondered.

"Oh, a youngish man, with a slight mustache—hey, squire?"

The colonel agreed. "About that, yes."

The Honorable John noticed a sudden tinge of color on the lady's face. "Did you hear his voice?" she asked a shade eagerly. "Not a sound."

She seemed disappointed. "It is very exciting," she said, and half turned to her car —rather reluctantly. "If your tracking is successful I wonder if you would care to tell me the end of your adventure?" she said with a touch of wistfulness in her voice. "I

am—somehow—fascinated."

They agreed very readily to that and were on the point of reminding her that they were calling at Harchester Hall that afternoon when another arrival sauntered up—the hard-faced gentleman whom the Honorable John had decided was a detective—now minus the ferocious cigar.

It was not without a touch of surprise that the partners observed that he appeared to be acquainted with the lady. He raised his hat very deferentially indeed as he came up.

"Good morning, Mr. MacHarrall. You have appeared on the scene at a good moment," said the heiress. "There is a little task for you, I think."

She turned to the Honorable John. "Would you like Mr. MacHarrall to help you? He is a"—she hesitated, then went on—"a very clever solver of mysteries, and revels in puzzles. I am sure he could help you find the mysterious rider—and perhaps the motor cyclist who shot at you, too."

"Eh!" Mr. MacHarrall suddenly looked intensely interested.

She laughed quietly. "There! I told you so. Mr. MacHarrall is my assistant secretary. I must go now. But do all you can to help these gentlemen, please, Mr. MacHarrall."

She smiled pleasantly and returned to the

car. The Honorable John detected a furtive grin on the lips of the chauffeur.

"You won't forget your promise, Mr. Brass," she called. "I hope to see you and Colonel Clumber soon—bringing a tremendous story. Good-by!"

She waved her hand and the great car slid forward.

"Well, she certainly had our names pat enough," the Honorable John told himself as he stared after the car. He transferred his gaze to Mr. MacHarrall.

"Evidently she is well served by her—assistant secretary, huh?" he added inaudibly and turned to the detective.

He felt a little more cordial to this one now that he had "placed" him. Obviously as he had guessed before MacHarrall was one of the staff of camouflaged guardians with whom the great Whitney D. Vandermonde had long found it wise unobtrusively to surround his heiress. And, unless he were grievously in error, the chauffeur was another of them.

Then the fierce, hot, yellow eyes of that man of mystery, Major Aldebaran Weir, his cruel mouth, and strange Tartar-type face, came into the Honorable John's mind and he nodded hearty approval of the precautions of the multimillionaire away in distant Chicago.

"A very sensible man, far-sighted and quick-witted, I should say. I admire a man like Whitney D. Vandermonde," mused the Honorable John, for he was naturally a fairminded man and he did not allow the fact that he proposed in due course to relieve Mr. Vandermonde of quite a hefty hunk of his wealth—return for services rendered—to interfere with his appreciation of the millionaire's sound common sense.

He turned to the detective. "Glad to have your help, Mr. MacHarrall," he said. "Let me introduce my friend, Colonel Clumber. The young fellow with the hound is Sing, my valet and handy man for the last ten years. Try Corporal out on the other side of the hedge, Sing. I'll tell you the facts as we go along," he added to MacHarrall. "Come on."

They followed the Chinese through the hedge.

The Honorable John had been right. The black hound picked up the trail at once the hoof marks were so plain here that the little company of man trackers could have followed it by eye alone—and headed straight across the pasture to a thick wood a couple of furlongs away.

### CHAPTER IX.

The pace at which Corporal led them across the field gave the Honorable John very little opportunity for cool and collected conversation with the gentleman so abruptly injected into the little expedition. But from the few coherent words which they were able to exchange while "centering"-as the Honorable John expressed it-heavily over the grass, the old adventurer gleaned that Mr. MacHarrall showed signs of being sufficiently of a kindred spirit as to render him not so wholly objectionable as a detective camouflaged as an assistant secretary might have been to the old adventurer. In short, the Honorable John realizing that he was by no means a man of excessively narrow mind, did not take a violent dislike to him-though it would be an exaggeration to say that he took more than a very moderate liking to him.

There was a little difficulty about the trail halfway across the field and MacHarrall took advantage of the short pause to inquire what sort of person they expected to find at the end of the trail.

Quite truthfully, the Honorable John was able to explain that he had not the glimmer of an idea. "Probably some groom who was half drunk last night and came into our grounds by mistake," he added indifferently. "There's no reason why it should be anybody else. We've got no enemies. Everybody in this neighborhood has known us for years, and we're a pretty easy-going pair— Clumber and I. We live and let live. But a man has got to do something, if only for the sake of his appetite. I don't think we'll find anything exciting to-day."

"But that revolver shot. There was no mistake about that," MacHarrall reminded him, his hard, gray eyes intent on the Honorable John's face.

"No—that's true. But it's a mystery to me, that business. The man must be mad or mistook us for somebody else. I don't understand that at all."

A bellow from the colonel announced that Corporal was away again, and they were about to follow when MacHarrall stopped suddenly, staring toward the distant pile of Harchester Hall.

He screwed up his eyes.

"Say, what d'you make of the flag flying over the Hall?" he asked suddenly.

The Honorable John peered, shading his eyes from the sun.

"There are two flags—a Stars and Stripes, meaning that Miss Vandermonde is in residence—and a big, triangular, white flag underneath," he said. He had the sight of a sea gull.

"That's how I puzzle it out, too. I guess I'll be leaving you. That white flag is a hurry call for me." MacHarrall hesitated. "Rush of correspondence—heavy mail in from the States, shouldn't wonder. Maybe I'll drop in one night and get acquainted, Mr. Brass."

"Sure, sure," said the Honorable John and forthwith Mr. MacHarrall was on his way to the Hall, straight across country as the crow flies.

"'Heavy mail' be darned for a tale," said the Honorable John to himself as he stared after the hurrying detective. "There's no delivery here at this hour of the day." He scowled a little, thinking hard. "There's some deeper game than a straightforward kidnaping going on-devilish deep and dangerous," he muttered. "And we've got to get hold of a loose end somewhere, quick. Thought Weir's crazy eagerness to get hold of the Old Place was a loose end, but it hasn't led us anywhere yet. All right, all right-I'm coming," he added in a shout to Sing and the colonel who were beckoning him from some distance ahead. "Anyway we'll see what's at the end of this little country stroll."

He began to trot heavily after the others. MacHarrall had already disappeared in the direction of the Hall.

The trail led straight along a narrow bridle path deep into the heart of the big wood. It was little used and was very overgrown. The wood, the Honorable John remembered, was part of a big, shockingly neglected estate which for years had been the subject of litigation—one of those interminable family affairs.

It was oppressively hot and airless in the wood and in places the trees were so thick that they shut out the sunlight. It was long since an expert forester had worked there mingling with the oak and ash were many pines and birch and big thickets of holly. Curiously, too, there were many writhing, misshapen, useless clumps of laurel and in places a ragged undergrowth of dispiritedlooking hazel.

It was a gloomy place and full of the hum of swarming insects.

The perspiration poured from the faces of the partners as they padded after the silent Chinese and the hound. But they had not much farther to go. The trail curved sharply, swung round a dense clump of holly and ran into a little clearing, now knee-deep in growth. In the center of this clearing stood a tiny cottage apparently in the last stages of decay, at the point of ruin.

Thickly overgrown with a strangling mass of ivy, its rotting door stood ajar, tilting drunkenly on one hinge only. The paint had long disappeared from that door, and many tiles had slid from the roof. All the glass of the windows visible in the black cavities in the ivy was broken and weeds grew everywhere about it. Evidently it had once been a gamekeeper's cottage but had long been deserted.

Only—a thin thread of blue smoke was rising from the chimney!

Automatically the Honorable John noted those things in his first glance.

The hound headed straight for a rotting, tumble-down lean-to shed at the side of the cottage. But halfway across the clearing he stopped with a jerk. Just beyond a ragged clump of growth—an ugly, untidy mixture of long grass, weeds, marigold, and a stringy, choking growth of runner beans, tenacious survivors of an old, abandoned garden sprawled, on his back, his yellow face upturned, a Chinese.

His sightless eyes glared up into the sun. He was quite dead.

And the cause of his death was plain to see. In the center of his forehead was a bullet hole, dark with half-dried blood.

For a moment the sheer surprise of the thing held them speechless.

The Honorable John recovered himself. "Well, it's all part of this cursed mystery, I suppose," he said.

He took the leash of the black hound from Sing, and knotted it to a stump.

"Search him, Sing, my son. Any idea who he is?"

The colonel felt the drawn yellow cheek and neck.

"Humph! Hasn't been dead long, anyway," he muttered, peering close at the wound. "That blood's hardly dry."

Sing's swift, deft hands slid back the

sleeve of the dead Chinese. He uttered a little hissing sound and looked up over his shoulder at his master, pointing.

On the inner arm was a tattooed mark already familiar to them—the mark of the Cobra tong.

"Hah! One of those reptiles, is he? I thought so. We needn't waste any more sympathy on him. Which one of them is he, Sing? Can you find his—his passport?"

The Honorable John meant a scrap of paper similar to that which they had found in the possession of the mysterious man with the yellow eyes. An instant later Sing had it. He glanced over it and passed it to the Honorable John.

"This man allee same Li Shan, master," he said and turned again to his search.

"Whitney D. Vandermonde—Patricia Charman Vandermonde," said the Honorable John poring over the only words he understood on the inscribed paper.

The colonel gripped his arm suddenly. "Quiet, man! Listen," he said. They went rigid.

Faintly through the trees there came a clinking sound, like that made by spade grating on stone or gravel.

Somebody, not very far away, was digging in the woods.

The Honorable John located the sound and leaned to the colonel whispering: "The man who killed him—hey? Digging a grave. The man we're after—the man we're looking for!"

The colonel's jaw was thrust out. "Weir?"

"No, curse it—why should Weir kill one of his own men?" said the Honorable John irritably. "The man who galloped down the drive at midnight—whose horse the chinks killed. We'll take a look at him. Come on, Sing. Leave that Chinaman till later."

He listened again. Faintly the chink of metal on stone came across to them again. The grave digger, whoever he was, was working busily.

"Somewhere a little to the right of the cottage, I make it. Go slow and take cover as you go," warned the Honorable John.

They moved cautiously, obliquely across the front of the cottage. But before they had moved half a dozen yards a crisp, sharp, clear, metallic voice shot through the silence of the overgrown garden.

"Stop right there! And put up your hands!"

They turned to the cottage desperately, startled.

Through one of the dark, ivy-masked windows protruded the barrel of a rifle, the small, black cavity of its muzzle seeming to eye them with a chilling air of menace.

Their hands went up.

Over by the body of the dead Chinese the black hound was growling savagely.

Then a long, low, penetrating whistle sounded from the window behind which watched the man with the rifle, followed almost immediately by the snapping of dead twigs from the direction of the woods.

"Still! Stand still!" came the sinister warning from the cottage, and a moment later a man appeared on the edge of the clearing—an oldish man, very tall, with a brown, seamed, weather-beaten face. In his hands he carried an old, rusty spade with a broken handle.

Even as he appeared the black hound snapped his leash and leaped across the clearing to attack the newcomer.

The rifle muzzle swung down sharply, spoke viciously, and Corporal pitched in a heap at the Honorable John's feet.

Simultaneously the partners' hands flew to their pockets—but they were too late, for with a movement almost too swift to follow the man in the cottage ejected his spent shell and covered them again.

"Up! Up! Up with them!" he ordered swiftly.

They obeyed promptly—it would have been suicidal to have done otherwise—and they stood watching the black muzzle from which a wisp of smoke still curled lazily on the still air, as the man with the broken spade came forward.

He dropped the implement as he drew near and his hand went to his belt, coming away at once with a heavy revolver with which he, too, covered the trio in the clearing as he approached them.

The rifle disappeared from the window and the bearer of it emerged from the cottage.

"Keep 'em covered, Jeff," he said in his clear, crisp voice, and faced the Honorable John.

"Who are you and what are you after here?" he rapped out.

The veins across the broad forehead of the Honorable John were swollen, but he was controlling himself.

"I'll tell you that fast enough-at the

right time, my son," he replied blandly. "But I'll have to know first of all who it is I'm talking to—and why you shot that chink."

The man with the rifle nodded.

"Well, I guess there's no conundrum about the second question," he said, his firm, goodlooking face darkening. "Keep a bead on 'em, Jeff."

The man stepped quickly to the crazy cottage, seemed to touch the rotting wood of the door at about the height of a man's head from the ground, and returned. The Honorable John noted that he walked with the loose, easy swing of an athlete and outdoors man and that he wore well-cut riding clothes.

"Does that convey anything to your mind —as to this other chink?" he said. "When it was flicked at me it stuck in the door about an inch from my face!"

He held up a tiny object. They recognized it at once. It was another of those evil little poisoned thorns!

"But I drilled the yellow devil through the skull before it had finished quivering!" said the man with the rifle, with an iron note of satisfaction in his voice. "And if you're in search of news I won't deny that you are well in the running for the other bullets. I kill my own snakes—and tongmen."

The Honorable John laughed harshly.

"Why, you fool, you don't imagine we are members of the Cobra tong, do you?" he demanded.

The eyes of the man with the rifle darted swiftly over them—and particularly at Sing.

"If you aren't you can't be too quick to say just who you are!" he satd curtly. "And keep your hands up while you're doing it. I'm taking no more chances with strangers, thorn experts and Chinese."

The Honorable John nodded.

"Well, that seems reasonable—considering you're top dog—temporarily top dog. Listen then. I'll be brief—for the sooner that dead man is underground the better for all concerned!"

### CHAPTER X.

"Well, get going," said the man with the rifle. "You can gamble that you're no more anxious to see that dead snake decently buried than I am."

"Sure, sure," agreed the Honorable John. "I've no doubt you'll be interested to know that we are the occupants of the house you were spying round last night—and you may take it that our arrival saved you from Weir and his men then. They nearly got you, anyway—whoever you are. There was a thorn in your horse's neck. Didn't you see us as you raced down the drive?"

"You were the rubber-soled bunch with the flash light, were you?"

"We were."

"What are your names?"

"I am the Honorable John Brass; this is my friend, Colonel Clumber, and Sing here is my valet."

The stranger nodded. "Got any letters on you to prove that?"

"Help yourselves at our pockets."

"Keep your hands up! Shoot if they start anything, Jeff."

With a curious, fierce caution the stranger searched the Honorable John and his partner, found certain letters bearing their names and addresses, relieved them of their pistols, and nodded.

"Satisfied?" demanded the Honorable John. "I will answer for the Chinaman."

Rather reluctantly the other nodded.

"I guess you're what you claim," he said. "All right, Jeff—but don't put your gun away."

Their arms fell. "Hah, that's better," said the Honorable John. He looked at the body of Corporal at his feet, and frowned.

"You're too impulsive with that rifle, my lad," he said. "You've killed a dog I shan't be able to replace."

The other laughed. "Killed! I haven't killed the dog. He's creased—stunned, you'd call it. Look for yourself. Here you are—that graze along the back of his head's only skin deep. I guess I am no dog killer! He will be all right in a few minutes."

They stared.

"D'ye mean to tell me you only aimed to graze the dog—a moving animal—in order to stun him?"

"Sure! Why not? Say, where were you raised, anyway? Haven't you ever heard of a man creasing a horse with a bullet? The dog will be all right in a minute—except for a touch of soreness for a day or two."

"Well, you are certainly the best soloist on the rifle I ever remember meeting," admitted the Honorable John.

"But, all the same, we'd be glad to hear your name and address—and the reason why you were prowling round Purdston Old Place last night," growled the colonel. "We'll let the name go at Larry Warrener. The address can stand as Ye Olde Ruin in the Wood"—he glanced significantly at the tumble-down cottage—"unless you like the sound of the Savoy Hotel better. The reason why I was prowling around your place last night is the same reason as why, if necessary, I'd be prowling around Canterbury Cathedral or Windsor Castle—namely, for the protection of Miss Patricia Vandermonde." His keen, gray eyes searched them, "Is that reason enough for you?"

The Honorable John laughed quietly. "Surely—surely. And your friend?"

"My friend is Jeff Croucher—and let me tell you that a man in need of a friend has got the lid of his luck well padlocked when he can say Jeff is his friend."

"And—to cut a long story short—you are acting against the Cobra tong on behalf of Miss Vandermonde?"

"Yes, you can say that—though she doesn't know it."

"Well, so are we," the Honorable John assured him. "But we can go into all that later. The thing to do now is to bury that Cobra man over there. Before lunch time if possible. I'm hungry—and this is not a country for leaving dead tong men lying about. Take off his boots, Sing. If old Corporal is willing before the trail's cold we'll see where Li Shan started from. You and Jeff had better come and lunch with us, Mr. Warrener—after the ceremony."

The good-looking young American stared at him coolly.

"Say, Mr. Brass, were you a general in the Great War?" he asked. "You've got the habit of command pretty well ingrown, haven't you?"

The Honorable John laughed. "That'll be all right, Mr. Warrener," he said blandly. "There's more than twenty years' experience dividing us and I'm not a stranger in this country. Listen to the old man for once for when it comes to leading he's the kindly light and, as a general rule, not easy to extinguish."

He dropped into a graver tone. "It's going to take all of us—and all the brains and experience we can muster up—to keep Miss Vandermonde safe, my boy. I've only got hold of a loose end or so, yet, but they look like leading to something ugly. Hey? How about it? Do we work together or in separate parties?"

For a few seconds they studied each other

—the one young, strong, confident, competent, unshackled by any fear, and not entirely without experience himself, the other, big, elderly, a little ungainly, heavy-looking, but with a curious, indefinable look at the back of his hard eyes which hinted quietly that, in spite of his appearance and manner, here was a man whose partnership in an affair of moment was not to be lightly declined.

Warrener saw that—and so, to judge by the slight relaxation of his gaunt features did Mr. Jeff Croucher, a fine-looking old Westerner who obviously would be far more at home on a big ranch than anywhere else on earth. They exchanged a glance. Evidently they thought alike for both moved their heads slightly in an oblique, scarcely perceptible movement.

"Well, that's put fairly enough," said Warrener. "I'll say that. And I don't see why it shouldn't be true. But we come from a place where men get in the habit of relying on themselves and don't tear up the roads racing to make partnerships with strangers. And for the present I guess we'll leave the treaty unsigned. We understand each other pretty well, and, if necessary, we can sign up an alliance at any old time. Meantime, we'll carry on in separate groups—as we're going. I guess that needn't hurt anybody's feelings."

"That goes with us," agreed the Honorable John. "You're our reënforcements we're yours! Let it stand at that. Well, we'd better get busy. Sing, you see to the hound. We four will attend to the snake."

Within half an hour they had buried Li Shan and effectively concealed the grave with strewn pine needles. When presently they came back to the cottage there was no sign that here, deep in the still heart of this ancient, English wood was the last resting place of a Chinese criminal. Li Shan might be missed—but there was none who would ever dream of looking for him here. Norconsidering that thorn plucked from the door -did any of them feel any regret. The man had stolen through the woods like a venomous, yellow serpent to spy, and he had tried to kill. He had received only that which with his last action he had tried to inflict.

Only his boots remained above ground and these were in the safe care of his countryman, Sing, who would see to it that these told no tales. Corporal was on his legs again but the old hound had had his full share of what the Honorable John truly described as "the rough stuff" during the last twenty-four hours.

"He's got the heart of a large lion," explained his owner, defensively, "but he's been knocked senseless once and been shot twice since midnight, and I don't blame him for showing no anxiety to track that chink before he's ready."

"It's a pity I creased him—but if I had let him alone Jeff would certainly have brained him," said Larry Warrener. "But it jars on me to think that he could lead us straight to where that chink came from."

The Honorable John agreed absently—another thought had returned to him. "Have you got any idea why that yellow-eyed wolf, Weir, was hanging around our place?" he asked. "He tried to buy it from us first of all—at a fancy price. You didn't overhear 'em talking at all?"

Warrener looked surprised.

"Only for the passage—that's all they need it for. They've got no interest in the house except for the passage," he said.

The partners stared.

"The passage-what passage?"

"Why, the underground passage from your house to Harchester Hall," said the American, his quick eyes flitting from one to the other of the amazed partners. "Say, do you mean to saw it off on me that you never knew there was a subterranean passage from your own house to Harchester Hall—you, who've lived in it for years?"

He turned to the silent, grim-looking Jeff Croucher. "Can you beat it, Jeff? I know this is a country where you can find rare old paneling worth more than its weight in gold pasted over and covered up with a cheap, floral-printed paper worth two cents an acre—but I certainly thought every man knew his own secret tunnels!"

"Oh, that old rumor!" said the Honorable John carelessly, concealing his amazement. "I thought for a moment that you meant a real passage, in working order. The old, historical tunnel that the guide books talk about partly fell in and was partly filled in and blocked up in the days of James I. You can see the depression in the park at Harchester Hall where the roof of the tunnel fell in—see it to this day. All grass-grown, of course. If that's all these tong men want the place for I wish I'd sold it to 'em. They'd want a squad of navvies working there for a couple of years before ever they got into Harchester Hall from Purdston Old Place."

"Well, they don't know that, anyway. I overheard 'em talking about it just before they entered your house and to hear the leader of the bunch—the man you call Weir, that would be—you'd think the passage was in perfect working order. In fact I was on the point of warning Miss Vandermonde. If that chink hadn't come along Jeff would have been on his way with this note."

Warrener took a note from his pocket.

"No use to make a fool of myself now, anyway," he said quietly and tore the note up. The Honorable John was watching him closely.

"But why didn't you call on her and warn her?" he asked casually, opening his cigar case as he spoke.

"Miss Vandermonde and I are not on visiting terms," said Warrener, a sudden flush on his brown, clean-cut face, and a chill, hard note in his voice that clearly was intended to warn Mr. Brass that it would be wise not to pursue this aspect of the matter.

But the astute old rascal had no desire to do so. One way and another he was getting information freely offered him which —like Larry's paneling—was worth its weight in gold.

"Well, well, it's just as well we saved you from sending that note. No man likes to be made to look foolish. And to get a letter back reading 'Miss Vandermonde presents her compliments to Mr. Warrener, thanks him for his timely warning, and will take the necessary steps to prevent any entry into her house by means of an underground passage which was filled up some hundreds of years ago!' would jar a man to the roots of his modesty. I know. I've had 'em-that sort of thing. However, we understand each other and we are working together when necessary. I'll say frankly I'm glad of that, Mr. Warrener-very glad. So's my partner. Hey, squire?"

"Sure," growled the colonel without much enthusiasm. But he would never be enthusiastic again until he clashed with Major Aldebaran Weir.

"Take a cigar, Larry. You too, Jeff. They're good cigars. And remember Purdston Old Place is at your disposal any time. And now we'll be moving. Plenty to do. Shall expect to see you two any time you feel like a change."

The Honorable John nodded genially and turned to Sing. "How's Corporal, my lad?"

The Chinese grinned. "Him velly well for walkee home—no likee workee. Allee same sulky, master."

"All right. We'll try out the trail to-morrow. If he won't work now he won't. You can lead a bloodhound to the trail but you can't make him smell it. Should feel sulky myself if I'd collected what he's collected in the last twenty-four hours," admitted the Honorable John.

And so saying he moved off with his "brigade."

### CHAPTER XI.

It was rather a silent return journey which the trio and the shot-up Corporal made to Purdston Old Place. The Honorable John seemed immersed in thought and the colonel was apparently in no mood for conversation. But as they approached their house the senior partner emerged from his reveries and studied the place with a new interest.

"If any one had told me that I was capable of living in a house with a secret passage to a castle-practically speakingwithout being aware of it I should have regarded him as I regard a politician, namely, as a 'left at the post' in the George Washington Stakes!" he said reflectively. "And how Weir learned about it, I don't know yet. Anyway we've got to find it. I think I managed to persuade Warrener that it doesn't exist but I certainly hope he never looks up any guide book-or hunts for that depression in the park. I tell you, squire, it called for some quick thinking to tear off that bit of fancy history at short notice. Yes, we've got to find that passage. It'll be an interesting little job for you and Sing this afternoon.'

"And what about yourself?" demanded the colonel.

"I shall be thereabouts. But I'm due to put in a lot of solid thinking after lunch and I can't concentrate my mind on more than half a dozen things at once," he explained good-humoredly as they entered the house.

"The trouble is," he was stating a little later over lunch, "the trouble is that my great gift for noticing details is liable to get snowed under in an affair like this. There are too many of 'em flying round." He drained his wineglass and refilled it. "I wish I could pass some of the brainwork on to you," he added wistfully. "But what would be the use?"

The colonel glared—debarred from making a prompt retort by the rather generous mouthful of *entrecote* à la Mirabeau which he was manipulating.

"However, thank God you and Sing are about the two most reliable bear cats for action any man could ask for."

Slightly mollified at this *amende* the colonel rather Mirabeauly inquired for particulars of a few of the thronging details to which his partner referred.

"Can't say I see any sense in any of the things that have been happening," he declared.

The Honorable John chuckled.

"Nor I, nor I—until our little interview with Larry and his silent pal with the eyes, Jeff. A couple of good men, those, squire. Handicapped by being strange to this country—but sound men, very."

try—but sound men, very." He glanced at the clock. "There's not a lot of time to spare but I'll give you my idea of the business so far. A lot of it is guesswork—but I'm a pretty good guesser, and I'll have my proofs before long. Here's my theory so far."

He thought for a moment.

"I ought to be one of those haunted-looking, shiny-coat-sleeved, tangle-haired guys that write stories for the magazines—the way I can build things up out of a few details," he said complacently. "The way I worry it out is like this:

"We know that Weir and his gang are meaning to kidnap Patricia Vandermondeeither for money purposes, or some other reason we don't know of yet. I'll be having a cable before very long which might make that clear. Revenge, maybe-or as a lever for use against Whitney Vandermonde. We shall see when Tony cables. In some way little Yellow-eyes learns of this passageway and I'll own it must have looked well to him. What could be better than to buy this house, get installed, and stroll at night—by the underground route-to Harchester Hall and get the general lie of the land there. Then, presently, when all is ready, all he need do is to go and fetch Patricia-a whiff of chloroform in her sleep and everything silent and sure. In the morning Whitney Vandermonde's heiress would be missing without a sign or a clew. And Weir has got

her where he wants her—in spite of the detectives her uncle has surrounded her with." "Humph! And where does Warrener fit

in?" The Honorable John smiled. "Larry's in love with her—and I shouldn't care to swear that she hasn't got a secret crush on him. But there's been trouble between 'em. They aren't on visiting terms. My guess is that he followed her to England, partly on the chance of making up and partly in order to take care of her. The real start of this business was in America unless I'm mistaken! Remember how both of them suspected Sing, because he was a Chinaman? Probably that's why Warrener first got wise to Weir-must have seen him with his chinks -for, make no mistake, they're not far off. They've got a burrow about here somewhere. Riding around at night, eving the light in Patricia's window-as lovers do, so I understand, though what satisfaction they get out of it I don't know-he sees Yellow-eyes and his heathen friends slide in here-and follows 'em. They know he's an enemy of theirs and Weir sends a scout-this Li Shan -out to see what he's up to and where he lives. The scout gets what is owing to him -not being scout enough for a rifle conjurer like Warrener or a tough old plainsman like Teff."

"Hah! What about that burglar we chased across the park?"

"I have a tenner to spare on a wager that that burglar was one of the detectives looking around—MacHarrall, for choice," said the Honorable John comfortably.

"All right. But who were the two men and the women that made the midnight call?"

The Honorable John's face grew serious.

"That's where my guessing stops short," he said slowly. "I don't know, and it's too early to guess. But I don't like 'em—I don't like 'em at all. I can't fit 'em in. I don't even know whether they're working with Weir or not. That's what I'm hoping to find out from this secretarial sportsman, Scanlon, at the Hall this afternoon."

He fidgeted and revisited his wineglass.

"She's a fine girl—not too young, not too old. A pleasant, capable girl—not spoiled. But if you can put me wise to some way of asking her why a girl like herself thinks it's necessary to allow her secretary to give his celebrated imitation of a slave buyer studying a slave he thinks of buying—and that at midnight in the presence of two other callers —you'd save me a lot of hard thinking, squire."

The colonel nodded. "It's an awkward question to put to a high-spirited girl," he admitted.

"It is, and I'm the goat that's got to do it, somehow," said the Honorable John without enthusiasm.

"She'll have you fired out of the Hall," said the colonel with a touch of pleasant anticipation in his voice.

The Honorable John shook his head. "Not if I ask her diplomatically," he demurred. "And I'm not asking her at the Hall, anyway."

"Where then?" demanded the colonel.

The Honorable John rose. "On the golf links. I'm running over there now. It'll look more natural. She will see me there— I'll take care of that—and probably she'll want to learn what happened this morning. That will be opening enough for me. I tell you, squire, I don't like that midnight visit business at all. I've got a hunch that it's some second-string scheme of that cannibal with the yellow eyes, and I'm afraid of it. If you and Sing find that passage while I'm gone I'll be a lot easier in my mind when we call on this smooth letter writer, Scanlon."

He turned to Sing. "Get the car round, Sing," he commanded, "just about as quick as you can. I don't want to have cut a good lunch in half for nothing!"

Sing disappeared promptly.

"I'm not easy in my mind," said the Honorable John, a touch of anxiety in his usually complacent voice. "Half the game's as clear as glass to me—but half of it is black —cursed black, I tell you. And the sooner we shed a streak of light on it the better I shall feel in my mind and my appetite, too, for that matter."

### CHAPTER XII.

But the Honorable John was spared the task of putting to Miss Vandermonde the somewhat embarrassing questions which he had outlined to his partner.

He drove himself over to the golf links. But he did not immediately institute inquiries as to what part of the links the lady might probably be found on. He parked his car and glanced at the other cars there. He saw no sign of the big Krugg which he knew the fair Patricia was using that day. He frowned a little and drifted into the professional's shop—in preference to making inquiries at the clubhouse. The pro and his assistant were talking as he entered.

"Carelessness," the pro was saying. "Mon, it's gettin' awful, this carelessness. It's the influx o' leddies on to the gowf courses during the past few years. In the old days at St. Andra's, ye ken, laddie, there was nae such carelessness. These days they stand in the line o' each ither's ba' wi' the utmost carelessness. A leddy slices a shot and ye have an accident on ye're honds forthwith. It's bad—bad for business. D'ye see, laddie? Miss Vandermonde will spend no money in the shop for a month, and mebbe twa. That's bad!"

"Hey, Sandy, what's that—Miss Vandermonde had an accident?" asked the Honorable John, very casually indeed, bending over a new club he had taken from a stand.

The pro—with a slight tone of personal grievance—informed him that only that morning, at the ninth hole, Miss Vandermonde's opponent, a lady friend, playing a full brassy shot, had inadvertently sliced and the ball had struck Miss Vandermonde in the mouth. Fortunately it appeared that the heiress chanced to have her finger tips to her lips at the moment of impact, so that she had probably escaped disfigurement. But several teeth had been loosened, both lips cut, and a finger—possibly two—broken.

She had motored home at once—a boy had run in with instructions for the chauffeur to go round to the wood bordering the minth hole and fetch her.

The Honorable John listened attentively. "Hum! That's bad—very bad indeed. She is a charming young lady. I'm sorry to hear this—very sorry. At the ninth hole, hey? Sent one of the caddies in for the car, you say?"

"No, sir," spoke up the pro's assistant. "Some village boy—not a caddie. The ladies were playing without caddies. Her lady friend said caddies made her nervous."

"Hum! I can understand that! Some of the caddies here would make Robert the Devil nervous. It's bad—very bad," said the Honorable John thoughtfully, replacing the club. "It's put me off golf to-day. I'll try the club later." He shook his head thoughtfully.

"I'm sorry. Brassy shot, you say. Dangerous club in the hands of a beginner. It's an awkward hole, that ninth—too many bushes and too dog-legged! Pity. Very great pity!"

He moved out of the shop and without troubling to enter the clubhouse strolled across the links to the ninth hole. There were few players out and none anywhere near the ninth. The old adventurer ambled slowly from tee to green, apparently musing.

"Queer they should have been playing without caddies," he told himself. "Must have wanted to gossip privately as they played."

He stood at the edge of the green, looking about him. He frowned a little as his eyes fell on the chimneys of a house beyond the lonely road which ran past the ninth hole. This house was almost hidden by a low hillock crowned with pine trees and was perhaps three hundred yards away from the green.

The Honorable John's frown deepened as he stared at the chimneys.

"Hum—broken fingers, hey? Great pity!" He moved on to the road. It was a low-lying track, not too well kept, and softer at the sides than the dusty main roads.

"She sent for her chauffeur to fetch her at once—hum. Very natural."

An object a little way along the road caught his attention. He moved along. It was a lady's handkerchief, white and clean, marked P. C. V.

The Honorable John's lips tightened. He put the handkerchief away and, without moving, continued to study the road and the rather complicated pattern of the motor tire tracks visible there. Evidently the Krugg driver had come up, turned-having to engage his reverse gear twice to turn the long car in the narrow space—and raced off the way he had come. The Honorable John recognized the huge, seven-inch steel-studded tires of the Krugg, noted the tortuous course of those tire tracks to his own satisfaction, and concentrated on the other tracks shown on the road. There were very few, for it was a byroad little used by motor traffic. One set of three-ridged Palmer cords he recognized without difficulty as belonging to the car of the occupant of the house farther along-the country place of a rising young Harley Street doctor who spent as much time as he could near Purdston Links. These he passed over, but he pored a long time over the remaining set of tracks-even going to

the trouble of making a very poor sketch—laboriously.

"I am no artist but that'll do—so far," he said and, after a moment, proceeded to a more ambitious effort—producing a curiously complex sketch of tire tracks which he studied for some minutes with a certain satisfaction, then pocketed it and with a final glance round strolled down the road toward the house.

"Well, I'm damned," he repeated to himself, over and over again as he went. "If— I wonder——"

Opposite the house of the Harley Street golfer he studied the road again, desisting as the owner of the place came into view, strolling with a cigar round the garden. The Honorable John nodded.

"Not playing to-day?" he asked.

No 1.

NO 2 TORPILETTE

KRUCE.

"Oh, yes. Had an early round this morning. Going out again later."

"Hah, good work. Be careful at the ninth."

The other stared. "Why the ninth?"

sideboard—where he found the colonel excessively dirty and grimy, helping himself to a perfectly enormous whisky and soda. "Back already, are you?" said that in-

"Back already, are you?" said that individual, with unusual good humor. "But you don't steal a march on us this time!"

He half emptied his glass. "Located it in next to no time. In a corner of the cellar, behind the big wine bin," continued the colonel. "And a devilish dark, damp-looking hole it is."

His tone was airy—like that of a man who has done a difficult thing with unexpected ease.

"What d'ye mean, squire? What have you found?" asked the Honorable John absently and without much interest, as he shot a spray of soda into his whisky.

The colonel stared. "Found! What have we found?" he asked irritably. "Why, the thing you left us to find! D'ye mean to say you've forgotten it already? Take a look at the filthy state I'm in! It's been no joke, let me tell you—we've found the en-



trance to the underground passage to Harchester Hall!"

The Honorable John nodded without excitement.

"Oh, have you? What time did you find it?"

"About ten minutes ago," the colonel informed him sourly.

"Ten minutes ago, did you?" said the Honorable John. "Well, you were about a couple of hours too late—at least. They've got her!"

"What's that?"

The Honorable John turned on his partner, his face set and hard, his eyes like green flint.

"I tell you they've got her! Plain English, ain't it? These Cobra men have kidnaped Miss Vandermonde and are miles away with her!"

The colonel stared, then laughed.

"Ah, well, there you're wrong for once," he said with laborious irony. "You might be

"Easy to have an accident there," laughed the Honorable John. But the doctor did not appear to catch the allusion.

"Oh, I don't know. What about the fifth? There are worse traps at the fifth, don't you think? That cross bunker there's a brute, if you like."

The Honorable John nodded. "Well, maybe," he agreed. "Yes, I agree with you there. The fifth ain't golf—it's inhumanity! Hey? Ha, ha—inhumanity!"

He moved on, chuckling at his joke. For a few yards he went in a leisurely manner but as soon as he set the trees between him and the house he speeded up extraordinarily, hurrying back to his car.

Once he stopped to mop his forehead, using superheated language as he did so.

"The cunning, crafty devils!" he said, with other details concerning the said "devils," then pressed on.

A quarter of an hour later he strode into Purdston Old Place heading straight to the laboring under the impression that little Yellow-eyes and his surviving assistant have got the lady, but if so you are laboring under a delusion. I am the lad that can give you the latest information about Miss Patricia. I know where she is and why she is where she is."

"You do. Well, perhaps you've got no objection to telling me where she is and why," suggested the Honorable John in the soft and luring voice of one who leads a jackass to the water with the secret intention of making him drink heavily or suffer in his hide for any refusal.

"I haven't," said the colonel with extreme cheerfulness. "The fact is the lady is in bed—bless her!"

"Ah, is she now—in bed, bless her, hey?" purred the Honorable John.

"She is, and the reason she is in bed is because Miss Anita Welland—a friend, visiting Patricia—accidentally drove a golf ball into her face on the links an hour or two ago, poor little soul."

The Honorable John feigned surprise. "Is that so?" he inquired.

"It is so," the colonel assured him. "I heard it some time ago. The poor child has had all her front teeth smashed, both lips cut to pieces, three fingers smashed and was brought home from the golf links practically unconscious. She is disfigured for life!" he concluded with a queer blend of triumph over his partner and genuine sympathy for Miss Vandermonde in his voice.

The Honorable John finished his whisky and soda. "It's a very remarkable thing to my mind how these things grow as they get passed on," he mused aloud. "By the time the news gets a little farther afield Patricia will be suffering from compound fracture of the skull and concussion of the soul. She will be toothless, hairless and practically mouthless. Exaggeration. An heiress can't be disfigured anyway—she will always be beautiful in some one's eyes. Listen to me, squire—and I'll get your news up to date!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

The Honorable John lit a cigar with maddening deliberation.

"Here are the facts," he said at last. "I was told by the professional at the links that this accident had happened. At the ninth hole, he said. They told me the ladies had no caddies with them and that a village boy who had happened to appear near the ninth green had been sent by Miss Welland to fetch Patricia's chauffeur.

"Now probably you—or any other average man—would have swallowed that like a shark swallowing the contents of some sea cook's slush bucket. But I am a little more fastidious about what I swallow—as you know. And I decided to stroll across and take a look at the scene of the catastrophe, as these bat-eared, gimlet-eyed reporters put it. I was looking for a few details, and being, as I am, a detail expert, both trained and naturally, I found 'em."

He puffed gently at his cigar and produced his sketches.

"Try to follow me carefully, squire," he said. "I thought it improbable that Miss Vandermonde would lug her own clubs around with her on a warmish day like this, unless she had some special reason—which I gathered was because caddies, the little hounds, made Miss Welland nervous. I understand that, scorch their young hides they nearly make me nervous. Still—the point interested me—by instinct. Neither of the ladies in the car this morning looked nervous to any extent. I bore it in mind as I went across the course."

"You bore it in mind, yes—go on," interjected his partner acidly.

"There's a by-road running past the ninth green as you know. I picked up this there."

He spread out the pretty, white handkerchief marked P. C. V. before his partner.

"What do you make of that, squire?"

The colonel frowned over it.

"Huh, let's look. P. C. V.—Patricia Charman Vandermonde. Evidently the girl dropped her handkerchief. That's what I make of that. What else is there to make of it?"

The Honorable John nodded, smiling blandly. "It's clean," he said, "there's no blood on it. She was only on the ninth green once to-day and she dropped her handkerchief in the road *beyond* the green. She reached the green—they tell us—with her lips bleeding and probably her fingers—but there's no blood on her handkerchief! Queer, that, squire? She must have needed several handkerchiefs if she was hurt badly, hey? Yet she hasn't touched her lips with her own. Not like a wounded woman, that, hey?"

The colonel stared like a man smitten with an idea and opened his lips.

"Keep quiet-it's my turn," warned the Honorable John.

"Who lives in that pretty, new house about three hundred yards along the road from the ninth green?" demanded the Honorable Tohn.

The colonel thought.

"That Harley Street sportsman who wears scarlet tassels on his golf stockings-Doctor Cavander. Good-looking guy, plays a good game of golf—like a lot of other doctors!"

"Correct," said the Honorable John.

"I suppose you're going to tell me what I've thought of already—even with my feeble brain," snapped the colonel. "You're going to tell me Patricia hurried off to him for attention."

But the Honorable John smiled-a sparse and stingy smile. "I'm going to tell you that she didn't." he said. "It's exactly what she or any other sensible woman like her would have done. Cavander is clever, almost famous, he was more or less on the spot, he's young, his wife is in London and he's extremely good looking. I can't see any lady losing a chance to get gentled and made comfortable and free from pain and generally jollied along by Master Cavander. Why, his looks and manners would be an excuse for an unhurt lady to visit him for treatment-and a girl in pain wouldn't dream of passing his place to travel a couple of miles and then to wait for another doctor to be sent for!"

"And yet Miss Vandermonde didn't stop at his place, you say?"

"She did not!"

"How d'you know?" asked the colonel incredulously.

"The doctor had not heard of the accident when I passed his place-long after Miss Vandermonde. I questioned himnear enough to make sure. If she had called there, as any sane woman would have done, he'd have known of it, wouldn't he?"

The Honorable John thrust his first sketch under his interested partner's eyes.

"Motor tracks!" he said briefly. "No. 1 is from a seven-inch steel-studded tire-on Miss Vandermonde's big Krugg car."

The colonel nodded. "Saw it this morning," he agreed.

"No 2 is from Doctor Cavander's Palmer cords on his light Torpillette runabout."

"Yes, I'll grant you that."

"Nos. 3 and 4 next. What do they convey to you?"

The colonel scowled. "I've seen 'em before and recently. A diamond pattern on an off wheel and a bar circle on the near wheel of the same car. Why, it was---"

"On the car that brought those midnight visitors to Harchester Hall last night, hey?" demanded the Honorable John excitedly.

"It was," agreed the colonel. "Sure. Trust the old man. Now look at this."

He produced the second sketch. "I'll explain this-for I am not a Royal Academy sharp and no man but me-the man who drew it-could understand it. Look now. for it's a bit of detective work that would give Mister MacHarrall the gapes. No. 1steel studs-the Krugg's-came up to the ninth green, stopped, reversed twice, turned and went straight back down the road not stopping at Cavander's. No. 2 means nothing. It's a straightforward track from and to Cavander's house. Nos. 3 and 4 came to the ninth green from an opposite direction to the Krugg, stopped, reversed once, turned and went back the way they had come! I found the handkerchief where they had stopped."

The Honorable John paused, looking expectantly at his partner.

"Do you get the answer to the riddle?" he asked.

The colonel shook his head.

"All right. I'll put you wise. Patricia Vandermonde is supposed to have been wounded but her handkerchief is spotless, and she ignored the doctor on the spot. She was not wounded or hurt, squire. And there were no caddies to witness it-thanks to Miss Welland's special request. No witnesses-remember that."

"But the Krugg came up and took her home because she was hurt—the tracks prove that," demurred the colonel. "And Bloom saw her go by-with her face bound up! I got the news from Bloom! You can't get over that."

"Can't I?" said the Honorable John. "Let me give you my guess at what happened. On the ninth green Miss Vandermonde was trapped or lured or forced into the strange car-with Nos. 3 and 4 tiresand taken away-kidnaped, you can call it. Miss Welland was in the plot against her and had barred the caddies because they would have spoiled the trick. Once the kidnapers have gone, with Miss Vandermonde, who may have dropped her handkerchief by

accident or on purpose, Miss Welland sends a boy to the clubhouse for the Krugg car which hurries to the spot and takes the ladies back to Harchester Hall. They don't stop at the doctor's because there's no wound to stop for!"

"The ladies?" asked the colonel blankly.

"Miss Welland and the lady with her face partly bound up."

"Miss Vandermonde?"

"No, man alive—the woman the kidnapers brought in the car to impersonate her! Now, d'you see? The woman in bed now at Harchester Hall is not Miss Vandermonde —but the woman who was substituted for her at the ninth green! Got it, squire? Miss Welland took out to that green Miss Vandermonde—but she brought back to Harchester Hall another woman!".

The colonel nodded. "By gad, you're right! But why the wound and the broken fingers?"

The Honorable John drove his fist down on to the table with a blow that made the glasses jump.

"Because the fake Miss Vandermonde's lips aren't quite the same shape as the real Miss Vandermonde's and she wants to hide them for a while!" he roared. "And because she doesn't write quite the same and wants an excuse not to write for a while! Hey?"

The colonel was really impressed.

"I'll admit it—I've got to hand it to you. You've hit the target in the dead center!" he confessed and excitedly dashed himself off a noggin of Scotch and soda to prove it. "What next?"

The Honorable John glanced at the clock. "Now we interview Arnold Scanlon, Esquire —by appointment!" he said. "Have you locked the cellar door? We don't want the Blooms prowling about that tunnel."

The colonel nodded, passing him the key. "Good. Where's Sing?"

"Doping out his ideas for dinner to-night."

"Good! You're getting the knack of organization, after all, squire! We'll be moving, then!"

He led the way out to the waiting car. "There's only one thing I don't quite understand," he said absently, pausing in the road, staring down.

"What's that? The thing's as clear as gin!" avowed the colonel.

"The car Weir and his men came to our place in had totally different tires from the one that went to Harchester Hall last night —and to the ninth green to-day. That's got a queer look to me."

He got into the car, frowning.

"They may have changed cars," suggested his partner.

"They may, but it was a quickish change. However—we'll see!"

The Honorable John engaged his gear, let in his clutch and they headed for Harchester Hall.

"I've done a good bit of high-class detective work to-day, and I don't deny it," he burst out once. "But—but—I ain't happy about that change of tires. Anyway, this business is speeding up—speeding up, mark my words. And it wasn't crawling when it started."

He was right.

### CHAPTER XIV.

Whatever may have been Mr. Arnold Scanlon's private opinion of the partners' midnight visit he had evidently left strict instructions that they were to be received as highly honored visitors—if the manner of the manservant who conducted them to the library was anything to go by.

He was waiting for them and greeted them with such extreme cordiality that, as the Honorable John put it later, one would have thought they had done him a very great favor by "overlooking" his curious actions on the previous evening.

Seen closely and in broad daylight Miss Vandermonde's chief secretary was revealed as one of those clean-shaven, sharp-looking, young-old, semilegal, semipolitical-looking individuals. He had a broad and bulbous brow, thin lips, a wide, hard mouth. His manner was charming but to the experienced Mr. Brass he was not actor enough to be able to conceal the natural insincerity of his smile, or the calculating expression of his hard eves.

He was at a disadvantage with the Honorable John and Colonel Clumber. He was sharp—but he looked it, whereas the partners looked heavy-headed, dull and slow.

ners looked heavy-headed, dull and slow. "Good day, gentlemen," he said, fussing comfortable chairs a few inches out of their position and back again, in a polite sort of way. "Be seated. It is most kind of you to call. My little inquiry surprised you, perhaps? Not serious, fortunately, but you will understand readily enough that Mr. Whitney Vandermonde looks for—very reasonably of course—a considerable degree of real care from such of us as he has given the privilege of serving his niece. The heiress of one of the richest men in the United States, as no doubt you know, gentlemen."

He smiled, watching them.

The Honorable John laughed. "Certainly, certainly," he said. "And when you saw footsteps all over the place this morning you naturally had them tracked back to where they came from and requested the owners —us—to explain. Well, that's very right and natural—as it should be, in fact. Should do the same ourselves, certainly, hey, squire?"

"Surely so, surely so," said the colonel.

"The reason we came is soon explained, and I'll explain," continued the Honorable John. "Last night—after midnight—some burglar tried to break into our little place across the park. He failed. We heard him and chased him. He headed for this place. He must have thought he had thrown us off, for when we arrived here we found him peering in through a window—probably planning to break in as soon as the person in the room had gone to bed."

"This room? I was sitting up late last night."

"Yes-probably it was this room," agreed the Honorable John. He leaned forward. "Now, Mr. Scanlon, I may tell you that I am a man who has a horror of burglars, and a stubborn hatred of dishonesty, or sharp practice in any shape or form," he said earnestly. "I am not ashamed to say that I am a stubborn and bigoted respecter of property. Property! The nation that loses its respect for property is doomed, Mr. Scanlon. I am a plain man, and I maintain that the famous John Bunyan-or maybe it was Dickens-never made a greater mistake than when he wrote that stuff about 'who steals my purse steals trash.' A ruinous, bad-principled thing to write, Mr. Scanlon. Who steals my purse steals my property—and there is no excuse for him. He's low, sir!

"Never mind that now, however. I decided to take that burglar red-handed. So I placed Colonel Clumber down the drive to cut him off—and my servant and the dog under the tree to nab him as he went by if I missed him myself. Then I closed in on him. He was too quick. As you see, I am no stripling. He heard me closing in and 8A—P though I grabbed him-on the flower bed outside the window-he got away. My man missed him, but the colonel caught him on the turf halfway down the drive. There was The thief was armed with a struggle. knuckle-dusters and used them-notice the colonel's cheek and eye. He floored Clumber and got away down the drive. He must have had a motor and some friends waiting for him-these modern thieves do, so I hear -for, long before we could get to the end of the drive, we saw the car lights switch on, heard it start up and disappear. We had lost the man.

"So we returned to where the colonel was lying, picked him up, stanched his cut cheek, and went home. We hesitated as to whether we should inform the inmates of the place but by the time we were ready the lights were out and the place in darkness. In any case, whether we had received your letter or not we should have called to-day about it."

The Honorable John ceased, selected a good-looking cigar from a box on the table and lit it.

For some moments Mr. Arnold Scanlon sat silent, evidently thinking hard. But his face had lightened curiously. He looked relieved.

"That was very neighborly, gentlemenmost neighborly. Miss Vandermonde will be grateful."

It was evident that he believed the story and moreover that the whole business of the chase had occurred after his mysterious visitors had left. But he made quite sure.

"Let me see," he mused. "About the motor—you say that the thief ran down the drive to the car which was waiting for him. Did you see the car?"

"No. We heard it only."

"You were too late? Did you see any of the man's confederates—the men in the car?"

"No. Were there any?" asked the Honorable John.

"Several, I believe—judging from the gardener's report about the tracks."

"Hum! Just as well we scared them off," said the Honorable John.

"Yes, indeed." Scanlon's relief was plain. "Well, we owe you a debt of gratitude gentlemen," he said.

"No, no," protested the Honorable John "We were doing it on principle—should have done the same for any one." He chuckled. "It will make an interesting story to tell Miss Vandermonde presently over the teacups. I will make it more thrilling—just to amuse her. Ladies like a thrill."

Scanlon looked at him rather queerly.

"Over the teacups—I don't quite follow," he said.

"Presently—at tea time, I mean. I'll tell the story of the little excitement all over again. It will amuse her," explained the Honorable John.

A genuine surprise flashed into Scanlon's eyes.

"Er—do I understand that you know Miss Vandermonde? That—er—she wanted you to—er—take tea here to-day?" he asked as delicately as he could.

"Hey? Certainly. We had quite a chat with her this morning, on her way to golf. We promised to call, then."

"But, my dear sir, Miss Vandermonde since then has had a serious accident on the golf links. Have you not heard? Indeed, the doctor has not long left. She is in bed. Very shaken and ill."

He broke off abruptly, a lady entered. The partners recognized her at once. It was Miss Welland, who had been in the car with the heiress that morning, and who had played golf with her. She was a striking, distinctly handsome brunette, perhaps twenty-five years old. She bowed rather distantly to the partners.

"Forgive me if I interrupt," she said in a clear, rather cold and imperative voice, and turned to the smooth secretary. "Miss Vandermonde is seriously annoyed with her French maid, Julie. The girl has been careless, unsympathetic and impudent. Miss Vandermonde desires you to discharge her, pay her, and send her away at once."

"I will attend to it immediately," said Scanlon and rose, as the chilly beauty went out without taking any further notice of the partners.

They took the hint. There was nothing else to do. Whatever the Honorable John's theories may have been about the accident it was evident that tea with the heiress was out of the question.

So they left after a few civilities with Scanlon.

"Hard luck," growled the colonel, not without a touch of malice as they went down the drive, glancing at his partner.

But the Honorable John's hard, green eyes were blazing with an unusual excitement and triumph. "Hard luck be cursed, squire!" he said in a low, harsh voice. "I've got the missing link I wanted. I tell you, I'm wise to the whole game. Hey? That blackhaired, icy dame handed me the very bit of jigsaw I wanted! Come on—we've plenty to do."

He slowed up at the entrance to avoid a big, brand-new two-seater Vauxhall standing across the gate.

MacHarrall, the detective, was talking to the driver of this car.

"I'm telling you, man, it's no use to-day," they heard him say. "Miss Vandermonde's ill in bed. Come again in a few days' time. There's nothing doing to-day, y'understand!"

The driver of the new Vauxhall looked up as the Honorable John, apparently intending to speak to MacHarrall, brought his car to a standstill.

And then they both got a shock.

It was the man with the yellow eyes. He had shaved off the long, stringy mustache, and made several similar facial alterations —but there was no mistaking the fierce, hot, glaring eyes that were fixed on them.

Without a shadow of doubt this man was Major Aldebaran Weir of the Cobra tong who was at that moment supposed to be miles away in quite another car with the kidnaped heiress!

The colonel was so surprised that he gasped audibly. But a second later he turned in amazement to the Honorable John, for that old rascal was chuckling like one who has just received good news!

TO BE CONTINUED.

## THE DOUBTFUL HONOR

"The days are approaching," remarked Litt Mallory, the Virginia philosopher, "when the party leaders will travel far and suffer much looking for the man who can be persuaded that he is just prominent enough to owe it to his country to be buried alive in the vice presidency."



# The Extraordinary Affairs of the Texan Wasp

By James Francis Dwyer

Author of "The Fear Drunkard," "The Lake of Pearl," Etc.

# I. WHERE THE GODDESS CHANCE HOLDS COURT

Mr. Robert Henry Blane—"The Texan Wasp"—travels on business and travels fast—with the most famous man hunter of Europe hot on his heels. Go with him on his journeys and you will see all the great cities of Europe; perhaps you'll miss visiting some of the places mentioned in the guide books but he'll take you to others more interesting and while you travel with him you'll never know a dull moment. In this issue, just as a starter, Mr. Blane attends to a small affair in the Casino at Monte Carlo.

THE Calais-Méditerranée Express rolled into Monte Carlo station at elevenfifty on a morning in February, not one minute behind time. The Calais-Méditerranée is a train de luxe and by its aid one can get from Piccadilly to the Casino at Monte Carlo under twenty-eight hours.

From its big carriages there alighted rich old men and women fleeing from the cold breezes of the north; saucy, well-gowned young women; fat and vulgar lady gamblers carrying pet dogs and funny hand bags; also a big sprinkling of smartly dressed undesirables with sharp eyes and keen features.

At the steps of one of the big brown sleeping cars a little discussion arose. A quiet, red-cheeked English maid, her arms filled with the wraps of her elderly mistress, was rudely hustled by a fat and oily gentleman of color who was followed by six attendants as dark as their master.

The colored man's boorishness brought a

protest. It came from a tall, athletic man in the early thirties, who possessed that curious indescribable manner that comes, as the poet said, "from manly strength and courage high."

"Pardon, George," he murmured, addressing the colored person, "you are walking on the heels of this young lady. You must be more careful."

"George!" screamed the boor. "What do you mean by calling me George?"

The slightest flicker of cold contempt appeared in the gray eyes of the tall man. "It is just my name for all colored folk," he said softly. "But that is not the point in dispute. Let me advise you to apologize immediately when you tread on the heels of a white lady. Immediately! Do you understand?"

The oily colored man took a deep breath that suggested an inward fear of imminent suffocation, then he delivered himself in a voice sharpened by the file of indignation. "How dare you speak like that to me, sah?" he screamed. "I am the Maharaja of Behan-Gudsa!"

The proverbial iced cucumber would be considered a warm commodity if compared to the cold manner of the tall man. "To me you are just an unmannerly negro," he said slowly. Then, as the colored man grew apoplectic with temper, he added: "Roll your words once round before you let them out. When I first started to roam I used to write the words Houston, Texas, after my name on the hotel registers."

The six attendants of the maharaja gathered round their shocked and speechless ruler, jabbering violently in Hindustani. It looked as if they might make a joint attack on the Texan but as they jabbered there came a diversion. A youth of eighteen or thereabouts, a supple, Panlike youngster, tore up the platform, hurled himself through the circle of excited Orientals and seized the grip of the tall man.

"I knew I'd see you again!" cried the youth. "Don't you remember tellin' me that you were comin' to this dump? I've watched this train for five days. I said to myself 'this will be his boat' 'cause this rattler stacks up with the Lake Shore and the Panhandle Express. It's the nobbiest packet that ever made a face at a signal box. Don't you say, what's up with the bunch of ragheads?"

The tall man smiled and the smile made him strangely handsome. It blotted out the fine lines bitten by the mordant of Old Man Care. It flung the fighting look from the gray eyes and enthroned the sprite of mirth in its place. A slight scar on the right jaw that had a sinister look when the mouth was tight closed was for the moment not noticeable.

"Nothing, Jimmy," he answered. "They're a little excited because they're visiting a gambling joint and they don't know exactly where to put their feet."

The youth surveyed the maharaja and his six attendants as a bright terrier might survey seven sleek rats. "D'ye want me to biff a couple of 'em?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh, Lord, no!" cried the tall man. "Come away."

The two pushed the Orientals aside and walked down the platform, the tall man, immediately forgetful of the colored crowd, questioning his companion. "Now what in thunder brought you here?" he asked.

The youngster was voluble. "A guy wrote me the day after you tossed me the fifty francs at Marseilles," he began, "and he say, boss, I'm never goin' to forget you for that fifty francs an'——"

"Shut up and tell what brought you here," ordered the other.

"Well, this guy wrote and said that he had heard about me from a sport who saw me box at the Prado Arena in Marseilles, an' he said in his letter, he says, if you're the real Just-So Kid that fought the Red Apache in Paris take the first train to this place and you can have a fight that will make 'em howl for you all over France."

"And has the scrap come off?" inquired the tall man.

"Not yet, not yet," murmured the youth. "Friday is the night, boss. At nine in the evenin' o' that blessed day I'm goin' to tear the champeenship o' the Alpes-Maritimes from a feller who looks slower than a dollar bill fallin' from a ten-story winder when you're waitin' for it on the sidewalk. He knows as much about fightin' as a one-legged jack rabbit an' when——"

jack rabbit an' when—" "Jimmy," interrupted the tall man, "I'm going up in the elevator to the terrace. Be a good boy and give my bag to the porter from the Hôtel de Paris. Yes, I'll be at the fight. I'll see you before then."

"Sure you will!" cried the Just-So Kid. "This is a small burg an' Barnum's dwarf couldn't hide in it. Say, d'ye know I thought that this joint from the advertisin' it got was as big as Cincinnaty or N'Awlyns, but it's smaller 'n Helena, Arkansaw. Were you ever-----"

The elevator heaved itself upward before the Just-So Kid could put his question, but he showed no displeasure as he turned and trotted out of the station. "Some prince, he is," he murmured. "Chucks coin around like a darky tossin' hen feed. Guess I'll tote his grip up to the hotel meself. Porters is careless insects an' I guess I'd have starved to death if he hadn't tossed me fifty francs at Marseilles."

The tall man of the Calais-Méditerranée Express stepped from the elevator to the Casino terrace overlooking the sea. His gray eyes feasted on the glorious view—probably the most wonderful view in the world. To the right the Rock of Monaco with the palace of the prince; to the left the picturesque coast line sweeping down to the Italian border.

"Wow, it's great to be back here!" he murmured. "I've seen cattle ranches bigger than the whole of this principality, yet this place is the romantic heart of the world."

He walked swiftly along the terrace, returned the salute of one of the picturesque guards who was clever enough to see something more than usually distinguished in the look of the stranger, crossed the Place du Casino and sprang lightly up the steps of the Hòtel de Paris. He gave to an observer the belief that he was a very happy and carefree man.

There are men who can walk into a hotel as if they were conferring an honor on the hostelry. The tall man was one of these. The war has killed much of the old-time respect that the European hotel keeper had for the visiting American, but all the prewar servility came back with a bounce as the tall man swung through the door. The head concierge bowed so low that he had secretly to disengage his well-groomed whiskers from the lowest button of his vest; an assistant manager with a black beard chopped off abruptly, à la Ptolemy, fell upon a pen and thrust it into an inkwell in a manner that suggested the unfortunate implement was being punished for an indiscretion. Monsieur Ptolemy pushed forward the police registration slip and asked whimperingly if the distinguished-looking visitor would fill it in.

The tall man nodded, then smiled at the Just-So Kid who suspicious of all hotel people had resolutely resisted all attempts to take the grip from him. "Thought I'd cling to it till you came," he explained. "These Frenchies have treacle flips they tell me."

The Texan, in a bold, dashing hand filled in the form tendered by the hotel manager. After the italicized words he wrote the required description of himself thusly:

Name: Blane.

Christian names: Robert Henry.

Citizen of United States of America. Date of birth: April 22, 1891.

Identification papers: United States passport.

"And what can I give you, Monsieur Blane?" inquired the fawning manager. "Do you wish a suite?"

"There was, if I remember rightly," said Robert Henry Blane, "an interesting adornment on the outside walls of your hotel. The names of the big capitals of the world were carved in the stone. London, Paris, Moscow, New-----"

"They are still there," interrupted the manager. "Yes, monsieur, they are there now."

"Then I would like the room directly over New York," said Mr. Blane. Turning to the Just-So Kid he remarked: "I want that room, Jimmy, because I always think that directly over New York lies heaven."

The assistant manager rushed to his diagram. Mentally he consigned all foreigners and crazy Americans in particular to a more sunny clime than the Riviera. Why should this stranger want the room directly over the words "New York?" Why not another just——

"It has just been made empty!" he cried, interrupting his own unuttered thoughts.

"Then it will be made full," minicked the man from Texas. "Bring the grip along, Jimmy. I want you to do an errand for me. It's an important errand that I wouldn't trust to every one, so I'm glad that you waited."

"You can trust me with your life," said the Just-So Kid. "I'd lay down in this scrap on Friday night if you told me to. If you hadn't tossed me that fifty at Marseilles I'd be teachin' angels how to stop a left uppercut by now. You saved—"

"Jimmy," interrupted the tall man, "the dollar is high in France but if these people hear you thanking me for fifty francs I wouldn't be surprised to see it drop with a bang. Be patriotic. Talk as if we were all millionaires. Now if you win that fight—..."

"If I win it!" snorted the Just-So Kid. "Say, boss, that feller has as much hope of beatin' me as a zoo turtle has o' beatin' a Kentucky thoroughbred once round Lexington."

Monsieur Robert Henry Blane smiled. He was beginning to like the Just-So Kid.

Mr. Blane and the little pugilist were ushered into the splendid apartment that overlooked the famous Terrace and the Avenue de Monte Carlo and after the servile attendant had taken himself elsewhere the Texan turned to the Just-So Kid.

"Jimmy," he said quietly, "I want you to take a message to a friend. I trust you, so I can tell you right now that I do not want you to go up the street bawling out anything that I tell you."

"When I was a kid," said the pugilist,

"they called me 'The Tomb' 'cause I was so silent."

Monsieur Blane investigated a wallet and took from it a slip of paper on which were mystical signs and numbers. With a pencil he decoded the cryptogram, then addressed the youth.

"My friend lives in a little cottage on the Crête des Mules, Jimmy. It's a cottage with green shutters on the south side of the road before you get to the cemetery. And you must walk there. Do you understand? He is a bit of a hermit and he hates carriages and taxicabs."

"I'll walk," said the prize fighter. "What'll I tell him?"

"Tell him," said Mr. Blane, speaking very slowly, "that 'The Texan Wasp' is at the Hôtel de Paris. That's all."

"I'm on my way," said the Just-So Kid. "Bon jour, as these geeks say."

After the departure of the youth Monsieur Robert Henry Blane, alias The Texan Wasp, drew a chair to the window, lit a thin, flat cigar made of specially grown Algerian tobacco and sat for a few minutes contemplating the view.

"A great old dump," he murmured. "We have nothing like it in the States. Palm Beach buzzes a little but this place is an all-the-year-round circus. Jimmy is surprised to find that there's only ten thousand people here, but then they're the right sort, as the shark said when he picked the champion fat man out of the bunch of bathers."

Monsieur Blane after finishing his cigar bathed and descended to the wonderful dining room. He celebrated his arrival at Monte Carlo by lunching luxuriously. He amazed the pompous maître d'hôtel who had made it a life business of patronizing Americans by the knowledge he displayed. He chose after much thought a lobster which he ordered to be served with sauce tartare; a chicken of Bresse-for which Savarin longed during his years of exile-baby peas that had been brought up from the plain of Lombardy that very morning, and a bottle of Bellet, the wine grown at the back of Nice and which has no reputation outside the district. "The devil knew of it without me telling him," said the maître d'hôtel to the head chef. "Be careful what you do. He knows things. He is an American because his passport is American, but I bet he knows many places besides Monte Carlo. I attempted to advise him but he looked at me like a viper looking at a frog and I stopped. Sometimes you meet one of those Americans of his type and they are bad. Yes, they are bad."

The chef did his best and Mr. Blane feeling in good spirits after the meal decided to visit the Casino and pay his respects to the Goddess Chance. Men turned and looked at him as he walked the short distance from the steps of the Hôtel de Paris to the doors of the Casino. A very striking figure was The Texan Wasp. Simpering young women flung bold glances up into his sun-tanned face. He, so it seemed from the glances of those who passed him, represented the queer quality that we call romance. He was tall and strong and handsome, and to strength, good looks and a frank air of deviltry life had added a subtle compound that went out from him. He had seen things, he had met life, he knew queer ports and strange men.

He hummed softly the lines of one of Adam Lindsay Gordon's poems:

"No game was ever yet worth a rap for a rational man to play,

Into which no danger, no mishap, could possibly find a way."

Quite close to the steps of the Casino a wide-eyed, full-lipped woman, showing the faded relics of a beauty that must have been true Arlesian, approached him with a basket of little rosebuds.

"Buy a flower, monsieur?" she murmured. The Texan Wasp smiled and shook his head.

"Only buy three flowers, monsieur," she whispered. "Three only, monsieur."

The Wasp without showing any excitement halted and went slowly about the work of selecting a bud. "Who sent you?" he asked, after a little interval. He put the question in French.

"I am the wife of Pierre," she answered in the same tongue. "The youth brought your message and my husband sent me to warn you." "Of what?"

"Of danger! Great danger!"

Monsieur Robert Henry Blane compared two buds with an intentness that would make an observer believe that his happiness lay upon the decision. "And where is the thorn?" he asked softly.

"Here," answered the woman. "Here in the town. It is Number Thirty-seven."

The Texan Wasp, with the manner of a

prince, took a rosebud, handed the woman a new and unsoiled five-franc note and passed up the steps into the Casino. The information, seemingly important in the eyes of the giver, made no change in his manner.

He turned to the left, presented his passport and demanded a ticket of admission. They are careful nowadays at Monte Carlo. Years ago a visiting card would admit one to the Shrine of the Spinning Ball but now a passport must be shown before the admission ticket is issued.

The Wasp checked his cane, for the visitor is not allowed to carry a cane into the sacred chamber; the attendant at the door punched the ticket and waved him forward into the throne room of the Goddess Chance. In the mind of The Wasp the words of the flower seller were running round and round the section which scientists call "the central conscious area:" "It is Number Thirtyseven."

Robert Henry Blane was no piker. His was not the manner of a piker. He bought one thousand francs' worth of chips and found himself a seat at the second table to the right.

He staked a hundred-franc chip and lost. He staked five more and failed to pick the numbered receptacle into which the whirling ivory ball would drop. He staked a seventh time on thirteen, which number also held the stack of a player who was betting the limit. The Wasp had not noticed the player but he had noted the fact that some one at the end of the table was playing high.

The pile of chips on thirteen was raked in as the voice of the spinner announced that eighteen was the winner and as the croupier gathered in the spoil Monsieur Robert Henry Blane was made suddenly aware of the identity of the plunger whose stack of chips shared with his own the unlucky thirteen. A queer, explosive yell came from the end of the table and The Wasp on looking up found the round beady eyes of the Maharaja of Behan-Gudsa fixed upon him. A fat beringed hand was thrust out as the colored ruler screamed his sorrows to the world.

"He has cursed my luck!" he screamed. "The American pig! I will not play if he remains. He must be put out. I was winning till he came to this table! He has cursed my good luck!"

Those sleek, crafty officials of the Casino who detest disturbances were at the side of the colored man in an instant. A scene of any kind is the last thing desired in the Shrine of the Spinning Ball. They endeavored to soothe the maharaja but the conceited native potentate refused to be soothed. He continued to scream out threats regarding Robert Henry Blane and the only person around the table who seemed utterly indifferent to the threats was Monsieur Blane himself. He sat with a look of boredom upon his handsome face, staking with careless indifference, seemingly deaf to the ravings of the other.

A person of authority came, a fat, pompous person with white pudgy hands, the fingers of which were so round and fat that they looked as if they were newly inflated. He delivered an ultimatum to the Oriental and it had its effect. The maharaja thrust back his chair and waddled out, followed by his attendants.

The Texan Wasp glanced indolently at the man with the fat white hands, then his eyes strayed to a person immediately behind him, a man that The Wasp knew he had never seen before but who was—and this information came to him with uncanny force from some subconscious depth—a factor in his future life.

The gray eyes of the Texan, trained to work at lightning speed, licked up the outstanding characteristics of the other's face and reported them to the nimble brain. They told of cold, merciless eyes that looked like brown-tinted and hard-frozen hailstones. They reported a mouth that was a lipless line with downturned corners. They reported a nose bred of battles, a short, bignostriled nose that suggested an ability to analyze the air it breathed; a chin that had thrust peace to the winds.

The Wasp, watching the table, staked and thought. He reasoned softly with himself, combating the instinctive dislike of the person who had been attracted to the table by the yells of the Oriental. His manner was cool as he thought over the matters gathered up in the one quick glance.

"It is he," whispered instinct. "Of course it is he!"

"Why?" questioned the logical section of Mr. Blane's brain,

"He looks the thing!" answered instinct. "Didn't the wife of Pierre say that he was here? Well, look at the silly faces of the mob in this room and compare those faces with his. It's he! It's No. 37!" The gray eyes of The Wasp glanced at the seat vacated by the maharaja. The seat . was occupied by the man with the merciless eyes. For a single instant those eyes of the other "hooked" the wandering glance of The Wasp and new details were carried to the brain of the Texan. "He's a little interested in you," they recorded. "He has taken a seat so that he can watch you. He's playing the lowest stake."

The Wasp, emotionless as a machine, played on. He staked as if his whole mind was on the play but as he staked he felt that the gaze of the other was playing over him like an invisible flame. He didn't glance again in the direction of the cold-eyed one but he felt the other's glances upon his face, his hands, his chest. It was a test of endurance under fire. Annoyance and hate, the foolish resenters of suspicion, were promptly throttled by Mr. Robert Henry Blane and with an equanimity that was remarkable he slowly gambled his dwindling pile of chips.

It took an hour of slow play, then he pushed back his chair and without a glance at the other strolled slowly from the room. Curiously he felt that the eyes of the other were licking at his back as he walked away.

The Texan Wasp dined at his hotel and went up to his room when he had finished. He switched off the lights of the splendid chandelier and sat at the window. He watched the Avenue de Monte Carlo, watched it intently. Trams ran from a point directly beneath him at hourly intervals for Beaulieu, Villefranche and Nice. At the moments of their departure there was momentary activity in the avenue but during the intervals it was nearly deserted. An occasional Casino guard came up from the terrace, peered around, then drifted down a path into the shrubbery.

A man walked up from the direction of Monaco and halted on the opposite side of the avenue. He stared up at the darkened window of the room directly over the words "New York" carved on the outer wall. The Wasp became alert. The man on the other side of the avenue lighted a cigar.

The man in the shadows opposite pulled three times fiercely at his cigar so that the red top glowed viciously with each pull. He hid it for an interval within his palm then pulled once. Again it was hidden then sucked at viciously for twelve consecutive times. The Texan Wasp counted not with figures but with the letters of the alphabet. The first three pulls represented "c," the following pull was "a," the twelve distinct illuminations of the cigar point denoted the letter "l."

The signaling went on. There came another "1," then "i" and "t," then in swift succession "o," and "f," the latter repeated twice.

"Call it off," murmured The Wasp repeating the message. For a moment he remained inactive, then he lit a cigarette and moved it slowly so that it made an interrogation point to the man on the other side of the avenue.

The answer came back swiftly, spelled out by the glowing tip of the cigar. "Me for Paris. Thirty-seven is here."

Far off, in the direction of the Italian border, there came through the still night the whistle of a Paris-bound express leaving the station at Cap Martin-Roquebrune. The man on the avenue heard. He sprang down the steps leading to the terrace and went at headlong speed toward the elevator. There was no doubt about his desire to put his threat into immediate execution.

The Texan Wasp sat for fully ten minutes after the disappearance of the man that he had chosen as his lieutenant, then he hurriedly seized a light overcoat and an English traveling cap and descended to the street. He walked swiftly to the Palais des Beaux-Arts and sprang into a taxicab.

"To the Riviera Palace Hotel!" he ordered. "Get a move on! Hurry!"

The cab swung up toward Beausoleil, climbing swiftly. There was a scared sickle moon swinging through a trailing mist.

A hundred yards before they reached the hotel The Wasp tossed his cap from the window of the cab, then immediately signaled the chauffeur. "I dropped my cap," he explained. "Turn back."

The taxi rolled back down the slope, The Wasp scrutinizing the road up which they had come. It was a road that gave little shelter to pursuers and the Texan evidently was satisfied that no follower was upon his trail. He leaped out and recovered the cap, then addressed the chauffeur. "Don't bother to turn round. I'll walk the rest of the way. Here's your fare."

The taxi plunged forward toward the many-lamped town between the hill and the

sea and The Wasp after watching its tail light disappear turned to the east and struck up the hill in the direction of the cottage that he had described to the Just-So Kid immediately after his arrival.

The cottage was in darkness. Monsieur Robert Henry Blane knocked softly, then after an interval he made a noise with his finger nails that resembled the scratching of a small dog seeking admittance.

A light appeared within, a wan, yellow light, the door was cautiously opened and a pair of blinking eyes peered out at the visitor.

"It's Blane, Pierre," snapped the caller. "Open up, can't you?"

"I didn't know you," mumbled the other as The Wasp pushed himself into the room. Then with a quick change in his voice the occupant cried: "Why did you come here? What do you want? I sent my wife to warn you!"

The Texan Wasp from his great height looked down at the undersized man in the nightshirt. A pathetic figure was the cottage dweller. A fear-ridden wretch showing by his actions that terror had roweled him over many years.

"Now, now, Pierre, don't get scared about nothing," said The Wasp. "Let's talk."

The nightshirted one, candle in hand, led the way into a back room that was filled with the unholy odor of chemicals. He pointed to a rush-bottomed chair, placed the candle in the broken neck of a bottle, then turned upon Robert Henry Blane.

"You know he is here?" he stammered. "You know and yet you stay?"

"Why shouldn't I stay?" asked the smiling visitor. "I saw him this afternoon and I think he looks a nice, gentle—."

"Gentle!" screamed the other. "He is as gentle as a Gaboon viper! He is a devil! A swine! Gentle? He is the spawn of the devil himself!"

"But he looks so quiet!" teased the Texan.

"Ah, he looks it!" cried the Frenchman. "He is! Yes, he *is* quiet! He follows like a bloodhound! I know! I know!" He glanced nervously at the door and lowered his voice. "He followed me that time from Paris to Dijon! On my heels! I fled to Toulouse and I watched the railway station night and day from a peephole that I had bored in the shutter of the hotel room—I stayed at the Hotel Chaubard, in front of the station. He got there two days after me! Yes! By the bones of the blessed St. Amelie he came out of the station with his head in the air sniffing like a dog! Aye, like a hound on the trail of a rabbit!

"I scurried to Marseilles and from Marseilles to Draguignan! I rented a little cabin in the woods at Draguignan! 'Here,' I said to myself, 'that bloodhound will never find you!' Ah, what happened? I took a walk one morning and he stepped from behind a bush! 'Pierre,' he said, 'I think you had better take a trip to Paris with me. The Côte d'Azur is not the place for a weak man in the hot summertime.'"

"A *little* sea trip?" screamed the man in the nightshirt. "Why—why that hell is twelve thousand miles away! Twelve thousand miles! Think of being that far from Paris! I did not think it possible to get that far from Paris! And that bloodhound sent me there for life!"

The Wasp regarded the little man with the cold eye of a psychologist contemplating the effect of fear. Monsieur Robert Henry Blane was interested and a little amused. So far as he was concerned terror was an unknown sensation.

The little man stepped closer to his visitor and laid a bony hand on his shoulder. "Go away and forget that you have ever seen me!" he said earnestly. "Please! Please go! I would have carried out my part of the contract if the devil had not arrived. I have everything ready as I said I would. But now-no, no! I tell you that I will not! When I think of him I can see the nickel mines, the cowardly warders, the rotten food, everything! Listen! I can see the black fins of the sharks that followed the raft on which Mathieu and I drifted to Australia! Black fins like plow shares! They followed us for days across the hot seas to the Barrier Reef! Go away! Go away!"

The Texan Wasp rose. The little man seized his coat with bony fingers and half dragged him to the outer door. All the horror of the French penal settlement had been unloosed afresh within his mind and he wished to get rid of the tempter. "Go, go!" he cried. "Yes, yes, I know that you are clever and that you are not afraid of man or devil, but I am afraid! He is a wizard and he can read what is in your mind when you are a hundred miles away. How did he know that I was going to Toulouse and from there to Draguignan? How? How? Answer me! I tell you that he knows you are here now!"

The Wasp laughed softly. "Don't get so scared, Pierre," he said softly. "It's all right. Don't worry. If you would just give me what I want——"

"I'll give you nothing!" gasped the other. "Nothing! I am through with the business! Through with it!"

He opened the outer door and half thrust his visitor on to the roadway. The hysteria of fear gave his thin hands strength.

The Texan Wasp walked down the hill toward the town. He thought over the terror produced in the minds of two of his friends by the arrival of No. 37 at Monte Carlo. The man who had signaled him from the avenue was a person of nerve, yet he had left abruptly; the little man in the cottage was a stuttering idiot with fear.

"Some terrorist, that chap," murmured The Wasp. "It's a good job that he has no knowledge of my face. He seemed to be interested though. Perhaps it suggested possibilities of wickedness to him."

Monsieur Robert Henry Blane thought over this idea as he tramped along. He told himself that evidently there was a criminal face, and admitting that there was it was quite evident that the warpings and lines that go to make up the criminal physiognomy must start somewhere.

"There may be a master wrinkle from which all the others branch out," murmured The Wasp a little delighted with the thought he had brought forward. "A sort of a key wrinkle. If a clever physiognomist located this he would—"

Monsieur Blane broke off abruptly and with one quick spring took refuge behind a clump of bushes. Some one was coming up the deserted road.

The halting footsteps of the approaching person stirred the suspicion of the Texan. They were tentative, undecided.

The Wasp crouched. He held his breath and waited. It was impossible to see a person at a distance greater than five paces. The scared moon was smothered in white mist. The pedestrian came closer. The Wasp lowered his head so that the upper part of the unknown would show against the sky. With unblinking eyes he watched. There flashed through his mind the words of the terrified Pierre who had asserted that a certain person could read what was in the mind of another even if that other were a thousand miles away.

The man on the road halted. He turned, head tilted as if sniffing the air. The Wasp bent lower. A semiluminous patch of sky directly behind the man on the road helped him. He recognized him! The pedestrian was No. 37.

The Wasp, crouching behind the bushes, thought that there really was something canine in the actions of the man hunter. For fully a minute he stood, evidently undecided, then he flung himself swiftly forward like a dog to whose nostrils had come a whiff of the prey.

The Wasp waited. The other breasted the hill. For a hundred yards he went forward swiftly, then the keen ears of Monsieur Blane discovered that he had turned and was descending rapidly.

The Texan thrust his hand into a specially constructed pocket in the left breast of his vest. His muscular fingers touched the butt of a tiny Browning. Questions were clamoring for answers within his brain. What had brought the extraordinary person up the hill? Was he interested in the movements of Monsieur Robert Henry Blane? If so, why?

The extraordinary hunter of criminals whose working alias was known from the "Old Port" of Marseilles to the filthy dens of Limehouse and from the "Thieves' Quarter" of Naples to the water front of Libau went by with his head bowed as if in deep thought. The echo of his shuffling feet on the pounded limestone of the roadway came back to the Texan for some minutes, then silence settled down again upon the slope.

The Wasp rose and looked down at the twinkling lights of the City of Chance. He was a little puzzled. He scaled a fence on the seaward side of the road, struck down the hill till he reached the Boulevard du Midi, then at a languid pace he headed for the grounds of the Casino. He had, with infinite care, dusted his shoes and trousers, leaving not the slightest trace of the limestone dust.

He entered the grounds from the east side and walked slowly around the Casino till he reached the terrace. There he found himself a seat immediately in front of the little bridge that crosses the railway track, the bridge over which the pigeon shooters go to the little elevator that takes them down to the shooting ground beside the sea.

The Wasp considered pigeon shooters as he sat upon the seat. He wondered what were the thoughts of the conceited fools who went across the little bridge. Then, suddenly, the little bridge became of importancel It became part of a network that was forming in his mind. It became very important. It was just a small bridge over the track of the Paris, Lyon et Méditerranée but——

The Just-So Kid interrupted the musings of The Texan Wasp. The Just-So Kid strolled across from the band stand and saluted with proper deference.

"Hello, Jimmy," said The Wasp. "Tomorrow is the night of nights, eh? I hope you're feeling fit?"

"Fit?" growled the little pugilist. "Why I'm so fit that I can't keep my feet on the gravel. I just want to fly. A feller from the old U. S. saw me go a few rounds yesterday an' he went dippy on me. He's some boy plunger. Bet a French punter ten thousand francs to three thousand that I would put this yap away before the fourth round."

"Who's the plunger?" asked The Wasp.

"Chap from Boston," answered the little pugilist. "He's makin' the arms of those croupier geeks ache rakin' in his money. They're thinkin' o' buildin' bigger tables so as he'll have plenty o' space to stack his chips. His name is Allerton—"

"His name is what?" snapped The Wasp. "Allerton," answered the Just-So Kid. "George Allerton."

"What is he like?"

"A tall, white-faced chap of about twentyfour. Looks as if the strongest thing he ever matched himself against was a cocktail but he certainly does keep those boys with the coin rakes busy. He's in there now buckin' the old wheel like as if he was the Rainbow Division hoppin' a dugout. He's\_\_\_\_"

"I'll see you again, Jimmy," interrupted The Wasp. "I want to look him over."

The Texan Wasp found the plunger. It was an easy matter. At two tables in the big room the huddled group of onlookers told that high play was in progress. Monsieur Robert Henry Blane strode to the first and

found that the person bucking the ivory ball was his old friend the Maharaja of Behan-Gudsa. He stepped across to the other table and found that the crowd had gathered to see the futile efforts of Mr. George Allerton of Boston to break the bank.

Mr. Allerton had no system. He played wildly and luck had completely deserted him. So much so that The Wasp, studying the faces of the onlookers saw upon them that queer look of terrifying prescience that we sometimes see upon the faces of those who watch, as through a veil, the approach of tragedy. Even the croupiers, those coldeyed accomplices of the relentless zero, watched the plunger as if they too were startled at the rather sickening manner in which the boot of fate was applied to his fortune.

Again and again Allerton staked and lost. The ivory ball ate up his pile with remarkable gluttony. It chattered a challenge to him as it whizzed around the bowl, seeking, with devilish cunning, a number that the young man had not backed.

"Come on!" chattered the Ivory Ball. "I am easy money! Every one thinks they can beat me, but do they?

"I pay the rates and keep the prince! I make the boldest plungers wince! I whirl and spin In the house of sin, And the devil looks on with an affable grin In our shrine at Monte Carlo!"

The Texan Wasp, standing immediately behind the player whose reckless plunging had attracted a crowd, lifted his eyes and looked across the green table. Standing in the second row of the spectators, a seemingly uninterested watcher of Allerton's play, was No. 37.

A spirit of challenge rose in the breast of The Texan Wasp. There came a little flame of resentment against the man hunter. Monsieur Robert Henry Blane, to whom fear was an unknown quantity, recalled the words of the terrified chemist. "When I think of him," the chemist had said, "I can see the nickel mines, the cowardly warders, the rotten food, everything!"

The Wasp leaned forward and touched the shoulder of the young plunger. The white face of the youth swung round upon him with a suddenness that was proof of disorganized nerves.

The Wasp spoke. "Don't you think you've had enough for one sitting?" he asked quietly.

"What's my business got to do with you?" snapped the plunger.

"Oh, nothing," answered the smiling Mr. Blane. "I just thought that your luck was out and I know how it is when that happens. One gets pigheaded and fights that infernal ball."

The young man regarded the face of The Wasp with eyes that showed evident puzzlement. He looked as if he was trying to pin down some fleeting memory.

"Seems as if I knew you," he stammered. "I don't know where but—but—what's your name anyhow?"

"What does my name matter?" murmured Mr. Blane. "No, you don't know me."

"Seems as if I did."

"No, no."

"Well, what are you buttin' in for?"

"Because you're an American and you're up against a run of bad luck."

The Wasp glanced swiftly across the table as he spoke. No. 37 had thrust himself forward, wedging his body in between two sitting players in an effort to hear the conversation that was taking place between the distinguished-looking Blane and the youthful plunger. And Mr. Blane smiled as he noted the efforts of the person who was taking the rather unusual interest in his actions. It was not the soft, whimsical smile that appeared on his face at the railway station when the Just-So Kid had offered to punch the Orientals; it was a hard smile that seemed to accentuate the whiteness of the scar on the right jaw.

The white-faced plunger was still staring at the face of The Wasp. Suddenly he spoke. "I don't want your advice in any old matter of mine!" he cried. "Mind your own business! Some one sent you, didn't they? Some one sent you!"

"No one sent me," said The Wasp quietly. "That's a lie!" screamed the other. "Some one sent you to talk stuff to me! Well, clear out! I can manage this little merry-goround without any advice from you."

Monsieur Robert Henry Blane, showing an utter indifference to the crowd packed around the table, moved slowly away. He passed out of the main room into the vestibule, languidly examined one of the charming landscapes by Jundt, then passed out into the grounds. Mr. Blane was puzzled. He was puzzled about the interest which No. 37 was showing in him. He was perfectly certain that the distinguished and

extraordinarily successful detective had never seen him before, yet it was quite evident that Mr. Blane's presence at Monte Carlo interested him.

"Perhaps there is something in that master-crime-wrinkle idea of mine," murmured The Wasp. "Possibly it can be detected in infants in the cradle. It's a great idea. The kids that had it could be specially treated, sort of brought up on special food and all that."

Another matter puzzled The Wasp as he walked slowly round the beautiful grounds. Young Allerton had accused him of being the emissary of some one. He had screamed his belief again and again. Monsieur Robert Henry Blane wondered who young Allerton suspected of having such a great interest in his welfare.

"The darn young fool," growled Mr. Blane. "He'll lose every cent he's got in bucking that marble."

He looked at his watch. It was eleventen. The ivory ball and its antagonists had another fifty minutes in which to battle before the tired croupiers called it a day.

The Texan Wasp looked for a vacant seat on the Place du Casino. They were all occupied but he finally found a bench with only one occupant in the rather shadowy part of the Place farthest away from the glare of the electric lights that illuminated the gambling place and the Café de Paris. He took the unoccupied end of the bench, merely glancing at the female figure who sat motionless on the seat.

Robert Henry Blane, one time of Houston, Texas, made a quiet review of his position. It did not altogether thrill him. He had arrived at Monte Carlo on a very welldefined mission but matters had taken a strange turn. A confederate that he always had looked upon as a person of great nerve and daring had bolted hurriedly; another very necessary accomplice whose knowledge of chemicals was superior to that of any other man in Europe apparently had become a fear-ridden lunatic. The fleeing confederate might have been dispensed with but the chemist was necessary. Furthermore the author of all the trouble, the man hunter with eyes like frozen hailstones, was taking more than a proper interest in Monsieur Blane himself.

The Wasp, momentarily forgetful of the other occupant of the bench, leaned back and softly whistled a little tune of his college days. It soothed him and as he whistled he wondered lazily why it had floated into his mind. Possibly the talk with young Allerton had stirred memories of other days. The young man's efforts to remember the name of Mr. Blane had naturally made Blane himself think of the days when he had come in contact with the other.

His musings were suddenly interrupted by the other occupant of the bench. To the ears of The Texan Wasp there floated a halting, whispered query. The voice thrilled him.

"Pardon," murmured the lady in the shadow, "you—you—oh, it is the tune that you are whistling! It is—it is something that I knew in the long ago. It is—it is "When Betty Goes to Boston," isn't it?"

By a great effort Robert Henry Blane controlled himself. "It is," he said quietly.

There was a soft silence for more than a minute. The music of the Hungarian band at the Café de Paris ceased; a breeze, thuriferous and intoxicating, came up from the age-old Sea of Romance and stirred the palms. It was a wonder night.

The voice of honey came again to the ears of The Wasp. "I thought it was. I knew some one who—who whistled it in in Boston. It is strange that I should hear it in Monte Carlo. I was so—so startled that I spoke to you. Forgive me."

Robert Henry Blane called upon his selfpossession. The sang-froid that had made the inquisitiveness of No. 37 an easy thing to withstand bolted in the presence of the voice. He blessed the shadows thrown by the palms.

"Your voice too," murmured the girl on the bench, "it—it sounds so much like the voice of the young man who used to whistle the tune. So much like it that I thought— I thought—" She paused and Mr. Blane steadied himself and took up the challenge. "Yes?" he questioned.

"That I—I thought it was he!" whispered the girl. The words were rushed out softly. To The Wasp they seemed like a little prayer.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly. "I'm sorry."

"But you—but you might be the same person," persisted the sweet voice. "You might be! His name—his first name was Bob."

Robert Henry Blane had recovered his impassivity. His voice was cold and even as he answered. "My name is not Bob," he said. "If you are in trouble and I could help, won't you forget that it is not Bob and tell me if I can do anything?"

Again came the soft silence. A clock far up the hillside struck the half hour. The Texan Wasp told himself that the blackcoated flayers that work for the Goddess Chance had thirty minutes more in which to skin young Allerton.

The girl spoke quietly. "Thank you very much," she said. "It is very kind of you to say that. I—I am in trouble, but—but it is nothing that you could help me with. If you were—if you were the person I thought you were I would tell you, but now I cannot."

The Texan Wasp, eyes directly to the front, put a question. "Is it some friend that has got caught in the gambling cobweb?" he asked.

"Yes," came the soft answer.

"There is a young American playing heavily," said Mr. Blane. "Is he the person?"

"He has lost much," she answered, evading the direct question as if she thought an answer not necessary. "And—and it is not —not his money."

"Is it much?" asked The Wasp.

"Oh, yes! It is an awful lot."

"Could I ask how much? It is impertinent of me but—but I am an American although I am not—not the Bob you knew."

"It is ninety thousand francs," whispered the girl and her horror at the size of the losses thrust itself in a queer way into her words. "That is," she went on, "if he loses what he has with him to-night. He is my brother, you know."

The Texan Wasp considered the words "you know" for a moment, then he spoke. "I can't tell you how awfully sorry I am," he said softly. "It is dreadful for you."

There was a long interval of silence, then the girl rose. Monsieur Robert Henry Blane, bareheaded, sprang to his feet. The two faced each other, standing some six feet apart. The man, for the first time, looked directly at the girl. She was slight and supple and the queer light that filtered through the trees fell upon a face that was very beautiful.

"Good night," she said softly. "I thank you for your sympathy. Perhaps I was— I was wrong to speak to you, but I thought —I thought that you were the man I knew. And—and I wanted to tell him something."

Robert Henry Blane bowed. The girl

turned away, then as if prompted by a sudden afterthought she swung around and spoke hurriedly. "I wanted to tell him that I always believed in him," she said quickly. "You see—you see something happened. He —he was blamed for something some one else did and—and he went away. But I— I always believed in him."

She floated away across the Place and up the Avenue de la Costa leading to the Hermitage Hotel. A clock boomed twelve. The worship of the Goddess of Chance was over for the day.

The Texan Wasp did not sleep that night. He walked the floor of his room at the Hôtel de Paris and memory dragged out of the past a thousand tormenting scenes that ran like hot films before his eyes. He tried to thrust the pictures back into the cell where they had been safely imprisoned till the girl had spoken to him but they defied the old verbal brooms of "I-don't-care" and "Itcan't-be-helped" with which the man tried to sweep them into the abyss of forgetfulness.

Many of the scenes brought him untold agony. There was a memory picture of a night when he sat with a girl on the stoop of an old house in Beacon Street, Boston; another of a spring day on Lake .Kezar in Maine when eyes that held the sweetness of the world were turned sympathetically upon a broad-shouldered college boy who babbled of the things he would do when he went out into the world.

"You might be the governor of the State of Massachusetts or—or of Texas," the girl had murmured.

"I—I might," growled the egotistic young giant. It was dreadful stuff to remember.

Dawn found Robert Henry Blane sitting at the window watching the Sea of Romance turn into a mesh of silver under the rays of the rising sun. On the Avenue du Monte Carlo the Just-So Kid breezed along in a morning walk. The little pugilist lifted a hand in salute to the figure at the window but The Wasp did not see. Those phantoms of "The Man You Might Have Been" were grilling him without a moment's rest.

It was midday when The Texan Wasp left his room. Although he had spent the night without sleep he was alert and keeneyed. Possibly a bright observer would have detected upon his face a knowledge of what he intended to do and was determined to do.

There was there that "look of shaping plans" of which the Little Corsican spoke.

Mr. Blane met the Just-So Kid immediately in front of the hotel, a very happy Just-So Kid on account of the nearness of the fight.

"To-night's the clambake," cried the little pugilist. "I'm goin' to hop at him like a hobo hoppin' at a pie. Gee, do you get longin's for pie? I wake up o' nights an' think about the pies my mother used to make. To-night I'm goin' to think that geek is a section o' deep dish an' that I'm the same hungry kid as used to work in the mill."

The Texan Wasp smiled. "I hope you will win, Jimmy," he said.

"I'll win if the Casino doesn't fall down an' kill me," growled the Just-So Kid. "An' there doesn't seem to be any chance o' this joint fallin' down. There's too many fools handin' the croupier guys coin to keep it in repair. They tell me that they skinned that Boston plunger who put some coin on me. Well, roun' about nine-thirty to-night he'll collect three thousand francs on my win so he'll have that much to make a new start with."

A taxicab driver looked at The Texan Wasp as if he—the driver—considered The Wasp a person whom Fate had willed to be the perpetual prey of chauffeurs and Mr. Blane accepted the challenge.

"Riviera Palace," he ordered, then to the Just-so Kid he remarked: "I'll be at the ringside to-night, Jimmy. I know you'll win. Think of the U. S. and the pies your mother used to make. Château Thierry was won in the kitchens of New England."

Pierre Chabanier, the little chemist, was startled when he saw the face of The Texan Wasp. He tried to close the door on the big American but The Wasp was powerful. He thrust the door open and the chemist a little terrified of the gray eyes backed away from him.

"Pierre," said the visitor, "I am not going to ask you for anything; I'm going to take it. There's a taxicab waiting down the road. Get your things together and the chauffeur will drive you and your wife to Monaco where you can catch the fourthirty-three express for Paris. Here's a thousand francs. Now tell me all about the valuable things in your collection and then get. Don't talk about anything else! I won't listen to you."

The chemist protested violently. He would explain nothing and he would not leave. He chattered like a monkey; The Wasp looking at him with cold eyes.

Suddenly the big Texan spoke. "You've got to go," he said. "I am using your cottage for an appointment this evening."

"An appointment? Who with?"

"Our friend."

"What friend?"

The Texan Wasp smiled. "The gentleman that sent you on the long sea voyage. I sent him a message——"

"You are mad!" screamed the chemist. "You—you—you—" He turned and made a rush for the door but Monsieur Robert Henry Blane sprang upon him and held him tight.

"Not for a moment, Pierre," he said softly. "I want you to explain a few things to me, then you can beat it. It's better for you to go away. Now come in here and tell me all about this stuff in the back room. Stop protesting or I'll break your neck. You fell down on your contract and you're squealing like a trapped rabbit. Shut up! Explain this stuff and you can go. I'm supplying the funds, you idiot! And No. 37 knows you are here. Yes he does. I found him nosing along the road the other evening."

The lower jaw of the chemist sagged. His little yellow eyes were the thrones of fear. A queer moisture appeared upon his face and he would have fallen if The Wasp had not held him upright.

"Now," said Monsieur Blane, "talk fast. No technical stuff. Just tell me quickly how to do what you agreed to do and funked on. No harm will come to you. Your wife and you will be the other side of Marseilles when I start operations."

The terrified chemist stammered explanations, and The Wasp asked simple questions. "How long before it works? And the radius? I see. No danger of killing any one? Good. It's simple. I'll just need these two things, eh? Now get. The chauffeur has his instructions. I'll see you some day in Paris."

Madame Chabanier had hurriedly gathered together their small effects while the chemist and The Wasp were speaking and now with an old valise in her hand she rushed to the side of her husband. "Come," she cried, "let us go! He fears nothing, but he is mad! They are all mad, these Americans!"

The chemist emitted a queer whimpering cry, gripped his wife's arm, stumbled through the doorway and went at a jogtrot down the road to where the taxicab was waiting. A very terrified man was Pierre Chabanier. Fear brought the smell of New Caledonia to his nostrils.

Monsieur Blane alone in the cottage calmly gathered up the articles whose value and use he had discussed with the chemist, stowed them neatly about his person and slipped out the rear door. He crept along a stone wall that went down the hill toward the town, and turned into a little by-lane where he luckily found a carriage in which he drove to his hotel.

The Texan Wasp spent the afternoon in his room. He locked the doors and drew the heavy curtains together. Once in the long ago an inquisitive person had used a trench periscope from the window of a room directly beneath the apartment occupied by Monsieur Blane and he had never forgotten the lesson he learned on that occasion.

He examined the articles that he had brought from the cottage of the chemist, examined them unhurriedly but with a fierce intensity that spoke highly of their value. They were strange little devices, the result of long investigation on the part of a man who was easily the leader in his own particular line. There was a small nickel flask with shoulder straps that would permit of it being worn around the neck of the person needing it. From it came a thin tube with a small. flesh-colored mask that would fit tightly over the nose. It weighed altogether less than half a pound and The Wasp, fingering it, wondered over the ingenuity of the chemist who had made it.

There was also a small brass cylinder upon which was fitted a heavy screw cap. Very heavy was the cylinder if judged by its size. It was but six inches in length and about three inches in circumference, yet it weighed over three pounds. "It's nearly solid," murmured Monsieur Blane. "Whatever is inside it must be powerful indeed."

Five score times during the afternoon did the strong fingers of The Wasp grip the heavy screw cap of the brass cylinder. The thing fascinated him. It had all the strange mystery of the vessel which the fisherman in the "Arabian Nights" fished up in his net from the sea. Monsieur Blane walked around it as it lay upon the table. He stroked it gently. He spoke to it softly.

It came four o'clock. The Wasp with much thought prepared a telegram, then he consulted the time-table of the Paris, Lyon, et Méditerranée. A train for Marseilles and Paris would pass Monte Carlo at sixtwenty. He rang for a bell hop and dispatched the telegram. "Our cold-eyed friend should be delighted with my invitation to a talkfest," he soliloquized. "Another little walk up the hill to Pierre's cottage will take the conceit out of him."

He overhauled his valise; a wonderfully fitted up valise that had been specially made for him. Mr. Blane examined it with regret. He liked nice things. He went over every article it contained, tearing off names and the addresses of the makers. These he burned.

At five-thirty he descended to the office. He asked for his account and paid it in new hundred-franc bills.

"Will I get your luggage down, sir?" asked the assistant manager.

"Not yet," answered The Wasp. "I am going to have a final flirtation with the Goddess Chance. That is why I am paying you now."

The assistant manager grinned. He knew the results of many flirtations between his guests and the goddess of the Casino.

Monsieur Robert Henry Blane walked quietly across the Place du Casino. The big electric arcs illuminated the gardens and the front of the Casino so that all the fairy beauty of the Shrine of Chance was evident. The seats were filled with loungers; a constant stream passed through the big doors: picturesque guards strolled up and down. A warm wind from Africa played with the exotic trees that the kind Société Anonyme des Bains de Mer which controls the Casino had gathered from the ends of the earth to make the place delightful to those simple devotees who come to challenge the wheel.

The Texan Wasp entered the Casino and passed into the gaming room where feverish gamblers sat with hunched shoulders and battled gamely with the torture wheel.

The Texan Wasp walked from table to table. Now and then he glanced at his watch. He had a schedule that had to be followed carefully. A queer schedule. He tried to keep his mind fixed upon it but at times there slipped into the fabric of definite plans the thought of a girl with a voice of honeyed sweetness who had asked about a song. The words of the song itself slipped up out of the past and filled the cars of Monsieur Blane, making him momentarily deaf to the monotonous announcements of the spinner.

A queer little song:

For every boy is filled with joy, And every heart's a lost one; And Boylston Street is paradise When Betty goes to Boston.

"Why—why," murmured The Wasp, "I— I wrote that song. I had forgotten. That's curious."

At the second table The Wasp found the Maharaja of Behan-Gudsa. A very excited maharaja at the moment. He was winning heavily and a brace of attendants were busy gathering up the piles of chips which came to their master.

Monsieur Blane looked for Allerton but the young American was absent. The rakes of the croupiers evidently had dragged the last franc from his pockets. But there was no lack of antagonists for the ivory ball. They fought for places at the green-covered tables.

The Texan Wasp made the round of the tables and again consulted his watch. There were five minutes to spare between the hour and the moment that the schedule went into operation. He decided that he would sit down on one of the big leather lounges built close to the walls of the gaming room and on which plungers can total up their losses or winnings in quiet comfort. Very soft and beautiful are the lounges. They soothe the loser and thrill the winner.

A minute passed. Monsieur Robert Henry Blane fingered the little brass cylinder in his coat pocket.

Two minutes passed. Three.

Monsieur Blane, perfectly calm, slipped his right hand beneath his vest and felt the nickel flask. Again he looked at his watch. It was within a minute of the moment when the schedule went into effect. Curiously, although his mind was fixed upon the task in front of him, the ridiculous little tune would persist. He rose from his seat with the words "And Boylston Street is paradise" ringing softly in his ears.

The Texan Wasp took a step forward, turned with lightning suddenness and dropped back into his seat. The watchful gray eyes had made a discovery. The Maharaja of Behan-Gudsa had left the table and, accompanied by his two attendants was waddling toward an angle of the lounge quite close to where The Wasp was sitting!

The angle of the lounge hid Monsieur Blane when he dropped back on the cushions. He heard the contented grunt of the fat potentate as the maharaja dropped upon the broad cushions. He heard the sharp orders in Hindustani addressed to the two secretaries.

Around the angle there came to the ears of The Wasp a thrilling murmur. The maharaja was counting his winnings! The two attendants had cashed the chips and the colored ruler was enjoying the luxury of tallying his thousand-franc bills.

Monsieur Blane slid softly along the seat. The floor was thinned. Sensational play was in progress at the nearest table and the loungers moved upon the spot.

From around the corner of the lounge came the fat throaty whisper of the counting maharaja.

"Sixty thousand; sixty-five; seventy!"

Closer, still closer to the angle slid The Wasp. Thrilling were the words that came to his ears. He hurriedly calculated the distance between himself and the maharaja.

The colored potentate had made a great killing. "Eighty thousand," he grunted. "Eighty-five; ninety; a hundred thousand!"

Monsieur Blane had a desire to whistle. The maharaja had beat the ivory ball out of a hundred thousand francs!

The strong fingers of The Texan Wasp's right hand slipped into the pocket that carried the brass cylinder. They unscrewed the top and, at the same moment Monsieur Blane, leaning forward to avoid observation, slipped over his own nose the small rubber mask connected with the nickel flask strapped beneath his vest.

A cry went up from the nearest table. A bigger plunger than the maharaja had cornered the attention of the onlookers. The strollers converged upon the point. The Wasp blessed the unknown whose play was the magnet for the unoccupied.

"Hundred and four thousand," chanted the maharaja. "Hundred and seven, eight, nine." The Wasp thrust the open mouth of the brass cylinder toward the angle of the lounge. There was vicitement at the nearest table. The new plunger had cornered the attention of all. None noticed the actions of Monsieur Blane. Suddenly the voice of the maharaja weakened. It became a sleepy whisper. It died away into a murmur that was barely discernible. He had counted to one hundred and eleven thousand francs.

The Wasp screwed the top upon the brass cylinder and slipped the rubber mask from his nose. Cautiously he thrust his head around the angle of the lounge. The Maharaja of Behan-Gudsa and his two attendants were fast asleep!

The right hand of Monsieur Blane was thrust forward and an enormous wallet that was slipping softly from the fat knees of the sleeping ruler was transferred swiftly into the pocket of the Texan.

Monsieur Robert Henry Blane rose. The door of the gambling room was thirty feet away. He lounged carelessly toward it. He had thrown his schedule to the wind because the unexpected had occurred. Now he had to substitute a new plan.

Monsieur Blane glanced at the table where the new plunger was proving a lodestone for the watchers, then he turned his gaze ahead. Coming toward him from the entrance to the gaming room was No. 37.

The mind of the Texan was an alert piece of mechanism. It acted with a suddenness that surprised the cold-eyed man hunter. He, the man hunter, bargained on The Wasp making straight for the door; The Wasp had different views. He swung to the left; hurled himself through a small waiting room and sprang through the window, clutching the leaden spout as he disappeared!

No. 37 showed a speed that was remarkable. As The Wasp touched the earth of the terrace on the seaward side of the Casino he glanced upward. The feet of the man hunter were swinging in the air above his head.

The alarm had been sounded. Into the quiet of the evening there went up the yells of officials, the screams of women; somewhere in the distance a gong clanged loudly. The Shrine of the Goddess Chance had been violated!

The brain of The Texan Wasp concentrated on the situation. It was a cool, log ical brain and it reasoned coldly in spite of the commotion. "The bridge!" it cried. "The bridge! If the express is swinging through you have a chance!"

From somewhere close came the long, drawn-out whistle of a speeding express. It

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cut through the yells and screams as if it wished to call the attention of Monsieur Blane to its nearness. He hurled himself across the terrace. "Quick!" screamed the alert brain. "The bridge! The bridge! Faster! Faster!"

The terrace was in commotion. Figures, strangely cubistic in the light, converged upon the path of The Texan Wasp. A shot answered the scream of the locomotive and a leaden hornet buzzed by the head of the flying Texan. The gong clanged louder.

It was a matter of forty yards to the bridge—the little bridge over which the pigeon shooters go to shoot the birds that, unloosed in the face of the big sea, turn back on the guns that butcher them. The arc lights lit a pillow of smoke that surged up out of the cutting. Again came the scream of the locomotive. The Texan Wasp hurled himself toward the bridge.

Curiously in those last few yards his mind registered a little happening. A man had run toward him but had made no attempt to stop him. He had stood as if astonished by the flight of Monsieur Blane and his action produced a strange climax. As The Wasp hurled himself over the rail of the bridge he looked back. The man who had run toward him and stopped had got himself directly in the path of the nearest pursuer. They collided as the fugitive dropped upon the rolling, lurching wagon of the thundering express!

The wagon tore itself from beneath Monsieur Blane as he fell upon it. Like a bobcat on a galloping deer he clawed for something to grip. He was swept backward nearly the full length of the car, hurled sidewise till his legs protruded over the edge, then just when hope seemed lost his strong hands gripped the cap of a lamp and limpetlike he drove off into the night in the direction of Monaco.

On the afternoon following the escape of The Texan Wasp, Miss Betty Allerton, sitting alone in her room at the Hotel Hermitage, received a visitor. A rather strange visitor. He was a supple young man of about eighteen and he appeared before her with a much bandaged head. He had refused to state his business to the hotel attendants and when he walked into the sitting room of the girl she looked at him in amazement. "I'm afraid I don't know you," murmured the girl. "What is it that you wish to see me about?"

The young man waved a threatening cap at the sleek black-coated attendant who had shown him in. "Beat it, bo," he said quietly. "The tale isn't for you."

The servant disappeared and the young man spoke. "I guess you don't know me," he began. "Your brother might, but you don't. I'm an American scrapper called the Just-So Kid an' some one—"

Miss Betty Allerton gave a little gasp of astonishment. The Just-So Kid paused and looked at her inquiringly.

"I bet your brother went an' told you that I throwed him down last night," he continued after a slight pause. "I didn't throw him down but I don't blame him for thinkin' I did. You see it was like this. Some one —some one I know an' who's been a good friend to me was in a hurry to catch a train an' some one else didn't want him to catch it. Sabe? Well, quite accidentally I stood in the track of the chap that didn't want my friend to catch the train. Unnerstan'?

"That feller was runnin' faster than a bootleggin' airplane. He hit me like a heavyweight rhinocerosas an' when I come to my full senses the people was comin' away from that fight because I wasn't there. Guess you've read about it in the papers? 'Bout the hurry o' my friend, I mean? They wired to the next station to tell him somethin' but he had stepped off in between. Anyhow that's why I wasn't at the fight. After I came out o' the trance the geek who ran into me had the cold nerve to ask me if I stepped in front o' him on purpose. What d've think of that for iced front?"

Miss Betty Allerton did not answer. Her wonderful eyes were fixed upon the prize fighter.

"It wasn't to tell you all that stuff that I came here," went on the Just-So Kid. "This friend o' mine sent me to-day a package an' told me to give it to you. He said I was to give it to you with my own hands 'cause he thinks the same as me that a lot o' these hotel geeks have treacle flips. Well, here it is."

He stepped forward and handed the girl a large square envelope. She took it with trembling fingers and with the eyes of the Just-So Kid upon her she tore it open. Her big eyes were ashine with emotion as she shook the envelope. From it there fell a shower of thousand-franc bills, the large, beautifully printed bills of the Banque de France! They fell into her lap, fivescore of them, and she forgot the little pugilist as she sat staring at them. She was murmuring softly—the youth thought it was a prayer.

The Just-So Kid backed quietly toward the door. He opened it softly, stepped into the passage, closed the door with the same care and tiptoed gently away.

Halfway to the stairs he had an encounter. A white-faced young man going in the opposite direction stopped with a little snarl and with uplifted finger began to stammer violenty regarding cowardice and the general fate of traitors.

The Just-So Kid thrust out a strong right hand and gripped the long white finger raised in admonition. He bent it backward till its owner howled with pain.

"Lissen a me, bo," hissed the pugilist. "I didn't throw you down but I'm not goin' to tell you what stopped me. But I'll tell you this! If I catch you goin' into that Casino to tire the arms o' these croupier geeks I'm goin' to give you what I didn' hand out to the champeen o' the Alpes-Maritimes. Do you get me? I've got my order from a prince who passed me some coin when I was thinkin' o' becomin' a boxin' instructor to the angels, so watch your step, sonny. Watch your step!"

The Just-So Kid thrust Mr. Allerton from him and walked proudly down the stairs. He was covered with bruises and he had lost the opportunity to win a title but he was very happy.

Another Texan Wasp story in the next issue.



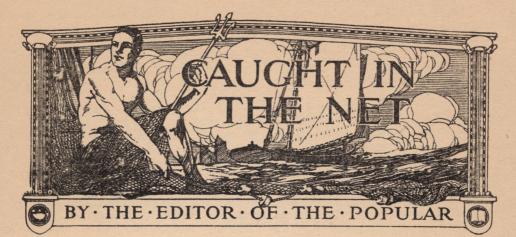
## SAILING ON SKATES

S KATE sailing, an old sport that at one time gained a measure of popularity in the northern part of the United States, is coming into favor again. It's a worth-while sport too, an exciting pastime that has all the thrills of ice boating but which doesn't demand the upkeep of an expensive craft that in many districts can be used only a few times during the winter. All the skate sailer needs is a pair of skates and the sail. He—or she, for many women are interested in the sport—is his own "boat." Sails are of three types; the square sail, used by some of the experts, which is fast but sometimes hard to manage; the triangular sail, which is much like the sails used on canoes; and the Claussen sail, a balanced type designed by Mr. W. van B. Claussen, the secretary of the recently formed Skate Sailing Association of America. For ease in handling and speed under usual conditions the Claussen sail is considered the best. The "sailer" grips the nine-foot mast, gets the sail between himself and the wind, braces the nine-foot horizontal spar against his shoulder—and off he goes. To go about the sail is passed over the sailer's head.

Although the sport still is in an experimental stage the Skate Sailing Association conducted championship races last winter in connection with ice sports held on the Shrewsbury River in New Jersey, where ice yachting has for years been a favorite winter sport. So far the only limitation placed on sails for racing is that they shall not exceed one square foot of sail surface for each two and one half pounds of the sailer. This winter a series of races will be held to decide the championship and it is expected that before spring the new-old sport will be firmly established among the popular winter recreations.

Women as well as men are eligible for membership in the Skate Sailing Association, the requirements being that the applicant be an amateur sportsman or sportswoman not less than eighteen years old. If you are interested in this exciting game and want to form a club in your town you can obtain full information about the parent association by writing to Mr. Claussen at 47 West Thirty-fourth Street, New York City. Many of the charter members of the association are prominent canoeists and skate sailing is recommended highly to canoe clubs **a**s a means of keeping their members interested and enthusiastic during the winter months.

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# WHEN WILL THE PUBLIC FLY?

THAT is the anxious question that every airman has asked himself and been asked a thousand times. And the airman knows that the answer cannot be given in terms of time; it must be couched in terms of achievement. The public will fly when—and not before—airplanes and all their accessories have been perfected and organized to such an extent that flying schedules can be established, just as railway and steamboat schedules are established, and adhered to closely and with reasonable security.

The real difficulty in commercial aërial transport to-day lies not in the imperfections of current types of aircraft so much as in the total absence of any accessory aids to security. The railway train is protected by an intricate system of block signals and sidings. The steam vessel is informed constantly by wireless of impending weather conditions and is guided when nearing port by lighthouses and buoys and foghorns.

The airplane has none of these things as yet. It must have them before public air travel can be made universal. People do not realize that the ship of the air is always flying off a lee shore. It can never reach the "open ether" as the ship of the ocean can reach the safety of the "open sea." Through the entire length of its course the airplane requires aids to navigation. It needs lighthouses—high-power searchlights. It needs constant weather reports. It needs frequent ports of refuge say every fifty miles along its route—auxiliary landing fields where it can repair in case of engine trouble or approaching storms. It needs foghorns—wireless direction finders, so that it can steer an undeviating course through clouds and mist to a port of safety.

The day is coming when all these things and probably others that we have never dreamed of will be provided to make travel in the air as safe or safer than transport on the ground. But it seems a long way off. To lay out a network of air routes across the continent where at no instant, in clear weather, night or day, will the air pilot be out of sight of guiding beacons or out of gliding distance of auxiliary landing fields; where as the craft roars ahead at over a hundred miles an hour through a blanket of mist a reassuring voice from the air will whisper constantly in the pilot's ear—or a little steel needle point—"This way, this way, this way;" to achieve such an organized system is not the accomplishment of a year. It means a vast expenditure of time and an even vaster expenditure of money. It is not an undertaking that individuals or corporations can be expected to assume. It is a function of government, just as the maintenance of lighthouses and coast-guard stations and the charting of channels and the setting of buoys is a function of government.

Some day it will be done. Some day from coast to coast flashing white beacons will dot the landscape by day and gleaming pillars of light stand on guard across the overland air routes by night, while every fifty or a hundred miles the landing flags and lights of air ports will show. When that will be it is hard to guess. Probably, airmen agree, within the next half century. But whenever it is to be, the public will not take to the air until it is accomplished. And then they will fly with the same assurance that to-day they board a train or walk up the gangplank of a ship. Flying will be safe—and the public will fly.

# WHERE THE TRADE ROUTES MEET

"HE Panama Canal has become one of the most important of the crossroads where meet the carriers of the sea-borne commerce of the world. Here converge eleven of the great trade routes of the Seven Seas and through the big ditch pass the merchant ships of many nations. After listening to the calamity howlers' views as to the prospects of our merchant marine it is cheering to learn that of the 2,736 ships that passed through the canal last year—that is, the fiscal year ended June 30th last-two of every five flew the Stars and Stripes, and that 45 per cent of the canal's total cargo tonnage was carried in American ships. One of every three ships that passed through the canal was British and 30 per cent of the cargo tonnage was carried in British bottoms. Japanese ships carried 10 per cent of the total cargo tonnage and that the merchants of Nippon realize the canal's advantages is proved by the fact that Japanese tonnage routed through the canal showed a 40-per-cent increase over the preceding year. Since the canal was opened to the world's commerce in 1914 almost sixteen thousand ships-nearly six thousand of them American -have passed through it carrying more than sixty-one million tons of cargo and paying fifty-six million dollars in tolls.

From the standpoint of volume of traffic for the last fiscal year the most important of the trade routes passing through the canal was that between Atlantic and Pacific coast ports of the United States. Of the almost eleven million tons of cargo that went through the canal, two and one-half million tons was on its way from one coast to the other of our country, and traffic over this route was almost twice that of the preceding year. Next in importance is the traffic between the east coast of the United States and the Far East—a one-sided traffic from the Atlantic and the Pacific because most of the ships make a round-the-world voyage and return to the United States by way of the Suez Canal. On this route 237 ships carried almost a million and a quarter tons of cargo to the Orient. Other of the more important trade routes are those between the west coast of the United States and Europe; between the west coast of South America and Europe; between the east coast of the United States and the west coast of South America; and between Australia and Europe.

The largest ship to pass through the canal during the year was the battleship Nevada, 608 feet long; and the smallest the yawl-rigged yacht Hippocampus, 28 feet long, sailed by three young Americans from New York by way of Jamaica "for the fun of the thing." The largest cargo carriers to use the canal were the American steamships Marore and Bethore, each 550 feet long. Among the unusual cargoes were 633 tons of strawberries carried in cold storage aboard the Deerfield from Seattle to New York and Philadelphia; 7,000 tons of pineapples aboard the Pacific from Honolulu to eastern United States ports, and three and one-half million board feet of oak and ash timber carried by a Japanese steamer from Otaru, Japan, for Dunkirk and Antwerp.

# FIGHTING THE NARCOTIC EVIL

E learn with horror that there are between one and two million drug addicts in this country, and observers warn us that the menacing habit is on the increase, its newest phase being the fascination it exercises upon the susceptible natures of young people. "Snow parties," at which the participants enjoy cocaine sniffing, are said to be the vogue among certain sets of many towns and cities, while those who use the needle and take "shots" are found in high and low places equally. Whether the alarm over the spread of habit-forming drugs is hysteric or not can be determined, possibly, by the authenticated statement that the United States imports about ten times more crude opium than the countries of Germany, France and Italy combined, those three nations having approximately 133,000,000 inhabitants against our 105,000,000. From such a fact it may be gathered that we are the greatest users of opium and its derivations.

Why is this so?

Seven years ago the Harrison Act was passed by Congress and it aimed to control traffic in drugs, provide for the medical treatment of addicts and prevent the possibility of new victims to the vicious habit. But the Harrison Act failed to accomplish its purpose. Instead, the drug addicts have increased in droves and the medical fraternity put the blame on the government which advised and permitted lay control of a matter that called for the highest professional wisdom and skill. The stupid and unscientific regulation of such drugs as morphine and cocaine disgusted reputable physicians and apothecaries, and addicts were forced into the arms of illicit dealers in these deadly products.

To remedy these conditions Congress has enacted another law, embodied in the Jones-Miller bill, which will hereafter govern the manufacture, importation and exportation of habit-forming drugs, and it is hoped that by attacking the evil at its source, a real antidote will have been provided. By the enactment of this bill, Representative Miller, one of its sponsors, says that the two principal producing nations of manufactured opium and cocaine and coca-leaf products, the United States and England, will have united in stamping out the illicit use of narcotic drugs the world over. The White Cross has also entered upon the crusade to save the American people from one of the chief dangers threatening their welfare.

# ASTRONOMICAL PATHOLOGY

F you are a sufferer from gout, dyspepsia, rheumatism, high blood pressure, low blood pressure, neurasthenia, or any other of the hundred and odd chronic ills to which hapless mankind is inexplicably subject, consult—an astronomer!

That, at any rate, seems to be the suggestion of a new theory advanced by a brace of eminent French pathologists, Messieurs the Doctors Sardou, of Nice, and Faure, of Lamalou.

At a recent session of the French Academy of Medicine these distinguished scientific gentlemen submitted a thesis based upon their observation of a considerable number of chronic cases in connection with the presence of spots on the sun. They cited instances of numerous patients afflicted with maladies of a chronic nature which, at ordinary times, were manifest in comparatively mild forms only. No sooner, however, than astronomers announced the appearance of spots on the sun, they stated, than these same patients suddenly passed from the chronic to the violently acute stage of disease, often suffering intensely. The acute symptoms usually persisted, the French Academy was told, throughout the duration of the sun-spot period. With the disappearance of the sun spots the acute symptoms vanished and the patients under observation returned to the mild chronic state.

Commenting on the researches of Doctors Sardou and Faure, which were carried out with the personal collaboration of Monsieur Vallot, director of the Mont Blanc Observatory, another noted medical man, Doctor Fiessinger, writes in the French Journal des Praticiens—Practitioners' Journal:

These observations are of extreme interest. They light the road to an entirely new field of medical research—the possible influence of astral variations on the physical reactions which govern the resisting powers of our bodies.

Are we, then, approaching the day when every self-respecting physician will be obliged to supplement his laboratory and his microscope with an observatory and a telescope?

And will the already top-heavy curriculum of the first-rate medical college be forced to raise its center of gravity another dangerous notch or so in order to include a post-graduate course in medico-astronomy? The time seems to be approaching when the aspirant to a medical diploma will be tottering on the verge of senile decrepitude before he is able to acquire enough learning to get a practitioner's license and hang out his shingle. Already the average physician is expected to equip himself with two years of academic college education, four years of medical-school training, another two or three years of experience as a hospital intern, and perhaps yet another three or four years as assistant to some successful leader of the profession, before he is trusted to treat a case of whooping cough on his own undivided responsibility. It takes a hero or a rich man's son, nowadays, to achieve an M. D. What will it take when they add astronomy to the burden of the overloaded medical student?

# A COMMERCIAL LEAGUE OF NATIONS

THETHER the United States should or should not become a member of the League of Nations is a question on which the opinions of our citizens are widely divergent and strongly held. The advantages of close and friendly coöperation with the other nations of the world are apparent to almost every one, but to many the disadvantage of possible entanglements in political affairs with which we have no direct concern is more than enough to decide against our joining the present league. But there is a nonpolitical and nonofficial league of nations which our business men already have entered-the International Chamber of Commerce, which will hold its second general meeting in Rome this March. This federation of industrial, financial and commercial interests represented by national organizations similar to the Chamber of Commerce of the United States was formed in Paris in 1920 and in three years has grown world-wide in scope. Its objects are to furnish a medium through which the business men of the world may express their joint judgment and desires, to gather data and compile statistics that may be accepted without hesitation by the traders of all nations, to provide an international body capable of representing the business interests of all nations in negotiations with governments, and in general to promote a better understanding among the business men of the world. The headquarters of the organization is in Paris, each of the member countries being represented by an administrative commissioner resident there.

Among the activities now engaging the attention of the official staff of the chamber are the preparation of a code for international commercial arbitration that is expected to reduce costly and unsatisfactory litigation between business men of different countries; the preparation of a basis for a uniform ocean bill of lading; the publication of a list of preferred definitions of trade terms for use in international transactions; and the international protection of trade-marks and copyrights.

It is expected that between two and three hundred American business leaders will attend the Rome meeting of the chamber, at which will be discussed many international trade problems that are of vital importance to the men who conduct our nation's business—and indirectly to all the rest of us.



# **POPULAR TOPICS**

OUR tallest men—according to the surgeon general of the army, who bases his opinion on records of the examinations of three and three quarter million young Americans examined for military service during the war—come from the mountain area of North Carolina. Their average height was 68.67 inches. By States the tallest men come from Texas, where the average was 68.40 inches, and the shortest from Rhode Island, where the average was 66.40 inches. For the entire United States the average height was 67.49 inches. The heaviest men came from the Dakotas, where the averages were 146.96 pounds for South Dakota and 146.95 for North Dakota. The average weight of men from Rhode Island was the lowest, 136.44 pounds. For the entire United States the average was 141.54 pounds. The State with the lowest percentage of defective men was Kansas, and the State with the highest, Rhode Island. A higher percentage of defective men came from the cities than from the country.

#### 光光圖光光

A<sup>T</sup> last—a heaven on earth for motorists! It won't be a very large heaven—just a mile and a half of the Lincoln Highway near Chicago—but it will serve as a model for future highway construction. This bit of road will be a hundred feet wide and will be paved with cement ten inches thick. There will be no curves of less than one-thousand-foot radius. The speed limit will be liberal—thirty-five miles an hour. The road will be well lighted at night, there will be no grade crossings, and all wires crossing the highway will be carried underground. No advertising signs will spoil the scenery and camp sites will invite the tourist to linger in this gasoline burners' paradise.

#### **兴兴:@:长**:长

WHEN you come back from your next round of the golf links and tell about your low score be sure that there isn't a sphygmomanometer concealed in your vicinity. This queer-looking instrument with the terrible name is said to record changes of blood pressure so that even a slight excursion from the path of truth can be discovered. Veteran fishermen are said to be the only subjects beyond the range of this invention.

#### 光光圖光光

A NOTHER uncanny instrument is the iriscope, the invention of Doctor Rudolf Schnabel of Munich. By examining your eyes with it the doc can discover pleasant and private little details—such as how much alcohol you are in the habit of consuming.

#### 光光圖光光

THERE are a million men without homes in the United States. Forty thousand of them are in New York City. Many of them are seasonal workers, some potential criminals, many beggars, and too many just men who haven't been able to find their right place in life. It is said that in our larger cities almost any man can live indefinitely by begging, and the problem of helping permanently these unfortunates is a serious and difficult one.

#### **兴兴**圆长长

THE Marine Corps has added a new achievement to its already long record. Down in Quantico, Virginia, they have built a stadium that will seat 33,000 people. The marines did the work themselves and the material they used was reclaimed government stuff. Little things like the lack of an appropriation from Congress don't bother the devil dogs when they want a place to play football.

### **法洗圆**浆洗

ULRIC VANCE, a boy marksman of Hillsboro, Ohio, recently hung up a shooting record that is likely to stay put for some time. Shooting with a 22-caliber rifle he made 1,022 bull's-eyes in nine hours. He was out to break the record of William Locke of Dinuba, California, a member of the Winchester Junior Rifle Corps, who made 644 bull's-eyes in four and one half hours.

#### 光光圖光光

THE sport of rifle shooting continues to increase in popularity. General Phillips, the secretary of the National Rifle Association, says that in addition to the large number of clubs affiliated with the association, ten thousand shooting fans have enrolled as individual members.

#### **洗洗圖**紙紙

A DMIRERS of Mr. Pickwick and his friends will be interested to know that the old Leather Bottle Inn, in Cobhan, England, to which Mr. Tracy Tupman retired after he had been "deserted by a lovely and fascinating creature," is for sale. Let's hope that some lover of Dickens will buy it!



# What For?

By Ralph Stock

Author of "The Way of the White Man," "South of the Line," Etc.

What puzzled Mr, Ponsonby was the reason for the existence of people like Troar.

ROAR felt his arm seized as in a trap and himself jerked into the deeper shadows of Wattle Street.

He stifled the cry that rose to his lips and began to think as rapidly and coherently as the pain in his arm allowed. Police? The idea of police in Wattle Street, Wooloomooloo, died at birth. Escape? To move was anguish. Resistance? Futile! His thoughts completed the small circle of possibilities and finding no outlet reverted to the ever-growing pain in his arm.

The hand that held him thus, by sheer pressure, must belong to some one of prodigious strength. His glance traveled upward, encountering in turn a pair of large and diladipated shoes, blue trousers seemingly overfull of leg, a swelling expanse of gray jersey and an unkempt, bullet-shaped head set on a neck like a stallion's.

"Holdup, eh?" Troar inquired evenly.

"You've said it," admitted his captor. "Price of a doss; that's all I want."

There was no violence in the tone, no threat. Here was a man making a perfectly legitimate statement of his requirements. "Why?" said Troar. "Why what?"

"Why is that all you want? Why not take all I've got while you're about it?"

There was a pause before the other answered.

"I'm not like that," he said; "but I don't

stand for no monkey tricks neither. What about it?"

The steel fingers bit deeper into Troar's arm.

"That's for you to say," he jerked out between clenched teeth. "This is a holdup, isn't it? Well, get on with it, because if vou-don't let go-of-my arm-"

"Cripes!" muttered the man and caught Troar as he fell.

"That's easy!" he exclaimed, kneeling over the frail form slumped against the wall. "Who'd 'a' thought, that easy?"

Troar opened his eyes on the giant standing over him.

"I don't think you can have any idea of the grip you've got on you," he said faintly; "and—and there's something up with my heart," he added apologetically.

The other said nothing at the moment but stood looming immense in the shadows of Wattle Street. Troar stirred and grimaced with pain.

"Can't be broke," said the giant judicially.

"Lor', no," agreed Troar. "There's something on me somewhere. Do you mean to say you haven't gone through me?"

"I meant yer arm," corrected the other. "Can't break 'em that way."

Troar's body commenced to shake. The giant peered closer in alarm and saw that the convulsions were caused by mirth. He drew back and stood with his stocky legs slightly apart.

"Well, if you ain't a corker!" he breathed. "Let me return the compliment," laughed Troar. "This must be the quaintest holdup on record. I can't move my arm yet and the money's in my right pocket. You'll have to fish for it."

And that is what the giant did, carefully selecting the requisite amount from the handful that he brought to light. After which he helped Troar to his feet with the gentleness of a woman and together the diverse pair passed through the dingy portals of Duggan's Doss House.

Protruding from his ticket office window like an obese gargoyle Mr. Duggan was directing a sluggish stream of humanity along the passage and up the stairs, at the head of which it dispersed among a battered honeycomb of cubicles.

It was July and the park and a newspaper are not quite proof against Sydney's midwinter. During this month and perhaps the ones on either hand the otherwise fortunate Antipodean "down-and-out" is forced to seek the shelter of roofs such as Mr. Duggan's, which flourish like fungus in Wooloomooloo -yes, there is such a place, and that is how it is spelled. Here he pays his pence and takes his choice. There are beds of every epoch and in every stage of decay, each complete with straw mattress and blanket as near clean as the previous occupant has seen fit to leave them. There is a looking-glass should he wish to consult it, which is unlikely, and there are boards, broken and dangling from their nails, which in a distant and more resplendent past afforded a certain amount of privacy.

With experienced eye the giant chose the least dilapidated cubicle in the place. It mattered not that an Italian oyster opener was already in possession and removing his boots. "Vamose, you!" uttered in a nasal drawl and entirely without animus caused him to smile ingratiatingly and retire, boot in hand.

"That'll do you," he advised, indicating the better bed of the two and Troar took it without question. He was not in a condition to question anything. After the antics his heart had taken to performing of late he was in the habit of lying supine until that eccentric organ readjusted itself.

So he lay watching his companion. Troar found him more entertaining than any one he had met for a long time. The fellow's undressing was a revelation. Under his shabby exterior lay a physique to ponder on and he was evidently in the habit of pondering on it. Slowly he closed his right fist, bent the arm to display biceps and forearm to advantage, and executed a devastating uppercut for Troar's benefit.

<sup>2</sup>"That's what does it," he announced amiably.

"I should think it would," encouraged Troar.

"And that's what *did* it," added the other enigmatically, casting his splendid length upon the bed.

"It doesn't surprise me," said Troar.

"Oh, it don't?" The giant reared himself on an elbow with an air of affront. "Takes a good bit to surprise you, don't it?"

"Perhaps it does," admitted Troar.

"So you wouldn't lose sleep over it if I was to tell you I'm—if I was to tell you who I am?"

"I shan't sleep in any case—but no, I don't think I should."

"Maybe you've guessed already?"

"I haven't tried."

A look of childlike disappointment ruffled the giant's heavy features.

"And you don't care one way or another?" he suggested.

"I can't say I do."

"There now," mused the other. "That's how much good publicity is. Can't make people take notice. Posters, press; what are they? Whisk by one while you're thinking about the missus and kids, and give the other the 'go by' for the race results; I dunno." He swung onto the edge of the bed and sat with his massive shoulders hunched dejectedly. "Then when you don't want it —there'll be columns about me to-morrow morning, columns!"

Troar refrained from comment, which in itself seemed to impress his companion.

"You're a queer one," he observed. "Don't know as I've met your sort before. Is there anything you do happen to care about?"

Troar contemplated the grimy ceiling with half-closed eyes for a space.

"Not that I can think of at the moment," he said. Which simple confession extracted a shout of laughter from the giant.

"You're doing me good, anyway," he said. "My name's Ponsonby; what's yours?"

"Smith," said Troar.

"Good enough to be goin' on with, ain't they?" grinned Mr. Ponsonby. "And now what about your boots and the rest of it?"

Troar suffered himself to be "put to bed" in expert fashion. Mr. Ponsonby had not been a "second" half his life for nothing, he pointed out.

"But what d'you call those?" he demanded regarding Troar's nether limbs with mingled pity and contempt.

"Poor things, but mine own," murmured Troar. "Better cover 'em up if you don't like them."

Instead Mr. Ponsonby drew back a pace and subjected his patient's anatomy to the critical survey of an expert.

"It beats me," he muttered reflectively.

"Well, that's something, isn't it?" suggested Troar.

"It beats me what a feller like you is *for*," ended Mr. Ponsonby on a note of frank perplexity.

"So it does me," said Troar; "but I shouldn't let it worry you. Perhaps I was created for no other purpose than to provide you with a night's lodging."

"That's so," agreed the other on reflection. "You never know, do you?" He retired to his less-favored couch and lay pondering a while. "You never know in this funny old world. Just a tap and they're after you—columns about it to-morrow, columns!" He turned on his side and the words trailed off into heavy breathing. Mr. Ponsonby slept.

Troar did not. Consequently he both saw and heard a man enter the cubicle about an hour later. He was a large man and there was little diffidence about his movements as he approached Troar's bed and ripped the blankets from it in one forceful jerk.

"Cold," he was good enough to explain.

"It is," agreed Troar pleasantly.

"And that's all you've got to say?"

"That's all," beamed Troar.

"Well, you know best."

"Not much good saying things if you can't back them up, is it?"

The nocturnal visitor peered closer through the gloom. "Sick?" he barked.

"Fair to medium, thanks. But if you want to carry on any further conversation I should advise you to speak lower or you'll wake my friend yonder."

"Oh." The other turned in the direction indicated. "And if this friend of yours is woke up, what does he do?" he inquired significantly.

A demonstration was immediately forthcoming, for at that moment Mr. Ponsonby opened his eyes. They were rather small but wonderfully quick eyes and in the murky glow of a turned-down gas jet they glinted unpleasantly. Their owner uttered no word, made no movement, yet such was the effect of his homely face framed in a coarse gray blanket that the intruder appeared stricken with apoplexy.

"'Kinks!'" he gasped.

"That's what," drawled Mr. Ponsonby; "so now you know what to do."

Of this there could be no doubt. Without a moment's hesitation the visitor dropped Troar's blankets as though they had been red-hot coals and tiptoed gingerly from the room, his ungainly shadow lurching before him.

Mr. Ponsonby grinned.

"That's what I'm for," he pointed out with an air of quiet self-satisfaction, "and don't you forget it, kid."

Troar was not likely to. It was a quaint, rather cruel coincidence that on this night of all others his own futility should be so vividly demonstrated. Place him among real live men and he was helpless. He found himself envying such a perfect animal as Mr. Ponsonby with all the bitterness of a frail intellectual. Intellect! What was it but a flail with which a man thrashes himself to death? How much did it make for happiness compared with health, strength, and a simple mind? We were deforming ourselves while——

He was awakened by Mr. Ponsonby tugging at his sleeve. It was still dark, save for the sickly gas jet, but time to be up and doing by the burden of his friend's remarks.

"Four o'clock; are you coming?"

"I suppose so," said Troar dazedly. "Why?"

"You know best as to that," snapped Mr. Ponsonby. "But if you've got to make yourself as scarce as I have and want to do it with me you'll have to get a move on."

Troar dressed under the vague impulse that it was undesirable to be separated from Mr. Ponsonby and for the same indefinite reason he followed his guardian down the stairs and into the street.

Outside the door and leaning negligently against the wall was a girl muffled in a shawl. "Lil!" exclaimed Mr. Ponsonby.

"Better come in here," she advised and kicked open a swinging door labeled "Restaurant," which gave access to a wilderness of sawdust and tea urns. "Who's this?" she demanded, scrutinizing Troar across a yard of soiled tablecloth with a pair of soft yet searching brown eves.

"Mate," said Mr. Ponsonby. "He's all right."

The brown eyes were temporarily appeased.

"I thought you'd make for Duggan's," said the girl in rapid undertones. "Whatever made you do it, Kinks?"

"Do it?" Mr. Ponsonby flung out his enormous hands in a gesture of protest. "What was I there for? It's the game, ain't it? It's what they pay for. Well, I earned my money fair and square. Is it my fault if the other feller dies of a clean knock-out?"

"It's not that," the girl broke in. "What made you clear out?"

"Clear out?" echoed Mr. Ponsonby, still on a note of energetic protest. "I didn't clear out. They cleared me out like so much dirt the minute the news come through. Said it was the best till things blew over. Set me adrift without a cent, they did. If it hadn't been for his nibs here-"

The girl could not wait for explanations. Her hand went out across the table and rested on Mr. Ponsonby's arm.

"Anyway, you did it, Kinks," she said. "And now you'll have to keep right on. Two came last night, one plain, one colored."\*

"To you?"

"Of course. Where d'you suppose they'd come?"

"Ain't it wonderful?" mused Mr. Ponsonby. He was slumped back in his chair, gazing wistfully across the table. "And we was to have been married after this fight, Lil."

"What's the good of talking?" demanded the girl, cutting into her lover's reverie like cold steel. "You've got to clear. You can send for me after if—if you like. Listen, I brought a few things. They're upstairs with Mother Duggan. Go and get them."

Mr. Ponsonby leaned across the table, his homely features transformed with tenderness into something almost beautiful.

"Lil," he said.

"Go get them," repeated the girl.

\*Meaning officers of the law, one in plain clothes, the other in uniform.

Mr. Ponsonby obeyed and Troar found himself confronted by a pair of soft brown eves that seemed to be searching for his soul. It was embarrassing. He shifted his position uneasily. But the girl relieved him of any necessity to make conversation.

"You'll look after him, won't you?" she said.

"I?" Troar was startled into self-consciousness. "Isn't it more a case of his looking after me?"

The girl shook her head slowly.

"He's nothing but a kid," she said, mother love welling in her eyes; "just a kid. It isn't all here, you know," she added indicating the muscles of her firm, rounded arm. "Isn't it?" Troar smiled whimsically.

"I've come to think the best part of a man

is, anyhow. Do you know what he said?" The girl shook her head.

"He said it beat him what I was for."

"It would," she said; "but it doesn't me." Troar leaned forward despite himself.

"If only you could tell me---" he began.

"I can," said the girl. "You're meant to look after my boy; to bring him back to me." Her head was bowed over the table. "You've got to bring him back," she added so low as to be hardly audible.

Something took hold of Troar, robbing him of his sense of the ridiculous. At that moment there seemed nothing ludicrous in a wisp of human inefficacy, such as he deemed himself, being asked to mount guard over a six-foot-two pugilist. Some one depended on Troar, believed in him; that was the reason.

"I'll do my best," he promised and their hands met across the table in a clasp of mutual understanding.

There was the leave-taking of Mr. Ponsonby, a short practical affair of a few lowspoken words and a caress, and the two men were in the street, walking unhurriedly and by devious ways toward the outskirts of the city.

"Not the country," advised Troar. "They'd get us easier there."

"Reckon they would," agreed Mr. Ponsonby, "but where else is there to go?"

"One of the beaches. We can lie doggo for a bit and think."

So toward noon they lay in the shadow of some scrub oaks on the cliff top overlooking Emerald Bay.

Below them a pygmy fleet of yachts rode

at their moorings and Troar lay staring down at them lost in reverie. Mr. Ponsonby was engaged in examining a sack that held Lil's "few things" and expatiating on the catholic nature of its contents.

"Ain't women wonderful?" he remarked, laying reverently on the grass a "hussif" complete with needles, thread and buttons, a cold pie and a well-known brand of alleged cough cure.

Troar nodded.

"Have you ever been to sea?" he inquired irrelevantly.

Mr. Ponsonby confessed to a year before the mast aboard a coasting schooner in his youth, but what really interested him at the moment was the grain sack.

"Good enough," said Troar, "because I've been thinking."

"Oh, you have." His partner brought to light a tin of bully beef and some peppermints. "Always did like peppermints," he added reflectively.

"And it seems to me," continued Troar, "that the only thing left for us to do is to take one of those yachts and set sail."

Mr. Ponsonby paused in the mastication of peppermints and regarded Troar with sudden interest.

"Now that's what I call an idee," he admitted.

Under cover of darkness a weird object slid from the rocks of Emerald Bay and progressed slowly but surely toward an auxiliary cutter of some twenty tons register looming dimly white in its path. It was composed of Mr. Ponsonby with a bulgent grain sack on his head and Troar clinging limpetlike to his shoulders.

A little while and the two men stood shivering with cold in the snug saloon of the *Minx*.

"Rub down and get into something or you'll die," asserted Mr. Ponsonby, and knowing this to be nothing less than the truth Troar obeyed. Meanwhile, and still in a state of Nature save for his trousers, Mr. Ponsonby proceeded to get under way. He had driven cars, he informed the universe, and if he couldn't extract an answer from the junk that constituted the average marine motor he would want to know why. He persisted in his inquiries—an immense white figure lurching and straining at the flywheel —until an answer was forthcoming, at first hesitant, then more coherent as the engine picked up and settled into the rhythmic cadence dear to the heart of the engineer.

"Shove in the clutch," he ordered, after the patter of his feet on deck, a rattle of chain and the plash of water told that the mooring was cast off, and Troar obeyed.

"There," said Mr. Ponsonby, snuggling the tiller under his arm and steering for the lights of Sydney Heads. "Now they can talk."

II.

Intense languor and a splitting headache had seized on Troar. He lay on one of the saloon settees shivering and burning by turns. Throughout the night Mr. Ponsonby sat at the tiller or lashed it and descended to tend the clattering motor. Then, some time after dawn it stopped abruptly, calling Troar back to consciousness by sheer cessation of noise, so that he heard his partner's forceful expressions of displeasure on discovering that the fuel had run out and his Herculean efforts on deck to hoist the mainsail single-handed.

Presently he came below. "Wind's abeam," he announced. "She's steering herself, bless 'er!"

"Where for?" muttered Troar.

"The Fijis," grinned Mr. Ponsonby. "May as well make a clean break while we're at it. Bound to hit something heading northeast."

Troar lay with closed eyes while a spasm of pain contorted his face.

"I'm sorry——" he began.

"What for?" demanded Mr. Ponsonby.

"For being such a wash-out. I—it takes me like this sometimes. It'll pass—or *I* shall, one of the two, and——"

"'Ere." His partner leaned forward and spoke through a mouthful of cold pie. "Don't you talk like that. I didn't bring you along because you was likely to be useful."

"Then why did you?"

Mr. Ponsonby stared at his patient during a gastronomic pause. "Maybe I like something to look after," he explained with a hint of diffidence.

"Well, you've got it," said Troar.

"Try some of Lil's dope," suggested Mr. Ponsonby, producing the miraculous cough cure, and Troar resigned himself without a murmur.

"We're doin' all right," soothed his partner. "Seen any charts about?" "You'll find them in the starboard locker," said Troar, "next to the sideboard."

Mr. Ponsonby had turned in the direction indicated when he whipped round with the unexpected swiftness of his kind.

"How in 'ell did you know that?" he demanded.

"One thing I can do is nose around," replied Troar. "And here's something more for your information: the fresh water tank's empty."

"Empty?"

"Yes. They were cleaning it out for a fill-up by the look of things. But don't worry; there's a beaker in the fo'c's'le that ought to last, with luck."

But Mr. Ponsonby was already immersed in the charts.

"Can't say as I know much about these pictures," he confessed. "Looks to me as if they only take in the coast. 'Owever we'll—\_\_\_"

A report like a pistol shot came from above—the slatting of a slack mainsail and an uneasy motion told that the *Minx* had come into the wind.

It was the first contrary gust of a gale that blew for three days.

Hove to the yacht rode it bravely. Mr. Ponsonby was perfectly cheery about it. This was a fight and he liked fights. So much was evident when after each spell on deck he staggered into the saloon a dripping, exultant figure.

"Third round!" he would bawl and make himself a mug of tea over the gimbaled oil stove forward.

As for Troar, he ate little, drank less and thought frantically. He found it a physical impossibility to move and lay staring at the wildly swaying, white-enameled beams overhead with a fixed smirk on his pinched face.

Once when his partner was on deck wrestling with sheet and halyard he laughed aloud—if it could be called a laugh. The sound escaped him at thought of the words: "You'll take care of him, won't you?" What a jest! Yet at the time she had meant it. He was sure of that. She must have seen something—something—

He slid from the settee to the floor— Heaven knows with what intent—and was flung headlong into a corner. With clenched teeth he gathered himself for another effort that met with a like fate and finally felt himself caught up like a wayward infant and gently deposited in the deep bunk of the owner's cabin.

There he lay, still thinking. The *Minx* was drifting. For three days and three nights she had drifted and might continue so to do for another three, or another ten for that matter. Where to? What lay between themselves and the desert of the South Pacific? Even if the gale moderated in the next hour, how would they steer? How much water was there in the beaker? Ah, he did know that—possibly a gallon.

His self-communings were disturbed at intervals by the appearance of Mr. Ponsonby with a steaming mug of tea in his hand, which Troar invariably refused on the ground that he had just had some. He could do that! His ability to do it in spite of nature's violent dictates to the contrary gave him unwonted satisfaction. For he had long since come to a definite and clear-cut resolve in relation to this partner of his. If either of them lived it must be Mr. Ponsonby. This decision was not a matter of conscious self-sacrifice on Troar's part. It was an obvious conclusion based on the requirements of nature and backed by a promise given with clasped hands in a Wooloomooloo restaurant. Troar was like that.

He began to wonder when his happy-golucky partner would appreciate their position and what would happen when he did. It was evident that up to the present Mr. Ponsonby had hardly given it a thought. He had been otherwise engaged, which was as well. But now that the gale was spent and there was little to do but sit at the tiller and whistle for a fair wind it was equally apparent from his puckered brow and air of abstraction that he had begun to think.

"I reckon we drifted south most of the time," he mused. "Anyway, I'm heading N. N. E. D'you see anything better?"

Troar admitted that he did not and there followed a long and silent interval during which the *Minx* pounded her way at a bare two knots through a still lumpy sea.

"Cripes!" shouted Mr. Ponsonby of a sudden, "we'll never get nowhere this way."

It was coming, Troar told himself. A full realization of his plight was dawning on this genial giant who, within a week, and failing rain or a landfall, would be a raving madman at his partner's throat. Already he was seeing all that he had to lose and the likelihood of losing it.

"We've got to get out of this," he mut-

tered, staring stonily over the heaving wilderness about them. "You don't know all; I just got to——" Troar noted the change in the pronoun without the flicker of an eyelash. "We was crazy to do this thing."

Troar did not answer, which seemed to annoy Mr. Ponsonby.

"It was your idee," he accused. Then, after another interval of thought: "And it was all right—for you. No ties—nothing. Ain't that so?" he demanded petulently.

Troar nodded.

Mr. Ponsonby laughed suddenly, whole-heartedly.

"Darned if I wasn't getting my dander up with you," he railed, giving Troar a playful pat on the back that shook his frail body to the bone. "You! As if it's your fault!"

But this lightsome interlude did not deceive Troar. It was a flash of sunlight between gathering clouds.

"I donno," wailed Mr. Ponsonby later in the day. "Wind don't seem to shift. With this abeam we'd be doing eight, but what's the good of heading for South America? Lor', couldn't I do with a pint! Where in 'ell are we?" They were the cries of a lost child.

"Seems funny to me," he went on presently. "Those old coves with whiskers and a sextant can find out where they are, and I can't. But I can't, and that's that. The bare sight of figures is a knock-out to me."

Troar heard no more. His partner's last utterance had lit a train of thought that blinded him to all else. It is doubtful if Mr. Ponsonby had ever made such an illuminating remark. It had been in Troar's mind to forestall the inevitable that night, or at latest the next. It was the best he could do and would save considerable trouble. But now, and if he could do this thing —if he could do it——

He went below. There was a sextant in a highly varnished case on one of the shelves, as he had thought, and a nautical epitome among the books. He examined them. He knew nothing of deep-sea navigation but a quick brain and a leaning toward mathematics soon placed him in possession of the rudiments. There was no chronometer aboard and a log would have been useless during the gale even if they had thought of such a thing, so that longitude was out of the question. But there was latitude, and judgment, and those were something—as much as our ancestors found necessary to

circumnavigate the globe. With an artificial horizon he took sights. With paper and pencil he worked out examples, and behold, latitude leaped at him. Was this the conjuring trick of the sea—the finding of a ship's position on a waste of waters—that so impressed the landsman? Why, it was child's play!

With flushed cheeks and unnaturally bright eyes Troar went on deck that morning and prayed for the sun. His prayer was answered and for over an hour he stood wedged in the shrouds taking sights in spite of every interruption. Mr. Ponsonby wanted to know what he was "playing at;" since when he had acquired his "skipper's ticket," and if he didn't think it more use to "take the tiller for a spell." But Troar had found something to do. He was chasing latitude.

Mr. Ponsonby was getting really annoyed when a stifled exclamation escaped Troar and screwing down the sextant with an air of finality he dived below.

Mr. Ponsonby waited with commendable patience an hour, two hours, before his partner again appeared in the hatchway.

"We're all wrong," he jerked out. "I've got our latitude, and we're wrong."

"That so?" said Mr. Ponsonby with the air of one humoring a child.

"Yes. We can't have drifted as far as we thought. She must have reached a bit while we were hove to. We're a hundred miles or less south of Lord Howe Island."

"Who says so?"

"I do."

"Oh, you do!" Mr. Ponsonby stared down at his partner and shook his bullet head slowly.

"But I've proved it," protested Troar. "It's as simple as falling off a log. I've proved it, man!"

"And you want to tell me you've learned in a few hours what takes a grown man half his life to get hold of?"

"Yes," said Troar, "if the grown man's a fool."

Mr. Ponsonby laughed but it was not a pleasant sound and there was a glint in his small eyes.

"Well, you don't tell me," he observed. "You come and take the tiller and give me a spell, that's what you've got to do, kid."

"Right," said Troar. "The course is east by north as near as I can make it, which brings this breeze abeam, and if we don't sight Lord Howe to-morrow-"

"The course is north-by-east," corrected Mr. Ponsonby heavily, "that's what the course is. I can smell land ahead and that's better than all your fandanglements. North by east, young feller, and don't you forget it."

The futility of further argument silenced Troar. With the tiller under his arm and Mr. Ponsonby sleeping audibly in the saloon he wondered what it was best to do. He felt little resentment at his partner's disbelief. It was to be expected. The aggravation of the situation lay in the fact that if the present course were held they would miss the nearest land by a comfortable margin and raise no more for at least five hundred miles, which meant they would never raise it. Yet how was it possible to convince Mr. Ponsonby of that? As well argue with an elephant.

On the other hand, if they steered east by north at approximately eight knots for six hours the *Minx* would be in the neighborhood of Lord Howe's latitude, and probably in sight of the island itself, considering that "Sailing Directions" gave it as three thousand feet high and visible at sixty miles in clear weather. As to what Mr. Ponsonby would do when he found his precious course changed—

Troar eased the mainsheet and watched the compass needle swing to east by north, whereat the *Minx* surged into the encroaching darkness as though freed of a restraining hand.

And Mr. Ponsonby still slept. For nine providential hours, while speeding under a star-pricked sky with a steady breeze abeam, he slept the sleep of the dead.

At dawn he thrust a tousled bullet head into the cockpit, blinked at his benumbed partner and consulted the compass. On the instant the muscles of his face became rigid. His small eyes narrowed to mere slits.

"You're headin' east-by-north," he exploded, and his devastating arm was upraised.

So was Troar's. It pointed directly behind Mr. Ponsonby's head. He turned and out of the sea, not ten miles distant, towered the mighty pyramid of Lord Howe Island.

#### III.

It was on Lord Howe that Troar came upon a week-old newspaper containing the information that in the matter of "Buck" Ingram's demise during a recent prize fight a verdict of accidental death was returned and his opponent, one "Kinks" Conolly, was exonerated of all blame.

Troar read it aloud, which caused Mr. Ponsonby to execute an elephantine edition of the Highland fling and lapse into thought.

"All for nothin'," he mused. "Think o' that, would you?"

Troar was thinking of it.

"And it's me for Sydney town by the next boat," chanted Mr. Ponsonby. "But what about the yacht? Plain theft, ain't it?"

Troar lit a cigarette.

"I imagine it is," he said. "But she happens to belong to my uncle, so I ought to be able to do something about it."

"Your uncle?" Mr. Ponsonby regarded him with frank incredulity.

"Yes. You needn't believe me unless you like, of course, but there it is. That's why I chose her."

"And you? What had you done?"

"Nothing," said Troar. "That was my main trouble."

"Then why in 'ell did you clear out?" blurted Mr. Ponsonby.

Troar flicked his cigarette ash over the veranda rail.

"I wanted to find out what I was for," he said.

"And did you?"

"Yes, I rather fancy I did."

"And what was that?"

"To steer east-by-north," said Troar.

There was a long pause, during which Mr. Ponsonby stared over the sea with his bullet head at an angle. Then:

"What's your Christian name?" he asked irrelevantly.

"James," said Troar. "Why?"

"It's goin' to be *his*," said Mr. Ponsonby; "that's all."

### A RETURN TO NORMALCY

One proof of the return to normalcy is that many a man who two years ago took his lunch to the job in a tin lizzie now takes it in a tin bucket.



# Back Home

By J. Frank Davis

Author of "A Rule of the Service," "Too Much Golden Fleas," Etc.

Captain Carmichael of the Texas Rangers does his duty and a little more.

APTAIN JAMES CARMICHAEL of the Texas Rangers, home-bound after a week in Mexico City on official secret business for the governor, let his gaze rove idly through the window of his Pullman as the train paused in the late afternoon at an unimportant Mexican hill village.

He saw a dingy station, around which stood and squatted expressionless, stolid, serape-draped Indian men. Behind it two or three square, flat adobe buildings, each a mean rabbit warren whose many doors were now crowded with staring women and babies. Beyond, in a disorder that made no reckoning of streets or avenues, fifty low *jacals*, barely higher than dog kennels, before which Indian women tended toy cooking fires or ground corn for tortillas. On a hill, a church. Far back beyond the hill's shoulder a glimpse of the handsome hacienda whose master was feudal lord of this narrow corner of the republic—or had been, before the revolutions.

The village children of ages from five to a dozen—a swarm of them—were not with the men whose backs rested against the station walls or the women in their doorways or about the fires, but were strung along the track for the length of the train, trotting beside the Pullmans as they slowed. One could see them if he pressed his face to the screen and looked down. One could hear them whether he looked or not. They were all softly whining, their eyes upcast to the car windows, their high-pitched voices almost a chorus in unison.

"Centavita! Centavita! Por gracias Dios, centavita!"

Captain Carmichael was not thinking of the things his eyes saw or his ears heard. They were not unique. At least a half dozen times since noon the train had stopped where the passengers' eyes rested upon a dingy station, many-doored adobe rabbit warrens, jacals with women tending toy fires before them, lounging men and swarming children who trotted beside the cars and begged, in the name of God, a little penny. The Ranger had noted the name of the station on its sign and it had brought his mind back to the errand that had taken him to the Mexican capital and the report that he should make to the governor at Austin, for it was not many miles back of this hill village that the Tarbox Exploration and Mining Company had one of its greatest concessions and what the Ranger captain would have to say to the governor would of necessity contain many a mention of the Tarbox Exploration and Mining Company.

And then, suddenly, as the car brakes jammed tight and the train came to its full stop, he saw a white man standing beside the track, a traveling bag on the ground by his feet, plainly an American or an English-

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man and the first the captain had seen at any station that afternoon. He wondered if, perchance, this man was one of the Tarbox outfit. It was not necessarily so, for there were other mining outfits in these hills, but it was possible.

A moment later the porter came bustling into Carmichael's car, bearing the white man's bag, which he put in a section almost opposite the captain, and the white man followed him. Presently, when the train was again in motion and the conductors came through, the Ranger overheard sufficient of their conversation to learn that the new passenger was bound for San Antonio.

The man was at least as old as Carmichael, who was fifty-three, and he looked rather more like an American than an Englishman, but the big bag that contained his belongings had never been made anywhere but in the British Isles. His dress was rough and worn, as would be expected of any Anglo-Saxon coming aboard there in the mountains, but Captain Carmichael's experience was of a section where one gauges a man by everything but his clothes and there was something in this stranger's bearing that gave an impression of success and prosperity.

He was tall and at first glance seemed thin, but his movements indicated a lean wiriness that bespoke an active life in the open, as did the sun-browned skin of his face and hands. His hair, short-trimmed by a barber not more than three weeks since, was wholly white, and his face, smooth shaven, might have been sternly handsome but for a scar, old and faded but deep and puckering, that crossed his upper lip almost from corner to corner and drew the lip upward into an expression of perpetual disdain.

Carmichael's first thought, as he observed the scar, was that if it were on his face he would conceal it with a mustache; his second that hair, in all probability, would not grow on that lip.

The man settled into his seat and stared out of the window and it seemed to Captain Carmichael that there was something vaguely familiar about his profile. More than twentyfive years in the Ranger service had cultivated his memory for faces, yet if he had ever seen the man before the recollection of when and where evaded him. He felt positive he had never seen that unusual scar, and it obviously was an ancient one, which would mean that if he had ever seen the man it must have been long ago.

Until dusk fell the stranger sat quietly in his seat, seldom moving, his eyes on the passing landcape, his face stern and brooding. Carmichael might have tried to open a conversation with him but another passenger who did so was politely but firmly discouraged. And after having got a good full-face study of him in the dining car Captain Carmichael became convinced that he did not know the man, that his impression of having met him somewhere was due merely to the stranger's slight resemblance to somebody else.

The correctness of this judgment was borne out at the Rio Grande, when the train stopped in the middle of the International Bridge the next morning and he heard the conversation between the stranger and the American customs and immigration officers.

The man's papers were in perfect order and he bore in his big British bag or on his person nothing dutiable and no firearms. His name was Andrew Miller, and he was a citizen of Argentina, of English birth. This was his first visit to the United States. He had had business in Mexico and wished to see a portion of the big northern republic. He expected to return to South America within a month or two.

The train rolled on to San Antonio, where the scar-lipped Argentinian left it. Captain Carmichael continued on to Austin.

There the governor gave him an hour of earnest conference the following forenoon, as an outcome of which it was decided his next investigations had best be made in San Antonio. He took an afternoon train and that evening found him registered at the Hotel Bonham, in whose wide lobby and its overlooking mezzanine, if he but waits long enough, one may see practically every refugee, revolutionary and plotter against the peace of Mexico that visits the Texas metropolis. And there in the Bonham lobby, after dinner, he again saw Andrew Miller.

The man was in different clothing—new clothing of a smoother weave and more fashionable cut than he had worn on the train —and he sat in an armchair that gave him a view of the desk and the passing crowds. The Ranger thought he might be waiting for some acquaintance. But when an hour had passed and Carmichael had finished his evening paper, always with his eyes over the top of it for a sight of the Mexicans he had come there to watch, if they should drop in, Miller still sat idle, unspeaking and unspoken to.

And then at a moment when the Ranger's gaze chanced to be upon him he saw something or some one near the main entrance that so affected his emotions that he could not wholly conceal them.

He did not start. He did not move so much as a finger. But his features stiffened ever so slightly and into his eyes came an expression such as comes into the eyes of the hunter when, after stealthily stalking, he comes into view of his quarry.

Carmichael looked quickly in the direction in which Miller was staring. He saw a score of men and half as many women entering and leaving the hotel. Discarding those who were going out as unlikely to have attracted Miller's attention, since he had had opportunity to see them before, the Ranger swiftly appraised the new arrivals.

One or two were traveling men, just alighted from a depot street car, hustling with their bags toward the desk. The remainder were women in filmy dresses and their well-groomed escorts, who passed laughing and chattering toward the corridor that led to the big ballroom from which a crash of drums and saxophones some time since had signaled the opening of a dance. It was quite evidently to be a big dance, for a hundred or more festively dressed couples had already passed in to it and more were constantly arriving.

Miller's eyes followed a group of these newly arrived dance patrons. He might be observing any one of the twenty or more. Captain Carmichael studied the group.

They were for the most part young people and Carmichael recognized several as sons and daughters of well-to-do business men of the city. Two of them were already successful in their own right—Morton Perry the real-estate operator and Wallace Locke the oil man. Each of these had inherited money and skillfully increased it, although there the comparison ended, because Perry's initial stake had been not more than fifty thousand, while Locke's father, an old cattleman, had left him close to half a million. Each of them although barely past thirty had at least doubled his original capital.

A pretty girl moved beside each as he passed on into the ballroom. Perry's companion was his wife, a slight, bobbed-haired bunch of vivacity. With Locke was Edith Alsbury, a merry girl of twenty-three with a creamy complexion and flaming hair, whom Captain Carmichael had known slightly all her life, being an acquaintance of her aunt who had reared her since she was orphaned in infancy. He recalled that he had heard she was engaged to Locke; that they were to be married in a month or two.

The captain's eyes, as the group disappeared and others coming from the entrance took their places, returned to the chair where the Argentinian had sat, to find it vacant. Miller now stood at the desk, talking to a clerk. Presently, nodding as though in thanks for some information, he left the desk and went to a chair, not the one he had vacated with its full view of the entrance, but another in a far corner. Seated in it he paid no more attention to the throng but fell into deep thought.

Captain Carmichael frowned as he studied the situation that had suddenly developed. Certain facts which aligned themselves in his mind seemed to have a bearing on one another and on the very assignment from the governor on which he was engaged.

Texas, as the next-door neighbor to Mexico, has many business relationships with the southern republic and Texans believe they understand Mexico and Mexicans better than do the residents of most other States. There was a period, during the early revolutions, the insane Plan of San Diago which set the border aflame, and the aftermaths of the Columbus raid, when the administration at Washington did not satisfy Texans because it watched and waited. Following the establishment of relative order below the Rio Grande certain of the Texas business citizenry became dissatisfied because watchfulness and waiting still continued and the Mexican government was not officially recognized.

With whether these were right or wrong Captain Carmichael was not concerned. His duty was to the State administration and that administration was doing what it might to bring about more perfect peace and understanding between the two countries. And it was convinced that more perfect peace and understanding was being hindered by certain American corporations which had financial interests below the Rio Grande.

Such a corporation was the Tarbox Exploration and Mining Company—whose biggest concession was there in the mountains back of where Miller had boarded the train.

Fighting the political ambitions and de-

sires of the combination of which the Tarbox outfit was a member was another combination. Wallace Locke was a member of it. Notwithstanding his youth, because of connections with the governor and other strong men of Texas, he was powerful.

Miller was an Argentinian. He might not have come from the Tarbox camp. But on the other hand——

Carmichael lounged to the hotel desk and asked the clerk, who knew him well:

"What did that old feller with the scar-Miller—ask you a few minutes ago?"

"Who the young man was with the young lady in white with the red hair," the clerk told him promptly. "With Miss Alsbury although he didn't know her name."

"You told him, of course."

"Yes. He said he had thought Locke's face looked familiar, but must have been mistaken. Anything the matter with Miller, captain?"

"No," the Ranger smiled. "I was just curious."

So Miller, who might be with the Tarbox crowd, was seeking to identify the Tarboxes' strongest enemy in Texas. It came to the Ranger that there had been attempts to buy Locke off, which had failed, and that there had been courteous words that were veiled threats.

Miller looked like a resolute man, a hard man. In all the hours the Ranger had observed him he had not once smiled.

Captain Carmichael went and stood not far from the news stand, facing the lobby, and absently rearranged his necktie, after which he left the hotel by the side entrance. A young man who had been within sight all the evening but had not spoken to him rose from his seat, drifted out aimlessly through the other door and went around the corner to where his captain stood in a shadowed doorway.

"There's an old fellow sitting not far from the manager's office," Carmichael said without preliminary. "White haired, smooth face, new clothes, bad scar on his upper lip."

"I saw him. Noticed the scar."

"His name is Andrew Miller. Born an Englishman; now says he lives in Buenos Aires—and I reckon he does; he has the papers to prove it. Tourist. First trip to the States, he says. Came in on the train with me yesterday. We didn't get acquainted but after seeing me there on the train he'd be bound to notice me, of course, if I stuck too close to him. I want him followed tonight and to-morrow. Get McCampbell to help you and split up the work so he won't see too much of either one of you. I want to know what he does, who he sees, what he talks about."

"Yes, suh."

"That's all." The young man turned away. "Oh, Burnham! You know that crowd I'm watching. If he gets in touch with any of them get me word as soon as you can—and try to fix it so you and Mc-Campbell can split up and keep tabs on both him and the people he sees."

"All right, cap'n."

Ranger Burnham returned to the hotel. So, after a little, did Captain Carmichael, who observed as he entered that Andrew Miller was still sitting quietly in the same place, still deep in thought and unsmiling, and that Burnham was seemingly engrossed in a magazine at the other side of the lobby.

The captain did not take further notice of the Argentinian. Indeed, there presently developed something else for him to do, when two well-dressed, Spanish-featured men, typical Mexican refugees of the wealthy class, entered together and met, apparently by accident and to the mutual surprise of all the trio, a big, gray-mustached man who looked like a retired cattleman, was a lawyer of sorts and really made the bulk of his excellent income as a lobbyist.

These were some of the people—none of them directly connected with the Tarbox Company, but all interested, for various reasons, in keeping alive friction between Mexico and the United States—on whom he had hoped to get his eyes this evening, and he was too busy observing them until they separated for the night to think again more than casually of the man with the disdainful scar.

Nor did he see Miller during all the following day. At six o'clock, while he was washing up for dinner in his hotel room, Ranger Burnham knocked at his door and came in briskly.

"Wallace Locke!" he exclaimed, the moment he had closed the door behind him. "If there is anything about Locke that this Miller hasn't found out, I don't know what it could be. He's asked questions about him from the cradle to this good day. And didn't you tell me he is a stranger? Never been in the States before?"

"That's what he claims," Carmichael said. "Bunk!" ejaculated Burnham. "This isn't the easiest city in the world for a stranger to find his way about in—and Miller got around it like it was his own dooryard. Without asking, usually. When he did ask it was about some part of the town that has changed the last few years. If he never was in San 'Ntonio before, I never saw a tarantula."

"And he wanted information regarding Locke, eh? What sort? And where did he go for it? Did he see any of the gang we are watching?"

Ranger Burnham answered the last question first.

"No, not one. His inquiries were made in exactly the places you would expect them to be made if he is exactly who he says he is a business man, a stranger, who has a proposition that he is half thinking of putting up to Locke if the replies to his inquiries are satisfactory. He has been to banks, to the chamber of commerce, to a big business man or two. He has good business credentials—from Buenos Aires. The questions he asked, however, had very little to do with Locke's business standing. They were mostly personal."

"In what way?"

"As to his character and habits. What sort of a man is he? Does he drink? Does he gamble? Does he run around nights? If so, where?"

"H'm!" grunted Carmichael. "Wants to know where to find him after dark, eh?"

"It looks that way. And right in that connection comes a thing that could be mighty significant. Less than half an hour ago he got him a gun—a .45—and a box of cartridges."

"Where?"

Burnham named the store. "Tucked it down into his pants—he's handled a .45 before, I'd say, from the way he did it—and then came here to the hotel. He has just gone up to his room."

Captain Carmichael considered briefly.

"If he's come here on some errand with Locke for that Tarbox outfit—and those questions look like he wants to know when and where to find him at bed hours," he said, "he isn't likely to lose any time. And with a gun hung on him—..."

The captain crossed to where his own holstered pistol had been laid on the bed while he made his toilet, strapped it on, and reached for his coat.

"I reckon the time has come to ask Mis-

ter Miller what his game is," he said. "Him toting a pistol that a way without any permit to do so gives me a good excuse. I'll make him a little unannounced call. Go get your supper; I'll see you downstairs afterward."

He already knew the location of Miller's room. Three minutes later he tapped on the door. A deep voice called, "Come!" and Carmichael entered. The Argentinian stood facing him from near the bathroom entrance, not a dozen feet away, and instantly, without a word, when he saw the Ranger he went after his gun.

It was not a fight; it was too one-sided and over too quickly to be called that.

Miller's right hand went back to the weapon high on his hip with what might have seemed fair speed to the eyes of some Easterner unversed in the technique of pistol drawing, but a fatal slowness by the standards of the Southwest. Captain Carmichael covered the distance between them in two flying steps and his own pistol leaped into his hand while he was taking the first of them; he easily could have killed the Argentinian where he stood but he did not find it necessary. Miller had not got the new gun clear of his waistband when the Ranger came within arm's reach. It was just coming free when the barrel of Carmichael's .45 crashed against the side of his head. He went down limp, his hand slipping from the half-drawn weapon.

The captain had it safely out of reach and had satisfied himself that Miller bore no other arms when the man opened his eyes, groaned, touched his head gently with his fingers and made a dizzy effort to sit up.

"Steady, hombre!" Carmichael warned him gruffly. "I've got your gun. Take it easy. When your brain gets cleared a little we'll talk."

Miller did not groan again, although his head must have ached terribly. Once he had gained full control of his faculties he did not even wince, and Carmichael noted this with approval; he admired men who could take what punishment came to them without whining. Two or three minutes elapsed before Miller asked:

"Do you mind if I sit in a chair, cap'n?" Carmichael succeeded in concealing his surprise that Miller knew him.

"Go to it," he said. He, too, took a seat, his pistol resting on his knee. "You won't be fool enough to start anything more," he said, moving it significantly. "If you do, you won't get away with it. All right. Suppose you tell me——"

Miller interrupted him. He was staring at his own wrists, as though puzzled.

"I thought there'd be handcuffs on them," he said. "Much obliged. I'd hate to go out through that lobby handcuffed."

"What did you go to pull a gun on me for, that a way?" the Ranger demanded. "You're a pretty darn lucky feller not to be dead this minute. You would be, if I couldn't see, first look, that you hadn't any speed."

"It's been twenty-two years since I pulled a gun, or even wore one," Miller said. "But I wasn't pulling it on you."

"Of course not."

"No, I wasn't, really. It was for myself." He leaned forward and looked into the Ranger's eyes earnestly. "See here, Carmichael! Couldn't the thing be fixed that way? I'll give you my word of honor I don't want to hurt anybody else. Couldn't you let me have that pistol of mine back and go out of the room for a minute? That would make the least trouble. For all concerned. Couldn't it be fixed?"

He seemed to think instantly of an amendment to this, and added:

"And you could let it stand that I'm a stranger named Andrew Miller—my papers prove it. Couldn't that be done, too? So that the old business never came out at all? Couldn't it?"

There was sincerity in the man's eyes. He meant what he said.

And he was not Andrew Miller, but somebody else. Who? He obviously thought the Ranger knew. Until he himself gave some clew to his identity the thing must be handled with tact.

"Why?" Carmichael asked.

"Why?" the man repeated. "Why? Great heavens! After all these years, to have it come out right now— You've got a family yourself, haven't you? You used to have, anyway. If you were in my place—."

"What did you buy that gun for?"

"I saw the game was up. You were closing in. When I saw you there in that Pullman I wondered if you'd recognize me—and I thought sure you didn't. I've changed more than you have. My hair, last time you saw me, was thick, and its natural color. And this"—he touched the long ragged scar on his upper lip—"you never saw that. Nobody in Texas did. Nobody in Texas ever saw me without a mustache; I had it all raised when I came here. Not a living soul in the State knew I had this mark under it except my wife—and she never saw it. I got it falling off a shed onto a harrow back there in Kentucky when I wasn't twelve years old. Just as soon as I was able to raise hair over it, I hid it. Then I raised whiskers, too. I was twenty when I came to Texas, you know."

"So you thought I didn't recognize you there on the train?"

"If I'd believed you did, I'd have left it the other side of the border. But when it seemed I'd got by you, I thought I could get by anybody, so I came on. Then there you were in the lobby last night but you didn't seem to notice me much. So I still thought I was all right until your man followed me to-day."

"How did you know him?"

"I didn't, of course. He doesn't date back to my time. But I ran into him three or four times this afternoon, and finally I asked a man, while he was in sight, who he was. And the man didn't remember his name but said he was a Ranger."

The man spread his hands.

"So then I knew it was all up," he said, "and that I'd been a fool to come back into this country. And there was no getting away —so I decided to take the only way out. I got the gun. If you hadn't come in here about when you did——"

Who was the man? Even with a mustache and beard imagined on his face, Carmichael could not reconstruct a face he knew. He said, groping for a clew:

"Twenty-two years. Time goes, doesn't it?"

"Twenty-two years. And in all that time I have never asked a question about Texas that would show any knowledge of it, never admitted I ever was in Texas, never more than three or four times seen a Texas paper. I went to England on a cattle boat right after my escape—with the whiskers and mustache shaved off, of course, so they never spotted me—and then, after a while, to the Argentine. I've been there ever since."

"Prospered some, I take it."

"Yes, I've prospered. I'm worth a good deal of money. It was one of my interests brought me to Mexico; I own more than half of the Buena Ventura Mine, there in the hills back of where you saw me get on the train. I had to come up to look it over and when I thought that I was only a few hundred miles from San Antonio—well, the thing pulled me. I just had to come. Why, I didn't even know whether my girl was alive or dead. And I wanted to know. For one thing, if she was living I wanted to fix it so she'd get my property when I pass out. And I couldn't write to anybody, of course, not without making talk."

"Been going straight all this time, eh?" Carmichael was still groping.

"I never was anything else," the man protested. "You never heard anything against me outside of that last killing, did you? And you never heard the truth of that. Nobody did."

"I don't remember all the details," the Ranger said. "It's a long time."

"I was railroaded," the man declared earnestly. "You may not believe it—convicts always say they were railroaded. But I was. The evidence was all against me. I didn't have a chance. But as true as there's a God in heaven I never killed a man that wasn't trying to kill me. Not one of them. Everybody had to admit that until the last one. They got me that time without a friendly witness.

"Of course anything I say isn't going to have any weight, after all this time. The records of the court show for themselves. But it's a relief, somehow, to talk about it. The biggest thing in a man's life and I've had to be dumb for twenty-two years! Twenty-two years without a word from home -although after a while it stopped seeming like home. Buenos Aires is my home now. People down there don't think badly of me at all. If it wasn't for the girl-and yet, until I got into Mexico there, so close to Texas, I never really intended to look her up in person. You see, I didn't even know whether or not she'd lived."

"So you said. Tell me about that killing. The straight of it."

The man had quite recovered from the effects of his blow, except that an ugly lump was raising itself above his ear, which from time to time he patted softly.

"That feud between John Gater and me," he said, "dated back a long time. He was the boss of Huevaca County in those days, of course, and I was a sort of leader of the faction that was trying to pull him off his throne and get halfway decent government. Sheriff Aristo Coyne was his man, and all

Coyne's deputies. And he was in with the Sarran gang."

"A fine bunch of desperadoes and horse thieves," Carmichael murmured.

"And Dick Sarran, the head of them, was a dirty killer, but nobody could do anything to him because Gater stood behind him. And Gater was above all the law there was in Huevaca County."

"He was a powerful boss."

"And I fought him, like a young fool. I was about twenty-five. I'm only forty-nine now. This white hair—

"Larry Beeson was governor and Gater was his man-and that meant that he had the State backing for anything he chose to do, murder included, provided he delivered the votes of the county. The first killing was on an election day, when 'Buck' Hamilton, one of Sarran's gang, tried to vote a bunch of Mexicans solid that he'd brought across the river only that morning. He and I had words and he went after his gun. I was some fast in those days and I killed him. They couldn't do a thing to me. It was selfdefense and there were a lot of witnesses. But they had it in for me from that minute. I was a fool not to leave the county. But I was too stuffy."

"It took more than stuffiness to stay in Huevaca County after John Gater and Dick Sarran wanted a man out of it," the Ranger said sympathetically.

"So they laid for me, and inside of a year I had to kill two more of them." Even the thought of it brought a harassed, haunted look into the man's eyes. "I slept, those days, with a gun, not under my pillow, but actually in bed with me, under my hand. Sometimes, looking back on it, it seems as though I didn't really sleep during that whole year. It was along in the early part of that time that the baby was born, and my wife died when it was four days old. And it seemed to me I didn't much care whether they killed me or not. My wife's sister here in San Antonio took the baby.

"Then that gubernatorial campaign came along where Jeff Rich was running against Larry Beeson, and you remember there never was bloodier politics in Texas. I was for Jeff Rice, to the limit. And when he was licked, after a close election, it looked as if word went out that it was an open season on the fellows that had fought Beeson the hardest. Anyway, a lot of them got killed pretty soon, one way and another. Well, I wouldn't leave the county, and my turn came.

"That man Bristow, of Sarran's gang, had a good reputation compared to most of the rest of them. He hadn't ever killed a manat least it never had been proved that he had-and maybe Gater and Sarran had that in their minds when they set him to get me. I suppose the scheme had been all worked out for some time, waiting for the cards to fall just right. Anyway, he and I met one evening along about dusk near the post office —and there wasn't one single man in sight that didn't belong body and soul to Gater. And Bristow said fighting words to me and went after his pistol and I beat him to it. Seems funny that I could beat fast gunmen to the draw in those days, when you think how slow I went after that pistol of mine just now, doesn't it? But after twenty-two vears without practice-----

"If another man, that they couldn't manage, hadn't come into sight just as I shot him, they'd probably have finished me right then and there, although perhaps I could have taken two or three of them along with me. But there was a preacher—one of these circuit riders-came around the corner just as Bristow fell. They didn't know, I suppose, whether he saw Bristow go after his gun first or not, although it turned out at the trial that he didn't. So they didn't keep the fight going-but one of them sneaked Bristow's pistol from where it lay beside him before the parson could get near enough to see what he was doing and everybody swore I'd deliberately killed an unarmed man that had always had a reputation of being peaceable."

For three seconds the speaker stared gloomily before him, his eyes on that tragic past. Then:

"That's all," he said, simply. "Gater had the jury and why they didn't hang me I don't know. Perhaps he thought it would be a bigger punishment to send me to the pen. The sentence was life. And Deputy Sheriff Dominguez started with me for Huntsville."

"And you jumped off the train, handcuffed, while he was asleep."

"I jumped off the train, but he wasn't asleep—and I had the handcuffs loose in my hand when I jumped, because they'd just been unlocked. And there was a thousand dollars in Miguel Dominguez's pocket the next day that hadn't been there before. It was pretty nearly all the money I had in the world and Dominguez was willing to double cross his own gang if the temptation was strong enough. He knew I'd never come back, and if I did, and told it, I'd be just an escaped lifer trying to make trouble for an officer."

"I've been trying to think of your first name, Alsbury," said Carmichael. "It is 'Martin,' isn't it? You were always called 'Red.'"

"Martin Alsbury," the other agreed. "'Red' Alsbury to everybody, in those days. The color's been gone out of my hair a good many years. The girl's got it. That exact shade. She's a fine-looking young woman, Carmichael. Just to think that until day before yesterday I didn't even know whether she had lived or died! A man doesn't have much affection for a little bit of a baby, less than a year old—especially if its mother died when it came. I never thought much about Edith till lately. But as a man gets older——"

Suddenly the grim stoicism with which he had been speaking departed. His face distorted and his voice broke, as he implored:

"Carmichael! Can't I have that gun and settle it the easiest way? Is it necessary she should ever know? She's going to marry that young Locke, and all day I've been checking him up, and he's a regular man, just the kind I'd want her to marry, but if he and she knew that her father—— She's never dreamed that I was alive. Is there any need for her to know? If you won't give me a gun, can't you slip me into Huntsville for the rest of my sentence without any of it ever getting into the papers, Cap'n? For those young folks' sakes!"

And now there was huskiness in the Ranger's throat, too, as he cried, harshly, to conceal his own emotion:

"Why, you darned old fool, you'll be at the wedding to give her away! Jeff Rich ran again for governor and was elected, two years after you escaped. They never could get track of you to let you know, and finally, when it was in all the papers and you didn't show up, everybody natchully supposed you were dead. One of the first things Jeff Rich did as governor was to sign your unconditional pardon."

"The Pink One," another story of the Southwest by Mr. Davis, in the next number.

# What's Afoot?

By William Hamilton Osborne Author of "Too Much Efficiency," "Scandalous Asphyxiation," Etc.

What Peter Pritchard knew didn't hurt him as much as it hurt other people.

THE business college at Fredonia lets out at three p. m. The trolley trip between Fredonia and Pritchard Park consumes an hour. It was nearly half past four that afternoon when Eloise van Liew alighted from the trolley at its Pritchard Park terminal and started for her home. She waved her hand blithely to the car crew as she went. The motorman, a latter-day æsthete, followed her boyish figure with his wistful eyes.

"Buddy," he said soulfully to the conductor as they swung the trolley pole, "how would you like to have that little dame a-cookin' dinner for you every night?"

His colleague, wise, weather-beaten, bilious, rubbed his chin reflectively. "Well," he doubtfully returned, "it would depend entirely on the cookin'."

Unconscious of this badinage concerning her, Eloise van Liew swung jauntily along. Three blocks from the trolley station, on the corner of a street, there stood a girl. At the girl's feet rested a new Gladstone bag. The girl was restless, fidgeting, forever glancing at the wrist watch that she wore. She was expecting some one; that was clear.

Ellie van Liew was wearing arctics; the morning had been bad though the afternoon was fine. She took the girl quite unaware; came upon her suddenly. The girl turned swiftly; she was startled. For one silent instant she stared at Ellie; realized that here, confronting her, was Eloise van Liew. And in that instant the girl became a frozen statue. Fear shone from her eyes.

"You!" gasped the girl. She had suddenly gone breathless; suddenly gone white. The rouge upon her face stood out, strangely distinct; a thing apart. Somehow she pulled herself together, forced a smile; ventured a little propitiating bow. "It is—only you," she faltered. Swiftly she snatched her bag up from its resting place. She darted off in the direction of the trolley line.

Marie Lamorte—a weird, wild, wicked beauty was Marie. Eloise knew her; everybody knew Marie. She was one of the hands in a brass-finishing room at the Pritchard Products Plant. Never in her life had she been arrayed like this. In the brief moment when the two had faced each other Eloise had made a swift appraisal of the girl. Marie Lamorte in a raccoon coat, a hat to match, a gown of vivid rose-hued duvetyn. A striking picture, a sensation; an expensive one. And where was Marie going with her Gladstone bag? And for whom was Marie waiting on that corner? Here were two unanswered questions that Eloise propounded to herself.

There was a third question that she feared to ask: Why had Marie Lamorte been so afraid of her?

Ellie lived on Eden Lane in Pritchard Park. Pritchard Park consisted of a settlement of three hundred houses, all alike except in size. As she turned into Eden Lane she heard the sound of rushing feet behind her. A loose-jointed personality passed by her on the run, joggled her elbow in a friendly sort of way and kept on going. This was Bert Whelan. Bert was a half back on the Pritchard team.

Eloise slumped down upon the top step of her porch, vigorously kicked off her arctics, leaned back against a pillar. She took her hat off and did things to her hair. Between houses and across back yards she could see the slowly setting sun. She sniffed the air. Somebody was burning autumn leaves. She wished she had some of her own to burn. She liked the smell.

Across the street from her were two men wearing influenza masks. One of them sat at the wheel of a motor car whose engine was still softly purring. The other man stood next him, in the middle of the street, one foot planted on the car's running board. They were talking local politics; wrangling with each other. Eloise watched them curiously. She didn't know them and she didn't like their looks.

A door opened behind Eloise. Somebody stepped out upon the porch. It was her father; a young man, but with a worried, hunted, haunted look forever in his eyes. His shoulders drooped; his hair was prematurely gray. Eloise thrust a hand in air for him to catch and hold. She tilted back her head, smiled at him lazily. For just a moment care dropped from him. Then, casually, he eyed the two men of the motor car across the street. His worried look came back. The two men kept on wrangling. Ellie's father shivered as one shivers with the cold.

"Chilly, Ellie," he remarked.

"Chilly!" echoed Ellie. "It's hot as Tophet here."

"Treacherous," returned her father, an anxious quaver in his voice, "you'd best come in."

Ellie sprang to her feet. She placed a hand upon her father's forehead. "My

word!" she cried, indulging in Fredonia's smartest and most popular expletive, "my word, I believe you've got a touch of flu or------"

She got no farther. At that moment Bert Whelan stepped out of the next-door house and shut the door behind him. He had with him a suit case. Across his arm was flung an overcoat. Bert leaped blithely down the steps; loped along the gravel path; turned into the sidewalk. And then it happened. One of the two men of the motor car strode swiftly toward him; intercepted him in front of the Van Liews. This man dropped a hand upon Bert's sleeve.

"Whelan," he said gruffly, "sorry to trouble you, but you've got to come with us."

Bert Whelan's suit case clattered to the pavement. Bert cast a startled glance into the stranger's eyes. "Good—gosh!" cried Bert in a sort of broken wail. He stood there, rooted to the spot. He glanced wildly up and down the avenue. He took his hat off—wiped his forehead. He shook his shoulders. "All right," he said at length, "but I wish you'd let me go back home and tell my mother first."

"That's fair enough," returned the stranger. He threw a backward glance toward the motor car. The car glided evenly across the narrow street and took its station near the Whelan residence. Bert Whelan and the man on foot disappeared into the house. Silence! Silence, followed by a woman's shriek. A woman's shriek, followed by a pistol shot.

The front door of the Whelan house burst violently open. The man in the automobile leaped from his car. Two struggling figures rolled out upon the lawn. Bert Whelan was fighting like a maniac; he had the better of the fight. The driver of the car drew a blackjack from his pocket; struck out expertly with it. In another moment it was over. The two men dragged Bert Whelan to the motor car, thrust him into it, snapped handcuffs on his wrists. Bert lolled there, dazed, bleeding, gasping spasmodically for breath. The land filled suddenly with rushing people. One of the two men stepped back to the Whelan lawn; he picked up a revolver.

"He fired one shot," panted this man. "He was going to kill his mother and himself."

"That right, Whelan?" demanded the other man of Bert.

"That's what I should have done," returned Bert Whelan desperately. "You can make the most of it." The crowd gaped, horrified.

Ellie turned away. She couldn't stand it. She had grown up with Bert Whelan. He had kissed her once, three years before. She was alone, now, upon the porch. She had a vague memory of a struggle with her father; he had tried to draw her forcibly within the house; she had resisted him hysterically. successfully. Her father was within now, calling to her repeatedly, persistently. She could not respond. She caught weakly at the nearest pillar, clung to it. She stopped suddenly. For as she stood there she saw the girl come slinking cautiously around the corner, the girl with the fur coat and the Gladstone bag. Here was Marie Lamorte again. Impatient and all uncomprehending but very careful, Marie came creeping, creeping on. She caught sight, in a flash, of Bert Whelan in the car. She stood stock-still, staring at the car, staring at Bert Whelan, staring at the crowd.

"Mother of God!" she wailed. Then, with broken, whimpering cry, she turned and fled.

The motor car moved off. The curious crowd clustered about the Whelan porch. The front door still was open. The crowd kept staring at it, hypnotized. The people waited for somebody to start something. Ellie started something. Her father tried to call her back.

"Don't mix in this, Ellie," he exclaimed, "I tell you, don't mix in."

Ellie never even heard him. She mixed in. She had to. For Bert Whelan's mother was inside the Whelan house; inside there and alone. Ellie pushed her way swiftly through the cluttering throng; darted through the She found Bert Whelan's open door. mother; found her in the living room, standing there, staring into space. Ellie's advent brought the woman to herself. Ellie placed a hand upon the woman's arm, led her gently to a seat. The woman, with despairing sigh, submitted; submitted until she caught sight of Ellie's face. Then she drew back violently; wrenched herself away with a gesture of defiance and disgust.

"Out of my house," she cried hysterically. "I never harbor snakes. Snakes in the grass. This is my house. You see the door. Get out."

Ellie got out. Amazed, hurt, wondering, Ellie made her way somehow back to her own home. Her father caught her, drew her into the hallway, shut the door. "Not you, not you," he kept repeating, "you mustn't mix in anything like this. Not you."

Ellie clutched her father frantically. "What did he do-what's Bert Whelan done?" she cried.

Her father shook his head. "Embezzlement, I'm told," he said, "three thousand odd. It's been going on some time. Listen, Ellie," he demanded, "did you hear Bert say it. Is it true? Was he going to kill his mother and himself?"

"I heard him say it," nodded Ellie.

"Great guns," her father groaned, "that's surely bad enough."

"Something must be done about it," exclaimed Ellie.

"Nothing can be done about it," said her father.

Her father's eyes were wild; his face was haggard; he shook as with the ague. Ellie remembered; she picked up the broken thread—she felt his head once more. "My word, father," she exclaimed, "you've got to go to bed."

"I can't go to bed," returned her father, "I've got a date with Peter Pritchard at eight o'clock to-night."

Ellie was exceedingly impatient. "My word, father," she retorted, "can't you even have the flu without Peter Pritchard's leave."

Her father feebly grinned. "Maybe I can't," he said. "I'm not so sure I can."

He went to bed. It was on a Tuesday afternoon that he was taken ill. On Wednesday evening at seven-thirty sharp the doorbell rang. Ellie answered the summons. On the porch without there stood two Pritchard Parkers, both equipped with influenza masks. Ellie knew them. They were members of the clerical force in the administration of the plant. Ben Smith was one of them. Minna Yawger was the other.

Minna Yawger handed Eloise a dollar's worth of flowers. Ben Smith bowed politely but a bit too stiffly. "From the sick committee of the welfare league," said Ben, "they're for your father. We're very sorry that he's ill."

They weren't sorry. There was not the slightest tinge of regret in Ben Smith's tone; not the first trace of feeling.

"And we hope he'll soon get well," said Minna Yawger. But they didn't hope it. They had nobly done their part; that was enough. They left Ellie standing in the doorway, staring at the dollar's worth of flowers; repeating their set speeches softly to herself. Next week another couple would appear with another dollar's worth of flowers; they in turn would murmur the sympathetic messages outlined by the by-laws of the league. And so it came to pass. The league did these things exactly in accordance with the ritual.

On the thirteenth of November Ellie's father died. Ellie cried her eyes out for two whole days. Ellie's father was the only really chummy person she had ever known. And Ellie stood just now woefully alone. According to the provisions of subdivision five of section six, the welfare league sent in thirty dollars' worth of flowers. Peter Pritchard sent in three hundred dollars' worth. The funeral was a church funeral, the largest one that Pritchard Park had ever known. Peter Pritchard saw to that. And all Pritchard Park turned out. It was compulsory. Peter Pritchard saw to that.

Nobody else did anything. During her father's illness, during the interim between his death and his interment, not another soul in Pritchard Park came to call on Ellie. Nobody called her up. No wives or mothers, no fathers, and no daughters. Nobody offered aid of any kind; nobody cared. Over and over again Ellie asked herself the question—why? She couldn't answer it herself. She had no friends in Pritchard Park. Yet she had lived there all her life.

After the funeral Peter Pritchard had a talk with Ellie. A big hulk of a man was Peter; monarch of all he surveyed. But there was a bovine sort of gentleness about him, too.

"Ellie," said Peter, "for twenty years your father's been my private secretary. And for twenty years he's been the only man that I could absolutely trust. Not anybody else —not Margerum." Margerum was Peter Pritchard's business manager; Peter was wont to boast that Margerum was the ablest business executive on the Atlantic coast. "Your father, Ellie," went on Peter, "was absolutely devoted to my interests; absolutely loyal. All the rest of them need watching, including Margerum."

Ellie's eyes softened. "I wonder," she mused wistfully, "what he was like, my father, twenty years ago."

"He was like you," said Peter Pritchard. Ellie had to cry a little more. "Ellie," went on Peter, "I'm going to keep a promise that

I made your father." Peter never had broken a promise in his life. "I'm going to give you a position in the works." He shook his head. "And yet," he said, "it's a thing that goes against the grain."

Ellie opened wide her eyes. "Mr. Pritchard," she protested, "you don't have to bother about me."

Peter Pritchard smiled benignantly upon her. "The only place," he said, "for a winsome lass like you is in a home."

Ellie never felt responsible for the vagaries of Peter Pritchard. But this suggestion was beyond the pale. "Surely," she cried, "you're not going to place me in a home."

"you're not going to place me in a home." "I am not talking," returned Peter, "about that kind of an institution. I am talking about an institution of quite a different kind."

"I don't want to have anything to do with any institution," faltered Ellie.

"The institution of matrimony," added Peter.

"Oh!" cried Ellie, beginning to sit up and take notice.

"Business is no place for pretty girls," said Peter. "Every girl of your age and appearance ought to have a husband, children, home."

Here Ellie felt herself in accord with Mr. Pritchard's sentiments. "There are lots of us over in the business college in Fredonia," she assured him, "who feel just as you do about it all. Many of us are called, or think we are, but few are chosen. Mr. Pritchard, I've never even yet been called."

"Nonsense," returned Peter Pritchard, "a girl like you can have anybody that she wants. All she's got to do is to exert herself."

"We exert ourselves but nothing comes of it," wailed Ellie.

"Ellie," said Peter, "if I weren't the head of an industrial plant I'd become a matrimonial agent. I have an idea that I could be one of the great matchmakers of the world. Now I have a nephew Jack——"

"Yes," said Ellie breathlessly.

"He's no good," continued Peter.

"What's the matter with him?" demanded Ellie.

Peter scowled. "He cares nothing about money," returned Peter, "and a man who cares nothing about money is no good. I mean it. It's common sense and up to date. No man can marry without money. No man can develop his emotional nature in these days without money. If he doesn't care about the wherewithal he hasn't got any emotions of the lasting kind. If he had he'd go out and get the stuff."

"Int'resting," quivered Ellie.

"I've told my nephew Jack a hundred times," proceeded Peter, "to take his place here in my plant, to settle down in Pritchard Park among my people. To marry here in Pritchard Park."

"Wouldn't that be fine," said Ellie.

"It's reasonable, isn't it?" demanded Peter.

"Very reasonable," conceded Ellie.

"I'm glad you think so," nodded Peter. "But he doesn't. He says he can't follow my suggestions and retain his self-respect. He's going to be a free agent or die in the attempt. And there you are."

"And nothing can be done about it?" queried Ellie.

"Nothing," said Peter.

"Mr. Pritchard," said Ellie, resignedly, "I have a feeling that I am cut out for a business career."

"I'm going to give you a position in the plant," said Peter.

"Where I can work up," stipulated Ellie. "I'm very good on theory. But I need a lot of practice."

"You will get practice," nodded Peter Pritchard, "lots of it. Ellie, I'm going to put you in your father's place. I'm going to make you my private secretary."

Ellie was aghast. "But," she protested, "I don't know how to be a private secretary."

"You know how to do as you are told?" asked Peter.

"Well, most of the time," assented Ellie. "Ellie," said Peter, "since your father's death there's only one person in all Pritchard Park that I can trust. That person is yourself. I've got to take you on. It's selfdefense. And all that I ask of you is loyalty," he said impressively, "loyalty to Peter Pritchard-loyalty to Peter Pritchard's interests. Think it over. Are you game?"

Ellie thought it over swiftly-too swiftly, possibly. She held out a firm little hand. "Mr. Pritchard," she returned, "I'll be loyal to you and to your interests. I am game."

Two days later she entered his employ. Ellie had a private mail box of her own, heavily padlocked. Her first duty was to scan her mail. Her first letter was a letter sealed with wax. She opened it and read it:

Report by Operative 3. S. T. Hanford, bookkeeping department, fre-quents blind tiger 11 Spring St. in Fredonia. There last Sat. evg. with woman not his wife. \$15.50 cocktails and tips. Left in taxi. Operative 5 detailed to follow.

The second letter was a report by Operative 7. It involved a girl who lived two blocks from Ellie. There were a dozen other letters. Ellie took them all to Peter Pritch-Peter scanned them eagerly. ard. He showed her how to file them in the personnel files, how to enter them in the personnel ledger. He showed her other things. That night, at ten o'clock two men called at Ellie's house on Peter Pritchard's business. Ellie started as she saw them. They were the two men who had taken Bert Whelan into custody. Their visit lasted for an hour. Going, they lingered in the doorway.

"Miss van Liew," nodded one of them, "about your father. He had a hard row to hoe, but he hoed it. He stood ace high with me. He was a regular human being and no mistake."

"He was a Class A man," nodded his colleague. "That man had a heart."

"He had nerve," went on the first man, "he didn't go around as some do and advertise the fact. But Mr. Van had nerve."

After their departure Ellie sat there in a daze. She understood now, all that there was to understand. All mysteries were made plain as day. Her father had been Peter Pritchard's private secretary—that and something else beside. He had been a sort of glorified detective-Peter Pritchard's reputable sleuth. Ellie had never known it. But all Pritchard Park had known it. And all Pritchard Park resented it, as Pritchard Park resented many other things.

There was something still, however, that Ellie didn't know. Her father never had been Peter Pritchard's chief detective. Peter's chief detective was himself.

Peter Pritchard was the autocrat of his people's breakfast table. He was the individual owner of the Pritchard Products Plant. The Pritchard Products Plant was a copper products plant; it specialized in copper wires, chiefly for the South American trade; it specialized in brass. Peter Pritchard was the proprietor of Pritchard Park. Pritchard Park was an industrial paradise. Every house in Pritchard Park was a home. Every house was equipped with everything that anybody's little heart could possibly desire. Copper kitchen utensils abounded. Each house was screened in with fine-mesh copper netting. In the living room of every house there hung a photograph of Peter Pritchard, neatly, richly framed in brass. Mr. Margerum, the business manager, had said quite openly that the frames were a notable addition to any living room.

Peter Pritchard somehow—it was a fancy that persisted—had reminded Ellie always of the unctuous Mr. Chadband: "Peace be unto this house." The comparison was ill-considered. Peter rarely uttered platitudes; he performed them. Peter forced peace upon this house. Happiness was compulsory in Pritchard Park. In Pritchard Park, thanks to Peter Pritchard, synthetic joy was wont to reign supreme. Peter didn't stop here; not only was he the well-wisher, the well-doer among his people. He was something more—Peter was the self-appointed conscience of his people.

In the matter of Bert Whelan he was merciless; he prosecuted Bert with zeal and vigor. His people resented it. Bert Whelan was a boy that everybody liked. He had been seduced by a seductive woman. He had been infatuated, blind. He was the kind of lad who goes wrong once and only once. He should have had another chance. So Peter Pritchard's people felt. So Ellie felt herself.

And the time came when Peter overreached himself; overstepped the mark. Adjacent to his private suite in the administration building there was a small room cluttered up with files and records whose usefulness was past. During a holiday period Peter had this room cleared of all its rubbish, renovated, decorated, furnished. Its furnishings were scant: a leather-covered lounge, a table, chair, a small bookcase set against the wall. A room like this was a distinct departure from Peter's business habit.

"My retiring room," said Peter.

Margerum, the business manager, looked it over carefully, and cynically, too. Ellie looked it over with him. Margerum was a gentleman of pleasing personality with very white teeth, with a compelling steady glance and a requisite amount of humor in his makeup. He was in mourning for his wife whom he had lost six months before. He bore up nobly under his affliction. He was frankly fond of Ellie. He had told her once that she and he were the only two in Pritchard Park who were not afraid of Peter. Margerum inspected the retiring room.

"Looks more like a cell to me," said Margerum, "though I see no cellaret."

"All men must relax at times," said Peter, though that was not part of Peter's creed.

"Go to it," nodded Margerum, "you have my leave."

Peter went to it. He spent his spare time within that room. But he emerged from it haggard, tired, undone. Ellie knew why. She knew the things that happened to Peter Pritchard when he was shut up in that room. The first time that he left it he was white with anger. "They think more of a selfconfessed embezzler than they do of me," he cried, "they send flowers to the county jail, to the jailbird that robs me of my money."

Ellie winced. With good reason, too. She had sent flowers to the county jail herself.

A week later Peter came out of that retiring room, sank down into a chair at Ellie's desk. He stared at her. "They call me names," he said, "they talk behind my back. Nobody defends me. I stand assailed. Ellie, my people are against me. Against me, to a man."

There was nothing Ellie could do for him. She had felt from the beginning that that room would get him in the end. And in the end it did. For the first time in his life Peter Pritchard broke down. He broke down all over, all at once. The New York specialists who attended him gave Peter his choice. Better six months of California, they advised him strenuously, than a cycle in a cemetery plot in Pritchard Park. Something inside of Peter added its warning. Grumbling his protests Peter Pritchard left for California, leaving Margerum in charge.

"You watch Margerum," Peter said to Ellie, "a man with something up his sleeve."

Peter was right. Margerum was a man with something up his sleeve. Ellie didn't watch him. But Margerum watched her. Always he had watched her. He felt now that his hour had come. He saw now that with Peter Pritchard's imminent personal protection gone Ellie was at the mercy of the people of the Park. There were people in the Park who could make it uncomfortable for Ellie if they chose. With Peter gone, they chose. She was part of a system that they hated. Ellie's existence became a miserable existence. But Ellie gave no sign. Ellie was stanch, Ellie was jaunty, Ellie had the high heart. But after all she was nothing but a human being, a girl made only of the stuff that girls are made of. Margerum waited until she was in the depths of despair. Then he closed in on her.

"Ellie," he said, "this thing is getting on your nerves. You hate this place; you hate these people."

Ellie shook her head. "These people hate me," she returned.

"And," continued Margerum, "you're the friendliest young thing on God's green earth. Ellie, you are suffering; you are suffering from Pritchardism. Your father was its victim. It got him in the end. It hasn't got me yet; it never will. But it's going to get you, Ellie, sure as guns. The time will come when you will think as Peter Pritchard thinks, when you will do as he does, when you will see things as he sees things. Listen, Ellie," went on Margerum with something catching in his voice, "I want to take you far away from all this. I want you to marry me."

Ellie was startled. "Marry you?" she echoed.

Margerum nodded. "I am as much in need of happiness as you."

"You've had happiness," protested Ellie, "you've had one wife. Isn't that enough?"

"No happiness," said Margerum, "I made the ambitious young man's mistake. I married a girl because her father had much money. He died without a dollar. I've been cheated, Ellie. I want my chance to marry just for love."

"Maybe," said Ellie, "so do I."

Margerum didn't beat about the bush. "Where is he, Ellie," he demanded, "this man you want a chance to marry just for love? He hasn't come to claim you yet. When will he come? Where will he come from? How will he find you; how will you find him? I'm here, Ellie. I can give you something that you want. People I can give you, friends, companionship; weekends in New York. I can give you the kind of life you want to live. It's opportunity I offer, Ellie. And if it counts for anything with you I offer love. Please think it over, Ellie, think it over—hard."

Ellie thought it over hard. The more she thought it over the more she concluded that here was the solution of her problem. But she withheld her answer. Every night when she got home, tired, distraught, she made up her mind that next day she would say yes to Margerum. But in the morning some in-

stinct held her back. When Margerum was with her she didn't want to marry him. When he was away from her she did. Margerum was politic. He didn't press his suit. He gave her all the time she needed to decide. But he courted her with assiduity and perseverance. He did things for her that she liked. Almost he made himself essential.

But something happened suddenly. Peter Pritchard died. He died in California. But they didn't bury him. According to his wish his body was cremated and his ashes scattered to the four winds at the place where life had left him. All Pritchard Park was shocked at Peter's death. Not Margerum. Margerum shook his head.

"Scattered to the four winds, Ellie," protested Margerum, "I don't like it. It sounds fishy. Is the old man dead or isn't he? It would be like him to play a trick on us. Always setting the stage, always laying a trap. I want to see the proof that Peter Pritchard's dead."

Next day they got a telegram from San Francisco:

Undersigned Peter Pritchard's nephew sole heir next kin beneficiary executor now sole proprietor Pritchard Products Plant stop desire manager Margerum remain sole charge pending arrival my business representative stop am on my way Honolulu trip round world.

J. PRITCHARD.

Margerum showed it to Ellie. "Comprehensive, anyhow," said Margerum. "Well, if the king is dead, long live the king."

Ten days later J. Pritchard's business representative arrived. His name was Farnsworth. He hailed from the Pacific coast. With him he bore a duly exemplified copy of Peter Pritchard's death certificate, a document that Margerum, with a wink aside to Ellie, scrutinized with exceeding care; he bore a duly authenticated copy of Peter's will and letters testamentary thereon running to John Pritchard; he brought a general power of attorney running to himself, duly executed by John Pritchard; he brought a large-sized, unconventional photograph of Peter Pritchard's nephew, which he set upon his desk. While the men were busy with the documents Ellie scanned the picture. The more she scanned it the less she liked it. Mr. Jack Pritchard, according to his counterfeit presentment, was a debilitated young man, clad in well-cut tweeds, leaning negligently against a table's edge, a cigarette hung loosely from his lips. In Ellie's estimation this nephew of Peter's was everything he shouldn't be and nothing that he should. His legs were very thin. He had the face of a roué, the constitution of a nervous wreck. It was a relief to look at Margerum.

"Mr. Farnsworth," said Margerum, tossing the papers on the desk, "you are boss here and I am at your service."

Mr. Farnsworth shook his head. "I am at your service, Mr. Margerum," he said politely. "I am nothing more nor less than an industrial engineer. You are a copper-products man. I've got to learn this business and you've got to keep me straight." Mr. Farnsworth stopped short. "Why, bless my soul," he said, "I forgot all about Charlie Stanislo." He started in the direction of the outer office. "Come in, Charlie," he exclaimed.

Charlie came in. Charlie was a young man with a round boyish face. He reminded Ellie unaccountably of Bert Whelan; she didn't know just why. "This is my assistant, Charlie Stanislo," said Mr. Farnsworth.

Charlie indulged himself in a roguish sort of bow. He was breezy and bashful, both at once. "You bet," said Charlie Stanislo. And then he smiled; stood there and smiled at Ellie, smiled at Margerum. Margerum marveled at that smile. Margerum calculated swiftly that in any business world a smile like that was worth a hundred thoustand dollars to any man who owned it. Aside from that he didn't like that smile. Ellie van Liew was smiling back at Charlie Stanislo.

"Miss van Liew," suggested Farnsworth, "you might show Charlie Stanislo around the plant while Mr. Margerum and I discuss the situation."

"May I?" nodded Ellie to Charlie Stanislo. "You bet," said Charlie. Ellie liked him from the start. He had a sheepish, chummy manner. The tang of the Coast was in his voice. And he said "You bet," a hundred times a day.

When they had left, Margerum nodded to Mr. Farnsworth. "Is Mr. Stanislo your sole assistant?" queried Margerum.

"He is," said Farnsworth. "I brought him on here for a specific reason. He's a personnel director. He's the slickest welfare man I know."

Margerum leaned back and smiled. "Mr. Farnsworth," he returned, "it's evident there's one thing you don't know. We're about fed up with welfare in this plant."

"Of the wrong kind, doubtless," nodded Farnsworth.

"What's this boy's method?" queried Margerum.

"He hasn't any," returned Farnsworth, "but if you'll have him introduced to two or three of the most popular people you've got here in the plant he'll do the rest."

"Well," mused Margerum, "the most popular man we ever had is in State's prison. We're shy on popularity. But we'll try and fix you up."

Margerum fixed them up. Inside of a week Charlie Stanislo was in training for the football team. Inside of a month he knew every man and woman, boy and girl, cat and dog in Pritchard Park. Inside of two months everybody called him Charlie. And by the end of ninety days everybody said "You bet," including Ellie. But Charlie Stanislo was worried. Ellie worried him. On numerous occasions when he dropped in to take Ellie to the movies he found Margerum's big car outside Ellie's house; he found Margerum inside the house. Charlie didn't like it. He said so.

"The old one keeps on coming," he complained. Margerum was forty. "What does he keep on coming for?" asked Charlie plaintively. "None of my business but I've got to know. Has he any claim on you?"

Ellie was cagy. "He thinks he hasn't," she returned, "but he likes me. I like him. You and Mr. Margerum are the only friends I've got. I like variety. There's such a difference between you two."

"Thank the Lord for that," said Charlie Stanislo.

Six months passed uneventfully. Then something happened. Mr. Farnsworth occupied Pritchard's old office and Ellie worked for him. One afternoon he called Ellie mysteriously to his side. "Miss van Liew," said Farnsworth, "I notice that we purchase all our copper—raw material—from the Green Falls Copper Company over in New York. Here's their address. I'd like to have you take a day off. Keep it mum. Go over to New York. Size 'em up. See what you can see."

Eloise complied with his request. She saw what she could see, which was very little. The Green Falls Copper Company was nothing but a shell. It occupied an inexpensive room on the top floor of a skyscraper. A stenographer, a little East Side girl, was the only individual in sight. The manager was out somewhere on the road. Ellie asked questions that had been adroitly framed by Farnsworth; she got vague answers. She went back to Farnsworth and reported; it seemed to her the trip had been in vain. Farnsworth's eye lighted as she told him all she knew.

"I thought so," remarked Farnsworth. He sent for Margerum. "Mr. Margerum," he said, "I find that we've been buying all our copper for some six months past from the Green Falls people in New York."

Margerum nodded easily. He glanced uncertainly at Ellie. "Mr. Farnsworth," said Margerum, "I've never taken up with you the matter of our purchases of raw material. The time is ripe. I've got all the data in my office. Suppose you come down to my department and I'll show you everything."

Why Ellie did the thing she did she never knew. Upon her still rested the hypnotic spell of Peter Pritchard. She was assailed suddenly with Peter's insatiable curiosity. Something was afoot-that much was Ellie didn't reason with herself; she clear. simply had to know. She darted into Peter's retiring room. She locked the door. She pressed a spring. She swung the small bookcase away from the wall. She swung the switch of the dictaphone to the letter M for Margerum. She pressed the receiver to her ear. She heard as clearly as though the men were in her presence. It was her first offense.

"Mr. Farnsworth," said Margerum, and his voice was as steady as steel, "let's get down to cases. What do you object to in our purchases of copper?"

"I have two serious objections," returned Farnsworth. "The first is that we're buying copper of a concern that has no real existence. The second is that we buy, invariably, above the lowest market price."

"We can't buy always at the lowest market price," said Margerum.

"Peter Pritchard did it."

"I am not Peter Pritchard," Margerum reminded him.

"You don't have to be," said Farnsworth. "The Pritchard Products Plant is purchasing from one hundred million to two hundred million pounds of copper every year."

"It is," said Margerum.

"It can command the lowest market price," said Farnsworth.

IIA-P

Silence. "And what," said Margerum at length, "do you claim is the trouble?"

More silence. "I claim," said Farnsworth, "that somebody is buying copper at the lowest market price and selling copper to the plant at an advance upon that price. I claim that that somebody is connected with the plant."

Ellie could hear Margerum's footfalls as he walked up and down the hardwood floor. "And," finally said Margerum, "you charge me with that breach of trust?"

"You may call it breach of trust," retorted Farnsworth. "I call it grand larceny—embezzlement."

"All right," said Margerum, "the charge is true."

"How much of a rake-off have you made?" asked Farnsworth.

"On every deal," said Margerum, "exactly one eighth of a cent per pound."

"Jehoshaphat!" cried Farnsworth, "if this kept on you would be a millionaire."

"Yes," said Margerum.

"And out of Jack Pritchard's profits," went on Farnsworth.

"Yes," said Margerum.

"Where," demanded Farnsworth, "is the money that you've corralled up to date?"

"I've got it soaked away," said Margerum. "I'll keep it soaked away until I make my pile."

"You intend then to keep on?" queried Farnsworth.

"I'll answer that question by asking another one," said Margerum. "When will this Jack Pritchard show up at the plant?"

"Nobody knows," said Farnsworth, "the world is wide—and wet."

"The wind lies in that direction?" queried Margerum.

"It does," said Farnsworth.

"Very well," went on Margerum, "and what does this Jack Pritchard expect of us?"

"He expects," said Farnsworth, "that this plant will make more money for him than it ever did before."

"Good," said Margerum, "the plant is going to make more money than it ever did before. My ambition is aroused. The more business this plant does the more copper we shall buy. The more copper we take on the more money I can make."

"You don't seem to realize the fact," Farnsworth reminded him, "that State's prison stares you in the face." Margerum laughed—a long, low laugh. "It doesn't stare me in the face," said Margerum, "because you're coming in with me. From now on it's a fifty-fifty deal."

There was a pause—a deadly pause. "Do you think," finally said Farnsworth, "that you can convince me—that you can induce a man like me to go into a scheme like this with you."

"I know I can," said Margerum. And in the end he did. It took him half an hour to do it but in the end he did. Ellie listened to Margerum's exhortation with growing admiration, and utter detestation for the man.

She could almost see Farnsworth lean across the table and extend his hand. "All right," said Farnsworth, "we'll play the game together just so long as the game is safe to play. Jehoshaphat!" said Farnsworth, "I forgot this boy, this Charlie Stanislo."

"We can leave him out," said Margerum.

"Can we?" mused Farnsworth. "I don't believe we can. The boy's a stranger to me. Pritchard and I picked him on his record. But Pritchard told me to watch him—to keep my eye on him. And he assists me. He helps me with my work. How do I know that Jack Pritchard didn't tell him to keep an eye on me? I can't take a chance on this, unless we get this Stanislo."

"I'll get him," said Margerum. "What's his specialty? Wine, women, song?"

"I wouldn't cut up any monkeyshines of that kind—not just now," objected Farnsworth. "As a matter of fact he's infatuated with the Van Liew girl in my office and—\_"

"Infatuated with the Van Liew girl?" echoed Margerum.

"He says he is," said Farnsworth.

"Is he a poker player?" queried Margerum.

Farnsworth chuckled. "He plays poker like a fiend," he said.

"I'll get him somehow," repeated Margerum.

And in the end Margerum got Charlie Stanislo. Ellie didn't know just how he went about it, but he did. Ellie didn't warn Charlie Stanislo of impending danger. Why, she never knew. She had too much faith in him, she knew he'd stand the test. Pritchardism had her hypnotized, her sense of loyalty to Jack Pritchard, her employer, kept her confused. Her habits of secrecy thwarted her. Ellie's reason fought her instincts; her instincts fought her reason. Ellie's mind was in a whirl.

And Charlie Stanislo was in a whirl, a whirl of his own making. A bit set up by his popularity, his head turned by Ellie's sudden interest in him, Charlie burst into full bloom. Hitherto somewhat shabby as to his habiliments, Charlie arrayed himself like the lilies of the field. He surpassed Margerum in dress. He bought a better car than Margerum had ever owned—a spiffy roadster with a high-powered engine. Jauntily he drove it up to Ellie's house; jauntily he exhibited it to Ellie; jauntily he asked her out to ride.

Ellie only shook her head. She was pale, distraught. "Not in that car," said Ellie, "not ever in that car."

"What's the matter with that car?" demanded Charlie.

"I can't go driving with you in that car," said Ellie, "because that car was bought with stolen money."

Charlie stared at her aghast. "You mean," he cried, "that I bought that car with stolen money?"

"You know you did," said Ellie.

"Will you please—specify," requested Charlie Stanislo.

And Ellie specified. She told him all she knew. She told him how she knew it. Charlie acted like a little boy, a stubborn little boy. He entered a general denial of everything she had against him.

"My car wasn't bought with stolen money," he persisted.

"Tell me," demanded Ellie, "where you got the money to buy a car like that?"

"I-decline to tell," said Charlie.

Ellie gathered him into her arms as a mother gathers her only offspring. "Oh, my dear, my dear," cried Ellie. The memory of Bert Whelan's bleeding face came back to her. For hours in her little living room she pleaded with Charlie Stanislo-appealed in frenzy to that part of him that she knew; the part of him that belonged to her alone. For there was no turning back now, she assured him that. He must come through clean. She told him that. Together they must make a clean breast of it to Jack Pritchard. Together they must make restitution—work their fingers to the bone to do it. And if Jack Pritchard was a Pritchard, if it meant State's prison in the end, then she would work and wait and scrimp and save until he'd served his term. But there

was only one thing to be done—the vital thing. It was a matter of Charlie's immortal soul. Nothing else mattered in the whole wide world.

Charlie listened to her, his eyes wide, his glance intent upon her face. "But what," he demanded, "does it mean to you?"

Ellie sobbed upon his shoulder. "It means my whole life, Charlie," she returned.

"And you'd do this thing for me—a miserable thief," he cried.

"I'd do anything for you," cried Ellie.

"I'll do anything you want me to," said Charlie Stanislo, "but I can't do anything alone. It's got to be you and me, together. Ellie, listen. Will you marry me to-night?"

The next day there was consternation in the offices of the Pritchard Products Plant. The Mesopotamia had docked the afternoon before. Farnsworth had received a wire at two o'clock a. m. Jack Pritchard had landed in New York. He would reach Pritchard Park at noon. Noon passed. Jack Pritchard didn't come. At half past three a big hired New York limousine rolled up to the door of the administration building Jack of the Pritchard Products Plant. Pritchard emerged from the limousine, just a bit the worse for wear. He was escorted by the taxi driver and a member of the office force, up to his private suite upstairs. Ellie van Liew and Mr. Farnsworth were there waiting for him. Mr. Jack Pritchard sat 'him down at the first convenient desk. He looked about him with a glassy stare.

"See no friendly faces," ventured Mr. Pritchard. "Looking for 'em everywhere."

Margerum strode into the room, bore down upon Jack Pritchard and shook him by the hand. "You got a friendly face," said Mr. Pritchard. He rose to his feet, leaned unsteadily against the desk, lit a cigarette, held it loosely with his lips. "Well, my boys," he said, "I'm here. You'd better get some money for me, boys. I'm here."

He dropped his cigarette upon the floor. He uttered a wild whoop. Charlie Stanislo was standing in the doorway. Mr. Pritchard dived for him and caught him in his arms.

"Jack, m'boy," cried Mr. Pritchard with great feeling, "I been looking f'r a friendly face."

Charlie Stanislo unwound himself adroitly from the gentleman's embrace. Margerum stepped forward with a chair. "Mr. Pritchard," pleaded Margerum, fearful of disaster, "you had better take a seat."

Mr. Pritchard stared at him. "I'm not Mr. Pritchard," he returned, "there's Jack Pritchard there—that li'l' cuss. I'm Charlie Stanislo." Margerum stared from the newcomer to the personnel director of the plant.

"Who," demanded Margerum, "is my employer, Mr. Pritchard?"

"I am," said the erstwhile Charlie Stanislo.

The visitor wound himself once more around his friend. "Jack," he said, "I did all your dirty work for you. Now I'm here. D'you know why I'm here, m'boy? I don't approve of goings-on like these. That's the first thing. The next is, I ran short of money. Jack, I want a thousand dollars right away, you hear."

"Mr. Farnsworth," said the personnel director of the plant, "will you get a thousand dollars out of petty cash for Mr. Stanislo, and then drive Mr. Stanislo to the best bootlegging hotel in Fredonia? In due course I'll join you there."

He sat down at Farnsworth's desk. Margerum took a chair that faced him. Margerum's face was white as chalk. Ellie cowered in a corner.

"Are you Jack Pritchard?" faltered Margerum.

"I am," returned the other.

"You want something of me," nodded Margerum.

"I do," said his employer.

"Restitution," went on Margerum.

"All of that," returned the other.

"You're going to prosecute?" asked Margerum.

"We'll see about that later," said his chief.

"You want my resignation," nodded Margerum.

Jack Pritchard shook his nead. "Mr. Margerum," he said, "I'd be a fool to part with you. My uncle Peter told me you were the best copper products man in the universe. That's the kind of man I've got to have. Of course," went on the proprietor of the Pritchard Products Plant, "I should expect you to work for as reasonable a salary as is possible and I should expect you to save me all the money and make me all the money that you can."

Margerum burst into a relieved laugh. "Well, you're a Pritchard after all," he cried. He leaned over and glanced curiously at Jack Pritchard. "Mr. Pritchard," he began.

"Jack," said Pritchard.

"Thanks," said Margerum. "Now will you tell me honestly just why you did all this?"

Jack Pritchard seemed positively puzzled. "I don't know why," he said. "My uncle told me that everybody needed watching here, particularly you."

"And I did," said Margerum.

"You did," went on Jack Pritchard, "and my uncle Peter laid the trap before he died and hypnotized me into following his program. It so happens he builded better than he knew."

"How," demanded Margerum, "are you going to square yourself with all our people?"

"I'll fix it with 'em," nodded Jack. "I'll tell the factory hands that it's a joke I've been playing on the office force. I'll tell the office force it was a joke on you."

"And it is," said Margerum.

Jack found Ellie in Peter Pritchard's retiring room, plucking the wires of the dictaphone receiving apparatus out by the roots. He helped her finish the job.

"I'll never suspect anybody any more in all my life," said Ellie, "and I'll never forgive you as long as I live."

"What have I done to you?" demanded Jack.

"You let me turn myself inside out last night," cried Ellie.

Jack caught her in his arms. "I wouldn't have missed it for the world," he said. "Listen, Ellie. There are hundreds of women

that want a chap like me for the money that he's worth. How can a chap like me ever come to know that a woman ever wants him for himself? I've got a pretty clear idea of how hard you wanted me."

"I can never look you in the face again," said Ellie. "I'd run away if I knew just where to run."

"I gathered there'd be trouble when you found out what was what," said Jack, "that's the reason that I married you last night."

"What you ever saw in me-" said Ellie.

"What you ever saw in me-" said "But look here," he went on, "the Tack. chief thing is to get you out of here. Ellie, I'm going to take you anywhere you say. If you say so we'll live in little old New York."

"We'll live right here," said Ellie. "I'm going to stick here until these people are my friends. I've thought out how to go about it, Jack. I want you to do something for me and do it right away. I want you to let me get Bert Whelan out of prison. And I want you to let me give him back his job."

"You bet," returned Jack Pritchard.

They made their way downstairs to Jack's new high-powered car. The plant was letting out. As Jack treaded his way among the home-going workmen a stentorian voice from their ranks rent the air.

"Hello, Charlie Pritchard," cried the foreman of a shop.

"Hello, Tim," yelled Jack. "You bet."

A hundred voices answered him. "You bet!"

# SPEAKING OF IRELAND

VERY day or so some one of more or less prominence says that the Irish problem is settled. Every one would like to see it settled, but to a good many it seems likely d to be settled like the reading on a certain old-fashioned barometer-"Settled

Stormy." It's been that way for a long time. No less an authority than Charles Lever, writing in 1837 of the Ireland of a few years earlier, sums up the situation, especially as to Dublin, the storm center of recent events, by quoting in his novel "The Con-fessions of Harry Lorrequer" a bit of what he calls "that most moving melody—"The Groves of Blarney:""

> Oh! Dublin, sure, there is no doubting, Beats every city upon the say. 'Tis there you'll see O'Connell spouting, And Lady Morgan making tay. For tis the capital of the greatest nation, With finest peasantry on a fruitful sod, Fighting like devils for conciliation, And hating one another for the love of God.

# Big-time Vendetta

By Howard R. Marsh Author of "The Three Toy Horses," Etc.

Big Moski almost gets what usually comes the way of the innocent bystander.

DUKES & LOOKS" stage a song-danceand-patter act. You have seen it many times at the Bijou, Temple or Tivoli. It's the act before the last and you know that it is put there because it is distinctly a front-stage act. While Dukes & Looks perform their "Funny Frolics" before the curtain the stage is being set for the big finale behind the curtain.

That curtain is the same in all the theaters where Dukes & Looks, vaudeville team de luxe, perform. It depicts an impossible boulevarded main street; there are grocery stores, butcher shops and kindred places of business painted in impossible perspective which makes possible the display of large signs announcing all manner of real and local businesses: Go to Cohn's for Sure-Fit Eyeglasses; Before You Buy Her That Ring See the Beauties at the Emporium; Meet Mitchell for Meats; Bank with the Big Bank, and so on.

The work of Dukes & Looks is to occupy the time and only the front stage while the finale is set; incidentally they must entertain the audience. This Dukes & Looks do well. Theirs is a clever act, affording a variety of appeals. Dukes stages an eccentric dance which brings roars of laughter from every man in the audience who has seen himself or his friends reel home with the same staggering steps Dukes portrays. In addition to his apparent defiance of all laws of perambulation and equilibrium and his snappy buck-and-wing Dukes has an ingenious line of patter. He conducts a strenuous flirtation with the beautiful Looks, who always just manages to elude his gaunt arms; he tells of conversations with the daughter of the Irish washerwoman and with her father. He succeeds in keeping the audience thoroughly interested and amused. Thus he is enabled to draw his sixty per week and achieves the ambition of a Big Time vaudevillean.

Looks forms a pleasing background for the display of Dukes' pedal and conversational skill. She dresses tantalizingly; she laughs liltingly; she tosses her fair hair girlishly; she repulses the ardent Dukes consistently. At the proper point in Dukes' jokes she always asks "Why?" thus doubling the interest in his answer. Toward the end of the act she joins the supple Dukes in a rapid terpsichorean whirl. She is the reverse of Dukes in make-up. He appears hopelessly lank, awkward, out-at-the-elbows. A high hat and far-too-short trousers aid his gawkiness. Looks, on the other hand, is fairly dazzling in her short dress, her high color and her graceful, rounded figure. Though Dukes does most of the work of the

act and arouses all the laughter, most of the men in the audience keep their eyes focused on Looks.

Finally the two whirl off the stage in a tangle of waving arms and legs; there is applause—an encore which Looks acknowledges by an all-inclusive kiss and Dukes responds to by tripping over his own feet. You know that finish, just as you know the whole act. Perhaps you are the man or woman who whispers loudly, "I suppose they are married."

They are.

Dukes and Looks, off-stage, are known as Mr. and Mrs. Jimmie Snowden. They arrived at the outer edge of Big Time where they'll always stay—via the Friday Night Dance Club of Danville, Illinois. Their route took them next to amateur night at the Bijou theater; the next step was a Chicago booking agency—followed by their marriage—two seasons around the Southwestern circuits, then Middle Western small towns and finally—the aim of their lives—to what they chose to call Big Time.

From September 15th to June 15th they are the next-to-the-last act on the boards; between the closing and opening dates they spend their time at an inland lake in Michigan, where they are known as "Mr. and Mrs. James S. Snowden of Illinois" and are supposed to derive their income from some remote connection with the theatrical business. Their dancing ability is admired, their perfect camaraderie and their respect and courtesy to each other extolled. They are the model couple of the small resort. They may well be, for Jimmie and his little blond wife are very much in love with each other. Even the hard work, long hours, beastly hotels and rough treatment have failed to shatter their strong mutual affection. Insinuating males have never had a chance with Estelle Snowden and the most vampirish females soon give up hope of enticing the boyish Jimmie from his wife.

That mutual love made the crime of the "Big Moski" the more dastardly. Big Moski, failing to capture the fair Estelle by strategy, resorted to force. This brought on the Big-Time vendetta between the team of Dukes & Looks and the captain of "Moski's Famous Troupe of Russian Tumblers"—recruited and trained in the shadow of the Williamsburg Bridge, New York City.

For three weeks the six acts, of which the one of Dukes & Looks was minor, had played together. It was a well-balanced show, with a trained-animal stunt, a domestic drama entitled, "Too Many Wives," and black-face comedians. Then there were the last three acts in which the team of Dukes & Looks was particularly interested.

The act before that staged by Dukes & Looks was an exhibition of sharpshooting by "Desert Nell and Plain Pete." These two individuals shot everything from pistols to machine guns and could hit anything from a dime to a duke at fifty feet. Particularly exciting was their shooting duet. In this they fired from pistols in all four hands. They claimed to hit the bull's-eye and ring the bell twenty-four times in ten seconds. That was the little exhibition which Jimmie Snowden put to use when he planned his revenge on Big Moski.

The next act was Dukes & Looks, with which you were familiar. Then came the Famous Troupe of Russian Tumblers. There were seven in the troupe; each was able to make a hoop out of his body and roll backward across the stage or to become a rubber ball and bounce nearly out of sight in the flies. They tumbled and dove and jumped from side to side; they leaped from shoulder to shoulder, upside down or right side Their final big feature was the human up. pyramid in which four stood atop each other while the other three draped themselves artistically around the base. The base, of course, was Big Moski-a human animal with two hundred pounds of muscle running straight up, front and back, into a shaven, bullet-shaped head. Big Moski was not bad looking on the stage, for his father had given him Greek grace and regular features, while his mother had added great brown eyes from Palestine. Off stage he seemed hulking, sullen, with a slow mind and animal propensities. He had never been remotely attractive to Estelle. But Looks did appeal to him. He began his campaign.

That was the first week of the season at Toledo, Ohio. Big Moski watched Looks whirl finally from the stage and caught her, breathless and dizzy, in his big arms. She laughed and pulled away. He was loath to let her go. After that he waited nightly for her whirling exit, his arms outstretched.

This seemed like mere professional courtesy at first. Then one night as Estelle struggled for her breath and balance Big Moski kissed her.

Jimmie saw. He smiled at Estelle as she

frantically rubbed the disgrace from her lips with the back of her hand; then he stepped close to Big Moski.

"That's plenty of that," Jimmie said. "The lady and I are married."

"Hein!" For some reason Big Moski laughed; his huge body shook with silent mirth. That response to his warning angered Jimmie.

"If you try that again I'll fix you!" he said.

Again the Moski laughed; there was reason for it this time. Jimmie, stringy and awkward, was threatening a muscular mountain of humanity; it probably was funny. "I mean it!" Jimmie was thoroughly

angry; his face was red through its powder, his voice shook. "Just try any more of that funny work with Mrs. Snowden and I'll knock you for a touchdown!"

Jimmie didn't mean his warning literally; he could have knocked Big Moski down with about the ease that a squirrel could down a grizzly bear. But he meant his warning seriously; he would not have Estelle insulted.

That was the beginning of the feud.

It became more bitter at Columbus when Big Moski bully-ragged the hotel clerk into giving him and his troupe the only two rooms left in the house, even though Jimmie had made a reservation. There was an actual declaration of war at Dayton. This time Jimmie was the provoker.

He had dressed rapidly and came up on the stage just as the Moskis were putting on their human pyramid; with a great deal of muscle-straining and impressive maneuvering the pyramid formed. Then, true to form, the top man fell to the floor. It was the customary trick to make the exhibition appear more difficult to the audience, and that audience, deeply interested, gasped when the pyramid tumbled. At that moment Jimmie, goaded by some irresistible impulse, laughed aloud. He laughed in his best stage form, a high falsetto, and shouted from the wings. "As graceful as that bird, the elephant."

The audience didn't all catch the words but Jimmie's laughter was infectious. Instantly the whole house began to snicker. They were still snickering when the pyramid was successfully formed, snickering instead of applauding when the curtain went down.

Big Moski rushed off the stage toward Jimmie. He flexed a brawny arm. "I get you for that!" he shouted and swung his fist at Jimmie's ear.

Jimmie took one of his agile dance steps and dodged behind the manager, who had appeared to reprimand Jimmie for the unseemly mirth which had ruined the act.

The manager ducked; then put his diamond-studded front between Jimmie and his attacker. "Here, here! Enough of that! Moski, cut it or I'll cancel to-night!"

Moski glared at Jimmie but dropped his

arm. "He spoiled the act," he insisted. The manager agreed. "Jimmie, what in the world was the matter? You'll be looking for a jerktown contract if you interfere with the show again."

"All right," Jimmie agreed. "But those fools did look so funny!" He dodged as Moski threatened to advance again. "I'll have to keep off the stage when they're on; they're so damn funny!"

"Keep off, then!" warned the manager and bustled away to settle a dispute between the stage electrician and one of the black-face comedians.

"I get you!" warned Moski. "You-you dude!" He couldn't think of anything worse to say. Moski was not a quick thinker.

"Tell it to the newspapers," scoffed Jimmie. He hastened away to recite the encounter to Estelle. He was not ashamed of his part.

Then trouble began in earnest. The last night's performance in Dayton witnessed its climax.

The act of Dukes & Looks started well enough. Jimmie's staggering dance was well received. Then he began his patter. Suddenly the noise behind the curtain increased. There was the banging of tables and chairs, sharp exclamations as the stage was set for the Moskis. In vain Jimmie tried to talk over the noise; each time he reached the point of an anecdote there was a bang which drowned all other sound. The audience began to fidget and cough. Then some one in the balcony mimicked Jimmie's voice with "A little louder, ple-ase!"

The audience laughed, not with Jimmie but at him. Jimmie was furious. He knew that Big Moski, unable to think of an original scheme of revenge, had turned his own trick back on him. He was white-faced and tense as he swung Estelle-the Looks of the team—into the final dance. He was too tense; in some manner he caught the foot of Estelle under his own; she cried out in sudden pain. Before he could lift his foot she had jerked away, leaving her white slipper on the floor. For a moment she stood, hurt and confused; then she limped hurriedly from the stage.

Jimmie hobbled after her amid the jeers of the audience. He reached the wings, murderous rage in his mind. Then he became deadly, steely calm. There in front of him was Big Moski and in Big Moski's arms was Estelle.

Looks was struggling, clawing, kicking like a frenzied kitten; but slowly, resistlessly, Big Moski pinioned her arms to her sides and lifted her face to his. He kissed her full on the lips, raised his head slightly to smile insinuatingly at Jimmie, and kissed Estelle again. He kissed her a third time, then lowered her to the floor. Estelle hid her burning face in her hands; she ran to Jimmie and hid her tears in his ridiculous little coat.

"Well?" Moski said to Jimmie. "What you going to do about it?"

"Estelle, let go! I'll brain the brute!" Jimmie was seeing black now. He pushed Estelle aside and ran at Big Moski, his fists flailing desperately but ineffectually. Big Moski waited for him, his huge arms extended. Jimmie ran blindly between them; they closed around him with the crushing strength of a grizzly bear. Tighter they squeezed Jimmie, tighter, until he was breathless and weak; they lifted him from the floor; they carried him to the center of the stage, to the very chair Moski used in his strong-man exhibition.

"Ready!" called Big Moski to one of his troupe in the wings. The signal buzzed; the curtain was rung up.

There in the center of the stage, before the audience which had jeered him, Jimmie was spanked by Big Moski. He was thoroughly spanked, laid across Moski's knees, held powerless and spanked again and again.

The audience, thinking Jimmie's punishment was an impromptu piece of buffoonery to atone for the poor performance of Dukes & Looks, shrieked with laughter as the thwacking hand of Moski descended regularly on the helpless Jimmie.

Finally Big Moski rose, seized the hapless Jimmie by the collar of his coat and dragged him across the stage like a bag of wheat. "There!" he said as he threw Jimmie into the wings. "Who got the Big Laugh that time?" Then calmly Big Moski whistled to his troupe and his act began.

Jimmie Snowden didn't sleep that night. He tossed and twisted, beat his pillow, cursed aloud. He was buried in humiliation, eaten with cankerous hate and the demand for revenge. In vain the loving Estelle tried to soothe him; each word from her brought a fresh storm of self-vituperation, oaths of vengeance.

Just before daylight Jimmie's tossings A thought had come to him; he ceased. turned it over in his anguish-heated mind. He considered it coldly, cruelly, his eyes wide-staring, his pulse leaping. Then he composed himself to sleep and as he slept a smile of satisfaction showed on his lips. He knew now the road to revenge. Big Moski would never kiss Estelle again; he would never have another chance to humiliate the team of Dukes & Looks. Big Moski was doomed. Jimmie's revenge was terrible in its thoroughness.

Fortunately for the team of Dukes & Looks it didn't have to appear again in Dayton; Jimmie could not have faced another audience in that city. Instead, the entire show went over the State line to Indianapolis. Jimmie did not speak once during the train trip. The jibes of his fellows, the sympathy of Estelle, had no effect upon him. He stared, white-faced, tight-lipped, at the flying landscape; he was perfecting his plans. He would—kill that big animal, Moski.

There was no matinée the first day. Jimmie remained in his hotel room. Absentmindedly he ate the food which Estelle ordered for him. Often he smiled a bitter, triumphant smile. His plans were perfect.

Night came. Jimmie went early to the theater. Even before the first act started he was dressed in his skin-tight coat and ragged trousers. Estelle, thoroughly worried, tried to stay close to him. He eluded her by dodging quickly among the properties behind the back drop. He remained there only a few moments; he worked rapidly. When he joined Estelle again there was a new look on his face; his smile was hard and his young eyes gleamed coldly.

Together Jimmie and Estelle watched the first two acts—acts which they had seen many times before. Jimmie was patient now; he could wait. Big Moski was doomed.

The black-face comedians began their chaff front stage. Behind the eternal "Main Street" curtain the stage was being set for Desert Nell and Plain Pete. Gun racks were placed, bells hung; formidable revolvers were placed on the table, bottles strung along a wooden bulwark. Finally was set the target with the metal bull's-eye against which rang twenty-four bullets in ten seconds' time.

"Wait here for me, Estelle," said Jimmie. He left the wing and strolled across the stage. He stopped in front of the target and squinted his eyes as though lining it with the back drop. From directly before the target he paced the distance to the side wings four full steps. He stepped behind the back drop and measured four steps away from the wings. There he scratched a chest-high mark on the brick wall.

That was where he would stand Big Moski —right in front of that chest-high mark. And twenty-four bullets would pump into him in ten seconds—for the bull's-eye of the target was no longer metal; *it was a piece of black cloth* torn from Jimmie's ragged trousers, from the very trousers which Big Moski had spanked. There was justice for you! And vengeance—real vengeance! Twenty-four bullets into that great hulk of a Moski, right through the cloth bull's-eye, through the thin back drop, and thud! thud! thud! into Moski.

Jimmie chuckled, then stifled his mirth. It was a too-evident sign of insanity. Of course he was insane; he admitted that to himself; insane with rage, humiliation, the desire for revenge. Front stage the blackfaces were telling broad jokes while back stage Jimmie Snowden gleefully visualized the wilting of that brute Moski under the hail of bullets.

The comedy act was over. The curtain raised on a desert scene, with tables and bottles and bells strung through the imitation mesquite and sage. Apparently such strange desert properties didn't seem out of place to the audience. But Jimmie Snowden, "Dukes," found it delightfully naïve. He laughed aloud.

Suddenly he realized he must hurry to get Moski and stand him up beford that death mark on the brick wall.

He hurried to dressing room No. 3 where the Russian tumblers were preparing for their act in an atmosphere of garlic and guttural oaths. Big Moski himself responded to Jimmie's rap. He was fully dressed in his buff athletic uniform but obviously surprised at Jimmie's visit. He half expected attack. But Jimmie smiled easily. "Moski, will you come with me for a minute? I want to talk over our little trouble."

"Trouble?" Moski grinned, showing his big white teeth. Then: "Sure, little man, I'll go with you." He called over his shoulder to his comrades, then followed Jimmie.

"I want to talk to you in private," Jimmie declared. "Shall we go behind the drop?" Suppose Moski objected! Jimmie held his breath.

"Sure t'ing!" agreed the tumbler.

Four steps behind the drop Jimmie stopped; craftily he maneuvered so that the bulk of Moski covered the scratch on the brick wall, the scratch which marked the destination of twenty-four bullets.

Now to keep Moski there! Keep him there until the very last of the sharpshooting act! Then would be the finale! The wonderful finale—twenty-four bullets thudding into Moski's hairy chest!

Until to-night Jimmie had paid little attention to the details of the sharpshooting act. He had been too busy preparing to slide out on the stage with Estelle the moment the curtain lowered. But to-night the finale was worth noticing! Yes, sir!

Big Moski stared at Jimmie bovinely. "What's the game?" he asked.

Jimmie knew that for three or four minutes he must keep Big Moski from moving; after that he would never move again. He plunged desperately into conversation.

"I wanted to see if we could straighten matters out," he said. His eyes were roving, his ears keen to catch the progress of the shooting act.

"Sure t'ing! I call it square. We are friends. Is that all?" Big Moski turned away as though the matter were closed.

Jimmie caught his arm frantically, held him before the scratch on the wall. "And Mrs. Snowden? You promise not to insult her again?"

"Insult? Ah, Jeemie Snowden, that was not insult. That was praise. She so pretty! I kiss her once, two—three times because shé so pretty! But no! I not do it again! My girl, Chrysis, she coming to Ind'anapolee tomorrow. We get married. So!" The big athlete smiled like a self-conscious child. "I not bother your wife again."

For a moment Jimmie was tempted to pull Big Moski from the death mark; then he thought of the public spanking and his mind and jaw set. "And now ladies and gentlemen," came the voice of Plain Pete from front stage, "we will use both hands, firing twenty-four times at the bull's-eye and ringing the bell every time!"

Plain Pete had announced the finale of his act; it was time for the team of Dukes & Looks to be rubbing resin on their shoes. Well, the team would be late to-night. Or there'd be no act, rather—just a cluster of people around the body of Big Moski, the body with twenty-four bullets in it.

"Are you ready?" called Plain Pete from the stage.

Jimmie Snowden visualized the raised revolvers leveled at the bull's-eye—leveled, in fact, at the chest of Big Moski. Involuntarily he drew back. His heart was beating painfully; he could scarcely breathe. Cold perspiration covered his forehead. And Big Moski only stared at him with that stupid half grin on his face.

"Ready?" repeated Plain Pete. What was keeping him? Why didn't he shoot? Shoot into the body of that big animal——

"Out of my way! Quick!" Jimmie was knocked aside. Big Moski was pushed away by a stage hand who came running behind the drop.

"Ready?" repeated Plain Pete impatiently from the stage.

"No! No!" Jimmie wanted to shriek. Big Moski was no longer in front of the death mark; the stage hand was there instead. "Don't shoot!" Jimmie tried to call, but his vocal chords seemed paralyzed.

"Ready!" whispered the stage hand hoarsely. Then rapidly he began to beat with a hammer on a steel horseshoe he held in his hand. Twenty-four times he beat, so rapidly and loudly that there was no sound of Desert Nell's and Plain Pete's rapid shooting. Then the stage hand turned on Jimmie.

"You almost crabbed the act, you fool!" he said. "I was late as it was and you stood in the way like an idjit! What t'hell! It'd been a fine thing if they'd fired those blanks out there and I hadn't been here to ring the bell for them! Wouldn't it? Huh?"

Dimly Jimmie heard the applause of the audience; he heard the voice of Estelle calling frantically for him. It was time for his act, but he was overwhelmed, dazed. And that Big Moski, instead of having twentyfour bullets in his breast was mollifying a rough stage hand who had pounded twentyfour times on a horseshoe with an old rusty hammer.

"Blanks?" echoed Jimmie. His mind had seized that word. "You mean----"

"Sure, you blockhead! What do you think? Those birds could hit that bull'seye with a gun in each hand? Say! How do you get that way?"

Big Moski pushed the sarcastic stage hand aside. "Leave my friend Jeemie alone!" he commanded. "He not know about your pound-pound-pound to ring the bell. He always out front when they do that sharpshooting. Beat it!"

Jimmie felt a big, muscular hand close over his. "We friends now, *hein?*" It was Big Moski's voice. And it was Big Moski who led the dazed Jimmie to Estelle, who immediately whacked him between the shoulders and pushed him on to the stage.

Mechanically Jimmie began his staggering dance. Immediately there was applause. Never had he staggered and reeled so well; it almost seemed that he couldn't help it, the way his knees shook.



### A DOUBLE-BARRELED COMEBACK

ARTIN W. LITTLETON, the New York lawyer who made the speech nominating Alton B. Parker for president, is as witty as he is eloquent. He adjusts his linguistic tactics to the kind of fighting he has to do. When he wants to move a jury, he is a combination of Cicero, Demosthenes and all the voices of spring. When he seeks the discomfiture of opposing counsel he is as sharp and cutting as Voltaire and Dean Swift.

On one occasion, when he was trying a case in Westchester County, near the city of New York, the lawyer on the other side took a crack at his "Chesterfieldian urbanity."

"Ah!" Littleton interrupted suavely, "may it please your honor, what a little thing is that Chesterfieldian urbanity of mine compared to the Westchesterfieldian suburbanity of my learned friend!"



## The Vindication of Smith

By Kenneth Latour

"Everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds." Smith was no exception.

THERE is a familiar type of man that all the world despises. He is inexcusably churlish, stupidly skeptical, grossly selfish, obtrusively honest, and almost never in the wrong. Not that he ever feels any gratuitous urge to the advancement of the right. He simply has a blind instinct that steers him clear of the rocks and shoals of error. His virtue is entirely negative. He is the kind of man who never beats his wife—and never takes her to a show! You cannot discuss him in any but negative terms. Even the universal dislike he inspires in everybody who knows him —people just know him, he has no friends —is born of the things he doesn't do.

Police Lieutenant Thomas Smith was that kind of man. Everybody in Hogan Street was agreed that there was no good reason for the existence of Smith. But if they had gone to college, which none of them had, they would have read somewhere that there must be a reason for everything—even Lieutenant Smith.

There was, for instance, the local epic of Kerrigan and O'Shea—and nobody in Hogan Street would have denied that the person responsible for that, no matter what else he might or might not be, had vindicated his right to a place in the scheme of Creation. But nobody suspected Smith of that masterly piece of work, not even Kerrigan and O'Shea—and least of all Smith himself. Quibblers might work back to remote and obscure fundamentals and point to the Master of Things in General as the responsible genius. Which does not alter the truth that, for all earthly purposes—and whatever Hogan Street may adduce to the contrary notwithstanding—Smith was the man!

Nevertheless, no true Hoganstreeter was ever able to conceive a satisfactory excuse for the presence of Smith in this life. He was regarded, as his type is universally regarded, in the light of a tolerable affliction, a disagreeeable incident to be accepted and borne with humility, like the measles.

#### II.

A fetid blast from the river flats behind the gas works rolled thickly through the dusk, down the grimy length of Hogan Street, and smote the hardened nostrils of Kerrigan and O'Shea where they sat perspiring silently on the topmost step of the Kerrigan stoop.

For a long time they sat and spoke no word. They were content to be silent and enjoy the solace of each other's presence. O'Shea was the first to break the ruminant calm.

"And who do you think, now, is after rentin' the house next door to mine?" he said. "I don't know," said Kerrigan.

"Smith!" grunted O'Shea.

"I never had no use for that man, at all!" exploded Kerrigan.

"He is entirely unnecessary," agreed O'Shea.

Silence fell again between the two, a warm, sympathetic, Hibernian silence—a silence with a brogue.

Looking neither to right nor left, nor up nor down, nor yet straight ahead, for he was earnestly preoccupied with an inward vision prompted by a pleasing condition of gastric irritation, Officer Patrick Xavier Kernan turned the car corner where modest competence meets genial opulence at the intersection of Waverly Boulevard and Hogan Street and progressed inexorably. With an inward eye still on his vision he began to count the flagstones that paved the line of his progress along Hogan Street. He did not know he was counting them. There was no need to count them. He had told them over every evening, barring sundry exceptions, for fifteen years. Counting them had become automatic and subconscious.

Exactly at flagstone number seventy-five, which lay precisely across the terminus of the Kerrigan front walk, he raised his nightstick, automatically and subconsciously. Glancing neither to right nor left he flourished the stick benignantly in the direction of the two figures sitting in the twilight on the Kerrigan stoop. He did not see them. He simply knew they must be there. It was Wednesday night. To Kernan, Wednesday night stood—among other matters of fixed and revered precedent—for the presence of Kerrigan and O'Shea on the Kerrigan stoop.

"Evenin', b'ys—fine evenin'!" he saluted them, and passed on still inwardly intent. He did not know he had spoken. He did not hear the reply. He had long ceased to notice anything he did or said. It never occurred to him that he was breathing either. He was a perfect policeman.

In the shadow of his own front door his wife relieved him of his stick, his cap and his brass-studded tunic, and led him to the realization of his vision where it steamed delectably on the red-naped table by the kitchen window.

For a brief space the room echoed with a succulent uproar as Officer Kernan achieved the consummation of his dream.

"Twas altogether a fine dinner, Maggie," he said when the uproar had subsided.

"I know it," said she. "Go smoke your pipe and never mind the blarney."

"I seen-" commenced Kernan.

"I know it!" exploded Maggie with an asperity that nothing the brief exchange of after-dinner amenities had seemed to warrant. "I cannot remember when you did not!"

"You cannot remember when I did not what?" demanded Kernan mildly.

"Very well you know what," retorted his wife. "Every Wednesday night it's the same. I am tired of them two. I suppose the world would come to an end if you didn't tell me you seen Kerrigan with O'Shea every Wednesday night of grace!"

"I'm thinkin'," opined Kernan, "that it might!"

From which it may be presumed that the friendship of Art Kerrigan and Daniel O'Shea was a wholly noteworthy thing.

It was. To Kernan and the other seriousminded members of the Hogan Street community it was monumental, immutable, cosmic, a part of the elemental, changeless order of things which lie at the foundations of the universe—like the Democratic party, the Constitution of the United States, the growler of Mrs. O'Callahan, the tongue of Mrs. McCarthy, Clancy's Place, and the iniquity of Albien.

It was an institution. People talked about it as they did about the weather, when they couldn't think of any other safe and easy topic. Visiting strangers to Hogan Street were made acquainted with the wonder and required to marvel. It had existed since the memory of Hogan Street runneth not to the contrary, for they had brought it with them there when the street was building. That was over fifteen years back.

As a matter of fact their friendship was a more marvelous thing than even the most worshipful of the Hoganstreeters knew. At the feet of Kerrigan and O'Shea, Damon and Pythias might have sat and learned. It was conceived in war and had prevailed over it. Against time it had endured; over love it had triumphed; propinquity had not worn it, envy had not eaten it, and on politics it had trampled and exulted. It was a really fine and edifying thing, a thing well worth the labor of creating, a thing well worth the trouble of preserving. Hogan Street would have admitted this without demur.

It had come into being in the days when

the despised Smith was still a lowly sergeant and before so much as a line of boundary stakes suggested the future of Hogan Street.

Kerrigan and O'Shea were just turned eighteen when they met. The manner of their meeting was sudden, strenuous, entirely worthy the epic partnership that sprang therefrom. It happened on a moonless Wednesday night in early fall. There had been a wedding in the Italian section that afternoon and the lamplighter, whose name was Tony, was in a consequent state of bibulous eclipse. So it was very dark when young Art Kerrigan, hurrying home from Jerry's with a foaming pail of beer in either hand, approached the fateful corner. Tilting his pails with practiced skill he banked the turn swiftly—and stopped!

The pails shivered from his startled hands. A cloud of creamy lather billowed round his transfixed feet. For an instant he stood swaying. Dazzling points of light span before his eyes. Godlike he stood—his feet swathed in clouds, his head ringed with stars.

He returned to mortal consciousness to find himself toe to toe and nose to nose with a shadowy individual dripping with beer and sputtering with rage. He could only make out the dim outlines of this person but the dripping and the sputtering were audible. The sputtering suddenly became articulate.

"You slimy, beer-jugglin' gutter pup!" were the incredible words that fell on Art's astonished ears. "Will you be watchin' where you're goin' or will I be after teachin' ye!"

This passed belief! Art Kerrigan was a newcomer in the neighborhood. Where he hailed from no lad his size and weight—and none were bigger—would have dared such sacrilege for his very life. A towering rage engulfed him. The glory of the Gaelic fury rose. He yelled for very joy and smote!

Without protest or comment the redoubtable Daniel O'Shea, for he it was, receded swiftly from the fist of Kerrigan and sat down in the puddle of beer that ringed his feet. There he remained for a space in an attitude of earnest meditation. He was trying, he decided, to recall some matter of the utmost moment. He opened his eyes finally and peered into the murk. Then he remembered. With memory came realization and hard on the heels of realization followed strenuous action. He roared and leaped!

In the dark two figures locked and swayed.

The sudden tumult of battle flooded the empty channel of the quiet street where a moment before the only sound had been a drowsy murmur of doorstep conversation.

The nearest burly householder, perched on the peak of the most adjacent stoop, came out of his vespertine trance of boredom with a jerk, lent ravished ear an instant, bit clean through the stem of his best and blackest dudeen in the abandonment of his delight, and raised the hue and cry. Around the hurtling champions a jostling ring swiftly took shape and tightened.

Five minutes later, when the mighty form of Sergeant Thomas Smith, six feet five and two hundred and fifty pounds of Yorkshire beef and bone, heaved around the corner and stumbled over one of Kerrigan's upturned growlers the crowd had grown to riot proportions. Obscured in its midst the gladiators were standing toe to toe and smiting blindly still. Smith couldn't see the fight, what with the darkness and the multitude, but he knew the signs infallibly. Like a plow in a snowdrift he cleft the crowd, making for the heart of the disturbance. But he never glimpsed the quarry.

"Cheese it!" bellowed the first self-constituted sentry to sense the presence of the enemy. "Beat it—it's Smith!"

Something less than sixty seconds later the disgusted policeman found himself blinking impotently into the dust-hung obscurity of a deserted street.

"Not a light!" he growled. "That dirty little Eyetalian 'as gone an' filled 'is skin agyne. I'll myke 'im smart for this!" He strode on along his beat considering how the confusion of the bibulous Tony might best be compassed.

Two blocks farther on he passed the gloomy portals of Spud Alley. Was it fancy or had he heard the low mumble of furtive voices issuing from the stygian depths of the narrow area? He paused, attentive. It must have been fancy. He passed on reassured, and his ponderous bulk was swallowed in the black abyss of the lampless street.

But his ears had not deceived him. While he had paused at the mouth of the alley Kerrigan and O'Shea had waited breathlessly no more than three paces distant, fearful lest he search their refuge. When he was gone they breathed again.

"That," said O'Shea, "is the only cop could make me run. That's Smith!" "I don't know any cop could make me run," stated Kerrigan with conviction.

"What did you run for, then?" jeered O'Shea.

"I wasn't runnin' fr'm him. I was chasin' yerself."

"The devil take him, he'll be always after spoilin' things. If it wasn't for him, now, I would have mashed your ugly mug."

"If he hadn't chased you away from me you wouldn't be able to mash anything by now, at all."

"Do you say so?"

"I do. And I could prove it. But it's gettin' late."

In the dark the grin that was bending the swollen lips of Kerrigan as he spoke was invisible to O'Shea.

"It's gettin' late," repeated Kerrigan, "an' unless y' insist on a demonstration I wouldn't want to "impose on you any longer the night."

Kerrigan was grinning broadly now and O'Shea caught the chuckle that rippled through his words. It was a friendly chuckle. When O'Shea answered all the enmity had gone from his voice.

"You wouldn't be imposin' at all. You're a grrand fighter, sure, the way 'twould be a pleasure to oblige you. But I'm thinkin' now------""

"Do you tell me?" interrupted Kerrigan.

"I do," said O'Shea. "I'm thinkin' that somebody's waitin' for that beer you spilled —an' if it's your father you'll be hearin' a thing the night."

"'T is a good thinker y'are," said Kerrigan ruefully. "But the buckets are lost."

"I might help you find them," offered O'Shea.

"You might," ventured Kerrigan.

- "Then," said O'Shea, "I will. Come on." They issued from the alley and retraced their steps toward the corner where they had collided.

"You are new in this part of town?" questioned O'Shea as they proceeded.

"I am," said Kerrigan.

"My name's O'Shea."

"Mine's Kerrigan."

"You needn't be ashamed of it," said O'Shea.

They hurried on. Presently O'Shea said: "You know that cop—the one that ran us off? Look out for him." "I have heard of him," said Kerrigan, "an' it's no good I've heard. He's an Englishman born, they tell me at Jerry's."

"He is. Look out for him. He never done nobody any good at all."

And so they were friends. And friends they remained, even though, down through the years, it came to pass that Art won the girl of Daniel's desire and had to be content with her as his only treasure; while Daniel found the wealth that Art would fain have had, as well, and must needs be satisfied with that and the lesser solace of a second choice in love. Neither jealousy in love nor envy in worldly things could part them, nor the weight of lassitude that sometimes comes with time, nor the friction that often follows intimacy. Not even the fate of Ireland, on which they held divergent views, could come between them, and that is a mighty test for men of their race.

They were married, and moved into Hogan Street, and lived there as neighbors, and their wives fought across the back-yard fence—and that also they disregarded.

In the fullness of time there was born to each of them a son. Instead of diverting their fondness for each other the coming of the children reënforced the cement of their affection. It gave them another common interest, another similar source of joy and woe and admiration and wonder. Hitherto the friendship of the big black Kerryman, that was Art, and the great red man of Cork, that was Daniel, had been centered exclusively in themselves—a selfish and intimate thing, too intimate for overt admission. Gruffly they strove to hide it, the one from the other, under exteriors studiously casual. It was a relief to have the growing boys, Michael and Patrick, as a channel through which to vent and transmit their secret regard. Each adopted the offspring of the other and lavished his love for the father on the son.

It is even possible that without the boys the friendship of the fathers might have cooled. When O'Shea, who came at length to the dignity of a contracting business in his own right, was prevailed on by his wife —she of the second choice—to desert their gaunt abode in Hogan Street and move into more pretentious quarters, with a spreading lawn and a wide, fret-worked veranda in Waverly Boulevard, around the corner, there was perhaps some danger. But the boys, knowing nothing of fine social distinctions, spanned the potential chasm.

The very fact that their mothers, whose hatred was open and cordial, strove to separate them annealed the Hibernian perversity of their fathers into a rigid determination to keep them together. And so long as little Michael Kerrigan and young Patrick O'Shea were united there seemed small danger of a schism in the friendship of their sires.

At least once a week the fathers felt the urge to meet and hear, each from the other, the adulation of the progeny wherein lay their chiefest love and pride. So the Wednesday meetings on Kerrigan's stoop became a matter of punctual ritual. There might have been meetings on O'Shea's luxurious veranda but Kerrigan's pride could not abide the condescension of Mary O'Shea, now that she considered herself one of the grand folk of the "boulevard." Daniel understood this perfectly. Moreover he secretly preferred Hogan Street where he could sit without his shoes and be comfortable.

#### IV.

Thus, as we have related, it occurred inevitably that Officer Kernan strolling dinnerward at the close of a warm October Wednesday should find them there—just as, so far as memory served him, he had always found them. Had he missed them in their accustomed place he would, as his wife had phrased it, have thought the world at an end indeed.

He had occasion after dinner on that same evening to return along Hogan Street questing tobacco at the cigar stand three blocks beyond. In passing he glanced idly and with perfect assurance toward the Kerrigan stoop. It was empty. His jaw dropped. He stopped and stared. If he had stood there two minutes earlier he would have seen the friends. If he had passed two minutes fater he would have heard them, as shall be told. But at this particular moment there was nothing to see nor hear.

The-peaceful aspect of the Kerrigan house did not reassure Kernan. If there had been a light in the front windows—— But they were dark. He was preëminently a man of precedent. Here was one of the mightiest precedents in his experience broken. It trou-

bled him profoundly. Novelty of any sort always troubled him.

"They were there but an hour ago," he muttered, full of forebodings. "I'll have another look when I come back."

Great events do *not* always cast shadows before them. Sometimes they happen with bewildering suddenness and an utter disregard for the triviality of causes and circumstances.

Not more than ten minutes prior to the last-mentioned passing of Kernan a small boy with a flaming shock of red hair and a very bloody nose careered vociferously up the Kerrigan front walk and flung himself into the lap of Daniel O'Shea.

"Pop!" wailed the newcomer between sobs and gasps for breath, "oh-h-h-h pop! Mike hit me with a big stick—he picked it right up and hit me in the nose!"

"He did, did he?" O'Shea scowled across the steps at Kerrigan. "Art," said he, "have you taught your boy what his fists are for --or maybe he has forgot!"

And then the edifice of half a lifetime crumbled.

"Daniel," replied Kerrigan deliberately, "do you see my Michael runnin' home with tears and tales to be comforted by the ould man? Belike he knows how to take care of himself, the day!"

O'Shea ignored the taunt for the moment. He addressed himself to his weeping offspring. "Run home now, Patsy, an' get your face washed. Your mother will be worryin'. Off with you, now, an' stop that snifflin'."

Having disposed of the youthful Patrick, O'Shea stood up. Kerrigan did likewise. They stood facing each other. Kerrigan's back was to his own door and his attitude did not suggest hospitality.

"I have taught my Patrick to fight square," growled O'Shea.

"I have taught my Michael to mind his own business, fight his own fights, an' bear no tales!" hissed Kerrigan.

"A fine manly b'y, no doubt," returned O'Shea. "A brave lad enough, with a stick in his hands!"

"Who says he fights with sticks?"

"You're after hearin' what my Patrick said. Are you deaf?"

"I have no ears for tale-bearin' brats!"

"For what?" roared O'Shea, stepping forward until his shoulder pressed the shoulder of Kerrigan.

"I—said"—spoke his friend of many years, slowly, softly, and with throaty emphasis—"I—said—'brats!'"

What followed can best be described as an explosion. O'Shea wasted no more time on words. He answered with his fist. It was a forceful argument.

Art Kerrigan crashed backward. His bulk encountered the flimsy frame and mesh of the screen door. He ripped through it and measured his length on the gaudy Brussels runner beneath the walnut hatrack in his own front hall. He was not knocked out. He was not even groggy. But the blast of O'Shea's wrath, transmitted through his driving fist, had caught Art unprepared and forced him to give ground with notable rapidity. As he backed through the door his heel caught on the frame and stuck there while the rest of him continued the precipitate retreat.

He was no sooner down than he was up. And the moment he reached the perpendicular O'Shea leaped at him through the gaping wreck that had been the screen door.

They grappled, tugging and straining and punching with short body blows between the grapples and the tugs. This time it was O'Shea's privilege to make the more intimate acquaintance of the hall runner. But as he fell he circled Kerrigan with a bear hug and the two went down locked in each other's arms. They rolled and thrashed about in the close quarters of the narrow hallway until their struggles finally propelled them through a doorway to the right and they bumped and tussled in a clutter of furniture to the center of the Kerrigan parlor.

It must have been just prior to this, while they were wallowing more or less noiselessly in the hall, that Kernan had passed and missed them. The rattle of scattering furniture when they struck the parlor could have been heard across the street.

They had managed to break and were struggling to their feet when Mrs. Kerrigan reached the theater of operations. Her head appeared momentarily in the doorway. She stared, wild-eyed, just once, emitted a shrill cry of dismay and dashed out across the stoop, down the steps, along the walk and off in the direction of Waverly Boulevard, wringing her hands as she fled and calling "Police!" She was a good minute too late

to reach Kernan. He was well on his way to the cigar stand.

Neither Kerrigan nor O'Shea, each intent upon the devastation of the other, had seen Art's wife when she appeared at the parlor door. They had not heard her outcry nor glimpsed her wild departure. Oblivious of everything but the business in hand, careless of consequences, forgetful of past affection and heedless of future regrets, mindful only of the tribal hatred that had surged at the affront each had offered to the blood honor of the other, they had arisen with single purpose and proceeded to the work of vengeance.

Fortunately there was no light in the Kerrigan parlor except the feeble rays of a distant street lamp that filtered weakly through the Nottingham curtains at the front windows. Kerrigan led off with a blow which had it landed would have written finis to this story at the instant of its impact. But in the gloom it missed its mark-just under the point of O'Shea's red-bristled chin-by a good six inches. There being nothing to stop that speeding fist, it continued clear across the room, describing a swift parabolic course and dragging Kerrigan after it. As it happened, a spindle-legged center table bearing an imposing porcelain lamp and flanked by a none too robust rocking-chair lay directly across the route that Art was following in the wake of his flying fist. These burst into fragments almost simultaneously as he surged through and over them.

The next three feet beyond the shattered rocking-chair were unencumbered. Kerrigan's twisting form fairly whistled through the open space and brought up, with a shock that rocked the light frame dwelling from ridge pole to ground stringers, against the wall at the precise spot where hung a massive gilt-framed crayon of his own tribe, himself, Katy, and Michael—the latter at the cooing age. This cherished treasure of the family archives went the way of the table, the lamp and the rocking-chair. Kerrigan kept his feet thanks to the good offices of the wall where he found himself propped.

O'Shea came leaping unwarily along the wreckage-strewn path that Art had cleared, thinking to add the impetus of a running start to the power of an unleashed left hook. But his foot caught in an angle of the ruined table. His center of gravity suddenly passed beyond the extremest limit of his base of support, the laws of physics allied themselves with his adversary, and he sprawled diagonally past his objective and toppled full length into a glass cabinet full of souvenir sea shells and china sheperdesses. There was a sound of rending and splintering, followed by the light tinkle of a multitude of falling fragments, and another household god of the Kerrigan ilk was no more.

Kerrigan, once more awake to the urge of blood vengeance, resumed the offensive. He caught O'Shea in the act of removing a section of the cabinet from his chest and assisted him to the extent of sending the fragment of furniture swiftly into space with a vicious placement kick that should have reached the ribs of the prostrate Daniel. A jardinière containing his wife's pet fern flew into pieces in a corner of the room. Art did not venture a second kick. He hurled himself bodily on his enemy, seized him by the head, and his hands began a rapid series of up and down motions as of one operating a short-stroke pump. A rhythmic sound like the beating of a tomtom accompanied this exercise. It was Daniel O'Shea's head pounding on the floor!

The pounding operation was short-lived. With a wrench and a roar O'Shea rolled over and broke away. But Kerrigan was scuttling after him on hands and knees and he had no time to get up, so he continued to roll, gathering impetus as he spun, until he whirled against the front legs of an open case full of books and yellowed periodicals. It was a bookcase of what the French would call "a certain age." It had seen better days. One of the front legs had been broken years before when the Kerrigans were moving into the Hogan Street house. Art had mended that leg but seasons of alternating heat and cold and dry weather and damp had weakened the glue in the splice. The leg gave way with a crack at the impact of Daniel's body, the bookcase leaned crazily outward, and its cascading contents swamped the crouching figure of Kerrigan as he scuttled across the floor in pursuit of O'Shea. A heavy family Bible that held solitary state on the topmost shelf of the case struck him neatly across the nape of the neck. The effect was much the same as that of a stiff "rabbit punch." He stopped scuttling instantly and bent his whole will to fighting an overpowering desire to lie down and go to sleep. The force of his will prevailed finally over the weight of the Scriptures but some two or three seconds elapsed during the struggle, and this brief diversion was sufficient to permit Daniel O'Shea's resumption of a vertical attitude.

Now it happened that when O'Shea again felt the weight of his body on the soles of his feet he found his toes pointing toward the front of the house and his view directed, quite accidentally, along the stretch of the Kerrigan front walk. And it further happened that at this precise moment Katy . Kerrigan, closely followed by the heaving figure of a man who, by his bulk alone, O'Shea instantly recognized, split the gathering knot of excited neighbors at the end of the walk and raced toward the house. O'Shea looked down at Kerrigan and spoke one magic word. The word was "Smith!"

VI.

Katy Kerrigan stepped through the gap in the screen door. Lieutenant Smith, bending almost double, followed her. They listened. The house was dark and silent.

"Saints!" exclaimed Katy. "They are both killed!"

Then a friendly mumbling of voices became audible and a line of light flashed under the kitchen door at the far end of the hall. Smith brushed past Katy's slight figure, flung open the door where the light showed, stooped, and strode into the kitchen, bristling with his accustomed truculence.

O'Shea, seated by the kitchen table with an evening paper spread before him, looked up placidly.

"Art," he said, "you have a caller."

Art Kerrigan turned from searching for something in the cupboard. He held a cigar box in his hand.

"Ah, lootenant," he said blandly, wiping away the blood from a cut over his eye, "this is an agreeable surprise. Draw up a chair, the way you'll be comfortable, an' join us in a cigar. I was just remarkin' to my friend O'Shea here—you're acquainted with Mr. O'Shea I think——"

Daniel arose, beaming, and extended a cordial left hand. His right was dripping red globules from a cut across the knuckles, a memento of the glass cabinet.

The stupefied Smith drew back and stared slowly from the cut over Kerrigan's eye to the gash on O'Shea's hand.

"Eh?" he ejaculated. Then: "'Ere, wot's this? You're a cool pair. A cigar indeed!

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Strike me! You're under arrest—both of you!" He glowered at them blackly.

O'Shea dropped his extended hand and began to frown. Kerrigan's bland smile and manner vanished. He stepped squarely in front of Smith and stuck his chin out at him intrepidly.

"Under arrest, is it?" he demanded. "An' for what?"

"For fightin' scandalous an' brikin' the peace. Wot else?"

Kerrigan stuck his chin out another full inch and glared at Smith. "Scandal!" said he. "Fight? Did ye see a fight?"

Smith began to fidget. His little eyes wandered irresolutely. He tried to scowl valiantly and accomplished only a perplexed pucker of the brows that made him look absurdly sheepish.

Kerrigan pressed his advantage. "Answer me now, Smith. Did ye or did ye not see a fight?"

The big Yorkshireman was beginning to rage inwardly. "See 'ere," he sputtered, "your wife——"

"Oh, ho!" exulted Kerrigan. "So it's herself, is it? Where is she?"

Katy peeped timidly around the arm of the giant policeman. Kerrigan fixed her meaningly with his eye.

"Katy," said he, "did ye see any fight anywheres? Tell the truth now."

"I saw no fight," announced Mrs. Kerrigan brazenly.

"Strike me blind!" roared Smith.

He turned on his heel and stamped out of the house, and he couldn't slam the screen door because it was beyond slamming.

#### VII.

Kernan, returning from the cigar stand, saw the crowd in front of Kerrigan's from a distance and lengthened his stride. He reached the place just in time to encounter the retreating figure of Smith. In his perturbation he forgot, for the first time in his life, to salute that dignitary. He even overlooked the formality of a "good evening" and came straight to the point.

"Was there somethin' wrong in there, lootenant?" he inquired anxiously.

"Oh no!" fumed the baffled and raging Smith. "My very dear friend, Mr. Kerrigan, just awsked me in to 'ave a cigar!"

Kernan's mouth gaped. Smith leered at

him viciously and turned his back to depart. Then he had a thought. If Kernan ever went into Kerrigan's to investigate, he, Smith, would never hear the end of it. He stopped and looked back. Just as he feared, Kernan was starting up the walk.

"Kernan," Smith called over his shoulder. "'Op it aw'y from theer, now. If you go nosin' into that plyce meddlin' with matters wich are my business I'll 'ave you transferred, s'welp me!"

Kernan stared at the retreating back of his disgruntled superior in amazement and consternation. Then he peered at the Kerrigan house wistfully, flung a whispered oath after Smith and turned sadly homeward.

"It's like Maggie said," he muttered. "The world has come to an end. An' it's Smith done it, somehow. There's no good ever came of a man like Smith!"

Art accompanied Daniel to the edge of the stoop. There was a brief, embarrassed silence. Daniel looked at his feet, then into the face of his friend.

"Art," said he, "I am goin' straight home an' give that brat of mine a whale of a lickin'!"

"Daniel," replied Kerrigan, "as soon as that limb of Satan that calls himself my son sneaks in here I am goin' to give him the same. I'll teach him to fight with sticks, the way he'll never even want to carry a cane in his ould age!"

Another silence fell. Again O'Shea was the first to break it. Ruefully he jerked his thumb in the direction of the Kerrigan parlor.

"An' to think," said he, "that all that was for nothin'! If it hadn't been for that man Smith, now—\_\_\_"

"We might have finished the job—is that what you would be sayin?" supplied Kerrigan.

"Well, maybe it is. I never had no use for him an' I don't love him any better now, but—\_\_\_\_"

"Yes?" queried Kerrigan.

"Just the same I am sendin' him a fine box of seegars in the mornin'. I don't want to be ungrateful." O'Shea shuffled his feet and grinned sheepishly.

For answer Kerrigan plunged his hand into his right trouser pocket and drew forth a slender roll of bills. He counted off five of them and extended them to Daniel. "I am not an ungrateful man myself," he said. "Here's my half of them smokes, Daniel. Be sure they are good ones!"

#### VIII.

Another Wednesday night rolled round. Officer Kernan reached home at the appointed hour and greeted his wife at the door. He was grinning delightedly.

"Maggie, darlin'," he said, "I have the devil of an appetite!"

"'T is the first time in a week," she grumbled.

He could contain himself no longer. "Maggie," he exploded, "I seen-----"

"Bad cess!" she grunted. "Will I not hear the end of them two as long as I live?" "I hope not," said Kernan. "What have ye got for supper, Maggie darlin'?"

After the meal Kernan pushed his chair back, sighed contentedly and lit his pipe.

"That reminds me, Maggie," he said puffing happily. "The strangest thing has been happenin'. Smith is gettin' outrageously extrravagint. I seen him smokin' seegars two or three times this week. They was elegint seegars, too, by the look an' the smell of them. 'Tis entirely unlike that man to spend his money on any such triflin' nonsense as a good seegar. I don't know what's come over him!"

"Perhaps," offered his wife, "somebody gave them to him for a present, now."

"'Tain't possible," objected Kernan. "Nobody has that much use for him!"

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#### A POINT OF ETIQUETTE

USTLY or unjustly, our friends of France complain that we of America, with all due credit to our military prowess, are lacking in a proper sense of certain niceties whereon they have been wont to set great store. Among other minor shortcomings, they accuse us of an unæsthetic propensity toward smoking during meals—even in public places.

Before the war the French—inveterate smokers though they be—looked upon smoking at table, prior to the coffee, as a pure barbarity, nothing less. But now, if we may believe a recent issue of the weekly *Cri de Paris*, Frenchmen have contracted the alleged American habit from their late comrades in arms and think nothing of seasoning their repasts with the fumes of the mellow leaf.

In substantiation of its assertion, the French paper cites a piquant incident. The scene is a dining car on a limited train crowded with fashionables bound from Paris to Deauville. The diner is packed to the last seat with hungry vacationers. At one of the tables-for-two sit an elderly gentleman of distinguished mien, wearing in his button hole the rosette of the Legion of Honor, and a young lady of prepossessing exterior and evident wealth and breeding. The elderly gentleman and the young lady are strangers.

They achieve the hors-d'œuvres and the soup in silence. Then the waiter brings on a platter of roast meat and distributes a few dabs of vegetables on their plates.

The elderly gentleman seizes knife and fork and prepares a vigorous offensive on the roast. Suddenly he is seized with an idea and stops. He drags from one pocket a black, portly brier and from another a pouch of tobacco; he lights up and puffs serenely. Resuming knife and fork he is about to return to the trencher when he is interrupted by his charming vis-à-vis.

"Pardon, monsieur," she says, smiling brightly through the clouds of smoke drifting about her head, "but will monsieur be greatly inconvenienced if I continue eating while he smokes?"

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#### THE BUM ACTOR

**P**RESIDENT HARDING, in one of his solitary strolls through the downtown streets of Washington, paused for a while and watched the people streaming into a motion-picture theater. While he stood there, two young men with "hick" written all over them stopped in front of the theater posters which announced the showing of "A Connecticut Yankee."

"Mark Twain," read one of them to the other in a voice charged with sarcasm. "Let's pass it up. Twain can't act for shucks noways."

## Willie Shivers

#### BY HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

**T**HEY had rather small apartments for his mother paid the rent-Drew her money from the suds of sock and shirt,

Up and down the rhythmic washboard, after each elusive cent, For her fortune, like a miner's, was in dirt.

Willie thought he was a poet: others held a different view Of his platitudes and attitudes in verse,

Yet his mother, poor old body, thought he was a poet, too, And she backed this proud conviction with her purse.

Bought him raiment that he fancied, silken hose, and ties and shoes-He assuring her that time would bring him fame.

While she scrubbed for coal and kindling he was flirting with his Muse, Still his mother, like a major, played the game.

It was: "Mother, you annoy me with that everlasting rub; Spoils my meter, makes me nervous, tires my head."

She would sigh and drip her fingers on the edges of the tub, Workday tears—in fact the only that she shed.

Then she'd set again to scrubbing on the corrugated plane,

While he fumbled for a word that rhymed with "Crush;"

Snug and warm, his vain poetics often dealt with snow and rain,

While he clasped his head, yet never thought of mush.

But the Power that holds the Balance, grinds the meal and weighs the gold, Paid a visit to his mother; softly drew

Down the Everlasting curtain, eased her body worn and old,

To that realm of peace and rest beyond the blue.

What became of Willie Shivers? Ask that corporation grim, That illumines town and city with a glow,

Which, if paid for waxeth brilliant, if not paid for, groweth dim-Willie still is reading meters, down below.

Willie thinks, as Willie shivers, of the happy days gone by, When his uncomplaining mother bore the rub

Of necessity, while wringing each essential sonnet dry, The madonna and the poet of the tub.



## The Heavy Hand

By Bertrand W. Sinclair

Author of "Sorrowful Island," "Over the Border," Etc.

#### A prayer is answered.

ROM where he sat on the warm earth with his back against the house Clark could hear the woman praying. Through the double wall of split cedar her voice sounded as an indistinct mumble. Now and then he could catch a word, a phrase. And although he made a slightly deprecating grimace over his motive he hoisted himself stiffly to his feet and went limping out of earshot. It made him uncomfortable to overhear that curious mixture of pleading and invocation.

He went down a path and out a gangway to a float beside which his boat was tied. He went slowly, favoring his lame leg, and seated himself upon a block when he came there, clasping both hands over one knee, staring thoughtfully at the tide creeping up over the weedy rocks, over the scarlet and purple starfish flaring among the white barnacles and the brown kelp.

Clark did not have much faith in the efficacy of prayer. In the matter concerning which Mrs. Seton prayed he would have put his faith in more material weapons. But then, he reflected, she was a woman and more than usually helpless. Perhaps a religious faith which could give her the occasional ecstasy of prayer made it easier for her to endure much that she had to endure.

He looked out over the shining bay with

its bottle-neck entrance that opened from the wide gulf. His eyes skirted the greentimbered shore, lifted to the inclosing hills. High above the loftiest peak white fluffs of cloud sailed free in a blue sky. There was a benign atmosphere of peace on that landlocked bay, an aspect of quiet beauty, a delicate coloring fresh from the palette of the Master Painter. The prospect pleased Clark. But he was irritated by a sense of all this peaceful beauty being marred by man's vileness. He could not shut out the praying woman, nor that which caused her to seek the relief of prayer, the beseeching cry to her God.

A rowboat slid in through the bottle-neck entrance, came up the bay with clicking oarlocks, rowed by a young fellow in shirt sleeves, bareheaded. In the stern a girl sat facing him. The boat drew in beside the float and the girl, after setting out two buckets of wild blackberries, sprang lightly to the planked surface.

"The old man came back a little after noon," Clark said to her.

Her face clouded.

"And I suppose he raised Cain when he found out I'd gone off with Walter, eh?" she remarked. "Did he get after mamma?"

remarked. "Did he get after mamma?" "Kinda, I guess," Clark admitted. "Here he comes now." Young Grey had been making fast the boat's painter. He stood up now with narrowed eyes turned on the man coming down the path. The girl's gaze rested on this approaching man, and so did Clark's, with something approaching apprehension. And as he came near another figure issued from a cabin a little to the right along the shore and also came toward the float.

The man who came down the hill would be about fifty, inclined to shortness, but his lack of height was more than offset by wide, thick shoulders, short bull-like neck and long arms that ended in big knotty hands. His face was ugly, not so much in feature or coloring, but with the expression it wore a mixture of snarl and scowl that put pin points of flame in his brown eyes and nasty threatening lines about his full red lips.

Clark looked at Howard Seton as he stepped on the float and wondered if the man had ever smiled genially, if he had ever been kindly in word or deed, if he had ever been anything but an ugly-tempered brute who found a perverted pleasure in domineering harshness. It didn't seem possible to Clark. He knew that Seton had come down there to be disagreeable, to vent his ill humor on the girl and young Grey for being out together, just as earlier he had abused his wife for the same reason. Clark had been watching the exercise of this domestic tyranny for nearly a month. He wondered how long these people had been enduring it, and why? But even Clark was not quite prepared for the fury of Seton's outbreak.

"You go on to the house an' help your mother get supper," he said gruffly to the girl.

She turned silently to obey.

"Take them berries with you," Seton commanded harshly. "Even if 'twas only an excuse we'll make use of 'em. Take 'em up, both of 'em."

Mary picked up the two buckets and walked off the float without a word.

"And you," Seton turned on young Grey. "How long's it goin' to take you to learn that when I say a thing I mean it?"

The youngster—he was not more than twenty-two or three—looked coolly at the older man.

"Your word ain't law to everybody," he said quietly.

"I'll make it law for *you*," Seton roared. His voice seemed to come out of his deep chest in a menacing beliow, as if he were an

enraged bull. Clark thought whimsically that he would not be surprised to see him begin to paw the planked float. "I told you before I ain't goin' to have Mary runnin' around with no damn whippersnapper like you. I give you notice to keep off my place, to keep away from this here float. I told you once. I'll bust you in pieces if I have to tell you again."

Grey's tanned face flushed. He stared at Seton. His lip curled.

"This is a partnership float. I helped build it and put it here. When I need to use it I will," he said defiantly. "You can run your bluff on women, maybe, but not me. Don't act like a fool."

Clark thought Seton would charge the boy like some infuriated animal. Instead he waved his hands and in a voice hoarse and quivering he cursed young Grey with all the foul and obscene expressions a man could rake out of the cesspool of profanity. And young Grey stood his ground contemptuous, immobile, his lip curling at the spectacle and the epithets until the man from the little house reached the spot.

He was a smaller edition of Howard Seton, a little older, a little shorter, less burly, far less aggressive in his general aspect. No one would have failed to mark the two men as brothers and as being utterly different. Old Henry broke in with a deprecating air.

"Aw, Howard, for the land's sake don't act like a crazy man," he remonstrated mildly. "What's the use cussin' like that? Hear y' all over the hull ranch."

"Who told you to butt in?" Seton roared at him. "You damn useless old pelter! You bald-headed old plug that I've fed for twenty years! You crawl into your hole and keep outa this."

"Here," young Grey cut in sharply, "you might as well cool off. I'm tellin' you right now that all your cussin' and jawin' won't get you anything. You sure do act like a crazy man."

"Looka here, Howard," old Henry began again placatingly. There was a humble pleading note in his voice that made Clark wince. It was almost a whine, tinctured with fear. "Aw, How\_\_\_\_"

Seton cut him short with a swift backhanded blow that dropped the older man on his haunches, blood oozing from between his smashed lips. Whereat young Grey's hands doubled into hard, white-knuckled fists. He took a step forward, his eyes suddenly steel bright. And Seton drove at him like an angry bull, head withdrawn between his hunched shoulders, his long arms shooting blows like the piston rods of an engine. He moved with incredible swiftness, as lightfooted as a great cat. He battered at young Grey with a devastating ferocity that beat the boy down as standing grain goes down before a hailstorm. He stood over him panting and mumbling and Clark was strangely reminded of a furious old boar.

"I guess that'll hold you for a while," he snarled. "An' that's only a sample."

He turned and went off the float, mumbling to himself, deep in his throat. Clark saw him follow and overtake old Henry trudging toward his cabin holding one hand to his bruised lips, saw him go through a threatening pantomime with his hands before he went on to the house. Young Grey rose to his feet, his face puffed and bleeding.

"Well," he said to Clark, "I didn't make much of a showing, did I?" "Never mind," Clark replied. "From the

"Never mind," Clark replied. "From the way he handled himself I doubt if there's many men in this country could do much with old Howard Seton. He's all same dynamite, I'll say."

"Just the same I'm not going to let him run over me," young Grey asserted slowly, without passion. "No. Not if I have to carry a club for him."

Young Grey left the float, traversed the shore on the left until he crossed the mouth of a small creek and there disappeared in a thicket. Clark sat on a block by the gunwale of his fish boat as he had remained sitting, a spectator of these matters, aloof and unconcerned apparently, his stiff lame leg thrust out before him. He smoked a cigarette, looking thoughtfully, abstractedly out over the bay with its faint ripples glistening in the sun.

All that he knew of these people he had learned in less than a month. He had come to the place to fish, to make such a living as a crippled man might make trolling for salmon in the waters outside this secure shelter. And because his lame leg, which was a memento of Ypres, had bothered him a little and cooking for himself had been even more of a bother he had arranged for board at Seton's table.

He wondered a little why Seton accepted a boarder when he saw the ground in cultivation on the slope behind the house, the

splendid orchard, the cattle that ranged in a natural meadow by the creek. The Seton ranch was a good one as ranches go on the British Columbia scaboard. But when Clark had been there long enough to see something of the Seton ménage he thought he understood. Old Howard Seton wanted revenue, next to having his own way-and he did not care how he secured either. He worked with a fiendish energy himself early and late. When he had no routine work in hand he battled with timber and stumps, reclaiming more land. A little extra work put on the two women of his household was nothing to him if the extra labor returned a profit.

Clark had learned a little of the Seton history from Mary, from old Henry, from Walter Grev. Mary's father had settled that place when it was forest. He had cleared the first acre, planted the first trees. Then he died. After a lapse of time, after a struggle with the wild land, Mary's mother had remarried. Seton had made the ranch what it was. Also he was making the lives of the two women a daily discomfort, a matter of bleak endurance by his harshness, by a spirit of vindictive domineering that pervaded all he did and said. Clark saw that for himself. But this outburst against young Grey went beyond harshness, beyond the petty meanness and domestic tyranny of the man. There was a strain of passion in it that made Clark wonder, that set him thinking.

He smoked another cigarette, threw away the stub and went up to the house. Mary sat on the porch picking over blackberries. Off behind the house rose the quick, whacking strokes of an ax. Clark marveled at the tireless energy of the man. He could rage and deal blows and go straight to his work. Clark sat down near the girl, finding a passive pleasure in watching the deft movements of her hands. She was not strikingly pretty, but she was slender, graceful, with the delicate, fresh coloring of youth. Clark saw that her grav eyes held a smoldering fire, that her fingers worked with an unnaturally nervous quickness. He had the impression of tensity, of some emotion rigidly repressed.

"You see the fracas down there?" he asked.

She nodded.

"You like young Grey well enough to marry him?" he inquired further.

Mary looked at him keenly. In that si-

lent scrutiny a faint wave of color crept over her face.

"Yes," she admitted at last.

"Then why don't you?" Clark suggested. "That would put a stop to this sort of thing. Pretty nearly amounts to persecution, doesn't it?"

The girl's lips compressed. Her hands rested on the edge of the bowl. She looked down on the smooth mirror of the bay, in which now the shore timber and the high hills above were pictured in perfect detail.

"You talk just like Walter," she said. "Did he tell you to say that?"

"No. Absolutely no. It simply occurred to me as the simple way out. I'm not blind."

"I can't," she whispered. "I wish I could, but I can't."

"Why not?"

"There's mamma. Can you imagine what it would be like for her here with me gone? There wouldn't be any limit to his abuse. I do a lot of work she couldn't possibly do. He'd have to hire some one to take my place. He'd be furious. He'd be worse than ever. He'd take it all out on her. And I'd know he was doing that. Don't you see?"

Clark nodded. He could understand. But he did not say he approved. He said nothing at all. And in the silence that fell between them, in the breathless hush of that quiet place, the voice of the girl's mother came plaintively through an open window. She was praying again.

"Soften his heart, O Lord, I beseech Thee. Thou knowest his harshness and pride. Bend his stiff neck, Lord, and make him humble. And if Thou canst not soften him by Thy loving kindness, let Thy hand be heavy upon him. Chastise him that he may know Thy grace."

Clark stirred uneasily. His ears were keen. Above the low intonation he heard a soft step on the back porch, the creak of a board. The voice ceased; another, deep, harsh, irritable in its inflections, broke in.

"Stop that damn prayin'," it sounded. "How many times a day you got to get down on your marrow bones an' whine to God Almighty? Huh? Cut it out, cut it out. You give me a pain. You're only wastin' time. Prayin' don't get you no spuds in the fryin' pan. Hurry up with supper."

Clark could hear Seton moving about inside, grumbling, hectoring, arrogantly insulting. Mary picked up the berries and went in. Clark looked after her reflectively. He could hear her clear tones as she spoke to her mother, ignoring the man. Of that family she was the only one who seemed not afraid of Howard Seton, who did not cringe before him. She did her work and held her tongue. But she carried herself like a lance. Her spirit was unbroken. Clark wondered how long she had been a self-appointed buffer between her stepfather and her mother, between doddering, placating old Henry and his brother—how long she would continue to be a buffer.

In half an hour the girl struck two strokes on an iron triangle outside the kitchen door. Old Henry came plodding up to the house. Clark looked at him. His lips were puffed a little and bruised purple. But he did not seem to be angry, to bear such resentment as even an old man with all the spirit knocked out of him might feel.

They went in together. Howard Seton sat in his place. Mary brought a plate of meat from the kitchen. Her mother hobbled in with a teapot, supporting herself with a stick, a prematurely aged woman, bent and twisted by rheumatism. They sat silent over their meal, old Henry with his face lowered above his plate gobbling his food, Seton eating with a gross, lip-smacking voracity.

Clark watched him, marking for the twentieth time the extraordinary vitality of the man, the muscular compactness of his body, the thick, corded neck. And if the physical presentment of the man stirred animallike comparisons in Clark's mind, certain facial expressions, an easily stirred fire in his eye, the sensuous mobility of his lips heightened such comparisons. A combination of satyr and faun! A petty Caligula? Or simply a coarse man of exceptional virility who derived a malicious pleasure in tyrannizing over his family? Clark could not say which conclusion seemed most fit.

The girl sat in her place, scarcely touching food.

"Why don't y' eat?" Seton demanded.

Mary looked at him without answering. There was a hostile contempt in her steady, unwavering gaze. Seton dropped his eyes to his plate.

"All the more for the rest of us," he said with a grimace. "S'pect young Grey ain't got much appetite to-night either."

Old Henry finished first, rose without ceremony, took himself outside as if he were glad to get away. Mrs. Seton and Mary began to clear the table. Seton sat stuffing his pipe. And Clark kept his seat, unobtrusively studying the man. Seton's eyes kept following the girl, they rested on her with a curious steadiness, with a lightninglike flicker of his heavy lids when she came near him.

"Say, Mary," he uttered when she drew off and folded the tablecloth, "you needn't bother about the cows. I'll get 'em up an' milk to-night."

"All right," she answered, coldly impersonal.

Seton sat looking at the doorway through which she disappeared. And Clark watched him, stirred by a discovery which he believed himself to have made in one of those prescient gleams which come to a thinking man now and then, that curious and vivid illumination of motives and actions which lights up the black abyss of the unknown, the unguessed. He suddenly had the key to the Seton riddle, a name for the quality of that look which Seton bent on his stepdaughter. It startled Clark. He got up and went outside to ponder upon the implications of this discovery. He was aware subtly, as he crossed the room, that Seton had turned in his chair and was looking after him with that air of covert malice that seemed his most natural expression. Clark had barely sat down on the steps when Seton followed him out. He stood tapping the bowl of his pipe against a porch post. "You paid a month's board," he said

"You paid a month's board," he said abruptly. "Month's up Friday. Can't keep you no longer. Too much work for the women."

"All right," Clark acquiesced. "I'll go back to baching Friday."

"No fish much around here anyhow," Seton grunted.

"No. Not many salmon just now," Clark agreed.

Seton said no more. He stood until he had restuffed his pipe with a thick forefinger, then walked back into the house. Clark limped down to his fish boat. He stretched his body on a narrow bunk in the cabin and gave himself up to reflection.

All that he knew about Howard Seton he had learned from Walter Grey, from Mary, and old Henry, piecemeal, in graphic snatches of talk. The rest was indirect, the fruit of observation, inference, intuition. In the beginning Mary's mother had been a comely widow with a little property. She

looked sixty now. She was in fact less than forty-five. Seton had absorbed the energy of the woman, as well as her property. Overwork and untimely disease had made her what she was, a physical wreck that Seton was trying to finish off with abuse.

He had the property. He wanted the girl. That was what Clark read in the man's eyes. Clark's frown deepened when he remembered how old Seton leaned his elbows on the table and looked at Mary. A man of his age, bending eyes on his stepdaughter! It troubled Clark. It seemed to him unnatural.

Seton didn't seem quite human to Clark. He was too strong, too ruthless. There was neither justice nor mercy in him. He would be crafty, remorseless, implacable in the pursuit of his desire. Some one ought to stop him. But who? And how?

Clark lay staring up at the cabin roof. Certainly no one in that vicinity was physically a match for Howard Seton. He had an idea that Walter Grey would passionately assault Seton if he guessed at what Clark believed to be a certainty, but it would take more than earnest intent to overcome the man. There was besides Grey only old Henry, timid, incompetent, browbeaten into submission long ago. There were the two women-and himself. And it was not his funeral-a crippled veteran with only one good leg. Clark shook his head. It promised to be a messy business. He reflected impatiently that if Mary would take the bull by the horns and marry young Grey that would settle it. But he doubted that Mary knew why Seton interposed his bulk, his arrogant authority, between her and Walter Grey. She wouldn't leave her mother to his spite, that was all. Clark reflected that the girl was like an animal trainer, unconsciously restraining a beast by sheer force of personality. He wondered how long that would be a sufficient restraint.

Clark wished he could banish his uneasiness. He got out of his bunk at last and leaving the float walked along a path that skirted a thicket of willow and young alder until he crossed a small creek. Then the path broke through the thicket and into a clearing, beyond which opened a swampy meadow. A log house stood in the clearing, a small shed, with a fenced garden in the rear. The creek was the dividing line between the Seton property and Grey's homestead. South of the creek lay cleared acres of pasture and orchard and vegetables which Seton owned by virtue of marriage, which he had brought to that stage of cultivation during ten years of Homeric labor-for he worked as he did everything with a prodigal expenditure of energy, a ferocity of toil. Clark stood, caught for a moment by the pearly tint cast over the lowlands by the dusk pushing down off the hills. The man, he thought, was pure act, matter energized dynamically, lacking a stable balance of reason and perception. A fever in the blood of such a one might drive him to any length. Seton was naturally cruel Clark felt instinctively, not knowing that he was even then walking toward proof of this instinctive conclusion.

He went up to the open door, called "Hello, Walter." No one answered. Clark had made himself free of the place before. He was welcome there. He did so now. There was no one in the house. He limped on toward the shed, thinking to see if young Grey was in the meadow. A casual glance through the open door of the shed arrested him. He went in.

Young Grey hung between two posts, spread-eagled, so to speak, one wrist lashed to each post by heavy cotton cord. He sagged on his arms. His head lolled forward. There was a gag in his mouth, bound there by a handkerchief. He was stripped to the waist and had been lashed cruelly.

Clark had lived through three years of war. He was not shocked out of power for speech or action by either blood or danger. He pulled loose the gag, cut the wrist lashings, eased young Grey to the floor. Grey was not even unconscious. But he was weak, stupid from exhaustion and pain. His eyes when they met Clark's with recognition held also an agony of shame. Clark said to him:

"Reckon you can walk if I help you? I can't carry you, worse luck, with my bum leg."

Grey nodded. Clark helped him struggle to his feet. So, the beaten man and the lame one, they traversed the few steps to the house. Clark got him a drink of water, made him lie face down on his bed, and washed the lacerated flesh, after wrapping the youngster's body with a clean shirt torn in strips. There was no antiseptic, not even a bit of germicidal salve in the house. Young Grey sat up. His eyes burned. He looked at Clark, at a rifle hanging on the wall. He

got to his feet, swayed drunkenly, put his hand to his head and sat down.

"I'll be all right in a minute or two," he muttered thickly.

"Who did this to you?" Clark asked. "When was this dirty business pulled off?"

"About half an hour ago," Grey told him haltingly, "old Howard come over. He talked soft and put me off my guard. Then he jumped me. You know he's as strong as a horse. He got me foul and strung me up between the posts the way you found me. Then he beat me"—Grey's teeth gritted— "beat me like a dog. Said he'd be back after a while to give me another dose and turn me loose. I hope to God he comes!" His lips parted in a twisted smile and his eyes turned to the rifle. "I hope he comes." "He won't come," Clark said slowly.

"He won't come," Clark said slowly. "And whether he comes or not, you can't stay here."

"Oh, can't I?" Grey muttered.

"No. You've got to get yourself attended to. That's more important right now than getting old Howard. He'll keep. In another hour or two you'll be stiffened up so you can't move. You're liable to get poisoned in those cuts if they aren't properly dressed. You come along with me to the Landing. There's a boat down to-night. You can get to the Paul River hospital on that."

In the end Clark had his way and there was a dual purpose in his way. He knew that Grey needed medical attention, that there was a danger of infection-but he knew further that young Grey would shoot Howard Seton on sight. It was not in the nature of man to endure such indignities. And for the present, at least, Clark wished to save young Grey from the sure penalty for taking the law in his own hands. So Clark prevailed. He was anxious to get young Grey out of there. He did not know what might happen afterward. But he could not sit beside Grey and listen to him talk in slow sentences, pinched dry of all emotion, without knowing what would happen if he left Grev to himself that night—and if not that night then to-morrow or the next day.

Clark had seen men primed to kill before. He knew the symptoms. Young Grey would kill Seton without passion or remorse. He could not live at peace with himself otherwise. He did not say so. But Clark knew. And he desired to postpone the execution of this just purpose for the time being. Something might happen in the interim. It did not seem to Clark that Howard Seton could go much farther without getting snarled in the mesh of his own deeds.

Dusk merged into darkness, the luminous dark that overlies the earth when the moon is hiding just under the rim of the hills. Presently Clark got young Grey started, down to the float, quietly aboard. He shoved the launch away with a pike pole before he started the motor. In two hours he was helping Grey up the gangplank of a coasting steamer. A little after midnight he was tied up at the float again.

He went up to breakfast as usual, a meal devoid of conversation, a business of taking food with silent glances, lowered eyes. Only the voice of the man at the head of the table would boom out arrogantly when he wanted something and his bold gaze would sweep them all as if he were conscious of his power over these meeker-spirited. He filled his chair with the bulk of his short, thick body. His hairy chest showed in the V of his unbuttoned shirt. His full eyes swept them arrogantly, contemptuously. All but Mary. There was a different quality in his look when it fell upon her. Clark wondered why he had not marked that before last night. He wondered if Mrs. Seton grasped the implication of that look, or the girl herself.

After breakfast he sat on the porch steps, deliberately waiting until Seton should go away to his work. He wanted to reassure Mary about Walter Grey's absence. And for some reason Seton seemed to be continually reappearing about the house, coming through the rooms or around the corner with a noiseless feline tread, walking on the balls of his feet like a cougar. He always went about like that, with a quick, springy step. Clark sat on the steps, hating him for this light-footedness, for his thick neck and bold eyes and full sneering lips.

But he had a chance to speak to Mary at last and told her a kindly lie about her lover's departure. He left the house then, because he could hear Seton growling at his wife in the kitchen, taunting her with her crippled body, withered and distorted by successive attacks of rheumatism. The troubled, uneasy look that flitted across Mary's face at the half-heard sound of this bullying language stirred Clark to fresh pity and resentment. He had seen the same sort of look flit across Mrs. Seton's features, lie like a shadow on old Henry's face. They were all more or less afraid of that gross brute. He inspired fear, just as dynamite or lightning or a caged tiger did by the potential evil that resided in them.

A man like that, Clark reflected, was capable of anything. He would be crafty, too. How, for instance, could any one prove that he had trussed up young Grey and beaten him? Prove it, that is, before a court that would punish him? Merely one man's word against another's.

Clark felt relieved that he was not going to be even an onlooker after Friday. Then he remembered Mary and his momentary relief became uneasiness. Still, there was nothing he could do. If he were right in his surmising no one could do anything until it was too late for anything but mere reprisal.

The second day after that old Henry came down on the float in the middle of the forenoon with a senile grin of anticipation on his face, a wrinkled serge suit on and an ancient traveling bag in his hand.

He cackled to Clark. He hadn't been to town in three years. Howard had staked him to a holiday. Howard was going to row him out and flag the tri-weekly steamer and put him aboard. He was "goin' to see every movin' pitcher in Vancouver." He prattled on and Clark pitied him. But when Howard Seton appeared on the path old Henry's simple joyousness faded. He cast an uncertain glance at his brother. He leaned toward Clark and whispered in his shaky old voice:

"Say. I dassent say nothin'. But you tell Mary t' look out for *him*. He ain't safe. *You* tell her."

Clark nodded. He was startled. Even this simple, colorless old man could see.

Behind Seton came Mary steadying her mother. They reached the float, got in the big rowboat and pulled away, old Henry and Seton at the oars. During his stay there Clark had never seen the women go with Howard Seton anywhere. They were going for his pleasure, not for their own, Clark felt sure. He wondered why.

When they came back Seton stood about on the float till Mary and her mother were out of earshot up the path. Then he said:

"There ain't no salmon around here now." Clark agreed briefly.

"I hear there's a good run on at Baker Pass. Why don't you try it there?"

"Maybe I will," Clark replied casually. He looked after Seton's retreating back. Young Grey driven off. Old Henry shipped away to town. A suggestion that was a veiled order to himself. And when he went there would be only Seton here in this lonely place, and two women, of whom one did not count, a crippled woman who could only pray.

"Damn his soul!" Clark muttered. "What's he up to?"

He did not take that pointed hint. He stayed on. He meant to stay until Friday, at least. He had an idea that Seton would brusquely order him to go then, if he did not move of his own volition. And Clark, sitting on the back deck of his boat, wondered if he were letting a weird fancy trouble him or if he were actually groping in a mist of unspeakable intentions.

The day after old Henry left Howard came down on the float.

"Got to go to Potter's Landin' for giant powder," he said to Clark. "Want to go along?".

"No," Clark declined. "I have some work to do on my engine."

Seton looked at him sidelong. He got aboard his own launch and made ready. Then he went back to the house. Mary and her mother followed him down. The girl stopped to speak to Clark.

"Come on. I ain't got no time to waste," Seton boomed at her across the float. Out of the corner of his eye Clark saw him scowl blackly.

"He's going off his head, that guy," Clark muttered to himself as the launch bore down the bay. "Crazy jealous. Jealous even of me. That's why he's started carting 'em with him wherever he goes. He's afraid to leave Mary behind and she won't go without her mother. Old Henry's right. He isn't safe. But what can a man do?"

They came back late in the afternoon. Seton set two or three boxes on the float. Mary helped her mother off. The stiffened, bent woman hobbled away leaning on her stick. Seton said to Mary:

"Bring along that there parcel."

He picked up a box under each arm. Mary started to follow him. Abreast of Clark she stopped to speak.

"Did Walter say when he would be back?" she asked hurriedly.

"Not exactly," Clark evaded. "I kinda persuaded him he'd better stay away a while. He's pretty hot-headed, you know."

"I wish he'd come back," she murmured.

"Why?" Clark asked bluntly.

A faint color rose in the girl's cheeks.

"I'll sound silly if I tell you."

"Maybe not," Clark encouraged. "What is it? You know I'm your friend and Walter's."

"I'm afraid of him." To Clark she always spoke of her stepfather as "him." "I never was before. But he's different with me lately. It frightens me."

"What does he say?" Clark asked sharply. "It isn't so much what he says. It's the way he says it. And he acts—I wonder if\_\_\_\_\_"

She broke off short—changed to an inconsequential account of what they had done and seen at Potter's Landing that day. Seton was coming along the gangway to the float with his quick springy stride, the planks rattling under his weight.

"Your mother wants you," he said gruffly.

He stood watching the girl go, his hands on his hips, darting sidelong glances at Clark sitting unperturbed on the side of his boat, a cigarette in his fingers.

"You better pull your freight," he broke out at last. "I'm gittin' tired seein' you around here. All you've done since you been here is lay around and honey up to the women."

Clark had a temper of his own under his placid exterior. It bubbled now under pressure of the insulting speech and his dislike of the man.

"You go to the devil, Seton," he snapped. "You can't bulldoze everybody and get away with it."

Seton's right hand shot out. His fingers clamped on Clark's neck. The man half lifted him from his seat and literally shook him with one hand. A grimace of fury narrowed his eyes and drew the thick loose lips back from his stained, uneven teeth. Then he let go.

"You better pull your freight," he grunted. "I'm liable to forget you're a damn cripple an' hurt you."

He picked up the last box and strode off the float without once looking back. Clark felt his neck. Across the back of it and under each ear the flesh felt as if it had been squeezed in a pair of great tongs. His neck ached. He climbed aboard and down into the cabin, shaking with anger, with rage against his impotence in the face of that superior brute force. He sat down on his bunk and stared fixedly at the opposite wall. On a shelf there, fastened securely in a small box, rested a Mills bomb, a relic of Clark's service overseas, a metal container charged with high explosive, of a size and shape to be easily grasped and accurately thrown by a man's hand. It lay in its place harmless as an apple—until the pin should be drawn.

Clark lifted down the box, took out the bomb, sat looking at it, turning it over and over, a red spot glowing over each cheek bone. Then he put it back with a sigh and lay staring up at the curved beams of the cabin roof.

He roused himself when he heard the supper gong—but not to attend that meal. He started his own galley stove, made a meal of tea and soda biscuits. Then he lay down again.

To-morrow he would leave. He hated to retreat under fire but there was nothing to be gained by staying now. The only defense he could make against such a man as Seton was to destroy him. Clark did not contemplate that with any qualms of conscience. He was chiefly restrained by a cool-headed calculation of the penalty he would pay for such summary vengeance. Nor did he desire greatly to revenge the minor injury he had suffered. It was the sense of lacking any adequate defense against that sort of thing that angered him most.

He lay in his bunk and smoked until dark settled like a black mist on the bay, until that darkness was silvered by a fat moon that swam up from behind the Coast range to lighten the dusky earth and dim the twinkling stars.

Clark lifted himself on elbow listening. In that silver-shot hush he had heard a sound like a cry. Or was it his overstimulated imagination? He listened, wavering between doubt and certainty, heaved himself up to the low after deck. A light glowed in the front window of the house. Behind the radiance of the bay the hills stood sharp against the sky, their tops bathed in the moonlight, their cañon-gutted flanks barred with black shadows. In all that breathless stillness there was no sound, not a rustling leaf, nor the slap of a wavelet, only the far murmur of a creek in its stony bed.

But Clark was sure of his hearing. He leaned on the cabin, stricken with a gnawing uneasiness for which he could find no name. Should he go ashore and see?

He negatived that with a picture of How-

ard Seton rising in sudden wrath to meet him at the house, to bestow fresh insults upon him if not further bodily injury. Clark shrugged his shoulders, went back inside and sat down.

But he could not sit at ease. He kept his seat less than a minute, rose, stood irresolute, got out on the float and listened again. No sound. He limped halfway up the path, stopped to strain his ears once more and so came at last with cautious steps to the low porch before Seton's house.

He could hear now and see also. The door stood wide. In the lamplight Mrs. Seton huddled in a heap on the floor, whimpering incoherently. Clark warily crossed the threshold.

"What's up?"

But the woman was in either the first or last stages of hysteria. She could tell him nothing. She whimpered and gibbered like a frightened infant. Clark straightened up.

"Mary," he called sharply.

The name rang through the empty rooms. No answer. No sound other than the muffled whimperings in the throat of the old woman on the floor, looking up at him now with glazed, wet eyes.

"Where's Mary?" he demanded of her.

"She ran-00-00-00-"

She went off into another spasm of incoherence.

Clark went boldly through the house, out the kitchen door, alert, every nerve in him taut like a bowstring, his right hand in his coat pocket. He stood to listen again. Nothing. Not a rustle in the thickets, not a footfall nor a voice, no sign of life in the welter of moonlight barred by intense black shadows of tree and shrub and fence. Clark passed the woodshed, the last of the outbuildings. He followed a road which ran between a garden on the left and a square of uncleared forest on his right, toward cultivated fields running back to the lowlands. He took a few steps at a time, listening, turning his straining ears and peering eyes this way and that.

Cautiously he traversed a hundred yards of this roadway until he came to where the forest on his right ran out into an area slashed and burned, starkly dotted with stumps in various stages of uprooting, the site of Seton's latest land clearing. Against one thick cedar stump abutting on the road Clark halted. A box stood upended against the stump, in one corner a dozen or more yellowish-brown cylinders like thick candles. Clark eyed the box and its contents casually. Giant powder for blowing stumps. Forty per cent nitroglycerin—dynamite.

He turned back at last, discouraged by the purposelessness of his quest, the futility of seeking he knew not what, along the borders of that gloomy timber, the nebulous area of the fields. He retraced his steps a dozen paces, fifteen, twenty, stopped in the black shadow of a lone fir. The crack of a breaking twig made him flatten against the tree. Then very distinctly he heard a voice, in which harshness and pleading were curiously blended, say:

"Mary! Hey, Mary. Don't be a darned fool. Come on back to the house. I ain't goin' to hurt you."

Immobile in the shadow Clark watched the roadway. Presently he glimpsed a moving body. It emerged from the litter of brush piles and down branches very silently, and stood in the roadway, clear in the flood of moonlight—Seton, bareheaded, looking this way and that. He came on and stopped again, beside the cedar stump against which leaned the box of dynamite.

"Mary. Oh, Mary."

He called twice—softly—then a little louder. He faced about and Clark's teeth set hard. The full glow of the moon exposed every detail of the man's face, betrayed him. He saw Seton suddenly make a most horrible grimace of baffled passion.

Somewhere in those shadows, under cover of the friendly gloom, Mary was hiding from that.

Clark took his hand out of his coat pocket, fumbled a moment, stepped clear of the tree and drew back his arm. He counted under his breath—one—two—three—and heaved.

The flying missile showed faintly in the moon glare that silvered the open. It fell with a faint thud beside the box of dynamite against the cedar stump. Clark saw Seton look, take a step.

In that moment there rose a fanlike burst of red and yellow flame, a thunderclap, a concussion that shook the ground and the great tree against which Clark flattened his body. Then the echo of that report bandied back and forth in the distant hills and there

came sound of things falling to earth like spray from a fountain. Then silence.

Clark stepped out into the road. There was no cedar stump, no man. Instead of the stump and the man and the box of giant powder there were riven roots upturned like grotesque arms in the moonlight, splintered timber, a cavity in the soil.

Clark turned back a step or two.

"Oh, Mary," he lifted his voice to a shout. "It's all right. This is Clark. Can you hear me?"

He walked on a few yards, called again, listened. The girl stepped into the roadway beside him, as noiselessly as a shadow, so close that he was startled.

"What happened?" she whispered.

"Seton blew himself up," Clark said. "Blew himself into kingdom come. He's scattered over half an acre of ground."

"Are you sure?"

He noted the relief in her tone.

"Sure as fate. I saw it. He was standing beside a box of giant powder—did you hear him calling you? Then it went off. That's all. Exit Seton—for good."

Mary faced up the road. The night air fluttered in their faces tainted with faintly acrid fumes.

"I wonder," she said to Clark softly, "if it's wrong to be very, very glad?"

At daybreak in the morning they went up the road, Mrs. Seton supported on one side by her daughter, on the other by Clark. A little way short of the place Clark halted them. They saw a mound of new earth. It marked a grave that Clark had dug the night before.

The bent, prematurely old woman gazed at it without a movement of her seamed face. Her washed-out blue eyes held steadfast upon the gruesome object.

"He was evil, evil to the core," she said at last, her old voice vigorous in its denunciation. "It was the hand of God."

Hours afterward, while the constable from Potter's Landing and another man viewed the scene of the explosion and heard the story. Clark sat on the bunk in the cabin of his boat, thinking.

"The hand of God," he remarked dryly to himself. He smiled, a grim curving of his thin lips. "Perhaps the old woman is right. Maybe it was."



BELIEVING in good resolutions for the New Year, and always anxious to improve ourselves, we started to draft out a set for this year 1923. When we got through we found we had done nothing very original. The new resolutions had a familiar ring. They represented the things we had been trying to do in the past. So when we tell you about them, we are talking about THE POPULAR as it was, as it is, and as it is going to be.

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There are a great many fiction magazines published to-day. Only one or two are as old as THE POPULAR. None of them has maintained the same editorial policy, the same standards throughout the past fifteen or twenty years, none of them save THE POPULAR. We are safe in saying that no magazine holds its readers so well, or numbers among its readers so many who began with the first issue. There are various reasons for this.

In the first place we have always tried to make this actually the best fiction magazine published. We have spent more money than any other unillustrated fiction magazine and we have held to what we conceive to be the soundest policy.

It is true that the best-known authors in America write for THE POPULAR. They write for it, however, not because they are well known but because they are producing the best fiction. We always buy the story. We never buy a name. We do not contract for stories from authors no matter how successful they may be. In our safes we have

thousands of dollars' worth of manuscript bought at various times from well-known authors, which on later consideration we did not consider worthy of a place in the magazine. As for the younger authors who are coming up, we are confident that we get the best they have to give when they are at their best. We try a little harder than most to find the new man who has something to say. And what helps us a lot is that the new author likes to find his first stories in the good company which he finds in the magazine. The best proof of the fact that we are fortunate in picking the new men of ability is that no magazine enjoys the same record in the way of discovering writers who afterward became famous. We could fill pages with their names.

Perhaps the groundwork of our success lies in the fact that we have a serious sense of responsibility. The bigger the circulation the more we owe our readers. We try honestly to live up to the circulation, and honesty always pays in the long run. The obviously easy way to run a magazine would be to cater to every superficial turn of popular taste, to play for the big name rather than the story itself. But with us the story is the thing. We buy no story unless we ourselves think it a good story. It must be more than this. It must be part of that bigger story of American life, of the hopes, the struggles, the achievements of the people about us. The novels and serials which appear in this magazine practically all find a permanent place in the public affection in

book form. Our aim is to give our readers now the stories that the book readers will be talking about next year.

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There is a further responsibility than this, and living up to it has sometimes cost us perhaps a temporary measure of success. We do not believe in a censorship of literature. We think that in the end it would do more harm than good, but we believe, nevertheless, that a lot of the things published today are neither profitable nor proper for nine tenths of the younger readers who may pick up the magazines on the news stands. Please don't get us wrong in this regard. We are not prudes, we believe that practically anything human has its place in literature. We think, however, that any story which gives the reader the impression that the moral and social codes may be violated with impunity or even with profit is false in its implications and untrue to life. It is easy to make a momentary sensation with a daring attempt to prove fictionally that the things learned from our mothers are not true. We have passed up this chance more than once. More than once we have turned down a story that was clever-but unwholesome. The story that makes a frank appeal to the passions may be as dangerous as poison and we are not dealing in poisons.

#### \* \* \*

You can take a copy of this magazine home and let anybody in the house read it without worrying. That does not mean that it is a Sunday-school publication, that it lacks anything of the strife and variety of life. It simply means that it is sane and wholesome. This applies to other than sex fiction as well. Murderers and burglars do not in actual life succeed and live happily.

And no matter how cleverly the thing may be done in fiction, we are afraid of it, for it is unsound.

Living close to nature, as all the great ethical teachers have testified, is a great lesson in sanity and morality. The same applies in fiction. None of the stories in this magazine are written with a purpose, but all of them have a great natural purpose inherent in them. The story that interests a man keenly or diverts him is a good thing, but the story that wakes him up a little and gives him an impetus to keener endeavor, higher enthusiasms, and finer aspirations is better still. Didactic stories are dull, but the stories we hunt for carry the lesson implied in them and not set forth.

We are conscious of no superior attitude in this. Others see things differently and they are entitled to their opinion, but one of the finest satisfactions in helping to edit this magazine is the thought that any one who reads it for any length of time is likely to be the better for it in some fashion, and is almost sure to form an affection for the magazine itself.

If you have read THE POPULAR long you know what we have been trying to tell you better than we can say. If you are a new reader, you will find out in a few numbers.

A magazine that won't hurt a child and that will hold a keen interest for men. A magazine without prudery, with plenty of full-blooded humor, with all the struggle and roughness of life in it, and yet with a sane, normal, wholesome, cheerful atmosphere.

So now you know what our resolutions are for the New Year. Just about the same as they have always been since the magazine first appeared.



# If You Were Dying To-night

and I offered you something that would give you ten years more to live, would you take it? You'd grab it. Well fel-lows, I've got it, but don't wait till you're dying or it won't do you a bit of good. It will then be too late. Right now is the time. To-morrow or any day, some disease will get you and if you have not equipped yourself to fight it off, you're gone. I don't claim to cure disease. I am not a medical doctor, but I'll put you in such condition that the doctor will starve to death waiting for you to take sick. Can you imagine a mosquite trying to bite a brick wall? A fine chance. A fine chance.

#### A Re-built Man

A Ke-built Man I like to get the weak ones. I delight in getting hold of a man who has been turned down as hopeless by others. It's easy enough to finish a task that's more than half done. But give me the weak, slckly chap and watch him grow stronger. That's what I like. It's fun to me because I know I can do it and I like to give the other fellow the laugh. I don't just give you a veneer of muscle that looks good to others. I work on you both inside and out. I not only put big, massive arms and legs on you, but I build up those inner muscles that surround your vital organs. The kind that give you real pep and energy, the kind that fire you with ambition and the courage to tackle anything set be-fore you. fore you.

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#### A Real Man

When I'm through with you, you're a real man. The kind that can prove it. You will be able to do things that you had thought impossible. And the beauty of it is you keep on going. Your deep full chest breathes in rich pure air, stimulating your blood and making you just bubble over with vim and vitality. Your huge square shoulders and your massive muscular arms have that craving for the exercise of a regular he man. You have the finsh to your eye and the pep to your step that will make you admired and sought after in both the business and social world. This is no Idle prattle, fellows. If you doubt me, make me prove it. Go ahead. I like it. I have already done this for thousands of others and my records are unchallenged. What I have done for them, I will do for you. Come then, for time files and every day counts. Let this very day be the beginning of new life to you.

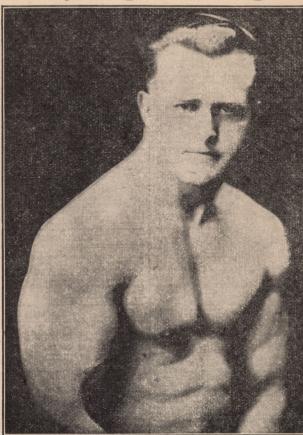
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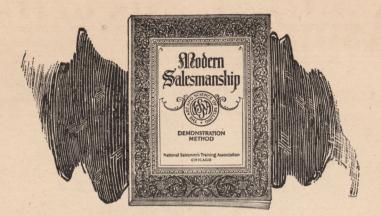
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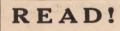


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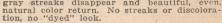
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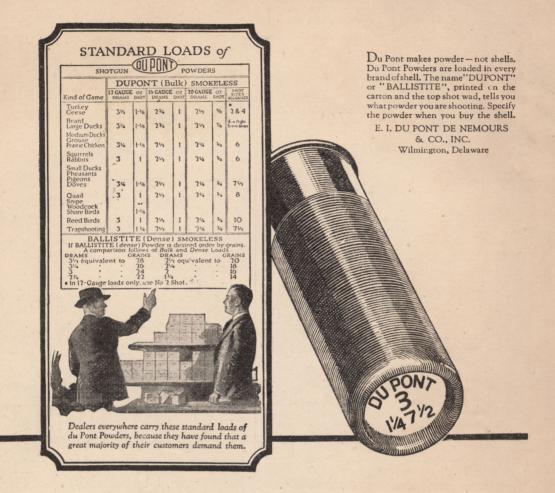
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